

The *Contender*

"CONTEND FOR THE FAITH WHICH WAS ONCE DELIVERED UNTO THE SAINTS" JUDE 3

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Seven Church of Asia, Part 1



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SEVERAL TIMES THROUGH THE YEARS WE HAVE STARTED ON A SERIES OF MESSAGES, TO DEAL WITH ALL SEVEN CHURCHES OF REVELATION CHAPTERS 2 & 3, BUT FOR ONE REASON OR

ANOTHER, WE NEVER SEEMED TO BE ABLE TO COVER THEM ALL WITHOUT GETTING STOPPED. I HOPE TO BE ABLE TO GO THROUGH ALL 7 THIS TIME, AND LET THESE TAPED MESSAGES REPLACE ALL THE OTHERS WE NOW HAVE. FOR QUITE SOMETIME NOW, THE LORD HAS BEEN DEALING WITH ME CONCERNING THESE CHURCHES AND THE MANY BEAUTIFUL THINGS THAT ARE PORTRAYED BY THEM, THAT ACTUALLY AFFECT THE VERY HOUR OF TIME WE ARE NOW LIVING IN. NATURALLY WE UNDERSTAND THAT WE ARE LIVING IN THE LATTER PART OF THE LAODICEAN CHURCH AGE THAT WAS PORTRAYED BY THE LITERAL CHURCH AT LAODICEA, DURING THE FIRST CENTURY OF CHRISTIANITY, AND CERTAINLY THERE ARE MANY THINGS TO BE SAID

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ABOUT THAT PARTICULAR SPIRIT THAT IS NOW RUNNING RAMPANT IN OUR DAY, BUT WE ARE GOING TO START WITH THE CHURCH AT EPHESUS, AND GO STRAIGHT THROUGH.

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The church at Ephesus was as different from the church at Laodicea, as night is from day. Therefore by taking a good look at Ephesus, the model church, we can see what Christianity was, before the tares got in to pervert the gospel message, and the doctrine of Christ. Then as we examine the dominating spirit of each church, we can see how they portray a steady decline of revelation truth moving right on into, and through the Dark Ages, and out on this side as God began to move upon certain men to restore truth that had been lost during those years. Ephesus was on fire for God, but Laodicea was lukewarm. The spiritual condition of those churches, and also the other five, represent the spiritual condition of a certain age of time in the dispensation of grace. Now,

here we stand at the end of the grace age, and every one of the things that Laodicea was rebuked for are present in this very hour of time. This is an age of materialism, and lukewarmness toward God. Almost everyone you meet claims to be a Christian, but one cannot help but notice that the fruit of the Spirit of God is absent from the lives of most of them. Why? Simply because they do not have the reality of the new birth in their lives. In the first century of Christianity, or we will say, in the first generation of Christianity, a person would not dare admit they were a Christian unless they had the genuine product. In other words, something inside them that was so real it would even cause them to stand for Jesus Christ in the face of martyrdom. But in our day, there seems to be a certain material advantage in being known as a Christian. It is good for business, and politics, to be seen in church, and it doesn't matter what church, for the spirit of this age promotes going to the church of your choice. In reality, that is a pagan concept of Christianity, for there is only one church, and it is a universal body of true believers that hold an apostolic revelation in their hearts of the word of God, and they are not a denomination. Different beliefs are what separates people into denominational groups, but the true body of Christ (the church) is made up of people from every nation, that all believe the same thing concerning the basic doctrines of the word of God. It is to these, and for these, that the New

Testament epistles were written, so with these points in mind, let us open our Bibles to the 2nd chapter of Revelation, where we will begin to examine the messages sent to these 7 churches of Asia.

EPHESUS

In the first chapter, we see Jesus Christ portrayed as the high priest, holding the 7 stars in His right hand, and standing in the midst of the 7 golden candlesticks. That is how the apostle John saw Him in the vision given to him, there on the isle of Patmos. Then he was told that the stars in the right hand of Jesus portrayed the angels of the seven churches, (The word angel, carries a dual, or twofold meaning) and the seven candlesticks represent the seven churches of Asia. Now there were other Gentile churches at that time, for these were not the first churches of Gentile origin. In Paul's first and second missionary journeys, there were established, churches at Iconium, Lystra and later, at Philippi, Galatia, Thessalonica, Corinth, and so forth. Therefore what we want to understand, is that the Lord Himself chose these seven particular churches for the purpose of conveying a twofold meaning, which we will see as we study the words written to each one,

and make proper application by the direction of the Spirit of God. First, let us get the geographical setting. All seven of these churches were situated in Asia, which today is the country of Turkey. Some of them were in coastal cities, which means that they were in the sea trade routes, but not all of them. Those in the seaport cities did have the greater advantage though, because of the commercial trade, and so forth, and Ephesus was one of them. Ephesus was the capital city, a seaport city, and a famous city. It was also a city of much pagan worship, and a city where there was a large Jewish colony, but the city does not even exist today, and neither do any of these others. I have never been there, but I have seen pictures of these various sites, and they are all archaeological ruins today. Two thousand years ago, they stood as flourishing metropolitan cities though, and Ephesus stood at the forefront of them all.

PAUL PREACHED AT EPHESUS

It was on Paul's 3rd missionary journey, that this door was opened for the gospel at Ephesus. We will not try to be exact, as to the years of Paul's ministry there, but rather, we will just say that it was somewhere around 54-56 A.D., give or take a year or two.

Actually all seven of these churches were established from the gospel fire that burned at Ephesus for three years while Paul was preaching there. He did not travel around to all seven cities, and establish a church as some may believe. It was the gospel message being preached at Ephesus that did the traveling to these other cities. It traveled in the hearts of hungry souls that came to Ephesus from all the regions round about to hear Paul preach. Now some who want to be contentious, claim that there is a contradiction in the Bible concerning the length of time Paul preached at Ephesus, but as for myself, I see no contradiction. In Acts 19:8, we find that he preached 3 months in the Jewish synagogue, and in verse 10, two years in the house of Tyrannus, and in verse 22, we find that he stayed in the area yet a while after that, probably in a pastoral capacity, so I see no reason whatsoever to dispute the three years mentioned in 20:31. But one thing is sure; Ephesus is where the revival fires burned, and all those other churches were established as a result of that revival. Paul may have gone later, to some of them, but if he did, the churches were already established. In the Old Testament tabernacle, one flame of fire lit all seven candlesticks, and that flame was never to go out, so here, we are allowed to see the reality of that type, as all seven of these candlesticks (churches) are lit from one Holy Ghost flame that burned at Ephesus. The scripture tells us that all

they which dwelt in Asia, heard the word of the Lord Jesus Christ preached during the time Paul stayed at Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks. But what we are dealing with primarily, is what the aged apostle John was instructed to write to these seven churches some 40 years later, which is 30 years beyond the death of the star messenger to the first age, Paul. By this time, (96 A.D.) John is an old man, the only one of the original apostles of Jesus Christ that is still alive. He had been loyal to the original revelation of truth that was imparted to them at the beginning, and the reality of it was still burning in his heart when he was put out there on that little island away from the main society of people. But he was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and Jesus appeared to him, giving him a commission to write what he was allowed to see. Then, to the angel of these seven churches (the angel of each church) he was to write a specific letter, or message. This is why I said the word angel carries a twofold meaning, for it applies both to the angel messenger to each church age in the dispensation of grace, and also to the individuals who pastored those 7 literal churches that set the type for the church age conditions.

THUS SAITH THE LORD TO **EPHESUS**

Time wise, (96 A.D.) if the Lord is going to speak to these churches while some of the old patriarchs are still alive, concerning the things that they had been harassed by, it had to be done at this time. Jesus had spoken the seven parables recorded in the 13th chapter of Matthew, to lay right over the words written to these seven churches, and to exemplify conditions that would exist in seven different periods of the grace age, but these parables do not portray the great persecutions of Satan, against the church; they only show his deceptive tactics during the time when the spirit of Antichrist and the Spirit of God are running parallel. On the other hand though, these letters to the seven churches do speak of certain persecutions, and you will find that they identify with a specific age of time, which we commonly refer to as, the church ages. We are looking at the message to Ephesus first, so notice how it begins, Revelations 2 verse (1) "Unto the angel of the church at Ephesus write; These things saith He that holdeth the seven stars in His right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven gold candlesticks." Now this was written to the ANGEL of the church of Ephesus, and we know it could not have been written to Paul, for he had been dead for about 30 years at that time, so that means that whoever was in the place of leadership in the church at Ephesus at that time was faced with the responsibility of leading them to take heed to these words from the Lord, or perish. Which they

eventually did. In 96 A.D., when they received this letter, they were living in an interval of time which proved to be the beginning of a transition from the first age to the second. The first age did not just suddenly end, and the second age begin; it occurred during an extended transition period while the spirit of Antichrist was sowing tares among them. Little by little the church of Ephesus was slipping away from its former estate, so the Lord gives them a fair warning, and it is up to the pastor (the angel) as to how they will react. As we have said already, this church stands out from the rest, because this is where the Holy Ghost fire fell that eventually ignited a gospel fire in the others. No doubt, the church at Ephesus was the strongest work that was established in that area, and no doubt had a very large congregation both of Jews and Gentiles. In the writings of the Antinicean Fathers, it is brought out how many of the saints from Jerusalem, traveled to these churches, giving their testimonies concerning the things they had seen and heard during the time when Jesus walked among them. Therefore I would be prone to believe that the church at Ephesus was the main one that they went to. Naturally that being the case, every evangelist, or apostle, or whatever they might have called themselves, headed straight for Ephesus. How do I know that? Simply because verse 2 reveals it. Notice when the Lord had to say to them, "I know thy works." We will take this one step

at a time, and try to see what each thing pertained to.

WORKS OF FAITH

The first thing mentioned is their works, and I want you to know assuredly that He was not talking about how many times they had painted the church building, nor how many new roofs they had put on it. The works mentioned, would be works of faith. If a brother, or a sister needs a coat, see that they get one. If they need food for their table, see that they get it. Anywhere Christianity has ever flourished in any spiritual depth, there was both the rich and the poor in the assembly, and the needs of the truly needy were always met. This is one of the ways that God puts our faith to the test. The true faith exemplified by the Lord Jesus Christ will always respond in the affirmative to such needs among brethren. Do not ever allow yourself to think for even a moment, that the Lord just chooses the rich to be saved, and lets the poor go to hell. That is the farthest thing from the truth. Genuine faith is not based upon our station in society, but our surroundings will definitely put our faith to the test and genuine faith will always be compassionate. Then statural growth enables us to couple wisdom with our compassion. There was a situation in

the early church that has caused much debate among Gentile Christians down through time, but you must remember, those who did this were all Jews, and Jews have always followed these practices for survival. I am talking about Acts 4, where all those that owned excess property sold it, and brought the money to the apostles for distribution among those that were needy. Many Gentiles have interpreted that to mean that those who owned houses and land sold everything they had, and divided the price of it among the needy. I assure you, that such a practice as that would not work for very long, for there will always be a tomorrow; therefore there always has to be some who have more than they need, in order for there to be help for the truly needy. That was simply a situation where those saints who owned real estate in excess of what they needed for themselves, sold it, and gave the profit to be used for the needs of others who were less fortunate, and God blessed that effort. The Jews did it like that, but when the gospel came to the Gentiles, another method was set up for helping the poor, and those poor saints at Jerusalem received help from them. (I Corinthians 16:3) Therefore let us look upon this word works, as something other than physical labors. Then let us notice that after works, He (Jesus) also mentioned the word labor. "I know thy works, and thy labor.)

LABOR OF LOVE AND **PATIENCE**

Again I want to say, let us keep the application on the spiritual side, realizing that the labor referred to here is the weight and pressure of dealing with ridicule, persecution, and all the other problems that can develop among a large assembly of people. You who have walked with the Lord for quite a few years will readily identify with the weight upon the souls of those who have the responsibility of dealing with problems that arise in the church. In the eyes of God, this kind of labor produces the same affect upon a person, as if they had carried shingles up a ladder all day to re-roof the church house. You do that for 8 hours, and I assure you, you will be worn out. But you will be just as worn out if you battle with spiritual forces all day long. In that first age, Christians were constantly harassed by Jews, as well as just plain ungodly men. Satan was trying to destroy every fellowship of saints, and at the same time, God was building in them spiritual character that would be able to stand up under any and all kinds of pressure. Through the pressures of everyday life, God's children are moved to take on more of the stature of Jesus Christ.

Therefore the next term referred to here (patience) just naturally follows works and labors of faith. This patience is a attribute of God, and I am sure that you will readily agree, that many people are born into this world, and go through life, never having an ounce of patience. If you want your children to learn to exercise patience in this life, do not wait until they are a year and a half or two years to start teaching it to them. Not just patience, but whatever other traits you desire to see in them. When they get to be two or three years of age, and follow you around in a store, Mommy I want this, Mommy I want that, and have a tantrum every time you say no, you have waited too long to start your training, you already have a wildcat on your hands. Furthermore if you let them get by with such behavior, the day will come when they may tear your arm off, or something worse. I only use these natural illustrations to stress a point of truth, spiritually, because in everything, there is a natural and also a spiritual to be considered. Those who conduct themselves properly in the natural will have less trouble with their spiritual behavior than one who just runs wild and carefree in the natural. But we are looking at the word patience here, spiritual patience, that God desires to instill in every son and daughter of His. This is the kind of patience that helps us endure the many attacks of the devil, until God shows us what to do about it. One thing is sure, whatever God allows the devil to do to

His children, will accomplish something in their statural growth if they learn to wait upon the Lord to show them how to handle the situation, and that is especially true, in the church. What did James say? James, Chapter 1, verse (2) "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; (3) Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. (4) But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing." In other words, spiritual patience is knowing how to wait upon the Lord, and that of course, will take you right to Isaiah 40 verse (31) "But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint." So you see, God allows certain things to come upon us, as His means of cultivating certain spiritual attributes that He desires us to possess. Therefore as He sent this letter to Ephesus, He acknowledged these attributes by saying, "I know they works, and thy labor, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which evil." In the various epistles, which were all written before this Revelation letter, the saints were always instructed on how to deal with evil. This was before the tares even got in the assemblies. The saints in that early age, were saints that would take discipline. Let us look into Paul's letter to the Hebrews, and see what he said to them on this matter of God's chastening, and its affect on true

sons and daughters of His. In Hebrews chapter 12 verse (5) "My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when you are rebuked of Him; (6) For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth." So there definitely does come a time in all our lives when God has to take us across His spiritual knee, and spank us. Oh, Bro. Jackson, God never has to spank me. If any of you feel like that, then maybe we should read a little farther. Verse (7) "If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? (Notice now) (8) But if ye be without chastisement, whereof ALL (not just some, but all) are partakes, then are ye BASTARDS, (illegitimate children-ares) and NOT SONS." In other words, if you just simply cannot take correction, chances are very great that you are not a child of God at all. You do not have the nature of the heavenly Father in you, or you would not run from Him when chastening time comes. Very plainly stated, I might run from my neighbor, but I would never run from my father, and you can make your own judgement as to why you will not stand still and take correction. I will not judge you. One thing is for sure though; it does not help the least bit, just to keep on hiding from the truth. It takes truth to set a son of God free.

APOSTOLIC MINISTRY

Coming back to Revelation 2:2 now, we read, "I know how thou hast tried them which SAY they are apostles, and are not, hast found them liars." Saints, right there is an important word placed within this letter to the Ephesus assembly, and it is the only one that contains this word apostle. Why would that be? First of all, this is the church where Paul, the first church age messenger stood. While reading in the Antinicean Father's writings, I read where Polycarp, who sat at the feet of John, wrote to the Philippian church, around 100 A.D., just a few short years after the Revelation letter was written, reminding them of the things that had been taught by the great apostle Paul. As you read those records, it becomes obvious, that Ephesus was a church where whoever claimed to be an apostle, eventually showed up there, because they knew that God always sent His true apostles to that church when He wanted to impart to them further truth. As I have already said, Ephesus stood out in the forefront with the gospel message. They had been taught well, so they had a true revelation of the doctrine of Christ. That is why they were able to detect, and expose those false apostles that showed up there, trying to make a name for themselves. They just simply gave them the word test. All of God's

true apostles believed and taught the same doctrine.

They taught that God is one, that baptism should be administered to believers in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and that all believers should be baptized for the remission of sins of the flesh, and none of them sought to elevate themselves above the others. They were laborers together, working in a great building for God. When Paul wrote the first Epistle to the Corinthian church, he rebuked them because of divisions among them, saying, "Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized in the name of Paul? Some of you say, I am of Paul; and others, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal? Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but it was God that gave the increase. (He went on to say) He that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labor. For we are laborers together with God: Ye are God's building. According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise master builder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon." When Paul referred to himself as a wise master builder, and how he had laid the foundation, he knew that he was the apostle to the Gentiles, and that it was his revelation

of the word of God, that these churches were founded upon. Every last one of them was established upon the revelation that he had preached to them. But as time passed God used other men to minister to them further truth for their spiritual growth, and not one of those God sent men ever preached anything contrary to what Paul preached. They were all laborers together on God's great building, (the church) which is redeemed souls, and not wood, stone and bricks. In later years, many Gentile ministers would feel led to go to Jerusalem, and minister to the Jewish saints, just as the Jewish apostles would go to the Gentile churches, and this brought about a condition whereby those who just claimed to be apostles had opportunity to get their foot in the door, and explains why the Lord spoke of how Ephesus had tried them, and found them to be liars.

FALSE PROPHETS - FALSE APOSTLES

Very early in His 3½ year earthly ministry, Jesus warned, (Matthew 7:15) "Beware of false prophets, which shall come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits." He was speaking of a future condition that would exist as the devil began his

program of sowing tares among the good crop of God. This Antichrist spirit was portrayed in the 13th chapter of Matthew, when Jesus spoke those 7 parables, all pertaining to a future condition. In the 7th chapter of Matthew, Jesus pursued the thought all the way to the end time saying, (22) "Many will come to me in that day saying, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name, and in thy name cast out devils, And in thy name done many wonderful works? (23) And I will say unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity." Satan's deceptive agents always appear to be very meek and humble, for that gains them the confidence of many people, but inwardly they are as ravening wolves, ready to devour the flock of God. Even as early as 90 A.D., when John wrote the little epistles, he could see that spirit working then. As he spoke of those that were Antichrist agents, he said, (1st John, verse 19) "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us." I can just see some of those fellows as they would jump on the back of an old camel, and head for some of those churches such as we are reading about in our text scriptures. Coming into those churches, the first thing they would say is, "I am an apostle. I have just come from Jerusalem. I have been with Peter and the other apostles there,

and I have been in the upper room, and ETC., ETC. That is exactly how some of these modern day preachers carry on after they have been to Jeffersonville, Indiana, and saw where the prophet to this age lived and preached, and after they have been to the cemetery where he is buried, and to the Spoken Word Publishers, to get an armful of books. After they do that, they feel that they are ready to circle the globe, straightening out the revelation of the bride of Christ. Most of them, find out just enough to make a fool out of themselves. Brothers and Sisters: It doesn't matter whether you ever get to Jeffersonville, Indiana, or not, the thing that really makes the difference, is whether you get true revelation of the word of God, or not. If you never get a revelation in your spirit from the Spirit of God, you will never be anything that God will accept. Without that, all your labor is vain, and you have no eternal reward coming to you. Over the years, many of these fellows have tried to gain access to this pulpit, to promote themselves, but the Lord has always allowed us to detect them, and put them to flight, just like the church at Ephesus did, with those that troubled her. I have known of various assemblies that were constantly in an uproar, simply because they let every self ordained preacher that happened to pass their way, get into the pulpit and preach his version of the message to this age. But, Bro. Jackson, How do you know who to let in? Are you not afraid of turning away someone who

has a true message from the Lord? Let me just remind you of something else that the apostle John wrote. It is found in 1st John 4:1. "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world." Now Saints, John was not referring to a smoky mist over in the corner of the church building; he was referring specifically to preachers, or as in his day, self appointed apostles. How do you detect them? The same way the church at Ephesus did; you just simply find out if they are preaching the same revelation that the apostles of Jesus Christ preached. Now do not misunderstand me. They do not have to use the same verbal words, but one thing is sure, no true man of God will ever preach a contrary doctrine, and the others cannot preach very long without it. Besides that, they will usually give themselves away by the way they talk, even before they ever get into the pulpit to preach. Nevertheless, Ephesus tried them by this means and weeded out the false ones, and the Lord acknowledged it. Let us look at it like this, Ephesus knew that she had been established by a true apostle, and their minds were resting upon the fact. However, they had learned to respect the men that came from Jerusalem, and Satan knew it, and took advantage of it. He just got him some men who were already desiring to make a name for themselves, and made apostles out of them.

SATAN'S DECEPTIVE TACTICS

In 2nd Corinthians 11:13-15, we find Paul writing to these Corinthian saints, saying, (13) "For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. (14) And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. (15) Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works." The respect that the church at Ephesus had for apostles, made them a prime target for Satan to bombard with his tare sowing false apostles, and he no doubt kept them coming. Now Saints, please do not get the idea that those fellows could not preach anything at all like the apostle Paul preached, for that is wrong. As much as 90 percent of it could have been exactly right, but saints that have been taught properly will catch enough from that other 10 percent to know that there is something wrong. After each episode where one of those false apostles would get into the church and preach, they would just have to do some spiritual house cleaning to clear the atmosphere, but the point is, they took it patiently. They did not become frustrated and disillusioned, and throw up their hands. They labored under the pressure

of that constant harassment, and with patience, they continued their works of faith, but 40 years of this, did have a certain effect upon them, which we will see a little later.

THE MODEL CHURCH

As we read Revelation 2:3, we find patience and labor both mentioned again. Notice, (3) "And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast labored, and hast not fainted." That word borne is associated in this case with carrying responsibility. We could say, with patience they had labored under the weight and pressure against them because of the name of Jesus, and they did not faint (give up) along the way. They endured all their trials, and kept that name of Jesus Christ, a fire in their souls. So in their patience, they had been loyal to that name. Brother, this was a tested church. They were attacked by every Satanic spirit the devil had to throw at them. Why so with them any more than the others? Because this was to be the model church. They had to have every opportunity to set an example in overcoming the constant attacks of the enemy of our souls. This is how our perfection is wrought. Brothers and Sisters, listen to me; We have passed through an era of economics like no other generation has ever known. We

will have no acceptable excuse when we stand before the Lord, if we do not hold on to what He has committed to our spiritual understanding, and life accordingly. It doesn't matter whether we have a car to drive, no whether we have all the modern conveniences in our home or not; it is what we do with that revelation in our soul that determines whether we come out victorious or not. I am afraid that some who gauge spiritual wealth and happiness by how easy the Lord makes it for them to live, are going to come up short in that day. When the going gets hard, we should not give up; that is what the word faint pertains to. In Luke 18:1, Jesus said, "Men ought always to pray, and not to FAINT." In 2nd Corinthians, Paul used the word, so let us read about two verses from chapter 4, just to catch the word, verse (16) "For which cause we FAINT not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man (spirit) is renewed day by day. (17) For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." That one verse alone lets us see that these afflictions and trials will work for our spiritual benefit, if we will just not give up (faint) before we come out on the other side. In Galatians 6:9, Paul said, "And let us not be weary in well doing; for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not." No matter how many preachers may have told the church at Ephesus, It would be all right to baptize using the titles instead of the name Jesus,

they knew that Paul had re-baptized the original 12 disciples among them, because they had not been baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, according to Acts 2:38. Therefore they held true to that name, and labored to keep it alive among them. Now I believe you can see what these terms actually apply to, so let us move onto verse 4, and find out what the Lord had against the church.

FORMALISTIC ROUTINE

In everything else, the Lord commended the church at Ephesus, but then told them that He had something against them. Notice what it was, as we read verse 4. "Nevertheless I have something against thee, because thou hast left thy first love." In reality, all the other things that they were commended for were built around the very thing that He is saying they have left. How can that be? I believe we can use a natural setting here, to illustrate the reality of this spiritual condition. It did not just happen there at Ephesus; it still happens. In the natural realm, a boy meets a girl; they fall in love, and after a period of time in which they have been dating and really getting to know each other, they get married, and start housekeeping together. Now all during the time while they were dating, they just could not see enough of each

other, couldn't hardly stand to be apart until the next date. But we all know that life is much more than that carefree way you feel during your courting days. One day there is a marriage, and suddenly there is responsibility that neither of you have ever had. Your love for each other causes you to assume that new responsibility with great zeal and fervency. Everything is approached with real joy and expectancy as you look to the future together. That is also exactly how it is living for God. When we first come to know the Lord we just cannot seem to do enough for Him. Our new found love just keeps us on the mountain tops, spiritually speaking. But God does not allow us to remain on the mountain tops forever, so He begins to bring us down to reality of life, and lay some genuine responsibility upon us, which in the beginning we accept with true joy of heart, just like the newlywed couple in the natural. But over a process of time, life in the natural can become very routine. We still do the same things, but not with the same joy and fervency. You still kiss your wife goodbye when you leave for work, and she still meets you at the door with a kiss when you come home, but it has become just a routine to you. What causes such a change? A few misunderstandings, a few disappointments, added responsibilities, financial reverses, and all sorts of things. Saints, we all understand that this is part of everyday life we are talking about, but we should

also understand, that no matter what happens, our love for our mate should always be considered above everything else, in the natural. It doesn't matter if you are 80 years old, you can still have that same love in your heart that you had when you were 20, and God is not pleased with any marriage that loses it. Neither is He pleased with any church that just goes through their formalistic routines week after week, and at the same time allows the fervency of their love for God to gradually fade into the background. When this is allowed to go on and on in a natural marriage, sooner or later, Satan sets a trap that eventually destroys the marriage. Then when you bring that same condition over into the spiritual realm, and allow it to go on and on without getting revived, somewhere down the road, Satan will have a trap set for you. So as we look to this condition at Ephesus, let me say this, If there was a need brought to their attention, they took care of it. If anyone was baptized, they made sure it was done according to Acts 2:38, in the name of Jesus Christ. If someone claimed to be something other than what they were, these saints would discern it. Whenever persecution and pressure was heaped upon them, they endured it with patience, but they had allowed themselves to fall into a formalistic routine to the extent that they were no longer motivated by the fire of that love for God which they started out with. They went to the assembly more out of habit and

routine, than to meet and worship with their brothers and sisters in the Lord. Therefore in Revelation 2:5, the Lord says, "Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, (be genuinely sorry) and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent." Now He did not say He would remove the star; He said He would remove the candlestick. Of course we know that the candlestick represented the power and presence of the Lord in their midst. Therefore they were being warned, and if they would not repent, the Lord would just move out from among them, and they could no longer do anything by the anointing of His spirit. Let me hasten to say this though, He was not telling them to be baptized again, as some folks interpret that term first works. He was merely telling them to repent of their motives, and to return to their former ways, when they were motivated by a genuine love that burned within their hearts. In other words, they needed a revival.

NICOLAITAN SPIRIT

After Jesus rebuked the church for losing its first love, He turns right around, and commends them again, (Revelation 2:6) saying, "But this thou

hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate." He did not say that they had any tares, nor such like, in their assembly, but this does prove that they had been harassed by that Antichrist spirit for He says, you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. No doubt these spirits had begun to have an effect on certain ones' attitudes, and maybe even caused some others to even consider using some natural means to try and get rid of the confusion that was looming upon the horizon. Saints, any time a church resorts to carnal remedies, trying to deal with spirits that trouble them, they have shut God out of the picture, completely. God wants to be in the picture so he can teach us some wisdom and patience, as these things arise. Beyond that, there are some things God will not let you have to tolerate, for He will warn you ahead of time, so that you can head it off as it comes down the road. That is how some men's sins go openly before them. Whether God allows though, you can be sure it will serve a purpose in the redemption and restoration process of God upon this old planet. When this thing winds up, God is going to have some people perfected, and ready to rule with Jesus Christ in the Millennium. But those that will be perfected, will not be those that jump the gun and take things into their own hands every time a little something goes wrong. It is the responsibility of the ministry to make decisions as to what the church will, or will not allow.

But many times, the ministry will have to wait upon the Lord longer than many think they should, in order to know what to do. This then, can bring about a carnal reaction from those who do not have patience to wait upon God's answers. Sooner or later, that brings about a strain between the laity and the ministry. It did not happen in the church at Ephesus, for they were very determined that the Holy Ghost was going to lead them. But we certainly do see it in the Pergamos church. It is a situation where the clergy is exalted above the laity to the extent that they rule them with fear tactics. No record has ever been found of any group or sect of people that were known as Nicolaitans; therefore we must conclude that the spiritual mention of them pertains to a spirit of the devil that caused the ministry to conquer the laity. You can still see that old spirit at work out here in various religious groups. Some people do not dare go visit their relatives once in awhile, without getting permission from their pastor. Saints, you know a situation like that is not ordained of God. God knows the hearts of all those who miss church services for whatever reason they miss, and He is the final one that they must answer to. Your preacher has no God given right to forbid anyone to miss church services, nor to rule over their lives with an iron fist. Furthermore God's true children do not need such supervision; they enjoy doing what they know to be right.

THE TREE OF LIFE

As we look back to the church at Ephesus for just a moment, and consider what the Lord said to her, we can well see why trials, tests and persecutions were allowed by the Lord in every church age. That is what produces a true soldier of the cross. One that has backbone, a strong faith, enduring love for God, and for others, and one that is trustworthy in the sight of the Lord. So let us notice this last verse to the church at Ephesus. Revelation 2:7 "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the CHURCHES; (churches-plural) To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God." In that symbolic language, to eat of the tree of life is to partake of the baptism of the Holy Ghost. The Holy Ghost is the life of the tree of life. The Holy Ghost is the seal of God whereby we are sealed unto the day of our redemption from this natural life, (Ephesians 4:30) and the Holy Ghost is the very substance of the new birth. Paul said, "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His." (Romans 8:9) Therefore let us conclude this part of the message by saying, The church at Ephesus was made up of true believers. They all had the Spirit of Christ, and they gave no place for the devil's ambassadors to

work among them. But we must realize that by the time John was instructed to write these words to them, the first church age that they represented was on the threshold of passing on to the second age which was represented by the conditions prevailing in the church at Smyrna. Ephesus was pure, free from tares. The first church age was pure, free from tares, but the infiltration of tares among the body of believers after those original apostles passed off the scene, is actually what inaugurated the second age. He that overcometh has a promise of something to look forward to. That also lets us know, that in every age, no matter what the devil bombarded them with, there was always sufficient grace from the Lord for those true believers to overcome, and that is still true in our day. Just be sure you do not judge the whole of Christianity by what you may see someone doing who professes to be a Christian. You look into the book of Acts, and you will see what true Christianity is, for God's standards have never changed. What Christians were in the beginning, is what Christians will be at the end time. But those who live to see the coming of the Lord will have a deeper revelation of God's complete redemption process than those of the first age had. Not a different doctrine, just a deeper revelation.

SMYRNA

The Lord has no rebuke for the church at Smyrna. This church it seems, was a victim of much persecution, and poverty stricken as far as material wealth is concerned. But the Lord told them they were rich in those things that have eternal values. So let us continue reading, here in verse 8, and see what was said unto the angel (Pastor or leader) of this church. "And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead and is alive; (9) I know thy works and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou are rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan." As we said earlier, each of these 7 churches existed in the days when the apostle John was still alive. Also, the Lord specifically naming the churches in a certain order, and this was for a very specific reason, for as it turns out, the local conditions existing in each of the 7 churches, represented the general condition of an age of time that would fall within the scope of the grace age dispensation. Each one characterized a spirit that would correspond to the prevailing spirit of a certain period of time in following generations. Whatever that spirit of Satan did, or tried to do in those 7 churches, is exactly what he would be doing in the age of time that corresponds in

numerical order to those churches. Smyrna was number two in the order given by the Lord; therefore her spiritual condition as well as the material wealth or poverty of the Christians in general, represented the general condition of that second church age, an age of tribulation, persecution, martyrdom, and much poverty. Let us understand also, that the general condition here in this church, reflected the overall picture of the whole city where it was located. In that day and hour, world travel was not like it is today. People did not run all over the world spreading their influence, and their material wealth, like they do today. Therefore the general conditions seen here, more or less represent the environment, or we will say the culture and general condition of the whole city of Smyrna, and Satan's influence is definitely seen here. Smyrna was definitely not a city where one would go with the thought of trying to amass a great fortune in a short time. Economic prosperity was limited to a great degree because this was not a city of great commercial trade, like some of the others were. This church, in this city, was the Lord's choice, to represent a certain spirit of Satan that would have its effect upon that second church age, after the tares began to get into the church universally and exercise their influence.

STAR MESSENGERS'S **RESPONSIBILITY**

Naturally the first application of the letter to the church at Smyrna was to the church itself right then, and there, and it was the pastor's responsibility to see that proper action was taken after receiving it. But beyond that local setting was an age of time in universal Christendom that these same conditions would exist; and therefore it becomes the responsibility of the messenger to that age to also take the necessary steps in applying these words from the Lord. Which in this case was Irenaeus. He was the generally accepted star messenger to the 2nd age. He held the true revelation of God's word up before them, to combat that spirit of Satan that was trying to destroy the church. Before going on though, let me just remind you once again that the conditions of these 7 churches, were conditions that existed in each particular church at the time of John's instructions from the Lord to write to them, which was 96 A.D. In 96 A.D. conditions were existing in these 7 churches, each church portraying a different condition spiritually and materially from the others, that somewhere during the following two thousand years would correspond to the general condition of an age of time, during which time, the angel messenger to that age of time commonly referred to as the church

ages, would be stirred in his heart to stand against that prevailing spirit of Satan with a message of truth from the word of God. Therefore I am going to read to you, a few excerpts from church history, that I have with me, so that you may hear some of what was written, especially concerning this 2nd age. But first, let us notice what the Lord had to say to this church. "I know thy works". He said that to the church at Ephesus also, did He not? That lets us see that there definitely are certain works that the Lord looks upon, either good or bad, in every congregation of believers. That always reminds us of what the apostle James said about works. "Faith without works is dead." Our works are not what saves us, but they do go hand in hand with the faith we exercised for that salvation, and it is our works of faith that actually portray character and concern, and the general condition of our spiritual lives. But just as faith without works is dead, so also is works dead if they are not accompanied by a corresponding faith. Faith and works are as inseparable as the Spirit of God and the word of God. Without the Spirit to quicken it to our own spirit, the written word of God is just a dead letter, and those who claim to have the Spirit, and do not have the word of God to stabilize them, have nothing but wild fire, which always leads to trouble.

POVERTY VERSUS RICHES

Alright, besides their works, the Lord also spoke of their tribulation and poverty there at Smyrna. If they had tribulation, that means they had persecution and trials to deal with, and on top of that, a lack of material wealth, for that is where the term poverty is applied. Spiritually they were rich; for the Lord Himself said so. That is a completely opposite picture from Laodicea, the seventh church, and the seventh church age. It just goes to show what the effects of Satan's constant bombardment of truth are. Laodicea is the age of climax. Men have struggled for centuries, to climb the ladder of monetary success, and prestige, and we are living in the age where intellectual achievement has reached a peak, almost to the point of where God will actually allow it to go, before He calls an end to it all. We have put men on the moon, sent rockets into space to photograph Mars, Venus, and such like, and medical science itself has reached a great peak in trying to defeat a law of God set in affect when the first man and woman failed Him. They want to gain the supremacy over death. But they will never achieve their goal along those lines, for death is an appointment that every man has, and must keep. Only those who are lifted from this old earth by the Lord Himself will escape it, and those who are working so hard with

their human efforts will not be among them. Nevertheless, intellectual achievement has ushered in an economic environment whereby the western world is living at its highest standard ever. That is why the Lord would say to the church at Laodicea, which is the church that corresponded to our age, (Revelation 3:17&18) (17)"Because thou sayeth, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: (18) I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire," and so forth. They were looking to their own self sufficiency more than to God who is the true provider of all that we have need of. It is Satan's goal, to get man with his human achievements to leave God out of the picture, and those who do so, no matter how rich they may be in this world's goods, in the eyes of God they are poverty stricken and naked, spiritually speaking. On the other hand, here were some people at Smyrna, probably just barely getting by, struggling to make ends meet, and on top of that, they were persecuted and abused, but because they had a strong faith, and a love for God that made them determined to stand, no matter what, the Lord said to them, "You are rich." They were laying up treasures in heaven, just like Jesus taught in the gospels, treasures that could not be corrupted, and that thieves could not break in and steal. Praise God! That is the kind of riches I desire.

If we will just be loyal to God, true to His word, and love and respect each other, He will see to it, that we are cared for in this life. He never promised us great material riches, but He used the grass, the lilies, the sparrows, and such like, to show how God cares for His own, and how He will care for them in life.

THE TARES ARE SOWN

Now as I have stated already, I know the seven parables of the 13th chapter of Matthew, the letters to these seven churches, and the seven church ages, all go together. But when I began to look at the words of the Lord to the church at Smyrna, knowing that the 2nd parable of Matthew 13, speaks of how the tares were sown among the good seed, I looked at the letter for quite some time, and then I saw that they had tares among them, but what He did say was, "I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan." He did place that nugget there, and it says a lot, if you know what else has already been said to explain it. Now let us realize, this was a local church, a specific congregation of people. But it was to portray a condition that would exist in a certain age, and that age would be the one that Jesus portrayed by the parable in

Matthew 13:24-30, the age in which tares got into the assembly of believers. (It will all clear up to you when I read some of these excerpts from church history). That church at Smyrna stands out though, because of their faith, and loyalty to God. Polycarp, who was a student of the apostle John, was the bishop of the church at Smyrna. He was a man that truly loved God, and that led the church to lay up treasures in heaven. But Satan was at work, and we learn from verse 9, that his presence was felt among them. As we look at the 2nd church age, which the church at Smyrna portrays, we find that Irenaeus was the star messenger to that age, and we read here in the history of the church, how he challenged the heretics in that 2nd age. Therefore even though we do not see anything specifically mentioned in the letter to Smyrna about that tare spirit, (heretics) we must realize that it had to be present, and that it had to be contained in that one little statement the Lord made about the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan. You see, if you did not know anything else, you could never get that, out of such a mere mention of something. But I do praise the Lord for the way He leads and allows us to see certain things that are hid from the wise and the prudent, (the theological giants of religion). We saw from the letter to Ephesus, that Satan was trying to destroy Ephesus by getting the ministry and the laity at

odds with each other, in other words, by getting attention focused upon rank and racial identity, bring friction into the church that would eat like a cancer to the deterioration of the body. But Ephesus was too wise to be trapped by such tactics; they sent those trouble makers on their way. We do know, from reading Acts 19, that the first believers at Ephesus were 12 Jewish men that were taken right out of the synagogue. They were Jewish men that had been baptized unto repentance, according to John's preaching, but Paul took them, and expounded the gospel to them, baptized them in the name of Jesus Christ, and therefore, they became the first, or the beginning of the church of Ephesus. What I want to impress upon you now, is this, There were Jews in all those cities where these 7 churches were located, and I believe Jews were among the first to make up the ranks of converted Christians that followed the teaching of the apostles of Christ. This gave the Jewish people in those congregations a certain image of recognition by those Gentiles who were converted later, and also, at the same time opened a little crack in the door for Satan to try to get his foot in. Naturally it was made known that it was the Jews who had preserved through time the sacred writings, and the knowledge and revelation of the one true God. This, to me, says that the Gentiles of that hour (in the first age) had a certain reverence for a Jew that had been converted to Christianity. Did not Paul

remind them of how blindness in part had been passed upon the Jews, in order that the Gentiles might be brought in, and made partakers of the gospel? I believe that is why these churches that were at the time of 96 A.D., made up mostly of Gentile believers, always tried to give place for the testimony of Jewish individuals that passed their way, claiming to be Christians. No doubt, those who truly were Jews converted to Christianity, were a great blessing and encouragement to the other believers, but that also opened up a way for Satan to slip in a make believer now and then. They would come by, claiming to be Jews, and many of them even claiming to be apostles, but those saints of Ephesus that had been taught so well by the apostle Paul, would not be taken in by them. They would discover their deception, and put them to flight. Therefore as we realize that what the devil tried to do in the church at Ephesus, is what he was trying to do throughout all of Christianity during that first church age, and then we look to the church at Smyrna which represents conditions present in the second age, it lets us see that he just kept on using those same tactics until he finally succeeded in getting tares (make believers) sown among the believers. By using that identity as a Jewish believer, or even as an apostle from Jerusalem, they could gain recognition in those assemblies, and that would give them an opportunity to slip in some of their own ideas. The

Lord said those fellows were the synagogue of Satan. In other words, these make believers were Satan's house of worship. I was reading some of what Iranaeus wrote about those fellows, and I noticed one statement in particular. He said, A naked lie is too easy to recognize as such. He was speaking of those fellows that traveled around from place to place spreading their false doctrines. Now I have heard many things from such characters as this, that I though was just about as ridiculous as anything that could ever be taught by someone claiming to be called of God to minister His word, but some of the things that were taught during the 2nd age topped them all. As they hacked away at the Godhead, they had about 6 or 7 steps involved in God condescending to the human role, in which He was called Jesus the Christ. No wonder the devil was able to do what he did in the third century. As long as that first generation of saints were alive, they could spot those phonies, but as they passed off the scene, and their children, and their children's children were left to attend to the affairs of the church, Satan's ministers were able to pull the wool over their eyes, so to speak, for they did not have the pure revelation that those 1st century disciples had. Satan just used the same persistence in sowing his tares, that Jesus taught His disciples to use in prayer. He just kept on until he got what he wanted, tares running the affairs of the church. Not just one local body, but universally,

and your denominational systems are still that way today.

AN AGE OF MARTYRDOM FOLLOWED

Now let us read verse 10, (Revelation 2) of the letter to Smyrna. Remember as we read this, that this was written to just one local church, there in Asia. He is warning them of something that was going to happen to them, and that same condition would also exist in the universal body of believers in the 2nd century, but as far as they knew, it was just them, there at Smyrna. Let us notice what the Lord said to them. "Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." This truly did happen. Right there in that church in Smyrna, men were arrested, and taken to the arenas where they were usually fed to the lions to satisfy the blood thirsty cravings of those pagans who lived just to watch that sort of thing. Polycarp was the 12th martyr from that church there at Smyrna. He was the bishop of that assembly as time passed from the 1st age to the 2nd. Tares were in the churches by then, and universal Christendom was beginning to feel the effects of Satan's

plan to overthrow the true gospel, and substitute it with his own perverted version. But first, he would have to get rid of the rest of those true saints who still held a true revelation of the apostolic gospel. That is what martyrdom was all about. True saints from that hour and onward, were subjected to wicked trials, and much tribulation. So from that church right there at Smyrna, Polycarp was the 12th martyr who gladly accepted death rather than denounce the Lord Jesus Christ. In the letter to that church, Jesus had said, Do not fear those things which thou shalt suffer. Some of you will be cast into prison, be tried, and have much tribulation, but be faithful even unto death, and I will give the a crown of life. Brother, that is exactly what they did, for as I read these various accounts from church history, I see where they actually welcomed martyrdom. They counted it a privilege to die for the sake of their faith in Jesus Christ. I want to read some of this in your hearing, so that you may better understand why that 2nd age was symbolized by a red horse rider in the seven seals. Blood flowed from the veins of those saints of God in the 2nd age as they stepped into those arenas just like a beast of sacrifice, which was symbolized in Revelation 4:7. John saw in the midst of the throne in heaven 4 beasts, and the 2nd one had the appearance of a calf, and we know that this actually symbolized the spirit of those believers who would actually welcome martyrdom when it came to

them. God gave them grace to sacrifice their own lives in that bloody age of martyrdom, that began when Satan got the stage set. Of course we realize that Christians were martyred even from the very beginning of the New Testament church, but not with the widespread sweep that started in the 2nd century.

THE SMYRNA CHURCH **WRITES**

I am going to read some of the letter written by the church at Smyrna, describing the death of Polycarp their faithful bishop. He has been arrested, and is standing before the forum where he is confronted with an order to worship Caesar, and renounce his faith in Christ. He replied, No, I will worship the Lord Jesus Christ. But listen to this. As Polycarp was entering into the stadium, there came to him a voice from heaven saying, "Be strong, and show thyself a man, Oh Polycarp." No one saw who it was that spoke to him; but those of our brethren who were present, heard the voice. (I wonder how the people there in that stadium felt?) Then as he was brought forward, the tumult became great, for they had heard that Polycarp was taken. As he came near, the Proconsul asked if he were Polycarp, and upon confessing that he was, the Proconsul

sought to persuade him to denounce Christ saying, Have respect to thy old age, and other similar things according to their custom. Such as, Swear by the fortune of Caesar, or, Repent and say, Away with the atheists. Polycarp, gazing with a stern countenance upon all the multitude of wicked heathen then in the stadium, and waving his hands toward them, and groaning, looked up toward heaven and said, Away with the atheists. But he said it with a different motive. Then the Proconsul urging him said, Swear by Caesar and I will set you at liberty. Reproach Christ! Polycarp declared. Eighty and six years have I served him, and he never did me any injury. How then can I blaspheme my King, and my Savior? I will stop reading right there, and just insert a point or two. Naturally he was condemned to death, after that statement, but just a few days before he was arrested, he had a dream which he told to other brethren. In the dream, he had seen the pillow he was sleeping on, set on fire, so he had told these brethren, the next day, I know how I will go; they will burn me. They usually fed them to the lions in the area, but by the time his sentence was passed upon him, it was late in the day. The lions had already been put away, so that opened the way for his dream to be fulfilled. One of the lower officials said, Bring in the lions. But the man in charge said, The evening events are over, and the lions are already back in their cages. That necessitated his destruction by fire, so when Polycarp

became aware of it, he prayed, and welcomed the fire. At the conclusion of his prayer, the men came with the fire, and Brother! Here is a beautiful testimony of a man endowed with the grace of God. Let me read it to you. As the flame breathed forth with great fury, we to whom it was given to witness it, beheld a great miracle, and have been preserved alive, that we might be able to report to other what took place there. The fire shaping itself into the form of an arch, like the sail of a ship when filled with the wind, encompassed as by a circle the body of the martyr, and he appeared within, not like flesh which is burnt, but as bread which is baked, or as gold and silver glowing in a furnace. Moreover we perceived such a sweet odor coming from the pike, as if frankincense or some other precious spices had been smoking there. (Saints, these are the things the Lord used to speak to that bunch of heathen in those days.) At length, when those wicked men perceived his body could not be consumed by the flames, they commanded that an executioner go forth and pierce him through with a dagger. Upon doing this, there came forth a dove, (symbol of the Holy Ghost) and a great quantity of blood, (which actually gushed out in such a way that it extinguished the flames, I read in another place) and all the people wondered, that there should be such a difference between the unbelievers and the elect, of whom this most admirable Polycarp was one.

Having in our times, been an apostolic prophet and teacher, and bishop of the church which is in Smyrna, every word that came forth from his mouth, either has been already, or shall yet be accomplished. This is the blessed account of Polycarp, which was the 12th that was martyred in Smyrna. Now brothers and sisters, those twelve were actually the patriarchs of the faith that had pastored the church there. They had all been martyred, and Polycarp was the twelfth one.

WHAT HISTORY REVEALS

From Polycarp's hour, as the second age really came into full focus, this same thing began to be a universal picture. Satan still continued to pervert Christianity from within, and at the same time, from without, tried to completely destroy every individual soul that held onto a true revelation of any sort. That is exactly why the 2nd beast (the calf) corresponds to the 2nd horse rider, (red) for the blood of the saints spilled upon the ground, as they faced martyrdom for their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. But one thing is obvious to anyone who read these various historical records, God gave them grace to die with dignity. They would walk into those arenas with their heads held high, and with victory in their souls, being thankful that they

were counted worthy to share in the sufferings of their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Naturally we have to go to other sources for much of this information, for it just simply is not written in the pages of the Bible. That is why I'm so thankful that many of these historical writings have been preserved through the years of time. Otherwise there would be many questions in our minds left unexplained. Much of what we know about Christianity and its adversaries passing from that first century into the second, and also from the first church age and on into the second age was written by Irenaeus the messenger to the 2nd age. He was born near Smyrna around 130 AD., and was taught by Polycarp who was a disciple of the apostle John. It was from the writings of Irenaeus that I read that about Jesus being the 6th stage of God's condescension to human form. He was telling about how schools of Christian learning were springing up in that 2nd century, and some of the things they taught about the Godhead. Anyhow that was the first I had ever heard, or read of God being as many as 6 or 7. It is hard enough in our day, to deal with these who believe Him to be 2 or 3, so I do not envy those saints of God who had to deal with such a wild spirit as that. Of course we realize that it all comes from that same spirit of perversion, but you do wonder just how anything could get so far off course, so soon after the original apostles passed from the scene.

Naturally as I read some of those things, my mind went to the parable of Jesus, in Matthew 13:24-30, where he said, "But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way." John was dead, Paul was dead, Peter was dead, James was dead. Those old guards of the true faith were asleep in Jesus, and the enemy of God sowed his tare seed (make-believers) among the wheat, (true believers) and went his merry way. Irenaeus wrote many epistles refuting those Antichrist teachings that were springing up throughout universal Christendom and I was reading also, how he sent certain men from Smyrna all the way into France evangelizing, but Satan was on the rampage. He had already enlarged his field of tares, and true Christians were being butchered like hogs in a slaughterhouse. Some were fed to the lions, and others were burned at the stake, as the devil tried his level best to completely destroy every trace of genuine Christianity, but God always preserved seed alive even in the darkest hour of Christianity, to shoot forth on this side of the Dark Ages. Let me say this also, No matter what anyone may think when they read those words written to the church at Smyrna, that particular church had a far reaching influence upon universal Christianity, and it was because of men like Polycarp and Irenaeus that would not shun their calling of God to stand for the truth.

SATURDAY WORSHIP OF SUNDAY WORSHIP

I believe we have said about enough concerning the church at Smyrna, so let me take a few minutes to deal with another point that I believe needs some clarification in the minds of many believers. Seventh Day Adventist people are always accusing us of worshipping on the wrong day of the week, and that has caused a lot of people to ask, Bro. Jackson, just where in the scripture, does it state that we should worship on Sunday instead of Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath? Those who teach Saturday worship have what they consider two strong points of argument. First they point out that Paul went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, to preach to the Jews, and of course that would be on Saturday. But let me remind you that Paul himself said the gospel was first to the Jews, and then to the Gentiles. Therefore in every city where he went, Paul always went to the Jewish synagogue where he would present the gospel to the Jewish element before going to the Gentiles. Now Brothers and Sisters, think seriously. If you wanted to speak to Jews that had gathered to worship, what day would you choose to go into their synagogue when they would all be gathered together? You say, Saturday, and that

is exactly why Paul went on Saturday; that was the only thing that made any sense. Secondly, those who teach Saturday worship are quick to point out, that it was the Catholic church that made Sunday worship compulsory, and from the standpoint of history, that is exactly right; the Catholic church did do that. But now let us go into the Bible and see what is written there. First I will direct your attention to 1st Corinthians 16:1-2, where Paul is instructing that assembly concerning the collection for the poor saints as Jerusalem. He says, (1) "Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. (2) Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings (collections) when I come." Now I ask you seriously, Why would they come together for worship on Saturday, and then come back again on Sunday the first day of the week, just to take up a collection? Do you see how foolish that would be? Common sense tells us they took up the collection when they came together for worship upon the first day of the week (Sunday). Would you not say so? The Christians worship day had nothing whatsoever to do with Paul's practice of going to the Jewish synagogue on their day of worship, to speak to them. His heart was heavy for his Jewish brethren in the natural. He never ceased to be concerned for them. But let us look at another scripture now,

and then I will read you something from church history. Acts 20; beginning with verse 7, is what I want to read at this time. (7) "And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight. (This might also serve to take the time limit off of how long we are allowed to preach.) (8) And there were many lights in the upper chamber, where they were gathered together. (They were in a building, a place of worship.) (9) And there sat in a window a certain young man named Eutychus, being fallen into a deep sleep: and as Paul was long preaching, he sunk down with sleep, and fell down from the third loft, and was taken up dead." I read all three verses there, just so you could see that the disciples were meeting for worship, in a building, upon the first day of the week, in the early age of Christianity. It was not a practice that was started by the Catholic church; they just merely adopted it, and made it law. But to add to what we have seen in the scriptures, let me read you what Justin the martyr, of the 2nd century wrote concerning the day Christians worship. "But Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly, because it is the first day on which God, having wrought a change in the darkness and matter, made the world. (Referring to the first chapter of Genesis) and Jesus Christ our Savior, on the same day, rose from the dead.

For he was crucified on the day before Saturn (Saturday) the Jewish Sabbath, and on the day after that of Saturn, having appeared to His apostles and disciples. He taught them these things which we have submitted to you also, for your consideration." Justin the martyr, wrote those words in the 2nd century, but I believe it is reasonable to conclude, especially since we have actual scripture to back us up, that worshiping on Sunday was a practice carried over from the 1st century when the first apostles were still alive. In other words, they had a revelation concerning the day of worship, just like Abel did, concerning an acceptable sacrifice unto the Lord God. Therefore let me say this to you, When we have so much to base our worship practice upon, we should not be at the mercy of unrevealed people who just want to argue. I would never hold these history accounts above the scriptures, but when they agree with what I see in the scriptures, I just have to thank God for a little more confirmation.

PERGAMOS

Coming to the letter written to the church at Pergamos, we will soon realize that the conditions in their midst even in 96 A.D., typed the conditions of an evil age that would

follow. What was going on in that particular church was just a very small sample of what would take place in the age it represented, for its acts and deeds would be multiplied over and over again and again. There are many disputes and contradictions, as men try to establish exact dates when the church actually passed from one age to the other. That is because of the many overlapping conditions that makes it next to impossible just to say, This age ends here, and this one starts here. According to one of the Antinicean books, the dates attributed to that 3rd church age was from 316 just before the Nicean Council was held, all the way to 606 A.D., the council was held at Nicea. All sorts of ideas about the Godhead were being taught even in the 2nd century, but as conditions among the believers really began to reach a critical point, a priest by the name of Arius began to teach his version of the Godhead, and it caused such a stir, the emperor Constantine took it upon himself to call for a council meeting to get this question settled once and for all. By this time the trinity version of the Godhead was widely accepted, but not by Arius. He combated the trinity teaching with a version of oneness that was just as bad, or even worse, for he denied the deity of Christ Jesus altogether, saying that He was just another creature made out of nothing, like all the rest of us. He did not say much about the Holy Spirit, except to deny that He was God, but his doctrine became known as Arianism, and it

caused such a fuss among the ranks of what was called the church, the emperor Constantine felt that it should be straightened out by a council of bishops. Of course they adopted the trinity version of the Godhead teaching, as opposed to Arianism, for that is what was taught right on through the Dark Ages and down through the years of Reformation, and even today, it is still a strong spirit that forces a trinity version of the godhead upon people. But we do have to thank God for preserving the truth through all of that, and for allowing us to be partakers of that truth here at the end time. Catholicism, as a religious organization, did not come into being until around 500 A.D., but that old spirit was on the scene long before then. The church in that 3rd age, no longer appeared as she did in that 1st age, for the tares were in control. The messenger of God to that age, history reveals, was a man by the name of St. Martin. He was a soldier in his younger days, more or less as a career, but inwardly, he had a compassion for the plight and needs of others. Therefore as a result of the feelings of his heart, the Lord came to him, and really gave him an experience of salvation, lifting him up out of a life of sin, and making him a soldier of the cross. He became a gallant defender of the faith in his hour, and it is known that his message reached all the way into the regions of Europe. But their battle for truth was basically the same as it is in our day and hour. It is still the Spirit of truth

combating that spirit of Antichrist, as it has been ever since that first church age began to be infiltrated there toward the end of the age.

SHARP SWORD WITH TWO EDGES

Let us read what the Lord instructed John to write to the church at Pergamos, the church of that 1st age, that had conditions in it that would parallel the general spiritual condition of the universal church in the 3rd church age. In Revelation 2:13, we begin reading these words. "And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write; These things saith He which hath the sharp sword with two edges." Have you been paying attention to the various ways the Lord identified Himself to these seven churches? To the church of Ephesus He identified Himself as He that holdeth the seven stars in His right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks. To the church at Smyrna He was identified as The First and The Last, which was dead, and is alive. But to the church in Pergamos, He which hath the sharp sword with two edges. Naturally the sharp sword with two edges is the word of God, and in that hour, the word of God was being contested by something that required warfare in the spirit. Therefore it seems

that the Lord portrayed Himself to each church in a symbolic way to actually express something of the spiritual condition among them. In this case they had a condition existing, that definitely required the use of that sharp two edged sword, that could cut from either direction. Notice the next statement. He said the same thing to the others also. "I know thy works." As we said before, that has to pertain to their true works of faith, not only as individuals, but also as a unit of believers. "I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is." That of course is having reference to the city of Pergamos itself. The Lord saw it as a city given over to idolatry, witchcraft, devil worship, worshipers of fire, and to immorality in general, and there was the church right in the midst of all of that, just like Lot down in Sodom. Read it carefully, for the Lord is not saying that the seat of Satan is in the church. It is the city itself that is the seat of Satan. The Lord could see that Satan literally controlled that city, yet here was a church of the living God, trying to uphold truth and moral standards in the midst of all that. He went ahead saying, "Thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth." I imagine Pergamos was a city sort of like certain cities in California in our day. California has become a state so taken over by demonic spirits, that

almost anything that one could think of in their mind, is going on there. It has, through the years, been a state where people would go to get rich, and the devil has taken it over. When we see pictures, and hear of some of the things that take place in that state, we wonder how such a place could possibly escape the wrath of God, but then we just have to realize that their cup of wrath is not full yet, but one day it will be, for I believe the prophecy, which declared that a great earthquake would hit her, and that parts of her slide into the ocean. Why? Because she has become a sanctuary for every kind of evil spirit of the devil. Homosexuals and prostitutes are in high places in that state, and even in the so-called church. Prostitutes form their unions, and use church buildings to hold their conventions.

THINGS GOD HATES

Brother and sisters: I am not necessarily picking on California alone, but she has been in the forefront with these conditions and since I cannot show you the city of Pergamos, I have to use illustrations so that you can understand just what Pergamos was like. You can better understand why the Lord would say, I know that you are dwelling where Satan's seat is.

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Their environment did not give them any license to do wrong, but it sure did make it hard for them to stay out of trouble, for Satan was consistently trying to destroy them. One thing in particular strikes you as strange. Here was the Lord acknowledging that they held fast to His name in this particular church, and in the very age that was typed by this church, the name of Jesus became a contested issue. His deity was contested, and also whether He was a true Son of God, or just an adopted son. Nevertheless the fact that Jesus was even mentioned, that they had held fast to His name, lets us know that Satan had been doing something in the church, trying to abolish His name from among them. Actually when you read 1st John 4:1-3, you will notice that as early as 90 A.D., the name of Jesus was already under attack, and John said that it was from false prophets who had gone out into the world, being motivated by the spirit of Antichrist. Then as we have already mentioned, in that 2nd age, Christian schools were set up, and that just naturally opened a door for these false teachers who loved to get hold of young minds and pollute them. They could not accomplish anything with saints who had a genuine revelation in their bosom, but if they could get hold of their children, and feed their perverted junk into their young minds, you can easily see how tares eventually got into the church, into places of leadership. You have the same situation even today, as in every age;

where children grow up in the church, take part in everything that goes on, do everything that their parents do, but many of them never have a true experience of salvation. Naturally when the older ones pass off the scene and these are left to take their places of leadership, without the Holy Ghost in them to take the lead, they have to depend upon their natural mind, in whatever function they may have in the church. Therefore if they have been taught a perverted version of the gospel, some of it is bound to come out and mix in with the truth that may still be present, but over a period of so many generations, you can just imagine what could happen, and it did happen. Satan got into the church. No, it was not the revealed believers that became heretics; it was those who were void of the Spirit of God in their lives. You can look back to Jacob and Esau, for an example of how one set of parents could produce children that God would either love or hate. Some people argue that God loves every individual, regardless of whether they are a Christian or not, and I will readily agree that God loved you before you ever became a Christian, or you would not be one, but if we are going to believe the word of God, (the Bible) then we will have to agree that there are some ungodly individuals in the world, that God hates. What I want to impress upon you though, is this. These false prophets (tares) did not attack the way Christians dress, nor whether they walked uprightly in all

the Christian virtues or not; the first thing they started hacking away at, was the revelation of the Godhead. If they can destroy that, everything else is a breeze for them. Now they can never rob a person of a true revelation that has already got past the mind, and into the spirit, but it is a known fact, that whatever you hold only in your mind, can be taken away from you, no matter how true it may be. That is the reason some people are always changing their doctrine; what they have been following was only in their mind. As time passed out of the 2nd age, and into the 3rd, those men of true faith began to take on a militant attitude in their defense of the gospel. That is why Jesus identifies Himself to the church at Pergamos, as He which hath the sharp sword with two edges, Now let us realize that when the Lord speaks of the church, He is speaking of only the true believers, and not necessarily everyone who sits in the assembly. That is why after commending the believers for holding fast to His name, and for not denying the true faith, He could turn right around and say, "But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate."

DOCTRINE OF BALAAM

As we said earlier, This church had only been in existence about 40 years at the time of this letter, and they already had these two conditions among them, that actually did not hit universal Christendom until the 3rd age. It just goes to show, that some congregations are easier for tares to slip into than others. It also confirms something that other studies have revealed. That is this. Forty years of time is just about what it takes, or we will say, is all the time that is needed for any group of people to reach a peak, or point where they will either go on with great determination, or start to deteriorate. The devilish city where they were located had a lot to do with their standards of morality, for Satan was continually bombarding them with every kind of perversion that could be imagined. Sooner or later, that sort of thing will bear an influence on a congregation. The Lord said, You have there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam. That means that there were people in that congregation that actually believed and upheld this doctrine of Balaam, and you really have to go back to the book of Numbers to find out what that false prophet taught. He was sent out by Balak, to prophesy against Israel, because Balak did not want the children of Israel to come through that part of the land on their way from

Egypt to the promised land. For fear of what might happen if they did come that way, he hired Balaam, a false prophet, to go out and curse Israel for a sum of money. (That reminds me of a lot of these preachers in our day.) Balaam agreed to go, but he told old Balak that he would only say what the Lord put in his mouth. Therefore as it turned out, every time he opened his mouth to curse them, he would pronounce a blessing upon them. Finally he told Balak that no man could curse them, but he had some psychology that would no doubt work. Balaam himself did not stay around to carry it out, but he told Balak what to do. He knew the holy standards that God had set among His chosen people, and he also knew that somewhere these people had a weakness in them, because of where they came from, Egypt. Therefore he told Balak, Get your young people to go out and entice the children of Israel to come over and worship Baal with them. It was all done under the pretext of just having some fellowship together; you see the same thing today. Their whole religious program constituted a feast, probably an elaborate meal, much festivity, the worshiping of a deity which incorporated the decking of an altar with flowers and feasting around a sacrificial ceremony. Then came the drinking and immoral acts of sex. The children of Israel were enticed into all of this, and God let them go for a while, but then the anger of God struck the camp of Israel. You can go to the

book of Numbers and read how one man came in and found two people in the act of sex, and thrust them both through with a dagger to bring an end to the whole rotten mess. Therefore the doctrine of Balaam was his revelation, his psychology. For he knew how he could bring God's displeasure upon the people of Israel instead of a blessing. So this practice in the church at Pergamos was not something new that the devil had cooked up, it was a carryover from centuries past. Gentiles, before receiving the gospel, had always lived like that. This is why the brethren at Jerusalem gave Paul such a set of instructions concerning Gentiles that had received the gospel. In Acts 15:19 & 20 we read it. "Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollution of idols and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood." Some of the brethren felt that Gentile believers should be circumcised, and commanded to keep the law of Moses, but Peter reminded them that God does not require such a yoke to be placed around the necks of Gentile believers, and reminds them of the fact that even Jews who had been raised to keep the law, could not bear such a yoke. Therefore they all finally agreed upon these very important basic instructions. Keep away from fornication, abstain from idol worship, do not eat meat that has been strangled to death, and do not drink blood. These

were all things that were very common to pagans, and that is exactly what Gentiles were, before they were converted to Christianity.

FORBIDDEN DIET

A lot of people will ask, What about these scriptures that speak of abstaining from eating meat offered to idols, and from things that have been strangled? First of all, meat that was sacrificed unto idols, was sacrificed to that deity to atone for something in their life. In other words, they offered the life of whatever it was, in an effort to appease that deity, and the other thing is, such meat usually has not been bled; the blood is congealed within. So that takes us back to Genesis 9:3-4. After the flood, God changed the diet of the survivors to include meat, saying to them. (3) "Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you; even as the green herb have I given you all things. (4) But flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall ye not eat." God established this law against them eating meat with the blood still in it, and that also meant that drinking blood was forbidden, but, especially in the day of Christ and the apostles, Gentiles were doing just exactly the opposite of that. Kosher meat (Jewish) even yet

today, especially in Israel, is meat that the Jewish Rabbi has presided over the preparation to make sure it is bled out properly. They make sure the jugular vein of that animal is cut so that all the blood is pumped out, and then it is hung so that it will completely bleed out. On the other side of the picture, heathen Gentiles developed a taste for blood, and took great pains to preserve it, when they killed an animal. Even recently, I saw a program on television of a tribe over in Africa, and one of the things they showed, was how they would go out, in the morning, and pierce a vein in the neck of a calf, and catch the blood in a cup. Then they would go and mix that with warm milk and drink it for breakfast, just like you might, tea or coffee. That is completely against the law of God, and so in any other form of deliberately drinking blood, or eating it in some other fashion. When those Gentile pagans would beat an animal to death, and never bleed it, but rather, let the blood remain in the animal and eat it that way, they were going contrary to a law God made before there ever was a Jewish people. That was for the whole human race. Then someone else said, What about this meat you buy in the store, that still has blood seeping out of it? That little bit of red you see in meat like that, has nothing at all to do with the heathen practices that the early apostles were concerned about. It is not that you will become contaminated by thing like that, it is simply a situation where those that deliberately do those

things that cross over God's laws, bring a curse upon themselves. You check back through the historical records of time, and you will discover that any tribe of people that has ever lived like that, has had to suffer for it, and will yet suffer for it. Of course we do not know just how far those people there in Pergamos were going, along those lines, but one thing is sure, the Lord said they had some folks in the church that held the doctrine of Balaam, and He wasn't at all pleased with the true saints for allowing such a thing in their midst. God would withhold His blessings from such an assembly; you can be sure of that. Now that wasn't all that the Lord had against that church, for He went ahead to say, "You also have some there, which hold the doctrine of Nicolaitans, which thing I hate." Not only did they have people in their congregation that believed it was alright to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to practice this free love thing, which is fornication, they also had some that held the doctrine of the Nicolaitans.

FALSE DOCTRINE AND CONFUSION

The church at Ephesus had been exposed to that Nicolaitan spirit, and they hated it, and refused to give it any place, yet here is another church,

founded on the teachings of the same man they were, and they have these conditions in their assembly. In other words, what was just deeds that were hated, in the Ephesus church, is an actual doctrine of some of those of Pergamos. They were already returning to their former way of life, eating meat offered to idols, and to fornication, so naturally this Nicolaitan spirit fit the occasion perfectly. Any church that is not led by the Holy Ghost, is a church where there is always confusion, and where there is confusion, there is always a variety of doctrines being taught. That part is like the chicken and the egg; it takes a revelation to know which one was first. It does fulfill an old proverb about the dog returning to its vomit, and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire, though, for they were returning back to the very way of life that the gospel supposedly delivered them from. No doubt this Nicolaitan spirit was trying to set up some kind of a priestly rule in the church, to deal with situations from a natural standpoint, before the Spirit of God could speak out to give direction. Some were probably saying, What the church needs is one bishop with the authority to settle disputes, and issue decrees for all the rest to be guided by. Of course that would leave the Holy Spirit out of the picture, and set such a difference between the ministry and the laity, that eventually, it would lead to human rulership in the church, rather than spiritual leadership. Can

you see why God would hate such a spirit? The Bible says He is a jealous God. He wants to lead His people. He did not want their worship services to be cut and dried, with everything preplanned, and printed up in a bulletin. In a Holy Ghost led service, you never know what is going to take place next, nor what time the service will end. But this Nicolaitan spirit will plan the whole service right down to the minutest detail, so that even to say amen, would be out of order. Can you even imagine that the apostle Paul, or John Wesley would have conducted services like that? Some of their services lasted all night, and they were not planned ahead of time, to be like that either.

ROMAN EMPEROR - **CHURCH LEADER**

Brothers and sisters, it is easy for us to see how a condition like this could have gotten into the church universal, in the 3rd church age, which is placed between the years 316 A.D. and 606 A.D., but what is strange, is that such a spirit could get into a local church within 40 years of its founding, to the extent that it could establish doctrine. No wonder John could write the little epistle on 90 A.D., saying, There are many Antichrists already. He could see what was happening in some of those

churches already. In other words, Satan sowed seed in the latter part of that 1st age, that really began to produce a crop over in the 3rd age, some 240, or 250 years later. It was the Roman emperor Constantine, that actually opened the way for that Nicolaitan spirit to rule the church. In the year 312, on the eve of a great battle, he was supposed to have had a dream or vision, in which he saw a fiery cross in the heavens beneath which was written, "By this sign thou shalt conquer." He interpreted that to mean, that the God of the Christians was speaking to him. In other words, If you will accept this faith, you will be victorious. He had painted the Christian emblem on the shields of his army, and into battle they went, and came out victorious. That did it for him. He granted freedom of religion in the Empire, (made a decree that added Christianity to a long list of other religions) and established Sunday as a day of worship. In the oncoming years, he took a great interest in Christianity, and that is what led up to the Nicene council. He decided that the Christian bishops should be called together, to settle this Arian controversy over the Godhead, and to formulate Christian doctrine. This actually brought about a calm, took the pressure off of the Christians that had been laboring under persecution, and truly brought about a condition that corresponded exactly to the 3rd parable of Matthew 13. The parable speaks of time when the kingdom of heaven would be like a

tree, whereby the birds of the air would come and lodge in its branches. That is exactly what happened, for these was a mass conversion of pagans, that began to swell the rank of Christendom from the very moment Constantine made his decree. Naturally as more and more pagans joined the ranks of Christians, doctrinal disputes became more and more intensified, so in the year 325 A.D., Constantine summoned the Christian bishops to meet in Nicea, for the purpose of settling these doctrinal disputes, and adopting a universal doctrine for the Christian church to follow. Naturally there were a few faithful pastors in that 3rd age, who would not even consider baptizing any other way, than in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, but they were outnumbered, so they stayed at home, and let the others go do what they were destined to do. The trinity doctrine of the Godhead was adopted, and that sanctioned using the titles Father, Son, and Holy Ghost of Matthew 28:19, in baptism, instead of the name of the one to whom those titles belonged, (Jesus Christ) for the remission of the sins of the flesh. I will just have to say this, no matter what some may think, Any bishop that attended that council, sat there and allowed a Roman Emperor to dictate church doctrine to them, would have to have been a tare. But that just goes to show how strong that tare force was by then. In other words, Satan got his council meeting, Satan got his church doctrine established, and that led right on into Millennial rule of

darkness. Praise God, I am glad Satan's Millennial rule is already past, and that the glorious Millennial rule of Jesus with His saints is close at hand. We will not set dates as some have, but all the signs point to His soon return. Hallelujah! Bride! Look up! The day of your redemption is closer than you may think.

SATAN JOINED THE **CHURCH**

We have not said much about St. Martin, the man most commonly accepted to have been the messenger of God to that 3rd age, but history reveals that he was a most gallant soldier of the cross of Christ. His ministry was filled with many outstanding miracles of various sorts, but it is recorded that he was a humble man. Even such a man though, was not afraid to stand up in the face of his enemies and oppose their evil ways. Of all the men who stood for God in that hour, his ministry seemed to be vindicated in such a way that he stood out above the others, as the messenger to the age. Even his conversion was unique. It is recorded in history that the Lord Jesus appeared to him in a vision one night, wrapped in half of Martin's robe, that he had cut in half and shared with a poor beggar by the roadside the day before. That vision is what was

supposed to have turned him to Christ. He was born right about the time that Constantine included Christianity as one of the acceptable religions that the Roman Empire would recognize. Some might think that persecution of Christians stopped when Christianity became accepted by the Roman Emperor, but you have to remember, that the devil was not converted. He joined the church to defeat true Christianity, not to defend the apostolic doctrine it held. Every tare is an agent of Satan, set in the body of Christ, to do that body exactly what a cancer does to the physical body, just eat away a little at a time. They started gnawing on the Godhead and the name of Jesus Christ in water baptism, and went right on through every major doctrine of the Bible. Those men of God like Polycarp, Irenaeus, St. Martin, and many, many more, fought that spirit of heresy with all their might, but Satan always has the majority. The ranks of the wicked have always outnumbered the ranks of the righteous, but God allowed it to be like that. For when God gets ready to move, He takes the minority and puts to flight the majority, just like He did with Gideon.

THUS SAITH THE POPE

Before dealing with the last verses of this letter to Pergamos, let me say this, These 7 literal churches did not have every condition present in them, that was actually present in the particular age they typed; however they did have conditions that revealed the presence of the spirit that would dominate that age to come later. The seven parables of Matthew 13, show the gradual breakdown of the universal kingdom of God through Satan's deceptive devices, taking it right on through the Dark Ages, and down through the Reformation to the very day we are living in. No wonder it took a prophet messenger, in this age, to get all of Satan's mess sorted out from among the true doctrine of the Bible. That in no way is to say that he got rid of it, but he did sort it out, and identify it, even to the highest religious order of the world. True saints once again have a true standard to follow. Where did the breakdown of the true revelation start? These 7 letters, along with some words spoken by Paul, John, and others, let us know that even in the first age, that Antichrist spirit was already working, but did not make much impact until the 2nd age. The 2nd age was marked with mass martyrdoms, while the 3rd age was given more to two doctrines, the doctrine of Balaam, and the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, both of which God Hates. There will still persecution of true believers, and martyrdom in the 3rd age, but not like it was in the 2nd age. After men like Constantine added their influence to the Christian church,

the main body that was still called, the church, was ruled more by pagan practices than Christianity. The Antichrist spirit had finally succeeded in causing people to turn back to their old pagan practices. Immorality was in the church, and a spirit that put too much difference between the ministry and the laity. These things were identified in the 7 literal churches of Asia in the 1st age, and they, then became universal conditions in the various ages of time their particular condition typed. As we said earlier, What was just deeds in Smyrna, was doctrine in Pergamos. Saints, I am sure you realize that not everyone was guilty of these things; for God has always had a few true saints in every age, but these were prevailing conditions of the particular ages of time they pertained to. What we see here in the Pergamos church itself, is that they did not reject these doctrines of the devil, like the church at Ephesus did. Therefore anywhere you find a certain doctrine taught, you will always find some people following that doctrine in daily life, and therefore it is reasonable to expect that doctrines split church bodies, and so on. It was Satan's goal to split the body of disciples, and separate the clergy from the laity, projecting the clergy into a priesthood. When that was accomplished, the priesthood would have sovereign authority over the laity, and that would completely eliminate the gifts of the Spirit of God, and there would be no more Holy Ghost led

services. As this condition began to be expressed in that 3rd age, it started out more or less as a competitive rat race among the major Christian centers, Jerusalem, Alexandria, Antioch, Constantinople, and Rome. Each bishop, just like in denominations today, trying to outdo the others, Each one trying to get the most in Sunday School, trying to get the largest congregation, or the largest offering, and all such like. All of this was Satan's way of eventually elevating a man somewhere, who could be lord of the whole kingdom of God. Somewhere around 500 A.D., he finally succeeded; the bishop of Rome became the one, and eventually became recognized as pope, (papa) a man who would have the last word on anything pertaining to Christianity. That all took place in the 3rd church AGE, in the years between 312 & 606 A.D., so the admonition of the Lord in Revelation 2:16, was both to the literal church in Pergamos and to the church age that corresponded to it.

REPENT, OR ELSE

Notice what the Lord says here in this verse, "Repent, or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them (Who? All who hold to these adverse doctrines and practices.) With the sword of my mouth." Alright, so the Lord has warned them, Repent, or

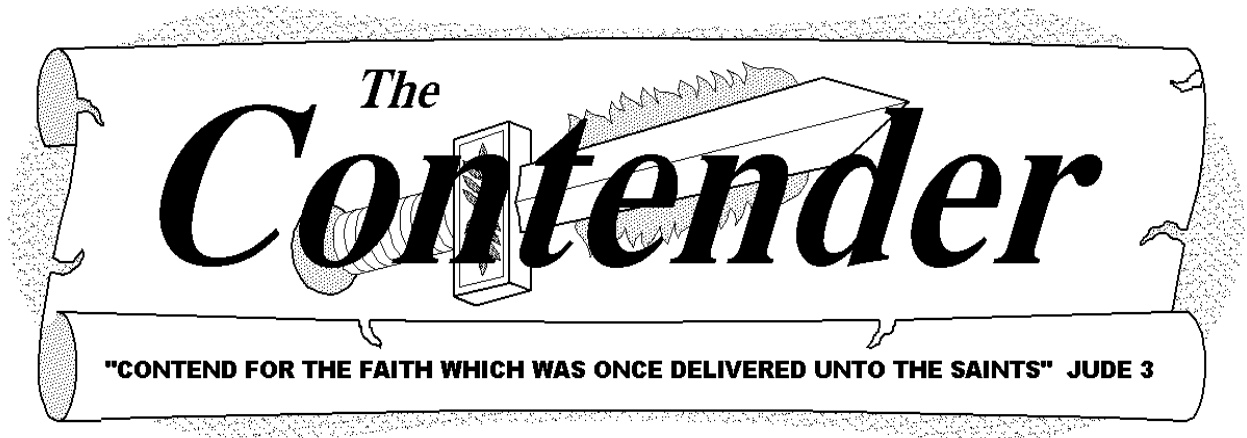
face the consequences. He said, "I will fight against thee, with the sword of my mouth." As we said before, That sharp two edged sword, is the word of God, that can cut from either direction. What did He mean? How would He do that? Who would he fight against? Not the drunks, nor the gamblers, nor the thieves, nor any other of such as these, out in the world. He was ready to draw His sword, and fight against His enemies, right in the church. They were planted there by Satan. Now that did not mean that the whole congregation was made up of tares, nor did it mean that the Lord was going to cut all the tares loose from the true people of God, for that would be contrary to the 2nd parable of Matthew 13, which says that they are to grow together until harvest time. But the Lord did anoint some saints to engage in verbal combat with those religious leaders and philosophers, that had raised up within the ranks of Christendom, in that 3rd age. St. Martin was a mighty warrior with that sharp two edged sword he carried, and as we have already stated, he is commonly accepted as the star messenger to the 3rd age. But do not forget, there were others, both before and after the star messenger came on the scene, that also defended the true revelation of the word of God. Why did they fight so hard for the truth? What was their promise? We will see that, when we finish reading the letter.

HIDDEN MANNA - OUR DAILY DIET

Let us finish reading, here in verse 17, "He that had an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it." Now we know that the children of Israel were fed manna 40 years in the wilderness, on their journey from Egypt to the promised land. They ate manna in the morning, and quail in the evening, for 40 years. They had no potatoes; they had no carrots, no tomatoes, green beans, nor corn on the cob, but they did have all they needed to keep them alive and healthy. Is this the kind of hidden manna that the Lord was referring to? No. But that manna that came down from heaven fresh every morning, was a type of the hidden manna Jesus was speaking of here. In the 5th chapter of John's gospel, did not Jesus say, "I am that bread of life. Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man eat thereof, and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven: If any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world?" Did he not say that? Was He talking about cannibalism?

Those Jews thought He was. No! He was speaking of those who would feast upon His word, and drink of His Spirit, and that is exactly what this hidden manna in Revelation 2:17 is. This hidden manna is not something they are going to get when they die; it is something for us to feast upon daily, the revelation of His blessed word. It is that truth that comes from above, by the anointing and unction of the Spirit of revelation. Satan does not like it, but true saints of God will die to preserve that privilege. The sword was necessary in that 3rd age, to preserve their food supply. Have you ever wondered how Shem preserved his father's revelation, and the other two boys that were on the same boat with them, lost it? Shem's descendants preserved a one God revelation, while Japeth's descendants became converted to Christianity and those philosophers among them, became tools in the hands of Satan, to attack the true doctrine, and shut off the food supply from the heavenly storehouse. Many of those true saints gave their lives in martyrdom in their efforts to keep that supply line open, and to some, it looks like they failed. But I will have you know, God has always preserved seed, in every generation. Therefore the over-comers of every age, received hidden manna while they were still alive, and secured the promise of a white stone, with their new name written in it, that no man could read, except he to whom it was given. That, my friends, is your reward

after death, but the hidden manna is our necessary food supply for our remaining days in this life. The white stone is symbolic of life in immortality. So let us feast upon the hidden manna, and thank God daily for it. Let us remember also, that the race is not yet over. There will yet be other saints who will have to die a martyr's death. You can be assured of one thing though, God will never require anything of you, without first granting you grace sufficient for it, whatever it is. If you could just read what is written in history about some of those early martyrs, you would realize they had something other than just their own human strength. Besides that, many of them even had a glow of light around them, as they faced the lions, or the fires of martyrdom. Most of us have coasted through life without any real persecution, but we have no right to expect it to be like that all the way, for there has been a great price, and Satan is still trying to destroy it.



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