

Clarence Larkin's study of the Book of Revelation... You can read or print it for free at:

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We've begun studying The Revelation... the last book of the Bible, God's final Word to man, His final revelation of Himself to man before He returns in the clouds to remove us, the true Church, His bride, at the Rapture.

When I say 'God's final revelation to man,' I mean the last formal message He planned to have written and preserved as His inspired, authoritative Word to man. That is not to say that He does not, by His Holy Spirit, speak to the individual hearts, minds and spirits of His Children... He does. He leads us, guides us, comforts us, encourages us, chastises and corrects us... He teaches us and continues His work in each of us.

Leading up to the Reformation some 500 years ago, He spoke to the hearts of numerous men and women of God as He resurrected the truth of His Word regarding Salvation by faith alone... by God's grace alone... based on His written Word alone which had been denied and hidden for nearly 1000 years.

He did the same thing about 200 years ago as He brought back to life the truth of His Word regarding the end times... prophecy, Israel, the Rapture, the Tribulation, Armageddon, the Second Coming, the Millennium, a New Heavens and a New Earth.

Both these areas of Truth, His complete Salvation for us and the events surrounding His return, were swallowed up and denied by a thousand years of the heresies of Roman Catholicism, but God chose to reestablish these important truths as the time of His return began to draw nearer.

And both of these all important subjects are taught and examined in the book of Revelation... in Rev 1:5-7 we read: 'To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, <sup>6</sup> and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him *be* glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen... Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen.'

On to Revelation...

The date is about AD 95... Sixty some years after the crucifixion, resurrection and beginning of the Church at Pentecost. The Church has been going and growing for a little over 60 years

John, because of his faithfulness in preaching and teaching the Gospel, has been exiled, because of persecution by the Roman emperor **Domitian**, to the Island of Patmos in the Aegean Sea between Turkey and Greece.

This is the same Apostle John who wrote the Gospel of John and the letters, 1,2,3 John. All of his writings were from around the same time as the Revelation ...around AD 90 or a little after.

John is the only Apostle believed to have lived to an old age and not to have been martyred. John had a special relationship with Jesus. Remember in John 21... after Jesus' resurrection, after Peter's denial, Jesus says, Peter do you love Me... feed my sheep... then Peter, turning around, **saw the**

**disciple whom Jesus loved** (John) following, **who also had leaned on His breast at the supper**, and said, "Lord, who is the one who betrays You?" <sup>21</sup> Peter, seeing him, said to Jesus, "But Lord, what *about* this man?" Jesus said to him, "If I will that he remains till I come, what *is that* to you? You follow Me."

I think John loved Jesus like no other Apostle... he loved Him and always wanted to be with Him and wanted to know Him intimately. His Gospel and his three letters are filled with the love of God for us and the need for us to love each other. In his Gospel he refers to himself as **the disciple whom Jesus loved**. He wasn't being egotistic... He was inspired by the Holy Spirit to write that. He is the one who leaned against Jesus' chest at supper... he's the one who asked Jesus who would betray Him... and Jesus answered and told him... he longed to be ever closer to Him.

I don't think when Jesus said to Peter, 'what's it to you if he remains alive till I come,' He was just talking nonsense... or goading Peter... He was speaking the Word of God and it meant something... it meant this... the Revelation... when The Lord Jesus Christ, would appear in His Glory to John on the Island of Patmos and give him this all important, last Word to us.

The Revelation is not some throw away spiritualized nonsense... this is the last thing Jesus Christ said to us and He meant for us to understand how very important it is and He will, by His Holy Spirit, give us understanding in it.

Remember, in Chapter 1:19, Jesus said to John... Write... 1. the **things which you have seen**... 2. and the **things which are**... 3. and the **things which will take place after this**.

This is the key to understanding Revelation... this is how we rightly divide **this** Word of Truth...

The 1st division... The **things which you have seen** is the Glorified Lord Jesus Christ standing among 7 lampstands with 7 stars in His right hand.

the 2nd division of Revelation... **the things which are**... the 7 letters to 7 specific Churches which also represent 7 succeeding eras in Church history... a prophetic picture of the condition of the Church as a whole down through its yet to come 1900 year *history*.

then the 3rd division of Revelation... the **things which will take place after this... after what?... after the time of the 7 letters representing the time of the Church on Earth... after the removal of the Church at the beginning of Chapter 4, after the Rapture... the things which will take place after this.**

The 3rd division of revelation includes the Tribulation, Armageddon, and The Second Coming with us, the true Church accompanying the returning King of Kings and Lord of Lords as His Bride, the Millennium with us ruling and reigning with The Lord Jesus Christ, the Final Judgment and, the New Heavens and New Earth and Eternity.

Now, as we begin the second division of Revelation, the 7 letters to 7 Churches in Chaps 2 and 3... it's important to remember... not only are these 7 letters to 7 specific Churches at that time... AD 95... but that they also were meant to give a prophetic picture of the Church down through the next 19 centuries until the Rapture... the totality of *the time of the Church*.

This was hidden from the early Church... time would have to pass before this would begin to become clear. If it had been clear from the beginning, they would have known that many years would pass until Jesus' return. That wasn't God's plan for us... he wanted us... all of us, from the beginning of the Church, watching and waiting expectantly for our Lord's return for us, in the clouds, because that would always be another incentive for us to constantly walk in a manner worthy of the calling with

which we've been called... to always set our minds and hearts on the things above, not on the things of the Earth.

These 7 letters to 7 Churches are prophetic... we must understand that. If they weren't, then these 2 chapters of this last, important final message from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Word of God, would make very little sense and be of very little use to the 19 centuries of Christians that would follow.

The Revelation is prophetic... all of it.

Rev. 2:1... 1st letter... "To the angel of the church of **Ephesus** write, 'These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands: <sup>2</sup>"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; <sup>3</sup> and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary. Nevertheless I have against you, that you have left your first love. <sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> 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."

Even though these letters presented a forward history of the Church, each one was also the exact condition of that particular local Church at that time... AD 95

My main concern with each of these Churches and the letters to each... is less with the individual Church itself in AD 95, and more with how God is giving an outline of coming Church history.

The church at Ephesus was still strong in the Lord... good works, patience, perseverance, laboring for Christ's name and not becoming weary, they resisted evil in their midst and most importantly they refused to believe the lies of false teachers and false apostles, exposing them as liars... but they had left their first love... they no longer held Jesus Christ as their first love... perhaps their righteousness was beginning to be 'self-righteousness.' Perhaps they had begun to love the world and the things of the world.

But Jesus said that it wasn't too late for them... they could repent and return to what they had been... this Church still had a strong foundation..... this is *Ephesus*... Paul had been their pastor... John had been their pastor... Ephesus probably lasted as one of the longest in being strong in the Lord and in retaining right doctrine.

(30 years earlier, Paul had warned this very church... he foresaw what was coming both here at Ephesus and into the Church at large... as he was leaving the Ephesians to go to Rome and prison he told them... "I know this, that after my departing shall grievous 'wolves' enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, 'speaking perverse things,' to draw away disciples after them." Acts 20:29, 30.)

Jesus' final commendation of them here in Revelation... they resisted and even hated the Nicolaitans... this was going to be the entry of what Paul called doctrines of demons... the Nicolaitans... but here, in AD 95, they had not yet made inroads into the church at Ephesus. Some of the 'wolves' seeking to enter and deceive the Church were the Nicolaitans. They were a group within the Church seeking to establish a hierarchy of spiritual leadership modeled after the Old Testament

order of Priests, Levites and the '*common people*.' This can be seen in the meaning of their name... Nicolaitans: from the Greek Niko, meaning to conquer or overthrow, and Laos, meaning the laity, the people... *victory over the people, overthrow of the laity*. This was the beginning of the professional Clergy, so opposite to what God ordained as the New Testament model laid out by Paul. Instead of being called pastors, they would be... the Clergy, Bishops, Archbishops, Cardinals and Popes... the ascension of the Clergy over the Laity... and God hates it. He hated it then and He hates it now. Those at Ephesus recognized it for what it was and stood firm against it... not so, we'll see, at Pergamos.

At the end of each letter, Jesus gives a promise **to him who overcomes**. How do we know who these promises are for... In 1 John we are told that every true believer is an overcomer.

1 John 5... Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God... Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God... Paul tells us that we are *in Christ* and Jesus said, 'I have overcome the world.' We are in Jesus Christ and He is in us. He has overcome Satan and the World for us... we are overcomers by virtue of what Jesus Christ has done for us and in us.

These promises at the end of each letter are promises Jesus is giving to every true believer. Here He says, 'I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.' Every true believer will be in the Paradise of God and have eternal life.

This letter prophetically corresponds to the period of the Church from about AD 70 until about 170.

2nd letter... "And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write, 'These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life: <sup>9</sup> "I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but *are* a synagogue of Satan. <sup>10</sup> 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. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.'"

This Church was about to experience greater persecution.

Prophetically, the Church of the '*Ephesian period*' had lost its first love... now God was about to chastise it... persecution was becoming much greater under the Caesars and Rome. The persecution had begun under Nero in AD 61 and increased until it ended with Diocletian in 310. They were told to not fear the coming persecution and martyrdom. He encouraged them and reminded them that He had been killed but had come back to life, as they would also, and that a special Crown of Life... a Martyrs' Crown awaited each one who was faithful unto death.

The time of the Church prophetically presented in this letter extended from about 170 until 312 with the coming to power of the Emperor Constantine.

3rd letter... "And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write, 'These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword: <sup>13</sup> "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. <sup>14</sup> But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual

immorality. <sup>15</sup> Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. <sup>16</sup> Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth. <sup>17</sup> "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives *it*."

This letter prophetically points to the period of the Church from the beginning of the Emperor Constantine's rule in AD 312 to 606 when Boniface III became 'Universal Bishop.'

Satan persecuted the Church for 250 years but changed his tactics when Constantine became Emperor in 312. Through Constantine, he began to exalt the Church. Constantine sought to cement and fortify his hold on the Empire by uniting the Church and State by welding his Pagan subjects and Christian subjects into one people. He declared Christianity to be the state religion and then began to exalt the 'clergy.' He poured out money and property to the Church and provided rich robes and furnishings to induce the worldly and pagans to come into the Church. This was the beginning of Roman Catholicism, a melding of trappings of the Old Testament priesthood with Paganism to consolidate his hold on power. This enabled the 'Doctrine of the Nicolaitanes,' the establishment of a priestly cast lording over the laity and also the Doctrine of Balaam.

When the Israelites came out of Egypt, in Numbers 22-25, Balak, king of Moab sent for Balaam, a prophet, to curse them. God wouldn't allow him to curse them, so he advised Balak to invite the Israelites to the sensual feasts of Baal-Peor and so draw them into sin so that God would destroy them. Balak did so... the Israelites joined in... and God did destroy 42,000 of them.

How Constantine used this method was to offer money, great buildings (basilicas), costly robes etc. Soon the priest, the bishop, the archbishop, the pope was dressed like kings and princes, sitting on a throne high above the people in a palace-like building overlooking a great ornate altar of gold and marble, surrounded by silver, gold and precious jewels.

A worldly form of worship was introduced, preaching of the gospel became thoughtless recitation of liturgy like Pagan priests and the major Pagan festivals were adopted into the Church and given Christian sounding names... all to bring in more Pagans... a glaring example being moving Jesus' birthday from the Spring, probably April, to Dec 25, the time of the Pagan high festival, the birth of the Sun God... 3 days after the winter solstice, the shortest and darkest day of the year when the Sun would begin its Northward journey once again toward Spring and Summer. So the birth of the Son of God was declared the same as the birthday of the Pagan Sun-God... mixing together the World, Paganism into the Church.

One of the more pernicious aspects of this paganization of the Church was the introduction of post-millennial teaching or, rather, the destruction of the scripturally based pre-millennial belief system... the Church was now rich and glorious, one with the State. Surely this would cause the world to become better and better to usher in the return of Christ, and since Scripture was needed to support this new heresy it was decided that Israel had been permanently cast off by God and that now, all of the future glory and blessings promised to Israel were to be fulfilled in the Church. Instead of an all important book of prophecy and insight from the Lord Jesus Christ, The Revelation was taught to be a spiritual allegory filled with unintelligible nonsense... better left on dusty shelves than studied and understood.

These same lies have continued on growing ever stronger to our own time and these are the lies that will cause the fallen away, apostate Church of today to actually receive the Antichrist after the Rapture, believing his lies that he is, in fact, Jesus Christ returned.

4th letter... "And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write,

'These things says the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass: <sup>19</sup> "I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and *as* for your works, the last *are* more than the first.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. <sup>21</sup> And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent. Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. <sup>23</sup> I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works.

<sup>24</sup> "Now to you I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine, who have not known the depths of Satan, as they say, I will put on you no other burden. <sup>25</sup> But hold fast what you have till I come. <sup>26</sup> And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations... <sup>27</sup> 'He shall rule them with a rod of iron; they shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessels'... as I also have received from My Father; <sup>28</sup> and I will give him the morning star. <sup>29</sup> "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

Jezebel was the pagan wife of King Ahab. She furthered paganism and idolatry into Israel and sought to kill the prophets. She caused all Israel and Judah to sin.

She is representative of the Papal Church of Roman Catholicism. When the Papal Church introduced statues and icons for the people to bow down to, they were led into true idolatry. When Church tradition and Papal pronouncement became superior to God's written Word, she became an idolatrous prophetess like Jezebel. The Church of this period, from 606 until the Reformation in the early 1500's was both idolatrous and wicked in its persecution of Jews and true believers as evidenced by the Crusades and the Inquisitions. It was only by God's grace and keeping power that the true Church didn't continue on this way and die out completely... certainly that was Satan's hope and plan.

These first 4 letters give a prophetic picture of the Church roughly spanning the time from the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70 as it gradually fell deeper and deeper into apostasy, until God began to wake the Church up at the time of the Reformation at about AD 1520. The final 3 letters to Churches will prophetically look forward from the Reformation until the soon coming Rapture and removal of the Church which will then take our study into the 7 year Tribulation... the 70th Week of Daniel.