

REVELATION – 101

8/10/25 – PM

Chapters 2-3 The Seven Churches of Asia / The Church Age (Dispensation)

Review – Chapter 1 – The book is all about Jesus Christ (“revealing / unveiling”)

- We believe the futuristic approach to interpreting Revelation
- Revelation must be studied chronologically
- John sees Jesus in all His glory / power, and Jesus tells him to write what he sees to the seven churches.

****Not able to spend a lot of time on each of these churches, but we have covered them in detail through a preaching series in the past.***

These seven churches are historical churches. They were churches that were actually assembling at the time John wrote the book of Revelation. John had pastored the church at Ephesus, a church that was founded by the Apostle Paul in Acts 19. The churches were located in a circular fashion geographically in order starting with Ephesus in the west, moving north, then east, then south, then back to Ephesus.

These churches also characterize many of today’s churches in their practices and spirit of their membership. For example, the people of Ephesus had left their first love (Christ) – how many Christians could be accused of that in 2025?

On another level, these seven churches describe the history of the church from the time Jesus started it until the time He will take it home. This is called the church age, or the dispensation (era) of grace. Sometimes “the age of grace”. While these seven church ages have distinct marks that identify periods of Christian history, they also flow continually through the history of the church, carrying things along from age to age, so that some elements of each church are found still today.

For chapters 2 and 3, we will use a seven point outline for each of the churches. The letter to each church follows the same pattern as John writes down what Jesus has to say to each of these congregations. Jesus addresses each of these letters to “the angel” of the church. *Remember, some believe that each church has a personal angel (messenger from Heaven), and some believe this title refers to the pastor of the church – as he is to be the messenger of God’s word.

The Outline we are using

1. The location of the church
2. The prophecy of the church age
3. Christ’s revealing of himself to the church
4. The condition of the church
5. The rebuke or exhortation to the church
6. The message to the church
7. The challenge for our church

I. The Church at Ephesus (Revelation 2:1-7) – The Fundamental Church

- a. Most prominent city in the Roman province of Asia. The Temple of Diana was located here (one of the 7 wonders of the world). Very wicked city, but the gospel was making a difference.
- b. Paul ministered here in Acts 19:1-20. It is believed that Timothy followed Paul, and then John as the pastor.
- c. Five of the letters say the church “in”, but this one and Laodicea say “of”, indicating it was not representing Jesus, but Ephesus
- d. This church age represents characteristics of the first 200-300 years of church history. It could be described as the “Apostolic” or early church age.
- e. Christ reveals himself in verse 1 as the one who holds the church in his right hand. This term indicates power / authority “right hand”. He also says he walks in the midst – indicating his presence and observation of the churches. He is watching BBC Savannah!

- f. The condition of the church is revealed in verses 2-3 (I know thy works – is repeated in all the letters). This was originally a strong, aggressive, Bible preaching, devil hating church. But now the church had moved into the next generations, and things had weakened and watered-down.
- g. He rebuked them for “leaving” (not losing) their first love. Their love for the Lord (first commandment) was found lacking. The furnace was there, but the fire had gone out (John Philips). Like a marriage that had gone flat – the relationship was there, but the love had departed. They needed to rekindle their love for Christ.
- h. The message (vs. 5-6) – Remember, Repent, Redo OR lose your place. It was either “revival or ruin”. *History records this church revived and was used by God for several centuries. He commends them for resisting the Nicolaitanes. Schofield notes that this term is in reference to those promoting a formal priesthood / hierarchy of clergy. (which would come in future church ages).
- i. The challenge – To him that overcometh (all 7 churches). Overcomers are saved people. This is not a question of if a saved person will overcome – it is a promise to those who have overcome, with Jesus as their savior. (Read – I John 4:4, 1 John 5:4-5). Tree of life is mentioned in Genesis 3:22-24 and Revelation 22:1-2. This indicates eternal life. The saved have ETERNAL life (Romans 6:23)

II. The Church “in” Smyrna (Rev. 2:8-11) – The persecuted church

- a. About 35 miles north of Ephesus. A seaport city, wealthy, and second only to Ephesus in importance in that region. Known as “the Lovely Crown Jewel of Ionia”. The city was noted for its wickedness and opposition to Christianity. “Smyrna” comes from the word myrrh, one of the city’s chief exports. Myrrh is a sweet perfume used in the anointing of dead bodies and as a holy anointing oil in the O.T. tabernacle.

- b. This second church and its age in history speak to the first few centuries to around 316 A.D. The years where there was great persecution of the church by the Roman government (Emperor Diocletian being the last great Roman persecutor). Coliseum, lions, burned at stake, etc. Forced Christians to renounce their faith.
- c. Christ reveals himself in vs. 8 (read) – He reminds them of his resurrection. Though many of them would die the martyr’s death of persecution, they will live again – even as Christ lives. What an encouragement for those facing death for their faith.
- d. In vs. 9 he recognizes their condition as that of tribulation (persecution) and poverty (lost their livelihoods because of faith) – “but thou art rich” (James 2:5 / 2 Corinthians 6:9-10). This church faced persecution from within, and from without (Hebrews 11:33-38)
 - i. This is one of two churches with NO rebuke from Christ
- e. His message to the church (vs. 10) – Fear not, this won’t last forever. He then mentions 10 days – this could be a literal 10 day time period that this church endured horrific violence, or it may refer to the 10 historic persecutions of Christians by pagan Roman emperors: Nero, Domitian, Trajan, Hadrian, Septimius Severus, Maximin, Decius, Valerian, Aurelia, Diocletian. Either way, Jesus is reminding His people that our trials and tribulations will not last forever! He promises them a “crown of life” – the martyr’s crown.
- f. The challenge / promise (vs. 11) that the overcomer shall not be hurt by the second death (Revelation 20:6, 14, 15 / Revelation 21:8)

III. The Church in Pergamos (Rev. 2:12-17) – The compromising church

- a. This city was also a prominent city in Asia, North of Smyrna about 25 miles. Very wealthy, with many temples devoted to idol worship and full of statues, altars, and sacred groves. Important religious center for pagan cults. Had a large university and a library of 200,000 books, which was later sent to Egypt as a gift from Anthony to Cleopatra. One of its main products was parchment paper – from which it got its

name. “Pergamen” was an animal-skin based material. “Pergamos” means “much marriage” – and we see the marriage of the church and state into one union for political gain and power.

- b. This church era began about 316 A.D. and will exist in some form through the end of the church age. Constantine the Great was a pagan emperor who converted to Christianity and legalized it in 313. He won major military battles over the Eastern empire and took control of the entire kingdom in 324. In 325 he called church officials to the Council of Nicaea, (Nicene Creed), solidifying the ecumenical, universal, Roman Catholic church. Through this “protection” of Christianity, the organized persecution ended.
- c. In verse 12, Jesus reveals himself as having a sharp, two-edged sword. (The word of God – Hebrews 4:12)
- d. The condition of the church (vs. 13) – dwelling in a major seat of wickedness (‘where Satan dwelleth”). Satan lays claim to the earth in Job, and also speaks of his throne in Isaiah 14:13-15. Paul reminds us of the spiritual battle in Ephesians 6:12. He commends the church that even though they are in the midst of evil, they were faithful to his name and his faith. *Antipas was a martyr, burned alive on a pagan altar.
- e. Christ rebukes the church in verses 14-15 for their compromise and carnality. He charges them for two false doctrines: 1) the doctrine of Balaam (Numbers 22) – you can’t curse God’s people, but you can corrupt them. This doctrine leads to idolatry and moral departure. 2) the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes (second mention) – which Jesus said “I hate”. This doctrine brought religious hierarchy of the priests over the people, and was established through the catholic church when Constantine united the church and state. Church officials became government officials, and used the power of the state to intimidate the people.

- f. The message (vs. 16) is to repent or else He would bring judgment. There were saved people in this church, but also lost people, and He will separate the sheep from the goats.
- g. The challenge to the overcomer – vs. 17 – hidden manna (Jesus is the bread of life). White stone – purity in Christ, the rock of ages. The church at Pergamos was in “fornication” with the world (marriage with pagans) – but Jesus is pure. A new name – The saved have a new name written down in glory!

IV. The Church in Thyatira – Rev. 2:18-29 – The Corrupted or False Church

- a. This church was in a small thriving town about 40 miles southeast of Pergamos, and had been established as a colony by Alexander the Great after the destruction of the Persian Empire. It was in a rich agricultural area and was famous for the production of purple dye. This industry was very organized and known for its artisan guilds.
- b. This church age was strongest from about 500-1500 A.D., from the time of Constantine to the Reformation age. This period was known as the Middle Ages.
- c. Jesus reveals himself as “the Son of God”, emphasizing his deity, as this churches corruption had led them away from true worship of Christ. Verse 18 also says his eyes are like unto a flame of fire and his feet are like fine brass. (similar to chapter 1) – Burning with indignation and purifying judgment, his eyes see the condition of this corrupted church. Feet of brass is a symbol of judgment throughout the scriptures.
- d. This is the longest and most severe letter of the seven. He describes them as being a church based on good works. Works of service, hospitality, and charity. Their works were prominent. *Salvation is based on faith – not works. We work because we ARE saved, not to GET saved, or STAY saved, or to EARN God’s favor or grace. The Bible calls those efforts “dead works” (Hebrews 6:1 / Hebrews 9:14 / Titus 3:5-7).

- e. The rebuke of this church is the most severe (vs. 20-23). He identifies that they were allowing the woman “Jezebel” to teach and to seduce to fornication and idolatry. Some believe this was an actual woman who had been given leadership in the church (maybe a pastor’s wife). Obviously the name is symbolic of the O.T. Jezebel, wife of Ahab, who introduced pagan, heathen worship in Israel, full of carnal practices and idolatry. She had the true prophets of the Lord killed and replaced with her pagan priests (O.T.). The relationship here is a product of the “marriage” that occurred in Pergamos. The church at Thyatira is the Pergamos corruption in full force and maturity. This church system represents the one-world church with its associates, nations, and governments. He warns of great tribulation for those involved with this church (except they repent – God’s grace). The other churches of history will see this judgment upon corruption, and recognize God’s righteousness (Jeremiah 17:10)
- f. Vs. 24-25 speaks to the godly remnant in this church. There are saved people in this church who do not believe those doctrines or beliefs of this corrupted church. He also tells them to hold fast – till I come (a reference to the rapture).
- g. The overcomer will rule and reign with Christ in the millennial kingdom. Power over the nations (rule) and the morning star (Christ is the morning star) – the bride is married to Christ for eternity.