

Revelation Lesson 3

Reading: Revelation 2

Memory Verse: Revelation 2:19

Definitions:

Nicolaitan – A false religious group that lived immorally and taught that the clergy were more important than the rest of the people.

Repent – To change your mind about sin, to be sorry for sin and turn away from it.

Overcomer – A believer in Christ (1 John 5:4-5)

Balaam – An Old Testament prophet whom the king of Moab tried to hire to curse Israel so he could drive the Israelites out of their land.

After reading the lesson, answer the questions using the following link:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSefSsVW9JfVZI526nxncoXrdmwsj_Jg-tEu9zJlyHhHsGP2Gw/viewform?usp=sf_link

You've got mail!

How many email messages do you send in a week? How many do you get? The messages you receive probably tell you what your friends and relatives are doing and give you news about other people you know.

But when Christ communicated with people, He did not do it the way you and your friends do. His messages followed a different format, as you will see in this lesson. And they were not always pleasant to receive.

Ephesus

City

Ephesus was a large seaport city, the capital of Asia. Because it was located on the trade route from Rome to the East, it was a prosperous business center. It was also a religious center with the large temple of the Roman goddess Diana, one of the seven wonders of the world. Because it was a religious, commercial, and political center, at times emphasis attracted as many as 2 million people.

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In addition to Diana's temple, Ephesus had a strong Christian church that Paul had founded on his third missionary journey (Acts 19). John was the pastor before he was exiled to Patmos.

Description of Christ (v. 1)

Christ described himself as *Him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands*. He was telling the Ephesians that He protects, controls, and has authority over the churches. He was also their judge and overseer, evaluating them and observing their testimony among the world.

Commendation (vs. 2,3,6)

Christ began by commending the church for a number of good characteristics. The believers there were known for good works, hard work in Christ's name, patience, and perseverance. They were doctrinally pure and morally sound. Furthermore, they refused to tolerate evil and tested those who claimed to be apostles to be sure they were authentic. Plus, they hated the work of the Nicolaitans.

Condemnation (v.4)

Yet they were not perfect. In spite of their works, they had forsaken their first love. Although their doctrine was sound, they had lost their love for Christ. Their service had become routine and formal, performed with cold hearts.

Counsel (v.5)

Christ told the Ephesians to remember their first love, to reflect on what their relationship with God was like when they first came to know him. He also told them to repent and to do the things they did at first. In other words, they were to serve Christ with the right motives and attitudes. If they did not, they would lose their testimony and eventually die as a church.

Promise (v.7)

Christ promised those who overcame that they would eat from the tree of life. In other words, the believers would gain eternal life.

Smyrna (2:8-11)

City

Smyrna was another seaport city about 35 miles north of Ephesus. It, too, was a commercial center, one of the most prosperous cities in the area. Because it was inhabited mostly by Jewish people who hated Christians, it was well-known as a place of suffering and persecution. In fact, 5 million believers died for Christ in this area.

Description of Christ (v.8)

Christ described Himself as the *First and the Last, who died and came to life again*. He emphasized the fact that He is God and has gained victory over death.

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Commendation (v.9)

Christ praised the Smyrnan believers for their endurance in the midst of difficulty. They were persecuted and poverty-stricken, but stood with the Lord.

Condemnation

Unlike the other churches, Christ did not condemn this one for anything.

Counsel (v.10)

In the light of their past and future persecution, Christ told the church not to be afraid. He encouraged them to be faithful to Him even to the point of death.

Promise (vs. 10-11)

If they stayed faithful to Him, Christ promised to give them the crown of life, a reward for faithfulness (James 1;12). Furthermore, the believers would not be hurt by the second death, or lake of fire.

Pergamum (2:12-17)

City

Like Ephesus, Pergamum was a religious center with a great temple, this one for Roman emperor worship and in honor of Augustus Caesar, who ruled when Jesus was born. It had the greatest library in the pagan world. Pergamum was also the place where parchment was first used for writing.

Description of Christ (v.12)

To this church, Christ described Himself as *the one with the sharp, double-edged sword*. Hebrews 4:12 describes this two-edged sword as the word of God. Christ was assuring the readers that His judgment would be based on absolute truth.

Commendation (v.13)

Even though Pergamum was a center of Satan's activity, the believers had not denied their faith in Christ. Some, like Antipas, had even died for their faith instead of denying the Lord.

Condemnation (vs.14-15)

But in spite of their steadfastness, some in the church believed false doctrines and were not kicked out for them. They followed the teachings of Balaam, who stood for moral compromise. (When God would not let Balaam curse His people like the king of Moab wanted him to, Balaam suggested an alternative. He told the king that God would judge His people if he could involve them in immorality and idolatry.) Others in the Pergamum church followed the teachings of the Nicolaitans.

Counsel (v.16)

As he did with the Ephesian church, Christ also commanded this one to repent. If they did not, He would fight against them with his sword.

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Promise (v.17)

But to those who overcame sin, He promised hidden manna – Himself (John 6:32-35) – and white stones. White and black stones were used to determine judicial decisions. If a judge drew a white stone, the person on trial was acquitted; if he drew the black stone, that person was condemned as guilty. So Christ promised the believers that they would not be condemned.

Thyatira (2:18-29)

City

Thyatira was the headquarters for a variety of trade guilds such as potters, bakers, tanners, weavers, robe makers, and dyers. Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth, came from there (Acts 16:14). Thyatira was known for its wool and dying industries.

Description of Christ (v.18)

To the church at Thyatira, Christ introduced himself as *the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like brownish bronze*. As such, He reminded them that He is God who knows and judges everything.

Commendation (v.19)

Christ praised this group of believers for their increasing works, love, service, faith, and patience.

Condemnation (vs.20-23)

But in spite of what they were doing for God, they also tolerated sin. They did not stop a prophetess called Jezebel from teaching false doctrine and encouraging immorality, idolatry, and occult practices. Jezebel may not have been her real name, but rather a comparison with the wicked queen Jezebel (1 Kings 16:31; 19:1-2; 21), who aggressively promoted Baal worship that included immoral behavior.

Counsel (vs. 24-25)

Christ warned those who had not succumbed to Jezebel's teaching to continue on in their faith until He comes.

Promise (vs.26-29)

To the believers, Christ promised power over nations. He referred to ruling in the millennial kingdom and to Himself.

Fast Fact

To each of these four churches, Christ emphasized His characteristics and actions that were pertinent to their situation. No matter what His children were going through, He was able to meet their needs.

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The same is true today. Nothing in your life escapes Christ's attention. And He can help you through it. Will you let him do so?

On the Street

All of us, even if we are committed to walking with Christ and doing his will, have some area of sin that continually trips us up. What is yours? Chances are you do not have to think too long. But have you thought about what leads up to your continuing failure in this area? Are you, like the believers in the church is at Pergamum and Thyatira, associating with people who regularly sin? Put this lesson to practical use by getting rid of the habits that cause you to fall.