

The Study of the Book of Revelation

The Revelation of Jesus Christ

Chapter 2

Revelation 1:1-3

*“The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John: Who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw. **Blessed** is he that readeth, and they that **hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.”***

As we have already learned from our previous study, Jesus intended for us to study the book of Revelation. **As special blessing is in its chapters and we are asked to read and “hear the words of this prophecy, and to keep those things which are written therein.”** God wants us to know what is going to take place in the future.

As we begin our study Jesus is going to give us a message for not only the seven literal churches in John’s day, but also will detail seven periods of time the churches would experience down through time.

Revelation 1:20

*“The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. **The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches.”***

THE SEVEN CHURCHES

CHURCH #1 - EPHESUS (False Apostles - lost first love)

Revelation 2:1-7

*“Unto the angel of the church of **Ephesus** write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks; 2 I know thy **works**, and thy **labour**, and thy **patience**, and how **thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: 3 And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast **laboured**, and **hast not fainted**. 4 Nevertheless I have **somewhat against thee**, because **thou hast left thy first love**. 5 **Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works**; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent. 6 But this thou hast, that **thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate**. 7 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that **overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.**”***

The Church of Ephesus represents the early Apostolic Church.

A.D. 31 to A.D. 100

The Testimony of Jesus to Ephesus -

Praise: Jesus commends them for opposing false apostles identified as the Nicolaitans. Rev. 2:2,6

Rebuke: In zeal for defending the truth, they have lost their first love. Rev. 2:4

Key Point:

The early church symbolized by Ephesus withstood the heresy of False Apostolic Authority.

Revelation 2:2

“...thou hast tried them which say *they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars:*”

Acts 20:25-32

“And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more. Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. Take **heed** therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to **feed the church of God**, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall **grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.** Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears.”

2 Thessalonians 2:3-9

“**Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.** Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things? And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. **For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming:**”

Key Observation:

The threat of false apostolic authority at Ephesus is identified as the “*works of the Nicolaitans.*” Rev. 2:6

3 Key Points About the Nicolaitans

1. The Nicolaitans are identified with Balaam in the church of Pergamum, Rev. 2:14
2. Balaam was an ancient prophet who lured God's people into paganism. Num. 25
3. The word Nicolaitan is found in the ancient Aramaic Translation *Onkelos* in Numbers 25:18 in the story of Balaam.

Speaking of Balaam:

“For they vex you with their **wiles** (**NIKLAHON in the Aramaic**) wherewith they have beguiled you in the matter of Peor, and in the matter of Cozbi, the daughter of a prince of Midian, their sister, which was slain in the day of the plague for Peor's sake.” Num. 25:18

The Aramaic *Niklahon*, the source of the Greek word *Nicolaitan*, comes from the Hebrew word *Nakal*. *Nakal* means to “deceive,” “to plot,” or to be “crafty.” (Brown Driver Briggs Hebrew Lexicon., page 647)

Conclusion:

The Nicolaitans are those like Balaam who "plot" to "deceive" and overthrow the early Christian Church by the deception of false apostolic authority.

CHURCH #2 - SMYRNA (Persecution & Apostasy from Without)

Revelation 2: 8-11

*"8 And unto the angel of the church in **Smyrna** write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive; 9 I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan. 10 Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life. 11 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; **He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.**"*

The Church of Smyrna represents the Church from A.D. 100 to A.D. 323. Covering the pagan Roman persecutions around the time of Diocletian.

The Testimony of Jesus to Smyrna -

Praise: Christ offers eternal life to those who are faithful under persecution even unto Death. Rev. 2:10

Rebuke: No Rebuke is Given.

The Church of Smyrna experienced intense persecution for "ten days." Rev. 2:10

Using the Year/Day principle, this corresponds to the ten years of Roman persecution under Diocletian in 303 to 313 A.D.

Speaking of the Great Persecution of 303 to 313 A.D.:

"...in the words of Tertullian, the "blood of Christians is seed." [Infuriated by a period of brief tolerance in which the church prospered, anger arose from pagans] "such as Plotinus's pupil Porphyry, whose work against the Christians attacked them with unprecedented ferocity. And Porphyry's friends were among the instigators of the Great Persecution that followed in A.D. 303. It was launched by Diocletian...the aim of these arch-regimenters was the total extermination of Christianity. It was the struggle to the death between one faith and the other, the older and the new."

"The first of Diocletian's edicts forbade all assemblies of Christians for purposes of worship and ordered the destruction of their churches and sacred books. Then further edicts in the eastern provinces commanded that the clergy, unless they sacrificed to the gods of the state, should be placed under arrest. Next, a fourth proclamation extended the requirement to every member of the Christian church (304)"

Michael Grant, *History of Rome*, pages 404-405

Speaking of a massacre at Phrygia, the historian Gibbon Writes:

"On their [the Roman's] approach the citizens threw themselves into the church, with the resolution of defending...that sacred edifice or of perishing in its ruins. They ... rejected the notice and the permission that was given them to retire, till the soldiers, provoked ... set fire to the buildings on all sides, and consumed, by this

extraordinary kind of martyrdom, a great number of Phrygians, with their wives and children.

Edward Gibbon, *Fall and Decline of the Roman Empire*, Chapter 16, Volume 1, page 229

The Great Persecution **started in 303** by Diocletian **ended** with "the Edict of Milan **in A.D 313**" under the leadership of the new Emperor - Constantine the Great.

Averil Cameron, *The Later Roman Empire*, page 45

CHURCH #3 - PERGAMOUS (Persecution & Apostasy from Within)

Revelation 2:12-17

*"12 And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges; 13 I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even **where Satan's seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth. 14 But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. 15 So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. 16 Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth. 17 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it."***

The Church of Pergamum Represents the Church of the Apostasy, Around the Time of Constantine the Great. A.D. 323 to A.D. 538.

The Testimony of Jesus to Pergamum -

Praise: He praises the few like Antipas who are faithful in the face of outright apostasy.
Rev. 2:13

Rebuke: The apostasy of the Nicolaitans has caused a large number of Christians to practice immorality and to compromise with pagan idolatry. Rev. 2:14,15

The Meaning of the Name Antipas:

"ANTI" means "against."

"PAS" is the Greek root for "Father." The Latin equivalent is "PAPAS." The English is "Pope."

Conclusion:

ANTIPAS means "Against the Pope" or "Against the Papacy."

In Pergamum the Apostasy of the Nicolaitans Wins the Day.

The movement of False Apostles in the Church of Ephesus is now enshrined in the power of the Papacy and its claim to Peter's apostolic authority.

Corruption of Christianity Shortly After the Persecutions of Diocletian in the Fourth Century.

"About this time the organization of the Church already showed the beginnings of a regular hierarchy. To be sure, the choice of spiritual leaders...came more and more to be

distinguished from the *laity* as *clergy*. Distinctions arose among the bishops according to the position of their cities and with particular consideration for the apostolic foundation of certain congregations. The synods, which were convened for many various reasons, served to unite the bishops as a higher rank. Among the bishops themselves serious degeneration becomes apparent as early as the third century. We find many of them sunk in worldly pomp, as Roman officials, as merchants, even as usurers.

Jacob, Burckhardt, *The Age of Constantine*, pages 126-127

Key Point:

Under Constantine, Christianity and Paganism Merged.

"For him Christ may have rated as a god along with other gods, and the professors of Christ's religion along with the servants of the pagan deities. We shall not deny the possibility that Constantine developed a kind of superstition in favor of Christ, and that he may even have brought that name into some kind of confused relationship with the sun-god."

Jacob, Burckhardt, *The Age of Constantine*, page 295

"A great inconsistency in Constantine's outward bearing persists; he accepts the monogram of Christ as the emblem of his army and has the name of Jupiter on his triumphal arch erased, but at the same time he retains the old gods on his coins, and especially the sun-god as his unconquerable companion, and on important occasions his outward conduct is entirely pagan....he wished to give direct guarantees to both religions, and he was powerful enough to maintain a twofold position."

Jacob, Burckhardt, *The Age of Constantine*, page 296

"At times he tried to find basically neutral expressions for religious practices which Christians and pagans alike should observe. Of this character is the common Sunday and the common Pater Noster. He taught all armies zealously to honor the Lord's Day, which is also called the day of light and of the sun....the pagans too were required to go forth into an open field on Sunday, and together to raise their hands, and recite a prayer by heart to God as giver of all victory:"

Jacob, Burckhardt, *The Age of Constantine*, page 298

"It is precisely in the last decade of his life that Constantine gives certain very plain indication of un-Christian, even of directly pagan, sympathies. While he and his mother were ornamenting Palestine and the large cities of the Empire with magnificent churches, he was also building pagan temples in the new Constantinople...At the consecration of the city certain occult pagan practices were demonstrably celebrated; the solemnities involved superstitions of all sorts, which later writers vainly seek to identify with Christian worship.

Jacob, Burckhardt, *The Age of Constantine*, page 302

"Constantine found the clergy already so suitably organized for power...he therefore gave the clergy every possible guarantee of favor, even as far as a sort of participation in rule, and in return the clergy were the most devoted agents for spreading his power, and completely ignored the fact that he still stood with one foot in paganism and that his hands were over and again stained with blood."

Jacob, Burckhardt, *The Age of Constantine*, page 306

Revelation 2:18-29

*“18 And unto the angel of the church in **Thyatira** write; These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass; 19 I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last to be more than the first. 20 Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because **thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols.** 21 And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not. 22 Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds. 23 And I will kill **her children with death**; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works. 24 But unto you I say, and unto **the rest in Thyatira**, as many as have not this doctrine, and **which have not known the depths of Satan**, as they speak; I will put upon you none other burden. 25 But that which ye have already **hold fast till I come.** 26 And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: 27 And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father. 28 And I will give him the morning star. 29 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.”*

The Church of Thyatira Represents the Apostate Roman Catholic Church of the Middle Ages. From A.D 538 to A.D. 1565. Covering part of the 1260 years of Papal persecution

The Testimony of Jesus to Thyatira -

Praise: Christ recognizes the good works, faith, and love of those who must patiently endure. Rev. 2:19

Rebuke: Thyatira fosters and tolerates paganism and she refuses to repent. Rev. 2:20-23

Key Point:

The paganism of Jezebel the False Prophetess vs. that of the Church period represented by Thyratira.

It is obvious that God is not talking about the Old Testament Jezebel that led Israel into false worship, idolatry and unfaithfulness to God. Remember, a woman in prophecy represents a church. A church that, like Jezebel, has led God's people into false worship, idolatry and unfaithfulness. We discovered this woman, in our study of Revelation chapter 17, as the Roman Catholic Church.

Jezebel is Identified as a False Prophetess.

Revelation 2:20

*“Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because **thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols.**”*

In Ancient Israel Jezebel led God's people into paganism. (1 Kings 16:29 -1 Kings 21:25)

1 Kings 16:31-33

*“And it came to pass, as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that **he took to wife Jezebel** the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Zidonians, and went and served **Baal, and worshipped him.** And he reared up an altar for Baal in the house of Baal, which he had built in Samaria. And Ahab made a grove; and Ahab did more*

to provoke the LORD God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him.”

1 Kings 21:25

“But there was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the LORD, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up.

Jezebel Has Children Who Are Connected With Her Sin.

Revelation 2:23

“And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works.”

The Harlot Woman Babylon of Revelation 17 Has Daughters.

Revelation 17:5

“And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.”

Mother Babylon (Roman Catholic Church) has daughters which represent all those churches who are tied to the Roman Church through her doctrines. The Papacy ruled for 1260 years. A time period known as the dark ages. She led people into spiritual darkness through false worship, idolatry and unfaithfulness. Through the Reformation people like, Martin Luther, John Huss, John Westley, just to name a few, came out of the Mother Church, but continued to follow many of her doctrines, like Sunday worship, immortality of the soul, everlasting burning hell and many more. Jesus has called us to come out of her and stand on His Word and be faithful to Him.

The Sin of Jezebel Brought a Famine With No Rain For 3 & 1/2 Literal Years.

Luke 4:25

*“But I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, **when the heaven was shut up three years and six months**, when great famine was throughout all the land;”*

The Sin Of The Roman Catholic Church Brought No Spiritual Rain For 1260 Years Which Is 3 & 1/2 Prophetic Years.

Revelation 11:3, 6

*“3 And I will give power unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy **a thousand two hundred and threescore days**, clothed in sackcloth. 6 **These have power to shut heaven, that it rain not in the days of their prophecy; and have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to smite the earth with all plagues, as often as they will.**”*

Remember, ancient Jewish calendar was a lunar calendar, with 30 days per month.

3 1/2 years = 42 months x 30 days = 1,260 prophetic days = 1,260 years

We will continue with the last three churches in our next study.