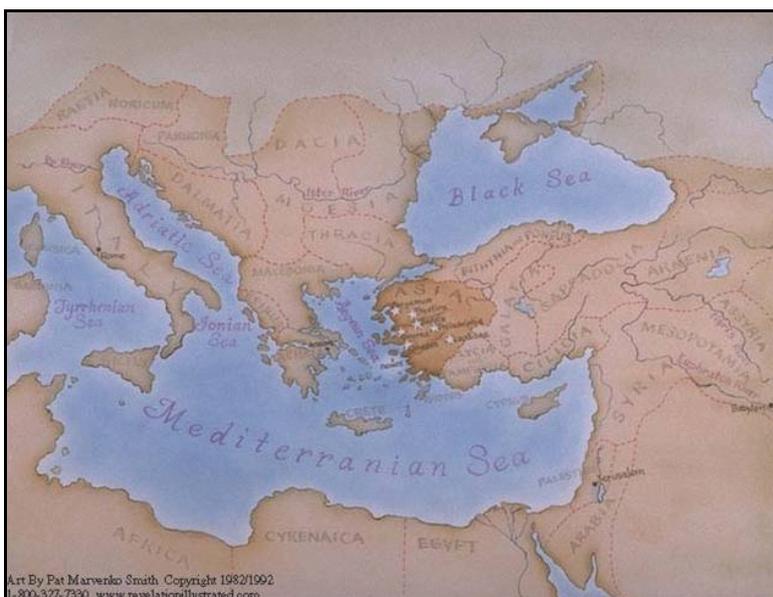


Revelation - Study 2

The Letters to the Seven Churches

Teacher Guide

Notes prepared by Dr. Ian A. H. Bond



You may use this study material in your personal Bible study or study group absolutely free. All we ask is that you acknowledge Free Online Bible Study and do not use this material on any website or for monetary gain. Thank you.

This study is part of a full college-level course on the Book of Revelation taught by Dr. Ian Bond. The complete Teacher's Guide, Student Notes, illustrative Power Point, the lectures in MP3 format, and Dr. Bond's book *Developing a Sound Eschatology*, Revised 2nd Edition, are available for purchase and download from the Teach the Nations, Inc. online store.

For more information go to www.free-online-bible-study.org

Copyright 2009 free-online-bible-study.org

This site is owned by Teach the Nations, Inc., a non-profit organization incorporated in the State of Georgia, which is exempt under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code from Federal income tax.

Contributions are deductible under section 170.

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Christ among the Lampstands (1:20)

1. A symbolic picture of CHRIST and His CHURCH.
2. The lampstand in the Tabernacle.
 - a. Seven branches with seven lamps.
 - (1) All of the branches of the lampstand join to a central stem.
 - (2) In John's vision, Jesus is the central stem, and he saw all seven lamps connecting directly to Jesus.
 - b. Not only is He LORD of the Church, but He is also the LIFE of the Church for out from Him is going the life of those churches.
3. John writes to seven distinct LOCAL churches. (1:11)
 - a. There were *seven* of them, yet they only made up the *one* total expression of the Body of Christ in that part of Asia.
 - (1) Wherever you find a local body of believers, they are 'the light' of that area.
 - (2) They are a distinct entity, yet because they are connected, vitally, mystically to the risen Christ, they form the part of the one, whole body of Christ, all over the world.
4. He holds in His hand the stars, which were the "angels" of the churches.
 - a. ἄγγελος, *aggelos*, a MESSENGER, envoy, one who is sent, an angel, a messenger from God.
 - (1) Exegetical question is posed by the ἄγγελοι τῶν ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησιῶν: is this a reference to BISHOPS or to real ANGELS?
 - (a) Gerhard Kittel: "Since elsewhere in the Apocalypse ἄγγελοι are always angels, the latter seems more likely...the reference would seem to be to angels representing the communities. These correspond to the angels of the nations already found in Judaism, and to Michael as the angel of Israel, but also to the description of angels, common to the whole Book of Revelation, as mediators of the divine action."

- b. $\acute{\alpha}\sigma\tau\acute{\eta}\rho$, *aster*, star, celestial light source; supernatural light for **LEADING** (Matt. 2: 2, 7, 9, 10)
 - (1) Every church is described as a “light-bearer.”
 - (2) Matt 5: 14—“*You are the light of the world.*”
5. Once you are a light in the darkness, the result is darkness **HATES** light.
- a. If you spend two days in intense darkness and someone puts all the neon lights on, it is going to hurt your eyes.
 - (1) For the people who have been in the darkness, and the light comes on, suddenly that hurts—*Turn the lights out!*
 - b. The fact that we are united to Christ is that we are shining in the world, and therefore the world’s hatred of Christ is taken out on us.

II. JESUS ADMINISTRATING HIS CHURCH (CHAPTERS 2-3)

A. Four Views of the Seven Churches:

1. The *preterist* is right in directing our attention to the **FIRST** century.
 - a. Any true exegesis must **BEGIN** with what this meant to them then.
2. The *historicist* believes that the seven churches represent the whole church in **TIME**—seven consecutive epochs in church history.
 - a. Ephesus covers the **EARLY** church.
 - b. Smyrna the **ROMAN** persecutions.
 - c. Pergamos the time of **CONSTANTINE**.
 - d. Thyatira the **MIDDLE** Ages.
 - e. Sardis the **REFORMATION**.
 - f. Philadelphia the worldwide **MISSIONARY** movement.
 - g. Laodicea the **LAST** days church.
3. The *futurist* believes that the seven churches will be **REESTABLISHED** in the very same cities of Asia just before Jesus returns.
 - a. Based on the assumption that “I will come” (2:5, 16; 3:4) refers to the Second Advent.

Copyright 2009 free-online-bible-study.org

This site is owned by Teach the Nations, Inc., a non-profit organization incorporated in the State of Georgia, which is exempt under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code from Federal income tax.

Contributions are deductible under section 170.

4. The *idealist* usually shares the *preterist* view, but adds the idea that the seven historical churches represent the WHOLE Church in all AGES.
 - a. Ephesus the ORTHODOX but LOVELESS fellowships.
 - b. Smyrna the SUFFERING.
 - c. Pergamos the ENDURING.
 - d. Thyatira the CORRUPT.
 - e. Sardis the DEAD.
 - f. Philadelphia the FEEBLE but EVANGELISTIC.
 - g. Laodicea the LUKEWARM.

B. The Seven-fold Structure of the Seven Letter

1. A commission
 - a. “To the angel of the church in....”
2. A characterization (of Christ)
 - a. Relates to Rev. 1:12-16
3. A commendation
 - a. Ephesus: Rejects evil, perseveres, has patience.
 - b. Smyrna: Gracefully bears suffering.
 - c. Pergamos: Keeps the faith of Christ
 - d. Thyatira: Love, service, faith, patience is greater than at first.
 - e. Sardis: Some have kept the faith.
 - f. Philadelphia: Perseveres in the faith.
 - g. Laodicea: None.
4. A criticism
 - a. Ephesus: Love for Christ no longer fervent.
 - b. Smyrna: None.
 - c. Pergamos: Tolerates immorality, idolatry, and heresies.
 - d. Thyatira: Tolerates cult of idolatry and immorality.
 - e. Sardis: A dead church.
 - f. Philadelphia: None.
 - g. Laodicea: Indifferent.

5. A correction
 - a. Ephesus: Do the works you did at first.
 - b. Smyrna: Be faithful until death.
 - c. Pergamos: Repent.
 - d. Thyatira: Judgment coming; keep the faith.
 - e. Sardis: Repent; strengthen what remains.
 - f. Philadelphia: Keep the faith.
 - g. Laodicea: Be zealous and repent.

6. A challenge: “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

7. A covenant promise to “He who overcomes.”
 - a. Ephesus: The tree of life.
 - b. Smyrna: The crown of life.
 - c. Pergamos: Hidden manna and a stone with a new name.
 - d. Thyatira: Rule over nations and receive morning star.
 - e. Sardis: Faithful honored and clothed in white.
 - f. Philadelphia: A place in God’s presence, a new name, and the New Jerusalem.
 - g. Laodicea: Share Christ’s throne.

III. APPLICATION: COMMON CHALLENGES CONFRONTING ALL CHURCHES

A. Introduction

1. “Everything mentioned here in one way or another could appear in almost any church with 150 to 200 people. These things are potential terminators of the vital life of the church. And Jesus came to confront them.” (Jack Hayford)

B. Devotion to DUTY is no guarantee of SPIRITUALITY

1. We are saved by grace (Eph. 2:6)

2. There is no sanctifying grace in neglect of duty.
 - a. Rev. 2:26—“To him who overcomes and does my will to the end...”

Copyright 2009 free-online-bible-study.org

This site is owned by Teach the Nations, Inc., a non-profit organization incorporated in the State of Georgia, which is exempt under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code from Federal income tax.

Contributions are deductible under section 170.

- C. There is an ATTRIBUTE of CHRIST that answers to every NEED
1. In each letter, the title of Jesus is carefully chosen to describe an aspect of his character which that church has tended to forget and needs to consider.
- D. REMEMBRANCE and REPENTANCE is the pathway to the overcoming life (2:5)
1. μνημονεύω, *mnemoneuo*, to CALL to one's mind.
 2. μετανοέω, *metanoew*, to CHANGE one's mind.
 - a. The command to repent is given FIVE times.
 - (1) If you have lost your first love, start doing the things you did when you were first believed.
 - (2) A congregation may continue to exist without being a light in the darkness.
- E. Four basic points of recurring error manifested in the church.
1. Spiritual LETHARGY (2:4; 3:15,16)
 2. Corrupted MINISTRY (2:6,15)
 3. Tolerated IMMORALITY (2:14,20-23; 2 Peter 2:15; Jude 11)
 4. LEGALISM (2:9; 3:9)
 - a. "Synagogue of Satan" refers to those who sought to add to the conditions for salvation.
- F. Nicolaitanism (2:6, 15)
1. Νικολαΐτης, Nikolaites, adherents of Νικόλαος, *Nikolaos*; from νίκος, *nikos* (3534), a CONQUEST, and λαός, *laos* (2992), a PEOPLE—means "victorious over the people or laity."

2. Led to division between CLERGY and LAITY.
 - a. Ministry became the preserve of selected “experts.”
 - b. Concept of “body ministry” was lost.
3. Became a heretical sect.
 - a. Possibly founded by Nicolaus.
 - (1) Either a convert from Antioch, or
 - (2) One of the seven deacons in Jerusalem.
 - b. Two heretical views:
 - (1) Practiced immorality by a complete separation of the SPIRITUAL and the PHYSICAL (Gnosticism).
 - (2) Developed a HIERARCHICAL system.

G. Doctrine of Balaam and Jezebel (2:14, 20-24)

1. Balaam: CHARISMA without CHARACTER
 - a. Numbers 22-25; 31:16 - Balak the King of Moab and Balaam the magician.
2. Jezebel: Her objective is to silence the voice of the PROPHECY.
 - a. 1 Kings 16:30-31 - Jezebel’s influence over King Ahab.
 - b. 1 Kings 18:4 - she murdered the prophets of the Lord.
 - c. 1 Kings 19:2-3 - she caused even Elijah to fear.
 - d. 1 Kings 21:5-16 - she arranged the murder of Naboth.
 - e. 1 Kings 21:25-26 - her evil domination of Ahab.
 - f. 2 Kings 9:22 - Jezebel was a harlot and a witch.
 - g. 2 Kings 9:30-31 - she tried to dominate Jehu.
 - (1) 1 Samuel 15:23 - rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft.
 - (2) A witch will never genuinely submit to her husband.
 - (3) A witch will never genuinely submit to his/her pastor.
3. Application: HEAR what the Holy Spirit is saying to the church.
 - a. LOOK to the Savior and LISTEN to the Spirit.
 - b. Remember and repent.
 - c. Treat ADVERSITY as a friend and as a refining force.