

Bible Study # 94
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Book of Revelation Series—Revelation 1—3

I want to get right into the book of Revelation this evening. We had an introduction to the book last time. Primarily, we **are focusing on Revelation 2 and 3 this evening that deal with the seven Churches of the book of Revelation.**

Much of the material we looked at last time focused on the setting of the book and the fact that this is written as a revelation—a revealing—from God Himself. It was given to Jesus Christ 'to show His servants the things that must shortly come to pass. It was sent and signified by His angel to His servant John' (Revelation 1:1). This is the message that God gave.

We saw in Revelation 1:10 that John addressed the fact that he was in the Spirit. He was transported into the Day of the Lord in Spirit. This is a time setting. This is a point of time that focuses in on the end time, the time of the return of Jesus Christ, the period of the Day of the Lord, as it's termed in the book of Joel and other places.

Revelation 1:10-11, "...and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet, saying, 'I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last,' and, 'What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea.'" So, in vision, John is transported.

All of a sudden, he hears this great voice behind him.

Verses 12-19, "Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands [KJV, "candlesticks"], and in the midst of the seven lampstands One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band. His head and His hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire; His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters; He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength. And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, 'Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of

Death. Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this.'"

Then He begins to interpret some of the symbolism that John saw.

Verse 20, "'The mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches.'"

There were seven Churches picked out in Asia Minor. If you have a map of Asia Minor in your Bible, I would suggest you turn to it. Asia Minor is now modern-day Turkey. These seven Churches were there. If you look closely, you will find there were other Churches that were also nearby. For instance, very near Laodicea was the Church of Colosse, to which the book of Colossians was written. There are several other cities that are mentioned. These seven are picked out.

Understand that God uses numbers in a symbolic fashion. Seven is used over and over in the book of Revelation because seven is symbolic of completion and perfection. Go back to the seven days of creation; seven stands out as God's number of completion and perfection. All through the book of Revelation you find seven stars, seven lampstands, seven Churches, seven angels, seven seals, seven trumpets, seven last plagues, seven heads of the beast. You have the number seven over and over. You have seven here, there and yonder that is used in a symbolic way all through Revelation.

These Churches were picked out. These were Churches on a Roman mail route. They are addressed in a particular order.

The seven lampstands—where does that symbolism come from? Does it remind you of something? If you think about it, it will remind you of the tabernacle back in the book of Exodus. Let's go back and notice, very briefly, Exodus 25 and Exodus 37.

Exodus 25:1-2, "Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: 'Speak to the children of Israel, that they bring Me an offering.'"

Verses 8-9, "'And let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them. According to all that I show you, that is, the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furnishings, just so you shall make it.'" God revealed the way it was to be.

The Apostle Paul tells us in Hebrews 8:5 that it was the pattern of heavenly things. The things in the tabernacle had symbolic value. They were built in a particular way.

Hold your place in Exodus 25. I want to read what Paul says in Hebrews 8.

Hebrews 8:1-2, “Now this is the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man.” This is referring to the tabernacle that Moses pitched. He said that Jesus Christ is the Minister of the true tabernacle.

Verse 5, “who serve the copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. For He said, ‘See that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.’” Why was it so important that Moses make it according to the pattern? –Because it had symbolic value. Everything in the tabernacle symbolized something either in heaven or in God’s great heavenly plan.

In Exodus 25, we go through what was to be built.

Exodus 25:31-32, we find, “‘You shall also make a lampstand [KJV, “candlestick”] of pure gold; And six branches shall come out of its sides: three branches of the lampstand out of one side, and three branches of the lamp stand out of the other side.’” There were six branches that came out of the lampstand. There was one central branch that came up, and then three on one side and three on the other, which made, of course, seven altogether.

Verse 37, “‘You shall make seven lamps for it, and they shall arrange its lamps so that they give light in front of it.’”

In Exodus 37, it further describes the making of this and how they were to do it.

Exodus 37:17, “He also made the lampstand of pure gold;”

Verse 23, “And he made its seven lamps, its wick-trimmers [KJV, “snuffers], and its trays of pure gold.” It talks about the seven lamps and the wick-trimmers of it.

Here’s the point: in the tabernacle itself, when you went into the Holy Place, there was a rectangular room that the priest walked into and there were three articles of furniture. On one side, there was a table that contained the 12 loaves of showbread or the bread of presence. This was brought in fresh every week. It was symbolic of the 12 tribes. It was there as an offering to God. These 12 unleavened loaves were on this table, the table of showbread. On the other side was this big seven-branched candelabrum. Really, it was not a candelabrum in

the sense that it held candles. It held a little bowl of olive oil because that was what they burned rather than a waxed candle. This was perpetually kept burning. This was the only light in there. Then at the back, right before the curtain that separated off the Holy of Holies, was the altar of incense.

Revelation 1:20 tells us that the seven lampstands are the seven Churches. In the tabernacle we had this seven-branch lampstand. In Revelation, we have seven lampstands. The people of God were symbolized by what was described there in the tabernacle. The 12 loaves were symbolic of each of the 12 tribes. They symbolized the people of God and were presented before God. These unleavened loaves represented the people of God.

Then we had the light that was provided by this candelabrum. What did Christ say in the Sermon on the Mount? Didn’t He say that we are to be the light of the world (Matthew 5:14)? God’s people through the centuries are symbolized as the light of the world. The lamp burned olive oil. Olive oil is used in the Bible as a type of God’s Spirit.

How do we give off light to the world? For light to be given off, there has to be a fuel supply. Our lights in here are electric. If the electricity went out, we would have no lights. If you have candles and all the wax burns away, you have no more light. If you have a kerosene lantern, when the kerosene burns up, you have no more light. There has to be a supply of fuel. Olive oil was the fuel. Just as in our lives, the only way we are going to be a light to the world is God’s Spirit in us. This was symbolic of the people of God.

I don’t have time to go into the parallels of the Old Testament, but if you go through the history of the people of God **in the Old Testament period, there were seven successive stages in the history of the people of God: 1)** the period of Moses and Joshua, **2)** the period of the Judges, **3)** the period of the united monarch of Saul, David and Solomon that ruled over the entire nation, **4)** the period of the divided monarchy that continued on down to the captivity, **5)** the period of restoration at the time of Zerubbabel, Ezra and Nehemiah and, after, the restoration period that continued all the way down through the Hellenistic time, **6)** the revival that took place at the time of the Macabbees, about 160 years prior to Christ and the brief work that they did in the physical sense and then, finally, **7)** the final stage of the history of the Old Testament Church was what we found when we came on the scene in the New Testament when Christ said the

Scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat (Matthew 23:2). That was the final stage of the history of the Old Testament Church.

The New Testament Church also has its history symbolized in seven stages, symbolized by these seven Churches that were picked out.

These Churches were picked out to illustrate something; there were other Churches in the area. This was not a letter to every Church that was in Asia Minor. There were many more than seven Churches. Colosse was right there where the rest of them were but wasn't in this group to receive the letters.

There were seven that were specifically picked out. They were on a Roman mail route, but the mail didn't run in only one direction. We have one-way streets. They didn't have one-way roads that they could go from "here to there," but then couldn't turn around and go back the other way. They didn't build roads that way in the Roman Empire. Roads ran both ways.

If you look at the seven Churches, they sort of go around in a circle. You could have started one way or started the other way. He started where he started because there was a particular symbolism involved. God inspired that John would pick out and focus in with a message to each one of these seven congregations, focusing on certain characteristics of each congregation that would be used to typify the people of God down through the centuries.

The history of God's people can be summarized in seven successive stages, symbolized by the seven lampstands. In the Old Testament, it was one lampstand with seven branches because it was in one place, one location and everything came out of the one place. The New Testament Church was different. You are looking at different groups, different places stretched across half of the globe, as we will see as we progress through the history of the New Testament Church.

It's important to understand that Jesus Christ pictures Himself standing in the midst of these lampstands (Revelation 1:13). The lampstands represent the Church, the light of the world. The seven lampstands were literally oil lamps, if you want to be technical about it because what's addressed here burned oil. Christ is pictured as standing in the midst. He wasn't just in the midst of those seven congregations in ancient Asia Minor. He is symbolized as standing in the midst because the seven Churches symbolized God's Church throughout the centuries. Jesus Christ is pictured as standing in the midst. We see Him

addressing it this way, and He addresses a message to each of the seven Churches.

Let's briefly look and summarize the history of the seven stages of God's Church. Then we will go through some of this material verse by verse.

The Church at **Ephesus** is the starting point, so that would obviously be the Church in the apostolic time. The Church of God, of course, had its beginnings Pentecost 31 A.D. It was originally centered in the area of Judea. John died in Ephesus. This was the headquarters of the Apostle John. Remember, John outlived all the other apostles by about 30 years. For about the last 30 to 35 years of his life, he was the last living of the Twelve. The Church was originally centered in Jerusalem and in Judea; Jerusalem was the headquarters. The Church spread out through the ministry of Paul and the other apostles. There were a number of things that happened.

I've brought these books along for a purpose. I want to show you something in just a few moments that is very instructive for us.

By 70 A.D., the true Christians had left Jerusalem. Remember, the Romans came in and destroyed Jerusalem. The Church had fled Jerusalem in 69 A.D. They went to a little place called Pella and were there for a period of about 65 years. In the meantime, of course, various problems and difficulties had come in. There were heresies that came in. The Apostle John lived until the 90s A.D. and he died in Ephesus. The Jerusalem Church, as I mentioned, fled Jerusalem in 69 A.D. They fled to Pella. By 135 A.D., the remnant of the Jerusalem church—most of the Jerusalem church—apostatized. That is the year the Jerusalem church ceased to keep the Sabbath and the Holy Days and began to observe Sunday. I'll read the documentation on that in a moment.

Sunday observance began to be openly promulgated in Rome and I have, interestingly enough, a book here entitled *From Sabbath to Sunday—A Historical Investigation of the Rise of Sunday Observance in Early Christianity*, published by the Pontifical Gregorian University Press in Rome. So, this is not just what I might say or what somebody else might say. It has the imprimatur of the Vatican right here. You can read it. You can even translate the Latin inscription: "With the approval of the Vicar in Rome." And it's dated. This represents a statement of history that is in accordance with what Catholic scholars would not take exception to at all, in terms of the statement that Sunday observance did not begin in Jerusalem.

Sunday observance began in Rome and they date it. There's no proof of it earlier than 115 A.D. In fact, the date for the first Easter Sunday service that was held in Rome, as opposed to a Passover observance, dates to 115 A.D. About 15 or 16 years after the death of the Apostle John, it was openly being taught that Sunday was the day of worship and not the Sabbath. I want to go into this because I think we should understand.

How can people get so far off in such a short period of time? There were people who had heard John preach. You're only one man removed from Jesus Christ Himself. John was the disciple whom He loved. He was the one who took care of Mary during the latter years of her life. He was the one who was there as a part of the Twelve. If somebody knew what Jesus taught, it should have been John. He certainly should have known. He was with Him as a disciple three and one-half years. He was the one that Christ trusted to take care of His mother. John certainly should have known and understood.

Interestingly, we are going to see some things, but I don't want to get ahead of myself. I want to give you an outline, and then I want to come back and fill in some details. I want to fill in more of the details on Ephesus because that's an important area.

It's interesting that the literal city of Ephesus came to an end shortly after 135-140 A.D. The population moved a short distance to higher ground. Ephesus was the capital of the Roman province of Asia.

I will read a brief quote from this book. This is a Protestant book. I have Catholic books and Protestant books here, as well as a couple of these early church fathers; for example: *The Apostolic Fathers*, Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*, and Gibbon's *Triumph of Christendom in the Roman Empire*. These are not just something that represents what Mr. Herbert Armstrong said or what the Church says in terms of our "ax to grind."

It's interesting. This book that I say is a Protestant book, a book by Jesse Lyman Hurlbut, *The Story of the Christian Church*, makes an interesting comment.

He says on page 41, "We name the last generation of the first century, from 68 to 100 A.D., 'The Age of Shadows,' partly because the gloom of persecution was over the church; but more especially because of all periods in the history, it is the one about which we know the least. We have no longer the clear light of the

book of Acts to guide us; and no author of that age has filled the blank in the history. We would like to read of the later work by such helpers of St. Paul as Timothy, Apollos and Titus, but all these and St. Paul's other friends drop out of the record at his death. For fifty years after St. Paul's life a curtain hangs over the church, through which we strive vainly to look; and when at last it rises, about 120 A.D. with the writings of the earliest church fathers, we find a church in many aspects very different from that in the days of St. Peter and St. Paul."

Amazing! Very different because you see one Church was on the horizon when the mist settled, and another church was on the horizon when the mist departed. How did the change take place? What happened?

Revelation 2 and 3 gives the history of the true Church. The Church at Ephesus was symbolic of the first stage of Church history, which is basically the history of the Church from about 31 A.D. down to about 135 A.D.

The Church at **Smyrna** pictures the second stage in the history of the Church. We pick up the story in the period after the death of the Apostle John and trace it down to about the mid-seventh century. We will use 650 A.D. as an approximate date.

The first leader, on whom we will focus, was Polycarp. Polycarp was the bishop or leader of the Church in the literal city of Smyrna, which was a neighboring city to Ephesus. Polycarp had been a disciple of the Apostle John. In fact, we have two or three of the letters of Polycarp that actually remain. They have been preserved. Polycarp died about 160 A.D. He had been a disciple and personal acquaintance of the Apostle John. He was a very elderly man when he died. He was probably in his late 20s when the Apostle John died, and he was well into his 90s at the time of his own death.

We come down. We'll read a little bit about the Church during this time. Various names are applied to the Church. The history of the true Church was primarily written by its enemies. The true Church was being persecuted. It was on the fringes of the Roman Empire during much of this time.

This period, which is symbolized by the Church at Smyrna, was a time of intense persecution and martyrdom. One of the names attached to the people of God was the term "Ebionites." There were others who were called Ebionites, too. It was a term that meant "poor people." We will see some things about that.

The Catholic Church, as we know it, emerged during this period. It arose from the confusion and multiple heresies that existed in the first century. It wasn't just one heresy in a straight-line shot; there were multiple heresies. There were certain things that became predominant. There was the emergence of a predominant leadership in Rome. It was the alliance of church and state made at the time of the emperor Constantine that ensured the supremacy of the bishop at Rome and the particular brand of "Christianity" that he happened to champion. The Council of Nicaea, which was called to standardize "Christian" practice, was called by the authority of the emperor Constantine. The Council of Nicaea was presided over by the emperor Constantine. He was the one who actually sat in the chair and presided over the meeting. The empire had become split and splintered, so it was his intent to use religion to reunify the empire. The old Roman state religion no longer had much influence.

I will give you a quote about Polycarp and later Polycrates. Polycrates was a later disciple of Polycarp. A dispute that was called the Quartodeciman Controversy came to a head around 200 A.D. "Quartodeciman" is just a Latin word that means "the fourteenth." The controversy about "the fourteenth" is what it means. We celebrate the Passover on the 14th day of the first month of the sacred calendar. The controversy was: when should the Passover be celebrated? You know, of course, that the term that is used in the Latin to refer to Easter, which is celebrated in the Catholic world, is the Latin word for Passover. It's called the "Paschal" season. A similar term is used in French to refer to it. French, Spanish and Italian all use terms that are derived from Passover. What it amounted to was the old Samaritan trick of calling the wrong thing by the right name. They appropriated names from the Bible and applied them to pagan things. The controversy over celebrating Passover was: should you celebrate the 14th day of the first month of the sacred calendar as Passover or should you celebrate it on a Sunday morning as the Paschal service?

Eusebius was a Catholic historian and bishop who attended the Nicene Council. He lived in the fourth century A.D. He was there with the emperor Constantine and the others at the Council of Nicaea. He wrote a history of the church up until the time of the emperor Constantine.

Quoting here from Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*, he said, "The bishops, however, of Asia

[referring to Asia Minor], persevering in observing the custom handed down to them from their fathers, were headed by Polycrates [Polycrates was the disciple of Polycarp, and Polycarp had been the disciple of John.]. He, indeed, had also set forth the tradition handed down in them, in a letter which he addressed to Victor and the church of Rome. 'We,' said he, 'therefore, observe the genuine day; neither adding thereto nor taking therefrom. For in Asia great lights have fallen asleep [His use of terms is interesting.], which shall rise again in the day of the Lord's appearing, in which He will come with glory from heaven, and will raise up all the saints;'"

Now, Polycrates didn't believe that they had all gone off to heaven. He didn't say, 'They are up in heaven watching us.' He said, 'They've fallen asleep and they are going to wake up when Christ comes back in power and in glory.' He names all various ones. He mentions Philip, one of the 12 apostles who sleeps in Hieropolis. He mentions John who rested on the bosom of our Lord, who's buried in Ephesus. He mentions Polycarp of Smyrna. He goes through and mentions various others.

Continuing, he said, "...[All these who are now] awaiting the episcopate from heaven [the visitation from heaven; the return of Christ], when he shall rise from the dead. All these observed the fourteenth day of the Passover according to the gospel, deviating in no respect, but following the rule of faith. Moreover, I, Polycrates, who am the least of all of you, according to the tradition of my relatives, some of whom I have followed. For there were seven, my relatives bishops, and I am the eight; and my relatives always observed the day when the people (*i.e.* the Jews) threw away the leaven.'" Oh, they observed the Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread! He said "my relatives always observed the day when the people threw away the leaven."

Continuing, "'I, therefore, brethren, am now sixty-five years in the Lord [He had been in the Church for 65 years, so he was a very elderly man by this time—certainly well into his 80s.], who having conferred with the brethren throughout the world, and having studied the whole of the sacred Scriptures, am not at all alarmed at those things with which I am threatened, to intimidate me. For they who are greater than I, have said, 'we ought to obey God rather than men.'" ...Upon this, Victor, the bishop of the church of Rome, forthwith endeavored to cut off the churches of all Asia,

together with the neighbouring churches, as heterodox, from the common unity. And he publishes abroad by letters, and proclaims, that all the brethren there are wholly excommunicated.”

It goes on. A little later he talked about Polycarp, who had actually made a trip to Rome many years earlier, trying to explain to the church at Rome that the Passover should be kept on the 14th day of the first month.

Continuing, it says, “And when the blessed Polycarp went to Rome, in the time of Anicetus [bishop of Rome], and they had a little difference among themselves.... For neither could Anicetus persuade Polycarp not to observe it, because he had always observed it with John the disciple of our Lord, and the rest of the apostles, with whom he associated; and neither did Polycarp persuade Anicetus to observe, who said that he was bound to maintain the practice of the presbyters [elders] before him.”

So, Anicetus followed the tradition in Rome which dates back to 115 A.D. Anicetus’s predecessors were Pius, Hyginus, Telephorus and Sixtus. Sixtus is the first of the bishops who is mentioned by Eusebius as having observed Easter Sunday. Sixtus, according to the dates given, came to his position in 115 A.D. That is why I gave the date 115 A.D. The idea certainly was around before then, but it was in 115 A.D. that Sixtus took over control as the presiding bishop in Rome and accepted Easter Sunday. We are going to see a little later how he made and introduced something like that.

Notice Polycarp and Polycrates. Here were people who were the true Church, who had a connection to the original apostles and—even as a matter as preserved by Catholic historians recognized—were observing the days we observe. This would be the time of Smyrna.

Pergamos was the third Church and the third phase mentioned. There was a time when the Church was in hiding. The very word “Pergamos” means “fortified.” They were known in history as Paulicians and Bogomils. These were terms that were applied to them. Some of the leaders, of whom we have record, are men such as Constantine of Mananali, Simeon who flourished about 690 A.D. and Sergius who flourished about 830 A.D. Pergamum was originally the seat of the Pontifex Maximus. It was also the city of Aesculapius the serpent, the original city.

Thyatira was the fourth Church, the fourth stage. It symbolized the Church in the Middle Ages. It was a period during which one of the

primary terms that was applied was the Waldenses. Peter DeBruys and Peter Waldo were some of the best-known leaders. Peter Waldo flourished between about 1150 and 1200 A.D. These were people who, in the latter part of their history, were scattered in areas of Southern Europe and Eastern Europe, down in the Alpine areas stretching across through portions of France and Italy. Originally, they had moved into that area from Bohemia. By about 1500 A.D., they were pretty well extinct.

However, the fifth stage, the Church at **Sardis**, known as the Lollards in English History, came to England in the late 1300s and 1400s. They spread in from some of the German and Bohemian-speaking realm. There are records of Sabbath-keeping Churches in England during the 1500s, 1600s and 1700s. We have a record of Stephen Mumford who came from England to Newport, Rhode Island in 1668 A.D. and established the first Church of God in the new world. It started in Rhode Island in 1668 A.D. In the early 1800s, a group called Seventh Day Baptists split off from the Church of God. About 1860 A.D., the largest portion of the Church followed the wife of an elder in the Church. This woman claimed to be a prophetess and to have visions. Her name was Ellen G. White. Those who followed her took the name Seventh Day Adventists. It was the remnants of these people that Mr. Herbert Armstrong came among in the 1920s and gave rise to what we term the sixth stage of the history of the church, typified by the Church at **Philadelphia**.

It’s interesting. The original city of Philadelphia was in a very earthquake-prone area of Asia Minor, and it was the site of frequent earthquakes. The name “Philadelphia” means “brotherly love.” We find that the Church in Philadelphia is pictured as going through open doors to do a work. We find that it is promised protection from the tribulation. This represents the work that God raised up through Mr. Herbert Armstrong, of which we are a continuation.

The Church at **Laodicea** pictures the final stage. Laodicea, in Asia Minor, was originally a very wealthy city. It was known for its soft wool and for its very soft life. It was a very prosperous area. There was a great pagan temple in Laodicea, which served as sort of the medical center of Asia Minor. It was an area to which pilgrimages were made from all over the area. It was also prominent in the manufacture of eye salve. We will notice a play on that a little later in the message to the Laodicean Church. The name “Laodicea” means “the people judge.”

“*Lao*” means “people” in the Greek language; “*dicea*” is the word for “judge.” It clearly is the era that is the final stage of the Church. The description given is very much in tune with the permissive, do-your-own-thing, materialistic, complacent attitude that is so pervasive in our society. Certainly, the people of God are not immune from the attitude and the spirit of the time.

I want to go back and comment a little bit on the situation at Ephesus—the Ephesians Church and the message to the Church at Ephesus.

Revelation 2:1, “To the angel of the church of Ephesus write...” This is addressed to the angel of the Church of Ephesus.

Verses 2-7, “I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name’s sake and have not become weary. Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent. But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.”

What is He talking about? The test of the Ephesians era was they had to weigh the claims of those who claimed to be apostles and were not.

2 Corinthians 11:13-15, Paul addressed that, “For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, ...”

This is going back to Simon the sorcerer. We studied about him in Acts 8. We went into a little bit about him last Bible study. According to history, Simon the sorcerer (from Samaria) left Samaria and went to Rome by 42 A.D. I should have brought the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, the old 11th edition, to read the article. They have about a three-page spread on Simon Magus. If you look him up in a modern encyclopedia you won’t find much, but the old encyclopedia had quite a spread on him. According to historical sources, he went to Rome about 42 A.D. and

remained there on up until his death in the late 60s. He was very much responsible for the heresies that eventually coalesced into the Catholic Church.

The Church in Ephesus (the Ephesians era) was tested in having to weigh the competing claims of those who claimed to be apostles—whether or not they were. They hated the deeds of the Nicolaitans. “Nicolaitans,” if you translate it, “Nicolas” is the Greek translation of “Baal.” “Nicolas” (“*niko*” in the Greek) means “conqueror” or “ruler”; “*lao*” means “people”—ruler of the people. “Balaam,” “*Baal*” means “lord” or “ruler”; “*am*” means “people.”

Jude 3-4, Jude told them, “...contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Verse 11, “Woe to them! For they have gone in the way of Cain, have run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit [KJV, “reward”], and perished in the rebellion of Korah.” This is the mystery of lawlessness that Paul said was already at work when he wrote to the Thessalonians in the 50s (2 Thessalonians 2:7).

Here is the way things got off the track. I am reading from a book, *The Collier Catholic Reader’s Series* entitled “Heresy and Orthodoxy.” In the book, he is quoting from the writings of Marcion. Marcion was a teacher. This is written about 144 A.D.

Here is the statement: “Paul alone preached the gospel, the essence of which is salvation by faith. For it’s enough to believe and to love.”

This is the statement that was made and began to be preached; you see how he got off the track. We are warned about those who would turn the grace of God into lasciviousness, into lawlessness (Jude 4). They confused God’s grace with a license to sin. They say the law is done away and that grace replaces the law.

2 Peter 3:15-16, notice Peter’s warning, “and account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation—as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which those who are untaught and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures.”

Peter said there are people who are taking what Paul said out of context. They are twisting the

Scriptures. What were they teaching? They were teaching that all you had to do was to believe and to love. If you really understand what it means to believe, and if you really understand what it means to love, yeah, that's fine, but they didn't understand it that way.

1 John 5:3, John said, "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments."

But their teaching was, 'Look, all you have to do is believe on the person of Jesus Christ.' Their gospel is a message that exalts the person of Jesus Christ and leaves aside the message Jesus Christ brought. It substitutes a gospel *about* Jesus for the gospel *of* Jesus Christ, the gospel He, Himself, brought. It was an "all you have to do is to believe and to love" gospel. That sounds good. That's pretty and that's flowery. That sounds beautiful. But if all you have to do is to believe and to love, it sets the stage for the next thing. This was the foundation of the heresy that was undermining the necessity of observing the law.

When you look at the earliest church fathers, they didn't say it was wrong to keep the Sabbath. They simply said, 'It's fine to do it as a custom, but it's not necessary for salvation.' They originally didn't try to stop people from doing it. They just said, 'Now, it's fine to observe these things. It's fine to do it and follow the example of the apostles and the ones that have gone before, but it's not necessary for salvation because for salvation, all you have to do is to believe and to love. All you have to do is believe in Jesus and love one another. That's all you have to do to be saved.'

But by about the time of John's death, intense anti-Jewish persecution began to break out in Rome. There had been several previous expulsions of the Jews from Rome. At that time, a very virulent wave of anti-Semitism swept Rome, in particular, and other parts of the empire. So, at that point, the bishop of Rome said, 'Sabbath observance is fine, but it's not necessary for salvation. All it does is get us unnecessary persecution because we are confused with the Jews. What we need to do is to make a clear distinction in our identity from the Jews, so let's not follow their custom anymore. It's not necessary for salvation. All we have to do is to believe and to love. We just have to believe in Jesus and love one another. Why should we get persecuted because everybody's mad at the Jews? Let's substitute; let's just have our services the next day.' That sounds reasonable, right?

It's interesting. Let me find my quote here in *From Sabbath to Sunday*, Chapter 7: "Anti-Judaism in the Fathers and the Origin of Sunday." This quotes Ignatius who was bishop of Antioch right after the Apostle John's death. You have to realize there was a mixture; there were people who were lurking around the fringes. There were various ones who had various positions, and once John died, it all came out of the woodwork.

3 John 9-10, even when John was alive—read 1, 2 and 3 John—you remember, John even wrote, "I wrote to the church, but Diotrophes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us. Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does, prating against us with malicious words. And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, putting them out of the church."

John said, 'If I come down there, I'm going to deal with that fellow.' But you see, John was on up into his late 90s and he died. When John was dead and no longer on the scene, then you had all this stuff that began to erupt.

Ignatius writes and I'll just read the quote from his writings, "For if we are still practicing Judaism, we admit that we have not received God's favor."

"The frequent recommendations to abandon the practice of Judaism imply a strong leaning toward Jewish practices within the Christian community of Asia Minor." You don't have to keep telling people not to do something if they are not doing it already. The fact that you had letters written to Christian churches in the second century condemning the practice of Judaism means that these people were doing these things.

Continuing, "...the condemnation of Jewish practices such as 'sabbatizing' which is the observance of the Sabbath according to Jewish manner, and the exhortation 'to live according to the life of the Lord...'" The beginning of the use of the term "Lord's Day" had to do with this.

Ignatius urges Christians to stop practicing Judaism and to stop living like the Jews. He's writing within five or ten years of John's death.

Ignatius says, "[If then those] 'who lived in ancient ways' and who 'attained a new hope', no longer sabbatizing but living according to the Lord's life (or, Lord's Day)... it is wrong to talk about Jesus Christ and live like Jews." 'It is monstrous to talk of Jesus Christ and to practice Judaism.' He is writing this sort of thing.

I want to read a little bit here from the *Epistle of Barnabas*. He's writing about 120 A.D. He tried to spiritualize away the law. He said, "Further, then, it is written about the Sabbath, also in the Ten Words which He spoke to Moses face to face on Mount Sinai, 'And treat the Sabbath of the Lord as holy with clean hands and a pure heart.' And in another place he says, 'If my sons keep the Sabbath, I will let mercy upon them.' He mentions the Sabbath at the beginning of the creation: 'And in six days God made the works of His hand, and ended on the seventh day, and he rested on it and made it holy.' Observe, children, what 'he ended in six days' mean. This is what it means, that in six thousand years the Lord will bring all things to an end, for a day with him means a thousand years. He himself bears me witness, for he says, 'Behold, a day of the Lord will be like a thousand years.' Therefore, children, in six days, that is, in six thousand years, all things will be brought to an end. 'And he rested the seventh day' means this: When his Son comes and destroys the time of the lawless one, and judges the ungodly and changes the sun and moon and stars, then he will rest well on the seventh day."

He goes on to say that, "If, then anyone can now, by being pure in heart, treat as holy the day God declared holy, we are entirely deceived. Observe that we will find true rest and treat it as holy only when we shall be able to do so having ourselves been made upright and had the promise fulfilled..."

His contention was, 'We can't really keep the Sabbath until after Christ gets back. We don't need to do away with it.'

There's an interesting statement that he made. Barnabas took a very allegorical approach to the Scripture. He said, "Now for as much as Moses said you shall not eat swine or eagle or falcon or crow or any fish that has no scale upon it, he received in his understanding three ordinances. So then it's not a commandment of God that they shouldn't bite with their teeth, but Moses was speaking it in spirit. Accordingly, he mentioned the swine with this intent. You shall not cleave, says he, to such men that are like swine; that is when they in their luxury forget the Lord."

What he did was quote Scripture and say, 'He didn't really mean that. He didn't really mean you shouldn't eat swine in the sense of eating it with your teeth. He's just saying you shouldn't associate with people who act like pigs.' They gave an interesting line of reasoning.

I am going to paraphrase a little of this for the sake of time. They said, 'Now, look, on the first

day of creation God said, "Let there be light." He did that on the first day. We call the first day of the week "Sunday." Who is the light of the world? —Jesus Christ. He's called, in Malachi 4:2, the "Sun of Righteousness." So, really, the first day is the day that should be symbolic of Jesus Christ.' This was the sort of reasoning that they used, 'See, no commandments and no particular point.'

Justin Martyr, who was writing about 150 A.D., used various things to justify Sunday worship—the creation of light on the first day, the resurrection of Christ. They quite often used the term "the eighth day." What is the eighth day? Well, it's the day after the Sabbath. The eighth day would be the first day. Justin Martyr went into all sorts of things—the fact that circumcision was on the eighth day (well, circumcision of the heart), there were eight souls in the ark, the flood covered the mountains 15 cubits, which means seven plus eight. Now what does that have to do with it? It was only at a later time that the emphasis on a Sunday resurrection began to be the primary reason. That couldn't be used at first because you had to get further and further away from the time of the original apostles. Since John was there as a witness to the resurrection, you couldn't very well preach about Easter Sunday when he was around. He was there. He saw Jesus Christ in His resurrected state. But once John was dead, the "floodgates" were open. All kind of things could come out. John wasn't around to say, 'No, it wasn't that way.' Paul's writings were the ones that were primarily twisted and misapplied.

Let me read just one other brief thing. This was from Edward Gibbon's (who was a famous British historian) *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. To show you a little bit of the way things changed that way, he says, "The ancient and popular doctrine of the Millennium was intimately connected with the second coming of Christ. As the works of the creation had been finished in six days, their duration in their present state, according to a tradition that was attributed to the prophet Elijah, was fixed to six thousand years. By the same analogy, it was inferred that this long period of labour and contention, which was now almost elapsed, would be succeeded by a joyful Sabbath of a thousand years; and that Christ, with the triumph band of the saints and the elect who had escaped death, or who had been miraculously revived, would reign upon the earth until the time appointed for the last and general resurrection." He explains what the church taught.

Continuing further down, “The doctrine of Christ’s reign upon the earth was at first treated as a profound allegory.” By the time of the second and third century, it was profound allegory. Iraneus, Ignatius and some of these others said it was a profound allegory.

“[It] was considered by degrees as a doubtful and useless opinion,... He said, ‘That’s just a matter of speculation. We don’t really know about that. He may not really reign for a thousand years. We can’t really prove that He’s going to literally come back and rule for a thousand years. That’s just speculation, and, you know, it gets our minds off on speculating about Christ coming back and everything. That’s doubtful and useless opinion.’

Continuing, “...and was at length rejected as the absurd invention of heresy and fanaticism.” It started out being accepted and taught as the truth. Then it was a profound allegory. Then it was just sort of a useless opinion and didn’t really matter one way or the other. Then it progressed to being heresy and fanaticism, and they were ready to persecute you if you believed that. It was a step-by-step progression. This sort of approach was the way so much of the rest of this went. The first approach was to continue to do the law. They continued to follow many of these customs, but what they undercut was whether or not it was necessary.

It’s sort of like boiling a frog in water. You turn up the heat and the water comes to a boil. If you threw the frog in the boiling water it would hop out, but if you put it in cold water and turn up the heat, it gets warm gradually and the old frog doesn’t notice until it’s too late.

If they had come along and just immediately said the Sabbath and the Holy Days were done away and they were going to keep Sunday, Easter and Christmas, boy, that’s quite a contrast. They couldn’t do that while John was alive. They couldn’t just instantly come up with that as the “first dash out of the box.” What they came up with is, ‘Look, the only thing you have to do is to believe.’

As Marcion wrote, ‘It’s just to believe and to love. That’s all that’s necessary, to believe and to love—believe in Jesus and love one another. All of these other things really aren’t necessary. It’s fine, but it’s not necessary. Well, if it’s not necessary, why should you be persecuted for it? Maybe we should just do something else.’ And so they did. They said it would make a clear demarcation of their history from that of the Jews.

I will read a little bit of what Gibbon says, “The history of the church in Jerusalem affords a lively proof of the necessity of those precautions, and of the deep impression which the Jewish religion had made on the minds of its sectaries. The first fifteen bishops of Jerusalem [all circumcised Jews and the congregation over which] they presided united the law of Moses with the doctrine of Christ [In other words, it was the true Church.]... The Jewish converts, or, as they were afterwards called, the Nazarenes [We find that term is actually used in the Bible; that was a term that was applied to them.]... The Nazarenes retired from the ruins of Jerusalem to the little town of Pella beyond the Jordan, where that ancient church languished about sixty years [and after the second Jewish revolt in 135 A.D.]... But at length, under the reign of Hadrian, the desperate fanaticism of the Jews filled up the measure of their calamities; and the Romans, exasperated by their repeated rebellions, exercised the right of victory with unusual rigour [They completely destroyed Jerusalem.]. The emperor founded, under the name of Aelia Capitolina, a new city on Mount Sion, to which he gave the privileges of a colony; and denouncing the severest penalties against any of the Jewish people who should dare to approach its precinct. He fixed a vigilant garrison of a Roman cohort to enforce the execution of his orders. The Nazarenes had only one way left to escape the common prescription.... They elected Marcus for their bishop, a prelate of the race of the Gentiles [He was a native of Italy.]... At his persuasion the most considerable part of the congregation [most of them] renounced the Mosaic Law [which would be the Sabbath],... By this sacrifice of their habits and prejudices, they purchased a free admission into the colony of Hadrian,....”

Then he goes on to describe, “...the obscure remnant of the Nazarenes which refused to accompany their Latin bishop...spread themselves into the villages adjacent to Damascus,... [and are known by] the contemptuous epithet of Ebionites.” He went on to describe how traces of the Ebionites can be discovered as late as the fourth century.

When Christ talked to the Church in **Ephesus**, He addressed those who had to make a distinction. The test of the true Church at that point was ‘to test [KJV, “try”] those that said they are apostles’ (Revelation 2:2). –Whether or not they were. How do you test them? You put it to the test.

Isaiah 8:20, “To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.” There’s no truth in them. The test as to whether someone was what he said he was, was whether or not he taught God’s truth. It was a time of demarcation between many who called themselves “Christian.” We find that very few really preserved and held on to the truth. They took the path of least resistance, undermined by things that took place over a period of years.

During much of the Ephesian era, there wasn’t a clear distinction between the true Church and the false church. In many cases, brethren were meeting in congregations that consisted of various ones because everybody called themselves Christians and congregated together. Communication, transportation and many things played into this. The clear cleavage between what became the Catholic Church and what remained as the true Church of God was accomplished during the time of the Smyrna Church.

Revelation 2:8-9, he says, “And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write, :... ‘I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich) [Spiritually, they were rich; physically and materially they were in poverty and under great persecution.]; and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.’”

The Samaritans anciently claimed to be Jews, but they weren’t. You can read of that back in the period of the Old Testament. We read of it when we went through Ezra and Nehemiah. Here were their modern-day New Testament descendants. The followers of Simon Magus claimed to be spiritual Jews and they weren’t that either. The message to Smyrna is, ‘I know those that claim to be My true people and really aren’t. For them to attach My name to them is blasphemy. I know that these false heretical groups are not the Church of God. It’s the synagogue of Satan.’

Verse 10, “Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days [There was a ten-year persecution from 303 to 313 A.D. by the emperor Domitian that seems to be addressed here.]. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.”

This Church was perhaps the most persecuted period. It was a time of intense persecution. It was during the next stage that God removed His people from the bounds of the Roman Empire.

For about 1,260 years, the Church remained primarily outside the pale of the Roman Empire and the populated urban areas.

It was basically during this Smyrna period that the emperor, Constantine, came on the scene. There are historical records in the church fathers concerning controversies involving the true Church and the heretics, all the way up to the time of Constantine.

The Council at Nicaea was called to settle the issue of when to observe Passover. The Roman practice of Easter Sunday was the decree. Then just five or six years later, the Council of Laodicea set enforcement on the issue of Sunday observance in place of the Sabbath. You don’t have to make an issue of those things if they are universal. If Christ is the One who changed it, why do you find disciples 300 years later still doing something else? The only reason that Constantine and the Roman government had to get in on the act was because they were trying to make something that had crept in and had become predominant, universal. But it wasn’t, by any means, universal. The true Church visibly disappeared from the scene during this period.

Smyrna comes from the word “*mer*.” It means “perfume.” That was what was offered on the altar of incense. They were, in that sense, a living sacrifice to God.

“Pergamos” means “fortified.” The Church at this point, the seventh century A.D., migrated out of Asia Minor up into the very mountainous regions of Armenia and remote mountain valleys. They were pretty well isolated from the general population.

Revelation 2:13, Pergamos was told, “I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is. And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.”

Pergamos was the ancient seat of the Pontifex Maximus of the Babylonian Mystery religion. It was in 133 B.C. that Attalus III, god-king of Pergamum, died. In his will, he left his kingdom and his title “Pontifex Maximus” to the Romans. He literally bequeathed his kingdom to the Roman rulers in his will in 133 B.C. The title “Pontifex Maximus” was used by the Roman rulers. It became a title of Julius Caesar; he became Pontifex Maximus. It continued on down and all the emperors of the Roman Empire used that title up until Emperor Gratian in 378 A.D. He resigned the title “Pontifex Maximus” and bestowed it upon Pope Damascus in 378 A.D. That title has since been used by Rome. That’s

why the term “Roman Pontiff” is used referring to the pope. It goes back to that title. That’s the trace of it.

It refers to Pergamos as being “the place where Satan’s seat dwells” because that ancient city was the location of that. “Antipas” in Greek could be translated “Antipater” or you could translate it literally as “antipope” or “one who was against or opposed the pope” in that way. It’s very likely a reference to Constantine of Mananali who was martyred in 684 A.D. for preaching against the pope. They labeled him as the antichrist of the gospels. It describes this.

The Church at Pergamos began to remove itself from the confines of the empire up into that area of Armenia.

Verse 14, he said, “But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam,”

Verse 15, “Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.”

There was a certain involvement of spiritual fornication. It was a time of persecution. There were various attempts of those who would try to make political arrangements and alliances with the world trying to protect themselves.

Verse 16, they were told, “Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth.” They were warned that the way to resolve their problem was not to enter into political alliances.

The term “Bogomils” came to be applied to this group of people. They moved up into the areas of Armenia and on into sections of what’s now portions of Bulgaria and portions of Eastern Europe. They moved in that very mountainous Transcarpathian mountainous area. Many of them got tired of running, entered into alliances with some of the people around and tried to protect themselves. This is what they are being indicted for here. There were others who trusted God and they moved on a little further.

We pick up the remnants of them in the next Church, the Church at **Thyatira**. Cloth merchants coming from that area of Bulgaria came into the Alpine areas of Europe and brought the truth that emerged there in the Middle Ages. It was the brightest flame in the Middle Ages. Particularly, the preaching of Peter Waldo had significant effect and influence through that remote Alpine area in southern France and northern Italy.

Verses 19-20, he says to the Church at Thyatira, “I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and as for your works, the last are

more than the first. Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and beguile My servants to commit sexual immorality and to eat things sacrificed to idols.”

There were those among the Waldenses who counseled people, ‘Go ahead and attend mass (which was enforced by civil decree) to avoid persecution. Go ahead and attend mass. You know it doesn’t really mean what it says. You go ahead and partake of the symbols there at the mass.’ In reality, you are eating something sacrificed to an idol because that’s what’s there. Idols are all over the place.

“To teach and beguile [KJV, “seduce”] My servants to commit sexual immorality [KJV, “fornication”].” –To enter into illicit relationships with the world and the society around. “You allow that woman Jezebel”; Jezebel was a type of the great whore of Revelation 17. The Catholic Church was personified in Jezebel. If you really want to know what God doesn’t like in a woman, go back and study about Jezebel; she sort of sums it up. When God gets ready to mention a bad example, she’s the one He uses. He uses her here symbolic of the false church because she literally committed fornication (immorality) with various surrounding kings trying to build alliances. The church, as a symbolic woman, symbolically entered into illicit relationships and various alliances. Thyatira was indicted on this. They had allowed some of these things, and He said, ‘I am going to allow persecution.’

Verses 22-23, “Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. And I will kill her children with death. And all the churches shall know....” We have the emergence of the beginning of some of the reform movements. Even the problems and persecutions that came are made reference to here.

Revelation 3:1, the Church at **Sardis** was told, “...you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.” They were spiritually dead. This is certainly the description of the Church when Mr. Herbert Armstrong came among them. They had a name, but for all intents and purposes, they were spiritually dead.

Verse 2, they were told, “Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God.”

Verses 3-4, "...hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you. You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy." But, of course, many had defiled their garments. "Sardis" means "remnant."

Verse 7, **Philadelphia** was told, "...These things says He who is holy, He who is true, 'He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens...'"" "Philadelphia" means "brotherly love."

The "key of David" was the symbol of opening and closing, the power to open and close. This was coming forth from the throne of David. It's interesting that the key that unlocks and opens up prophecy to our understanding is the knowledge of where the throne of David is, the throne that God established, the throne to which Christ will return. Christ pictures Himself to Philadelphia as opening doors for a work to be done and, in some cases, shutting doors.

Verses 8-9, he says to Philadelphia, "I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name. Indeed I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie—indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet," That means in the resurrection. We will have to be born into the Family. We will have to be God, as a part of God's Family, for anybody to be able to worship us because it's a sin to worship even an angel.

Revelation 19:10, when John bowed down before an angel, the angel said, "...See that you do not do that! I am your fellow servant," He said, 'Stand up. I'm a servant of God just like you are (cf. Daniel 8:16-18).' So, if Christ is going to make somebody come worship at our feet, that will only be after we have entered into the Family of God and have, in that sense, been literally born as sons of God. We are sons of God right now but not in glory as at the resurrection. We are not sons in the full sense that we shall be.

Revelation 3:10, KJV, "Because you have kept the word of My patience," That's the test of this era—to patiently wait for God to do what He says He will do. If you get ahead of God, you get in trouble. That's one thing that is very important for us to understand and to remember.

It was God's purpose to bring Israel, under Joshua, across the Jordan River and into the Promised Land, wasn't it (Joshua 1—4)? God

intended to do that. Because the Jordan was at flood stage, you couldn't cross it. God worked a miracle. He opened the Jordan River and let them come across on dry ground. Do you know how He did it? He had the priests bring the ark. They carried it on their shoulders and came down. When the first priest stuck his first foot into the water, the waters stopped and the waters parted. The priests walked out and stood in the middle. They held the ark in the middle and people walked across.

What do you think would have happened if somebody had gotten ahead of the ark? If they had said, 'Well, God wants us on the other side so why wait?', you know what would have happened? They would have drowned in the river. You don't get ahead of the ark.

Verse 10, the Philadelphia Church is told, "Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth." This is a reference to the Great Tribulation.

Verses 11-12, "Behold, I come quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown. He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God,"

The pillars of Solomon's temple had names. You can go back and read it in 1 Kings 7:15, 21 and 2 Chronicles 3:15, 17. The pillars of Solomon's temple were named Boaz and Jachin. It literally meant "strength" and "stability." That's what's involved here. The pillars were supports—strength and stability. That's part of what God's trying to build in. He says the reward is being with Christ at headquarters in the New Jerusalem.

The Church of the **Laodiceans** is the final stage of the Church.

Verses 15-18, he says, "I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of My mouth. Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked—I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see."

The problem is that they don't see themselves. Their own evaluation is that they think they are in great shape. This is descriptive of a complacent, materialistic, permissive sort of

watered-down, tepid approach, very much in harmony with the state of our society and our world. The world we live in is a lot more conducive to producing Laodiceans than it is Philadelphians. Christ indicts this final stage of the Church because they reflect too much of the spirit of society, as opposed to the Spirit of God. They don't really see themselves for what they are. They want to basically do what they want to do. They are not all stirred up and all excited about God and about God's way. They are preoccupied with other things.

Verses 19-21, he says, "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. To him that overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne." We see this involvement here.

We see these statements to the seven Churches. One refrain that runs through after the message to each one of the seven Churches is, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22).

There are three aspects of the messages to the Churches. The first aspect is that it was a literal message to seven literal congregations in Asia Minor 1,900 years ago. Second, it certainly is descriptive of attitudes that have been extant in and among God's people all the way down through the centuries. At any given time, you would find people who reflected a variety of these attitudes and states of mind, but that's not all it's about because we have seven distinct congregations that are successive stops on a mail route. It's not simply of historical significance to what was going on in congregations 1,900 years ago. It's not simply attitudes that are prevalent. Surely, there are those who have lost their first love and there are those who are Laodicean. There are those who are this or that in terms of attitudes. Third, there are also seven distinct successive stages typified by seven distinct successive stops on a Roman mail route that symbolized the seven stages through which the history of the Church of God will pass. We should be aware of that and aware of these things because they are messages for us.

Revelation 3:22, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.""

You, perhaps, thought that by taking seven Bible studies on the book of Revelation, we could go into every detail and cover in depth every word

of the book of Revelation. I have skimmed the high points of the first three chapters and haven't covered a third of what I wished I had covered. But we're not going to spend 21 Bible studies on Revelation. We are just going to keep it to seven. We will come back and pick up some of this stuff in later Bible studies and sermons on other subjects. This is to give you an overview.

You have study questions for next time. We are going to cover chapters 4, 5 and 6. By the way, if you have copies of *Revelation: The Mystery Unveiled* and *The Beast of Revelation, Myth, Metaphor or Soon-Coming Reality*, it would be good to study them.