

The 7 Churches of Asia Minor

Rev. 2-3

EPHESUS (2:1-7) A backslidden church

Name means “let go” or “relax”
(Approx. 65 A.D. - 100 A.D.)

The city of Ephesus: An important trade city located on the west coast of modern day Turkey. The isle of Patmos is located about 30 miles off the coast. The city rivaled those of Alexandria in Egypt & Antioch in Syria. The city was built near a shrine dedicated to the old Anatolian fertility goddess. The Greeks had taken it over & renamed it Artemis, but under the Romans it became known as the Temple of Diana (sex goddess). This cult & the temple that served it was the prime employer of the city (slut city!!) It was the seat of pilgrimage to tourists from all over the Roman empire. Read the entire 19th ch. of Acts. It gives an account of the adventures of Paul when he comes into the city & begins to preach. The entire city goes apopleptic as he causes city-wide riots due to the preaching of the word of God! People were getting saved & the local sex shops, 900 #'s & the psychic hotlines were going out of business! By the time Christianity had come to town the city was living off it's reputation. The reeds & marsh were starting to clog up the harbor & the city was on it's last legs as a vital, economic center.

The Church Age: This part of the church age is typified as being “workaholics”. Jesus begins His commendation with the phrase - “I know thy **works...**” They bore the brunt of plowing virgin fields & taking the gospel to new places. They were known for their ‘work’, their ‘labor’ & their ‘patience’. But not for ‘love’. They had left their first love - Jesus! They got caught up in work for works sake. They were constantly busy, like Martha in Lk. 10:38-42. But Jesus wants more than ‘work’, He wants you.

The “deeds of the Nicolaitanes”. These are the ‘wolves in sheeps clothing’ who have entered into the church with the purpose of polluting from within. There is an attempt to return to the O.T. mode of priests & the accompanying paraphernalia that went with it. The word comes from 2 Greek words, Niko (to conquer) & laos (the people). This is the beginning of the doctrine of Apostolic Succession & the separation of the Clergy from the Laity, a thing that God “hates”. This opened the way for more errors to creep in. We have the seeds of the Catholic Church.

SMYRNA (2:8-11) a persecuted church

name means “bitterness”

Approx. 100 A.D. - 312 A.D. (Constantine)

The city of Smyrna: Another harbor city & trade terminus in western Turkey. It was originally destroyed by the Lydians in 627 B.C. & rebuilt around 350 B.C. When Rome began to flex it's muscle, Smyrna allied themselves with them from the very start.

The Church Age: There is no criticism of this church (age). The Christians were faithful in spite of the sufferings & persecutions to which they were subjected. The ‘first church’, having backslidden, now this church must pay the price & suffer persecution. They thought they were poor, but in actuality, were rich. Just the opposite of the church age we are in (Laodicea). The saints were being blasphemed (slandered) by false Christians (synagogue of Satan, Jn. 8:44; 1 Jn. 3:10 & 2 Tim. 3:1-12).

They were told to be ‘faithful unto death’ (they would surely be persecuted to death)! The author of the suffering would be Satan himself. But look at the Promise: we may be hurt of the first death & suffer physical death, but the second death will have no hold over us & we shall receive a Crown of Life! The persecutions under the hand of the Roman Caesars was unbelievable. But it backfired. Now, Satan, having tried & failed to crush the Church from without was now about to shift gears & move from within. Enter Constantine. “Protector & Defender” of the Church!

PERGAMOS (2:12-17) A Licentious Church
name means “married”
Approx. 312 A.D. to 606 A.D. (Boniface III crowned “universal Bishop”)

The city of Pergamos: One of the chief cities of the new Roman Empire. The city was the site of the first temple of the Caesar cult, dedicated to Augustus in 29 B.C. A second shrine was later dedicated to the emperor Trajan. The city was also noted for its worship of the god Zeus. Politics & paganism went hand in hand in this town & the pressure on the christians to compromise their faith must have been stupendous!

The Church Age: This church perfectly symbolizes the marriage of church & state that was so prevalent during this time. Tradition tells us that Constantine, upon facing certain defeat, saw a vision of the cross, won a victorious battle & then converted to christianity. Whatever the account of events may say, history shows us that the conversion was more political than spiritual. Christians were a relatively small, but unbelievably vocal, part of the empire. Persecution (from the days of Nero) had not worked. The Church was getting stronger & stronger. For the sake of the Empire he had to find a way to bring peace & harmony. He would reverse the playing field. In a stroke of genius he made christianity the “state religion”. With all the pomp, money, prestige & authority that it needed. Three absolutely fatal doctrines came to bear fruit at this time.

1. Satans throne was there. The city (age) became the new headquarters of the Babylonian ‘mystery’ religions. It also included emperor worship that soon found itself moving from pagan Rome to papal Rome. The stage was being set for the “holy universal catholic church”.
2. The doctrine of Balaam was there (Num. 22-25). Balaam was a renegade prophet who was instrumental in leading Israel into sin through assimilation into the heathens round about them through the lure enticement of sexual sin, worship of idols, intermarriage & compromise. (Thus the pagan festivals & were renamed with so called ‘christian’ names).
3. The doctrine of the Nicolaitanes (their baaaak!) We now have the church divided into 2 sections, the Clergy (with priests, bishops, arch bishops, cardinals & pope) & everyone else. This is the formal beginning of the Roman catholic church.

In the Council of Nicea, 325 A.D. there were approx. 1,500 delegates. The laity outnumbered the clergy at a rate of 5 to 1. Yet the clergy won out, dictated the course of the Council, set the agenda & have never looked back since. When the Church entered into union with the state, it was tantamount to “spiritual fornication”, or “Balaanism”. Constantine gave the bishops large Basilicas for their churches & lavish gifts of money to convert them to “christian worship”. They were supplied with superb vestments that set them apart from the laity. They were literally seated on thrones with marble altars, the whole, being embellished & encased with gold & gems! To complete the transformation pagan festivals were incorporated into the daily mix of the church. What any of this had to do with the humble church that Jesus started was anybody's guess. Any resemblance between this group & the church in the book of Acts is purely coincidental! And what of the newly appointed office of ‘vicar of Christ’? We are told in Jn. 15:20, “Remember the word that I said unto you, *The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you...*” That is a bit out of touch with a man clothed in regal raiment, crowned with a 3 tiered crown, a scepter in his hand & being carried on a throne, living in absolute regal splendor. I see no servant here. Perhaps Jesus had it right. His kingdom is not of this world.

