

## APOCALYPSE OF JOHN

### Session 9: Letters to the Seven Churches (Revelation 2-3)

#### REVIEW

Structure of John's Apocalypse:

1. Prologue (Rev. 1:1-20)
2. Part I: The Revelation of "what is "now" (PRESENT) (Rev. 2:1-3:22)
3. Part II: The Revelation of "what must take place after this" (FUTURE) (Rev. 4:1-22:6)
4. Epilogue (Rev. 22:7-21)

#### THE SEVEN CHURCHES IN ASIA

A. Recipients:

**"To the seven churches in the province of Asia"** (Rev 1:4b)

**"Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea."** (Rev 1:11)

B. Literal Seven Churches or Symbolic?

1. Examples of Personalization in the Letters:
  - a. Smyrna:
  - b. Laodicea:
  - c. Pergamum:

See William Barclay, *Letters to the Seven Churches* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1957); Colin J. Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in Their Local Setting, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series*, 11 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986); W.M. Ramsay, *The Letters to the Seven Churches*, rev. ed., ed. Mark W. Wilson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994); Roland H. Worth, Jr., *The Seven Cities of the Apocalypse and Greco-Roman Culture* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1999) and *The Seven Cities of the Apocalypse and Roman Culture* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1999).

2. Open Letters:
3. Why These Churches?
  - a.
  - b.
  - c.

## STRUCTURE OF THE LETTERS TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES

### A. Covenant:

The seven letters are structured like Hittite \_\_\_\_\_ Covenants/Treaties.

### B. Five Typical Elements of Ancient Covenants seen in Joshua 24:2-27:

1. \_\_\_\_\_ (24:2a):

**This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: . . .**

2. \_\_\_\_\_ (24:2b-13)

**Long ago your forefathers, including Terah the father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the River and worshiped other gods. But I took your father Abraham from the land beyond the River and led him throughout Canaan and gave him many descendants ...I brought your fathers out of Egypt...Then you lived in the desert a long time....**

**Then you crossed the Jordan and came to Jericho...So I gave you a land on which you did not toil and cities you did not build; and you live in them and eat from vineyards and olive groves that you did not plant.”**

3. \_\_\_\_\_ (24:14):

**Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your forefathers worshiped beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD.**

4a. \_\_\_\_\_ (24:20):

**If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, he will turn and bring disaster on you and make an end of you, after he has been good to you.**

AND/OR

4b. \_\_\_\_\_ (*not found in Joshua 24, but see Deuteronomy 27-28*)

5. \_\_\_\_\_ (24:22-27):

**Then Joshua said, “You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen to serve the LORD...This stone will be a witness against us. It has heard all the words the LORD has said to us. It will be a witness against you if you are untrue to your God.”**

### C. Five Typical Elements of Covenants seen in Revelation 2:1-7 (the Letter to Ephesus):

1. \_\_\_\_\_ (2:1b):

**These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands: . . .**

2. \_\_\_\_\_ (2:2-4, 6):

**I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary. Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love...But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.**

3. \_\_\_\_\_ (2:5a):  
**Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first.**
- 4a. \_\_\_\_\_ (2:5b):  
**If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.**
- AND
- 4b. \_\_\_\_\_ (2:7b):  
**To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.**
5. \_\_\_\_\_ (2:7a):  
**He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.**

D. In the letters to the seven churches, King Jesus invites the churches to \_\_\_\_\_ the \_\_\_\_\_ with him.

## **PRESSURES FROM WITHIN THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY**

A. Ephesus (Revelation 2:2, 6):

<sup>2</sup>I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false....  
<sup>6</sup>But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

1. False Apostles:
  - a. Meaning of “apostle” (*apostolos*):
  - b. Apostles of Christ (e.g., Mark 3:14-19; Acts 1:21-26; 1 Cor 9:1; Gal 2:8):
  - c. Apostles of Churches (e.g. Barnabus in Acts 14:14, Andronicus and Junias in Romans 16:7, and Epaphroditus in Philippians 2:25):
  - d. Identity of the False Apostles in Asia:
2. The Nicolaitans (also mentioned in Revelation 2:15):

B. Pergamum (Revelation 2:14):

Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality.

1. Balaam and Balak (see Numbers 22-25; 31:16; cf. Philo, *Vita Moses* I.48-55; Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* IV.126):
2. Sins of Balaam:
  - a. “Eating food sacrificed to idols”:
  - b. “Sexuality immorality” (see, for example, Hosea 4:12; cf. Revelation 2:20-22; 9:20-21; 14:8; 17:1-5, 15-16; 18:3, 9; 19:2; 21:8; 22:15.):

C. Thyatira (Revelation 2:20-25):

<sup>20</sup>Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. <sup>21</sup>I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. <sup>22</sup>So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways. <sup>23</sup>I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds. <sup>24</sup>Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan's so-called deep secrets (I will not impose any other burden on you): <sup>25</sup>Only hold on to what you have until I come.

1. The Old Testament Jezebel (see 1 Kings 16:29 – 2 Kings 9:37):
2. The Asian “Jezebel”:
3. Sins of the Asian “Jezebel”:
  - a. “Eating of food sacrificed to idols”:
  - b. “Sexual immorality” or “adultery”:
  - c. “Teaching...Satan’s so-called deep secrets”:

D. Conclusions:

1. Pressures from within the Asian Churches in A.D. 95-96:
2. Jesus'/John's Response:

**OPPOSITION FROM OUTSIDE THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY**

A. Philadelphia (Revelation 3:9):

I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars—I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you.

B. Smyrna (Revelation 2:8-10):

These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again. I know your afflictions and your poverty—yet you are rich! I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.