

Notes on Revelation 2-3

Intro: The focus of these notes on the church is to understand something of the environment of the church. By doing so, we may see the challenges that it faced and appreciate even more the letters addressed to each.

The church at Ephesus

Notes on background:

Ephesus was a seaport city of Asia Minor. Now 6 miles inland due to the silt from the river that has filled the harbor.

It was a well-known commercial and religious center; and these were connected at Ephesus.

A huge theater large enough to hold over 24,000 people.

The great temple to Diana (Roman Artemis) was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. The temple was 342 by 163 feet with 100 supporting columns.

Paul worked there for nearly 3 years and influenced the whole area (53-26 A.D.).

Paul left Timothy there later after his release from imprisonment (1 Tim. 1:3) From this letter as well as Colossians we may see the brand of Jewish Gnosticism that was affecting the area in the early 60's.

Notes on the Lord's remarks:

Some contend that leaving "first love" involves a latter generation thus a latter date for Ephesus. However, such often happens quickly.

"False apostles" existed in the area as early as 57 A.D. (Cf. 2 Cor. 11:13).

Is the promise of access to the tree of life fulfilled now or in heaven? The tree is in the Paradise of God (always referring to heaven). May we eat of it now? Ogden contends that the "tree" or "wood" is the cross and spiritual life it brings. Is this the "restoration of all things" as prophesied by the prophets culminating in the "new Jerusalem", a "new heavens and new earth" (Is. 65:17) that reaches into eternity? It seems better to see the glorious kingdom of O.T. prophecy as beginning at Pentecost but continuing forever by means of the defeat of all enemies, including death, and the establishment of the "new heavens and new earth" after the destruction of the present world. This would seem to imply that Rev. 21-22 are a description of the eternal order resulting from the overthrow of all evil.

The church at Smyrna

Notes on background:

Also a commercial city with two harbors, second only to Ephesus.

Its town symbol was the crown since its acropolis on Mt. Pagas also looked like a crown.

Smyrna has a strong political loyalty to Rome, erecting a shrine to the goddess Roma around 195 B.C. and being chosen as the site for a temple to Tiberius (14-37 A.D.)

The Jewish synagogue strongly influenced the persecution of Christians.

Notes on the Lord's remarks:

The tribulation of the past seems to center in the Jewish opposition to the faith. This was particularly prevalent from Pentecost to the destruction of Jerusalem. Such persecutions were often inflicted by means of the Roman authorities. Cf. the life of Paul.

The church at Pergamos

Notes on background:

Pergamum was the political capital of Asia minor housing many beautiful buildings including a library of 200,000 volumes. Pergamum gave the name to a paper-like material for books called "pergamena" which has come into our language in the word "parchment" (made from animal hides).

As the seat of Roman power, three temples to the emperors were built there (Augustus, Trajan, Severus).

Also four pagan deities were worshipped, Zeus, Athena, Dionysus, Aesculapius (the god of medicine worshipped under the symbol of a serpent, Cf. modern medical symbol).

No wonder Jesus called it, the place where "Satan's throne is".

Notes of the Lord's remarks:

Nicolaitans seem to be followers of a man named "Nicholas" who was perhaps a Gnostic false teacher.

The doctrine of Balaam refers to compromise for material gain. In this case, by worshipping in pagan temples.

The church at Thyatira

Background of Thyatira

Noted for purple dye and garments made from the madder root which abounded in the area. Cf. Lydia a seller of purple was from there, Ac. 16:11ff)

The city was noted for trade guilds which usually had their patron "gods" who were worshipped in trade meetings. This afforded many occasions of compromise urged on by "Jezebel" the false prophetess.

Also the Gnostic heresy is evident, "who know not the deep things of Satan". Often Gnostic thought encouraged full participation in fleshly living, arguing that it had no effect on the spirit.

Notes on the Lord's message:

Authority over the nations and rule over the nations by their defeat seems to be present victories through the Messiah's reign eventuating in total victory in heaven.

The church at Sardis

Notes on background

The city was built on an almost perpendicular rock hill that made it "theoretically" impregnable; yet twice in its history the city was taken by a lack of caution against enemies.

Sardis was the home of Croesus, a king whose name has become proverbial for wealth or riches.

Some think that the challenges to spirituality in that city did not take the form of idolatry or Csaesar worship but indifference.

Notes on the Lord's remarks

Commentators point out the remarkable similarity between the church and its environment. Sardis was asleep, no works perfected, a past but no future, immorality. A church may have a reputation for soundness but actually be decaying and dying within.

"perfect" translates "pleroo" meaning "to bring to completion or finishing something already began".

Jesus' assessment of the character of a church is made on the basis of the predominant attitude of all its members, not just a few faithful ones. We cannot go to heaven on the coat-tail of others. We must be faithful ourselves.

The church at Philadelphia

Notes on background

The city was founded by King Attalus II in honor of his brother, Eumenes II. He called it "philadelphia" (brother lover).

Since the vicinity was conducive to grape growing, the cult of Dionysus became prominent.

Since it had so many festivals and temples to the "gods" it was called "Little Athens".

A sizeable Jewish synagogue here may suggest the possibility of Jewish persecution.

Notes on the Lord's remarks

There is in this letter strong contrast between Christ and his people, the true Messianic king and his kingdom as opposed to the physical synagogue which are not the real synagogue of God but Satan.

Jesus calls the synagogue there "a synagogue of Satan". They denied the Lord; but he is "true", "holy", holding "the key of David"; and thus the Messiah; but they "lie". They will bow at your feet (an O.T. symbol for complete defeat). The true people of God, those whom God loves, are those who serve His Son. The physical Jews would see this.

For those who gain the ultimate victory, they are God's temple in which he will dwell forever, each Christian a "pillar" in that temple (suggesting permanence). He will be marked with God's name and the city of God indicating association and ownership.

The church at Laodicea

Notes on background

Commercial banking

Special anointment for eyes
Black wood garments

Notes on the Lord's remarks