**THE 7 CHURCHES**

**This is a lesson outline of each of the 7 churches of Asia as described in Revelation chapters 2 and 3: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. This is not a complete narrative of all of the history that relates to the events relative to these 7 church ages, but merely an outline to guide through those events. A church history book and the chart of the 7 churches with the brief outline of church history, should accompany these outlines.**

**I. TO THE ANGEL OF THE CHURCH OF EPHESUS. REV. 2:1-7. FIRST CENTURY AD.**

**V1. He that holds the 7 stars in his right hand.**

**--- Who walks in the midst of the 7 candlesticks.**

**V2. I know thy works**

**--- And thy labor**

**--- and thy patience**

**--- and your abhorrence of evil**

**--- and your rejection of false teachers.**

**V3. And how you have borne (burden and labors for the gospel)**

**--- And have had patience (in the work of the gospel)**

**--- And hast labored in my name (which the world has not known and has rejected)**

**--- And hast not fainted (but endured under pressure).**

**NOTE; The history of the early church:**

**a. Founded at Pentecost by the outpouring of the Holy Ghost.**

**b. Carried the gospel to the Roman world.**

**c. The basic message of that gospel was: D/B/R of Christ; faith in God’s will and plan; repentance from sin; baptism in the name of Jesus; baptism of the Holy Ghost; a pure, holy Christian life; salvation was for all people; the return of Jesus; the resurrection, and eternal life.**

**d. Nobody in the Roman Empire believed this, but God worked with them mightily.**

**V4. I have something against you.**

**--- You have left your first love. See Acts 20:29-30.**

**V5. Repent**

**--- Or I will come unto the quickly (in judgment for leaving your first love)**

**--- And remove your candlestick out of its place (in church history).**

**V6. Thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes.**

**--- Nico = to conquer; laity = the people. Conquer or lord it over the people.**

**--- The arising element of higher ministerial authority, vested in bishops of larger cities and ultimately the Roman bishop, who came to be called “papa”, or “Holy See”.**

**V7. He that hath an ear let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.**

**--- To him that overcometh**

**--- He can eat of the tree of life**

**--- In the midst of the paradise of God.**

**II. TO THE ANGEL OF THE CHURCH OF SMYRNA. REV. 2:8-11. 64 AD TO 313 AD.**

**V8. The first and the last; which was dead and is alive.**

**V9. I know thy works**

**--- And tribulation – It was a period of severe persecution of Christianity.**

**--- And poverty (but you are rich). Void of any standing in the world; rich in Christ.**

**--- The blasphemy of hypocrites; false Christians.**

**--- The synagogue of Satan. Pagan practices under a Christian profession.**

**V10. Those things which thou shalt suffer.**

**--- The “devil” (symbol for Paganism) will cast you into prison.**

**--- Tribulation 10 days. 10 imperial persecutions from Nero to Diocletian.**

**--- Be faithful unto death.**

**--- I will give thee a crown of life.**

**V11. He that hath an ear let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.**

**--- He that overcometh.**

**--- Will not be hurt of the second death. (Will not suffer the consequences that those who are part of a false, spiritually dead, system will suffer).**

**Smyrna means “bitter” and thereby symbolizes the extremely bitter suffering of Christians from Nero to Diocletian. In 313 AD, Constantine the Great, decreed that Christianity should be on an equal footing with every other religion in the empire, thus ending a long period of “imperial persecutions”. This does not mean that persecution was now ended for Christians. From this point forward, persecution developed from within the “orthodox church” toward anyone opposing its views.**

**III. THE ANGEL OF THE CHURCH OF PERGAMOS. REV. 2:12-17. 313 AD TO 529 AD.**

**V12. He that hath the sharp two edged sword.**

**--- That will be used to cut sharply into a church culture declining from the truth.**

**V13. I know thy works.**

**--- And where thou dwellest where Satan’s seat is.**

**--- Note: “Devil” in 2:10, and Satan in 2:13, is a symbol for imperial Pagan Rome.**

**--- The church has now ascended to the throne, by way of Constantine’s profession of Christianity. It dwells high in the popularity and participation of the world. Quoting from B.K. Kuiper’s “The Church In History”, page 27, as follows: *The edict of Milan proved to have a very definite disadvantage. It was now no longer a shame but an honor to be a Christian. The Christian name now secured many and great material advantages. The Christian name had become a passport to political, military, and social promotion. As a result, thousands upon thousands of heathen joined the church. Unfortunately many of these were Christians in name only. The Christianity of Emperor Constantine himself was, if not of a doubtful, at least not of a very high character. What the church gained in quantity, it lost in quality. Constantine’s edict of 313 opened the floodgates through which a mighty stream of corruption poured into the church.***

**--- Thou holdest fast my name;**

**--- and hast not denied my faith.**

**--- Even when you were under the previous period of persecution.**

**V14. I have a few things against thee.**

**--- There are those among you who hold the doctrine of Balaam –**

**--- Who caused a stumbling block to be placed before the children of Israel –**

**--- To eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit fornication –**

***This doctrine of Balaam refers to an O. T. story found in Numbers chapters 22-25. Balaam was a “seer” of some sort, but not of the tribes of Israel, nor endorsed by Moses. With Israel at the borders of Moab, Balak sent for Balaam to come and curse Israel because he feared them. Balaam asked God what to do and God told him not to go, and thus he told the messengers. But Balak send higher ranking officials and promise of great promotion for him to come and curse Israel. Though Balaam already knew God’s will, he asked again, (there is greater incentive to go now). God told him to go. Along the way, Balaam’s donkey shows what a fool he is for going to curse Israel. When he arrived, he and Balak went to the high place of Baal and made 7 altars. But he could only pronounce good upon Israel. They went to a higher pinnacle and built 7 altars for heathen worship. Then he went even higher and built 7 more altars. He could only pronounce good upon Israel, so Balak dismissed him. But the damage to Israel had been done. This man, speaking great words of blessing upon Israel, while all the time going higher and higher in his worship of Baal, caused many in Israel to think that he must be great. They followed his example and committed fornication with the children of Moab. A plague ensued and 24000 were destroyed.***

***From Whelpley’s compendium of history, we read: In the days of Constantine, the Christian religion had penetrated almost every part of the empire. No sooner, therefore, did that prince declare in favor of it, than it became the religion of the court, of the capital, and soon of the empire itself. This was truly an amazing change, and forms one of the most memorable eras in ecclesiastical history. In this period the Christian church was lauded with honor, wealth and power; nor did her virtue ever sustain a severer trial. The chief dignitaries of the empire could scarcely do less than imitate their master; and Christianity soon became a necessary qualification for public office.***

**This doctrine of Balaam, therefore, is one where he compromised true worship for Baal worship, all the while saying great sounding things about Israel, but displaying a corrupt, compromised example. And he did it for gain and promotion, and not for the good of Israel.**

**This is what happened in the Pergamenian church period.**

**--- This is the time of the formation of church creeds.**

**--- This is the time when barbarians flooded the church, unconverted, and brought their customs and practices.**

**--- This is the time when the church began its departure from the purity of Biblical teaching and replaced it with rituals, traditions, worship of the dead, worship of angels, worship of saints, elevation of the Papal throne, monasticism, priesthood, transubstantiation, purgatory, infant baptism.**

**--- It is also the time when the church rejected apostolic teachings of the New Testament, such as: the oneness of God, Baptism in Jesus name, repentance, baptism of the Holy Ghost, life only through Christ and others.**

**V15. You also have the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes –**

**--- Which I hate!**

**V16. Repent!**

**V17. He that hath an ear let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.**

**--- To him that overcometh**

**--- I will give him hidden manna –**

**--- And a white stone with a new name written in it, which no man knoweth.**

**IV. THE ANGEL OF THE CHURCH OF THYATIRA. REV. 2:18-29.**

**Thyatira is the longest of all 7 church ages, reaching from 529 to 1529. It is also the most eventful age, and the age of the deepest darkness and corruption spiritually. It begins with the marriage of the church and state in 529, and ends with the Protestant League, in 1529, with the reformation breaking forth in power and deliverance.**

**V18. Unto the angel of the church in Thyatira.**

**--- Thyatira means a sweet sacrifice, and as such, represents the untold thousands who sacrificed their lives for their faith in Christ and the word of the Lord.**

**V19. I know thy works.**

**--- And charity, and service, and faith and patience. (Christian characteristics).**

**V20. I have a few things against thee ----**

**--- Because you suffer that woman Jezebel -----**

**--- Which calleth herself a prophetess ----**

**--- To teach and seduce my servants to commit fornication ----**

**--- And to eat things sacrificed unto idols.**

**In the Pergamanian period, the analogy of Balaam was used to illustrate the spirit of Pergamos. In Thyatira, that false prophetess Jezebel is used to illustrate this period.**

**The story of Jezebel, Ahab and Elijah, is recorded in I Kgs. 16:29 thru 19:21. Ahab was king over the 10 tribes of Israel, and more wicked than any before him. He married Jezebel, a Zidonian and a worshipper of Baal. Ahab blasphemed the worship of Jehovah, and became a worshipper of Baal, under the influence of Jezebel. He built Baal a house of worship in Samaria, and built an altar to Baal in it. He also built a grove, and in general, did more to provoke the Lord than all the kings before him.**

**Jezebel was the driving force behind Ahab’s wimpish wickedness. She was the real idolater; the one seeking to destroy Elijah; the one who outlawed and killed the prophets of the Lord. She was the main cause of Israel (except a remnant) falling into idolatry and religious harlotry. She was the mastermind behind the false accusations against Naboth, having him stoned and confiscating his inheritance.**

**Elijah, the prophet of God’s word, proclaimed a famine. He was fed by the ravens, and then by the Sidonian widow (destitute church); confronted Ahab; challenged all the false prophets; slew them at Carmel; and brought rain again. The 3 ½ years of famine was over.**

**V20. Cont’d. Jezebel a prophetess represents the Roman church.**

**--- And she taught and seduced the church into spiritual fornication and idolatry.**

**--- Let’s look at some of the things Jezebel (The Roman Church) taught.**

**a. The absolute control of both civil and religious authority (Jezebel over Ahab).**

**b. The suppression of the word of God through Roman laws, language mysteries, priestly interpretations and the sword, etc.**

**c. Infant baptism, and elimination of immersion in the name of Jesus.**

**d. Through counsels (Nicea, Constantinople, Chalcedon, Ephesus, etc.) the establishing of creeds.**

**e. Platonic doctrines of the immortality of the soul and related concepts.**

**f. The Eucharist and transubstantiation . (Gives salvation)**

**g. Indulgences.**

**h. Purgatory.**

**i. Worship of relics and saints.**

**j. Rosary prayers**

**k. Immaculate conception of Mary, whom they called “the mother of God”.**

**l. Trinitarian view of the Godhead.**

**m. Papal infallibility and superiority.**

**n. Priestly orders, celibacy, monasticism.**

**V21. Unrepentant even with the defeat of her prophets by “Elijah”.**

**V22. Judgments pronounced upon wicked Jezebel. I Kgs. 21:19 &23; II Kgs. 9:10 & 30-37.**

**V23. I will kill her children with death.**

**V24. Those in Thyatira who have not “known” the doctrines of Jezebel.**

**V25. Hold fast till I come ---- in judgments on Thyatira.**

**V26. He that over cometh; Power over nations.**

**V27. Rule them with a rod of iron.**

**V28. I will give him the morning star. A new day.**

**V29. He that hath an ear let him hear.**

**V. THE ANGEL OF THE CHURCH OF SARDIS. REV. 3:1-6. 1529-1789.**

**V1. Sardis means a remnant, and we are at a time in church history when the endurance of the Christians is severely tested.**

**--- The 7 spirits and 7 stars representing the 7 churches.**

**--- Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.**

**V2. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain.**

**V3. Repent.**

**V4. Thou hast a few names in Sardis which have been faithful.**

**--- They are worthy to walk with me.**

**V5. He that overcometh --- shall be clothed in white raiment;**

**--- And I will not blot out his name from the book of life.**

**V6. He that hath an ear let him hear.**

**Sardis begins at the dawn of the reformation. It extends through a period of violent measures by the Roman church to destroy the protestant movement. They witnessed the awful inquisition; St Bartholomew’s massacre; such martyrs as William Tyndale, only because he translated the Bible into the common language; 30 years war which almost destroyed the protestant movement; the annihilation of the French Huguenots, and much more. They were in a battle for their spiritual lives. God had ordained the battle and he would see to it that they were victorious.**

**From the time Martin Luther ignited the fires of the reformation in 1517, until the end of the 18th century, the battle for religious freedom from the tyranny of the awful abuses and spiritual bondage of Papal oppression was a life or death struggle. But the inevitable overthrow of this tyranny had been distinctly marked in the prophets visions. Dan. 7:25, had limited the reign of tyranny to 1260 prophetic years. This same identical time period is set forth in the visions of Rev. 11, 12, 13. The Sardian church period brings us to the end of these 1260 years. They began with the union of the church and the empire, under Emperor Justinian, in 529 AD. Twelve hundred and sixty years would extend to 1789, the year the French revolution began. Before the end of the 18th century, the far reaching civil power along with the absolute control of the religious conscience of the known world by Papal rule, were both, completely broken. The decade from 1789 to 1800, provides a record unparalleled in religious history. In coming chapters of Revelation this short period of time will capture our attention. For now, we will close the Sardian period with the certain knowledge the “Philadelphia” and brotherly love is about to replace a long night of religious oppression and spiritual fornication against the word of God and those who sought to obey it.**