

II

THE THINGS WHICH ARE

OUTLINE OF CHAPTER TWO by James O. Combs

Christ in the Midst of His Churches

OBJECTIVE: To reveal Christ appraising, judging and correcting conditions existent in His churches.

OUTLINE:

I. EPHESUS: The Lacking Church (2:1-7)

- A. The Address of the Administrator (1)
 - 1. An Epistle to the Messenger-minister
 - 2. An Epistle to the Ephesians (means *desirable*) (2)
 - 3. An Epistle from Jesus Christ (1)
 - a. He holds the ministers
 - b. He walks in the churches
- B. The Analysis of the Assembly (vs. 2-6)
 - 1. Appraisal (2-4)
 - a. Full of works (2)
 - b. Fundamental in doctrine (2)
 - c. Faithful in labor (3)
 - d. Failing in love (4). They "left their first love," thus were lacking
 - 2. Appeal (5)
 - a. Remember ... previous ardor
 - b. Repent ... of failing
 - c. Renew ... first works OR ELSE there will be
 - d. Removal of spiritual place and power.
 - 3. Approval (6) Fearless against Nicolaitans
- C. The Admonition by the Advocate (7)
 - 1. Open ears!
 - 2. Overcome! Promise of tree of life in paradise

II. SMYRNA: The Loyal Church (2:8-11)

- A. The Address of the Administrator
 - 1. An Epistle to the Messenger-minister (8)
 - 2. An Epistle to the Smyrnans (means *crushed*)
 - 3. An Epistle from Christ
 - a. His eternity (first and last)
 - b. His death and resurrection (in Time)
- B. The Analysis of the Assembly (9, 10)
 - He says nothing negative about this church.
 - 1. Commendation (9)
 - a. Knowledge about them: their works, tribulation, poverty, true riches
 - b. Knowledge of their enemies: false Jews—synagogue of Satan
 - 2. Counsel (10)
 - a. Fearlessness
 - b. Foes to oppose
 - c. Future: 10 days of tribulation
 - d. Faithfulness—crown of life for martyrdom
- C. The Admonition by the Advocate
 - 1. Open ears!
 - 2. Overcome! Promise of no second death.

III. PERGAMOS: The Lax Church (2:12-17)

- A. The Address of the Administrator (12)
 - 1. An Epistle to the Messenger-minister (12)
 - 2. An Epistle to the Pergamosians (means *elevated or married*) (12)

- 3. An Epistle from Christ. His sharp Word-Sword condemns or converts
- B. The Analysis of the Assembly (13-16)
 - 1. Their Dedicated Attitude (13)
 - a. Their Dwelling at "Satan's seat"—place of idolatrous wickedness
 - b. Their Determination—held Christ's Name
 - c. Their Deaths—Antipas the martyr exemplifies
 - 2. Their Doctrinal Apostasy (14, 15)
 - a. The Doctrine of Balaam
 - The Teaching that separation from unbelievers is not a part of true religion (Study Numbers 22, 23, 24 and 25:1-5 with 2 Pet. 2:15,16; Jude 11.)
 - b. The Teaching is the concept that the laity (Laitans) were to be ruled or conquered by the priestly hierarchy. Nicolaitanes: from "nikao," "to conquer," and "laos," people.
 - c. The Directive of Christ: Repentance or Punishment—by the Word-Sword (see Hebrews 4:12)
- C. The Admonition by the Advocate (17)
 - 1. Open ears!
 - 2. Overcome! Promise of hidden manna, white stone, new name.

IV. THYATIRA: The Loose Church (2:18-29)

- A. The Address by the Administrator (18)
 - 1. An Epistle to the Messenger-minister (18)
 - 2. An Epistle to the Thyatirans (oppression)
 - 3. An Epistle from Christ
 - a. He is the Son of God
 - b. He has the flaming eyes, seeing all
 - c. He has the brazen feet of judgment
- B. The Analysis of the Assembly (19-25)
 - 1. The Works (19) love, service, faith, patience, works increasing
 - 2. The Woman (20-23)
 - a. Who she was: Jezebel—typified idolatrous teaching (see I Kings 16:30-33)
 - b. What she did: taught error, seduced servants into sin, defiled through images
 - c. How God dealt with her: allowed time for repentance
 - d. What was in store for her: personal judgment, prospective tribulation, possible repentance, purging by death, punishment by the Lord
 - e. What God says to the rest: those not following her doctrines are to hold to truth
- C. The Admonition by the Advocate (26-29)
 - 1. Overcome!
 - 2. Keep works and be rewarded. The only time rulership is promised in these seven admonitions is in association with faithfulness.
 - a. Rulership promised
 - b. Morning Star (Christ) promised
 - 3. Open ears!



seven churches map

It is worthy of note that the "Messages to the Seven Churches" are inserted between **Two Visions**, the "*Vision of Christ*" in the midst of the "*Seven Lampstands*" in chapter one and the "*Vision of the Four and Twenty Elders*" round about the Throne, in chapter four. As chapter four is a vision of the "Glorified Church" with the Lord, after it has been caught out (1 Thess. 4:13-17), then the Second Division of the Book –

"The Things Which Are,"

and which includes chapters two and three, must be a description or prophetic outline of the "Spiritual History" of the Church from the time when John wrote the Book in A. D. 96, down to the taking out of the Church, or else we have no "prophetic view" of the Church during that period, for she disappears from the earth at the close of chapter three, and is not seen again until she reappears with her Lord in chapter nineteen. This we shall find to be the case. See Chart of the Book of Revelation.

"*THE THINGS WHICH ARE*" (CHAPTERS 2-3). "*Hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches*" (plural). The answers are, that these churches were chosen, and the messages to them arranged in this order, because, thus arranged, their then actual condition prefigured seven great phases of church history, from the close of the apostolic period to the rapture of true believers, and the apostasy of the professing church. In other words, this section is church history told in symbol, by the Spirit of prophecy. This is clear because: 1. It is incredible that in a prophetic book, (Rev. 1:3) concerning the whole period of the existence of the church of God on earth there should be no prophecy concerning it. 2. These epistles to seven churches contain that prophetic foreview if it is in the book at all. No church is mentioned after Rev. 3:22. 3. The symbolic number seven indicates a complete statement about something. 4. It is incredible that so much space should have been given these churches if nothing symbolic was meant. 5. This occurs in the most symbolical book in all Scripture, a book of "*signs*." "*He sent and signified it by His servant John,*" (Rev. 1:1). 6. The messages to the seven churches by their terms go beyond the churches. All are exhorted "*hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.*" 7. And, finally, and perhaps most conclusively of all, these messages do present an exact picture of the history of the church in precisely this order. If Ephesus (Rev. 2:1-7) represents the average spiritual state of the churches at the close of the apostolic period (and all other information confirms it) then Smyrna fitly represents the era of the great persecutions; Pergamos of the lapse into worldliness after the conversion of Constantine; Thyatira, of fully developed Romanism, etc. The parallels are too exact and too numerous to be accidental. These messages have, then, a fourfold application. 1. Local, to the churches actually addressed. 2. Admonitory, as touchstones by which any churches in any age may test their spiritual state in the sight of God. 3. Personal, as enabling individual saints to discern evil in themselves. 4. Prophetical, as disclosing seven progressive phases of the spiritual history of the church from (say) A.D. 96 to the end. (From The 1917 Scofield Reference Bible, pp. 1331-1332)

This interpretation of the "*Messages to the Seven Churches*" was hidden to the early Church, because time was required for Church History to develop and be written, so a comparison could be made to reveal the correspondence. If it had been clearly revealed that the Seven Churches stood for "Seven Church Periods" that would have to elapse before Christ could come back, the incentive to watch would have been absent.

While the character of these Seven Churches is descriptive of the Church during seven periods of her history, we must not forget that the condition of those churches, as described, were their exact condition in John's day. Se we see that at the close of the First Century the leaven of "False

Doctrine" was at work in the Churches. The churches are given in the order named, because the peculiar characteristic of that Church applied to the period of Church History to which it is assigned. It also must not be forgotten, that, that which is distinctive characteristic of each Church Period, does not disappear with that Period, but continues on down through the next Period, and so on until the end, thus increasing the imperfections of the visible Church, until it ends in open Apostasy, as shown on the chart - "The Messages to the Seven Churches Compared With Church History."

It is noteworthy that the "Salutation" to each Church contains a reference to some characteristic of the Son of Man as described in chapter one. We will now consider each message separately.



1. **THE SALUTATION** - *"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. **THE COMMENDATION** - *"I know thy works, and thy labor, 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: And hast born, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast labored, and hast not fainted."*
3. **THE COMPLAINT** - *"Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love."*
4. **THE WARNING** - *"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."*
5. **PRAISE** - *"But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate."*
6. **THE PROMISE** - *"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 complaint that Christ makes against this Church is that it **"had left its first love."** Its character is seen in its very name, for Ephesus means to "let go," "to relax." It had become a **backslidden Church**. Paul, who founded it, warned it of what should happen, in his parting message.

"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." (Acts 20:29-30)

The significance of this warning is seen in the commendation of the Message, vs. 6 - *"But this thou hast, that thou 'hatest' the deeds of the Nicolaitanes."* They were not a sect, but a party in the Church who were trying to establish a "Priestly Order." They were probably trying to model the Church after the Old Testament order of Priests, Levites and common people. This is seen in the meaning of the word, which is from "'Niko" to conquer, to overthrow, and "Laos" the people or laity. The object was to establish a "Holy Order of Men," and place them over the laity, which was foreign to the New Testament plan, and call them not pastors, but Clergy, Bishops, Archbishops, Cardinals, Popes. Here we have the origin of the dogma of "Apostolic Succession," and the separation of the Clergy from the Laity, a thing that God "hates." the Church at Ephesus was not deceived, but recognized them as false apostles and liars. There were already divisions over leadership, not by the leaders themselves, but by the followers. *"Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?"*

(1 Cor. 1:12-13)

The character of the Church at Ephesus is a fair outline of the Church Period from A. D. 70 to A. D. 170.



1. **THE SALUTATION** - *"And unto the **angel** of the church in Smyrna write; These things saith the **first** and the **last**, which was **dead**, and is **alive**;"*

2. **THE PERSECUTION** - *"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**."*

3. **THE EXHORTATION** - *"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**."*

4. **THE PROMISE** - *"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 in its "Ephesian Period" having left its "First Love," the Lord is now about to "chastise" it, so as to cause it to return to Him. Smyrna has for its root meaning "bitterness" and means "Myrrh," an ointment associated with death, and we see in the meaning of the word of prophecy of the persecution and death which was to befall the members of the Smyrna Church. They were told not to "fear" the things that they should be called on to suffer, but to be faithful "unto" death, not "until" death. That is, not until the end of their "natural" life. They were not to "recant" when called upon to face a Martyr's death, but remain faithful until death relieved them of their suffering. The reward would be a "Crown of Life." This is the Martyr's crown.

Please note that it is not said that they had "lost" their first love but instead "left" their first love. Mr. Larkin makes the same mistake that many do in misquoting the verse. We can "leave" our first love but we cannot "lose" Him.

They were told that the "author" of their suffering would be the Devil, and its duration would be "*ten days*," which was doubtless a prophetic reference to the "Ten Great Persecutions" under the Roman Emperor, beginning with Nero, A. D. 64, and ending with Diocletian in A. D. 310. Seven of these "Great Persecutions" occurred during this "Smyrna Period" of Church History. Or it may refer to the 10 years of the last and fiercest persecution under Diocletian. This Period extended from A. D. 170 to Constantine A. D. 312. See the Judgment of Reward Chart.

James O. Combs observes, "The ten days of persecution were literal in Smyrna, but foreshadow the ten great persecutions under Emperors Nero, Domitian, Trajan, Marcus, Aurelius, Severus, Maximus, Decius, Valerian, Aurelian and Diocletian from 64 A. D. to 313 A. D.



1. **THE SALUTATION** - *"And to the **angel** of the church in Pergamos write; These things saith he which hath the **sharp sword with two edges**;"*

2. **THE COMMENDATION** - *"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**."*

3. **THE COMPLAINT** - *"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**. So hast thou also them that hold the **DOCTRINE OF THE NICOLAITANES**, which thing I hate."*

4. **THE WARNING** - *"**Repent**; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the **SWORD OF MY MOUTH**."*

5. **THE PROMISE** - *"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."*

In this message Pergamos is spoken of as "*Satan's Seat*." When Attalus III, the Priest-King of the Chaldean Hierarchy, fled before the conquering Persians to Pergamos, and settled there, Satan shifted his capital from Babylon to Pergamos. At first he persecuted the followers of Christ, and Antipas was one of his martyrs. But soon he changed his tactics and began to exalt the Church, and through Constantine united the Church and

State, and offered all kinds of inducements for worldly people to come into the Church. Constantine's motive was more political than religious. He wished to weld his Christian and Pagan subjects into one people, and so consolidate his Empire. The result of this union was that two false and pernicious doctrines crept into the Church. The first was the "*Doctrine of Balaam*," and the second the "*Doctrine of Nicolaitanes*." The latter we have already considered under the Message to the Church at Ephesus and the foothold it had secured in the Church was seen in the First Great Council of the Church held at Nicaea, in A. D. 325. The Council was composed of about 1,500 delegates, the laymen outnumbering the Bishops 5 to 1. It was a stormy council, full of intrigue and political methods, and from the supremacy of the "Clergy" over the "Laity" it was evident that the "*Doctrine of the Nicolaitanes*" had secured a strong and permanent foothold.

James O. Combs states, "Pergamos located about 100 miles north of Ephesus, was the capital of the kingdom of Pergamum, bequeathed by Attalus II to the Romans in about 313 B. C. Here was a center of education, where Babylonian wisdom, culture and cultism were maintained after the decline of that city. A temple to Aesculapius, a serpent-god, was erected here, the reconstruction of which is now in Germany and is a museum. Christians would regard this evil idolatry as Satanic in origin, spawned by that old serpent, the devil; hence it was "Satan's throne."

The "*Doctrine of Balaam*" is disclosed in the story of Balaam found in the Book of Numbers, chapters 22 to 25 inclusive. When the Children of Israel on their way to Canaan had reached the land of Moab, Balak the king of Moab sent for Balaam the Son of Beor, who lived at Pethor on the river Euphrates, to come and curse them. When the Lord would not permit Balaam to curse Israel, he suggested to Balak that he invite them to the licentious feasts of "Baal-Peor," and thus cause Israel to fall into a snare that would so anger the Lord that he would Himself destroy them. This Balak did, and the result was that when the men of Israel went to those sensual feasts and saw the "daughters of Moab" they committed whoredoms with them, which so kindled God's anger that He sent a plague that destroyed 42,000 of them. Now the word "Pergamos" means "Marriage," and when the Church entered into a union with the State it was guilty of "Spiritual Fornication" or "Balaamism."

The "Balaam Method" that Constantine employed was to give to the Bishops of the Church a number of imposing buildings called Basilicas for conversion into churches, for whose decoration he was lavish in the gift of money. He also supplied superb vestments for the clergy, and soon the Bishop found himself clad in costly vestments, seated on a lofty throne in the apse of the Basilica, with a marble altar, adorned with gold and gems, on a lower level in front of Him. A sensuous form of worship was introduced, the character of the preaching was changed, and the great "Pagan Festivals" were adopted, with but little alteration, to please the Pagan members of the church, and attract Pagans to the church. For illustration, as the Winter Solstice falls on the 21st day of December, which is the shortest day in the year, and it is not until the 25th that the day begins to lengthen, which day was regarded throughout the Heathen world as the "birthday" of the "Sun-God," and was a high festival which was celebrated at Rome by the "Great Games" of the Circus, it was found advisable to change the birthday of the Son of God, from April, at which time He was probably born, to December 25th, because as He was the "Sun of Righteousness," what more appropriate birthday could He have than the birthday of the Pagan "Sun-God?" It was at this time that

"Post-Millennial Views"

had their origin. As the Church had become rich and powerful, it was suggested that by the union of Church and State a condition of affairs would develop that would usher in the Millennium without the return of Christ, and since some scriptural support was needed for such a doctrine, it was claimed that the Jews had been cast off "forever," and that all the prophecies of Israel's future glory were intended for the Church. This "period" extends from the accession of Constantine A. D. 312 to A. D. 606, when Boniface III was crowned "Universal Bishop."



1. **THE SALUTATION** - "*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;*"

2. **THE COMMENDATION** - "*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.*"

3. **THE COMPLAINT** - "*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. And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not. Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds. 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.*"

4. **THE PROMISE** - "*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. But that which ye have already hold fast till I come. And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: 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. And I will give him the **MORNING STAR**. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."*

In His commendation to this Church, Christ lays the emphasis on their "*works*," as if they depended on them, and claimed they deserved merit for "*works*" of "supererogation," but he had a complaint to make against them that was terrible in its awfulness. He charges them not merely with permitting a bad woman, Jezebel, who called herself a "*prophetess*," to remain in the Church, but with permitting her to "*teach*" her pernicious doctrines, and "*seduce*" the servants to "*commit fornication*," and to "*eat things sacrificed to idols*."

Who was this woman in question? She was a "*pretender*," and called herself a "*prophetess*." Probably she was of noble lineage. She certainly was a woman of commanding influence. Whether her real name was Jezebel or not, she was so like her prototype in the Old Testament, Jezebel the wife of Ahab, that Christ called her by that name. Jezebel the wife of Ahab, was not by birth a daughter of Abraham, but a princess of idolatrous Tyre, at a time too, when its royal family was famed for cruel savagery and intense devotion to Baal and Astarte. Her father, Eth-baal, a priest of the latter deity, murdered the reigning monarch Phales, and succeeded him. Ahab, king of Israel, to strengthen his kingdom, married Jezebel, and she, aided and abetted by Ahab, introduced the licentious worship of Baal into Israel, and killed all the prophets of the Lord she could lay her hands on. This influence she exercised, not only while her husband was alive, but also during the reign of her two sons, Ahaziah and Jehoram. Moreover, the marriage of her daughter Athaliah to Jehoram, son of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, introduced idolatrous worship to Judah, and it was not long before there was a house of Baal built in Jerusalem, and so Jezebel caused all Israel to sin after the sin of Jeroboam the son of Nebat (I Kings 16:29-33).

There is no question that, whether the Jezebel of Revelation was a real person or not, she typified a "system" and that "system" was the "Papal Church." when the "Papal Church" introduced images and pictures into its churches for the people to bow down to it became idolatrous. When it set up its claim that the teaching of the Church is superior to the Word of God, it assumed the role of "prophetess." a careful study of the "Papal System" from A. D. 606 to the Reformation A. D. 1520, with its institution of the "Sacrifice of the Mass" and other Pagan rites, reveals in it the sway of "Jezebelism." it was also a period of "Jezebelistic Persecution," as seen in the wars of the Crusades, and the rise of the Inquisition. A careful comparison of this "message" with the parable of "the leaven" will reveal the wonderful correspondence between the two, the "Jezebel" of the Church of Thyratira, being the "woman" of the parable (see Matt. 13:33-35), who inserted the "leaven" of "false doctrine" into the meal of the gospel. This period extended from A. D. 606 to the Reformation of A. D. 1520.

The end of the church period, (Chs. 2-3) is left indeterminate. It will end by the fulfillment of I Thess. 4:14-17. Chapter 4:19 are believed to synchronize with Daniel's Seventieth Week, (Dan. 9:24). The great tribulation begins at the middle of the "*week*," and continues three and a half years, (Rev. 11:3-19.21). The tribulation is brought to an end by the appearing of the Lord and the battle of Armageddon (Matt. 24:29-30; Rev. 19:11-21). The kingdom follows (Rev. 20:4-5); after this the "*little season*" (Rev. 20:7-15), and then eternity.

The root error of the so-called "historical" school of apocalyptic interpretation lies in the disregard of this twice repeated statement. That interpretation assumes that Rev. 4-22 (or at least 4-18) runs parallel to Rev. 2-3, covering substantially the same period of time. Hence the endless confusion of the books professing to interpret the apocalypse. This is inevitable, for possibly no two minds, ranging through profane history from the first to the twentieth and now the twenty-first centuries for fulfillment of Rev. 4-18, would see those fulfillment in the same incidents. Indeed, except as they obviously take from one another, there is no agreement—unless it be in calling the papacy antichrist. Doubtless the papacy is anti-Christian, but antichrist is a person, not a system, so even this is wrong.

