

Rebellion and Redemption

The Church Militant

Lesson #12 for March 19, 2016

Scriptures: Revelation 2:1-3:6; 3:14-22; Hosea 2:13; Isaiah 60:14.

1. When Jesus ascended to heaven 10 days before Pentecost, He left a small group of followers with a task that even they—taught by the greatest Teacher of all time for up to three and one-half years—did not comprehend. Read Matthew 28:19-20. In the beginning, they thought their work was exclusively to the Jews living in Palestine. Through a variety of circumstances which we have discussed in previous lessons, God finally convinced them that the gospel was to go to all the world. Paul with Barnabas—and later, Silas—carried the gospel to western Asia Minor, now Turkey, and on into Europe. Others, no doubt, were involved as well.
2. Near the end of the first century, the Roman government attempted to kill John by throwing him into a pot of boiling oil. But he did not die! The same people who had thrown him into the pot of boiling oil had to pull him back out again.

John was cast into a caldron of boiling oil; but the Lord preserved the life of His faithful servant, even as He preserved the three Hebrews in the fiery furnace. As the words were spoken, Thus perish all who believe in that deceiver, Jesus Christ of Nazareth, John declared, My Master patiently submitted to all that Satan and his angels could devise to humiliate and torture Him. He gave His life to save the world. I am honored in being permitted to suffer for His sake. I am a weak, sinful man. Christ was holy, harmless, undefiled. He did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth.

These words had their influence, and John was removed from the caldron by the very men who had cast him in.—Ellen G. White, *Acts of the Apostles*, 570.1-2.

3. The Roman authorities decided that they must silence John's influence by sending him into exile on the Isle of Patmos. While there, he wrote the book of Revelation. Much of the book of Revelation teaches us about the great controversy. Revelation 12:7-12 explains for the first time how the great controversy started in heaven itself. How do you win victories in a war by "the blood of the Lamb"? If Satan started the war by deceit and lies, the remedy would be to tell the truth! Revelation 13 and 14 describe how Satan will be almost 100% effective in converting the world to his side; but, through the three angels' messages, God will use a small remnant who will endure under very difficult circumstances and stand firm on His side of the great controversy to finish the work of the Christian churches through the ages.
4. In Revelation 2 and 3, we read about the personal approach that Jesus has taken to each of the churches in western Turkey to which John wrote. These were churches with members that John knew personally. Each of them struggled with issues which were challenges to their Christian faith. Unfortunately, it is a story of how many of the churches were trying to straddle the fence between being Christians and being a part of this world. John received a vision while on Patmos concerning issues that affected each of those churches. Jesus Himself was reaching out to them. It is through those churches and the larger groups of Christians that they represented down through the ages that God intends to spread the message of Christianity to the world under the close eyes of the onlooking

universe. (Ephesians 3:8-10; 1 Corinthians 4:9)

5. Read Revelation 2:1-7. The church of Ephesus represents the time period between 31 A.D. and 100 A.D. Those were the times of the apostles; but, by the end of that period, none of the apostles were left. The Devil was doing his best to stop the spread of Christianity. It is quite possible that each of the apostles except John died a martyr's death. Remember that Christianity was an illegal religion in those days. Paul spent years in Ephesus, and so did John. Both of them survived threats on their lives while working in Ephesus. Apollos also worked there as did Aquila and Priscilla. Ephesus was the "publication center" for the early church. Ephesus was a large, wealthy city, possibly the fourth largest city in the Roman Empire at that time. Was that part of their problem?
6. The church at Ephesus was certainly at the center of Satan's early attacks against Christianity. Heretics in various forms tried to corrupt the church. While we do not know very much about it, there was a heresy apparently started by Nicolas one of the original seven deacons (Acts 6:5) that had some influence in Ephesus as well as in Pergamum.
7. In what respect had the early Ephesian church lost its first love? Is that suggesting that the second generation of Christians were not equal in zeal and devotion to the original apostles? Remember that both Paul and John spent a significant amount of time in Ephesus. Did the Christian church in Ephesus gradually settle in and let their zeal die?
8. Read Revelation 2:8-17. To the churches at Smyrna and Pergamum, Jesus introduced Himself as the Creator and Redeemer of the church and the One who died for her salvation and who is now present with a sharp two-edged sword coming out of His mouth. (Revelation 1:16; 2:12) A sharp two-edged sword coming out of the mouth of Jesus must describe words of truth that condemn those who believe in error.
9. Smyrna represents the period between 100 A.D. and 320 A.D. when Constantine issued a decree declaring Christianity to be the official religion of the Roman Empire. It was a fairly true church because it was constantly being persecuted. There was a final fierce persecution that lasted about 10 years under Diocletian and Galerius, ending shortly before Constantine made his declaration. Polycarp was one of the early church leaders at Smyrna. After ministering there for many years, he was arrested and burned at the stake by the Romans.
10. The church at Pergamum represented the period from about 320 A.D. through 538 A.D. when the Bishop of Rome began to exercise both political and military might. By uniting church and state under a single head, he became the first real pope and started the 1260 day—42 months or 3½ years—prophetic period described in both Daniel and Revelation. The church at Pergamum was warned about following the teachings of Balaam and the teachings of the Nicolaitans—followers of Nicolas as mentioned above.

Nicolas and Balaam seem to be parallel terms; Nicolas is a compound Greek word (*nikaō* and *laos*) and means "the one who conquers the people." Balaam can be derived from two Hebrew words—*am* ("people") and *baal* (from *bela*, "to destroy" or "to swallow"), meaning "destruction of people." —Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ: Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 2002), p. 111. (As quoted in the *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Monday, March 14.)

11. Read Revelation 2:14-15. It was during this time period that most of the corruption entered

the Christian church. Many pagan ideas were adopted by many of the Christians in a move we call syncretism. As one example, they changed the holiday dedicated to Tammuz, making it into “Christmas,” a celebration of the birth of Jesus. It was also during this period that Sunday worship became popular, and worship on the true Sabbath gradually died out.

12. Read Revelation 2:18-3:6. Jesus is introduced to the church in Thyatira as having fiery eyes and feet of polished brass. (Revelation 1:14-15) That description was used in Daniel 10:6 to describe the Messenger that brought Daniel one of the important messages recorded in the book of Daniel. Thyatira represents the time period from 538 A.D. to about 1560 A.D. when the Protestant Reformation had begun in earnest. Thyatira covers the millennium that we refer to as the Dark Ages. Near the end of this period, the process of reformation got its start with giants of faith like Martin Luther, William Tyndale, John Wycliffe, and others.
13. During much of this time, the Waldensees in northern Italy, southern France, and portions of Switzerland were able to keep alive the light of the gospel truth including a correct understanding of the Sabbath.
14. The period of Sardis goes from about 1560 A.D. to 1798 A.D. As we know, the Protestant Reformation began very well. It had an enormous impact on Western Europe. Unfortunately, just as what happened in Ephesus in the early church, the followers of the first reformers gradually settled back and just held onto the truths already discovered by their leaders. They stopped making progress in Christian matters.
15. The end of the period of Sardis was marked by several very important events: 1) The Lisbon earthquake of November 1, 1755; 2) The American War of Independence, 1775-1783; 3) The dark day and the moon turning to blood in northern New England on May 19, 1780; 4) The French Revolution beginning in 1789; and, 5) The end of the 1260 day/year prophecy with the arrest and death of the pope. People began to read their Bibles seriously and noticed that these were signs of the time of the end. The church at Sardis was warned to “hold fast” and “repent.” Christians were challenged to hold fast the teachings that had come from God Himself through the Bible—both Old and New Testaments. They were to repent of their worldliness and, thus, their tendencies to adopt the customs and practices of the world around them. They needed to free themselves from the control of the Roman Catholic Church and needed to begin to seriously study the Bible for themselves.
16. Read Revelation 3:7-13. The period of Philadelphia was a short one, representing what has been called the great Christian Awakening. It began with the arrest and death of the pope in 1798 and ended with the Great Disappointment in 1844. Bible societies were formed, and they began printing Bibles at a cheap price. For the first time, an ordinary Christian could afford to own his/her own Bible. And Bibles were translated and printed in a variety of languages as well. It was a time when serious Bible students such as William Miller made intensive study of the Bible; the advent movement was the result. It was during this period that the “stars fell” on November 13, 1833. The church at Philadelphia is the only one of the seven churches with no condemnation attached.
17. The church at Philadelphia was commended for its defeat of the “synagogue of Satan.” What do you think that means? Apparently, they had thrown off some of the last vestiges of Roman Catholicism by returning to a correct understanding of the Sabbath and of many of the prophecies in Daniel. They were told that if they remained victorious, they would become pillars in the temple of God and have the name of God and the name of the city of God’s New Jerusalem written on them. Clearly, Philadelphia was a church that God

loved.

18. But, unfortunately, Philadelphia was not the last of the churches. What do you think happened between the Philadelphian period and the Laodicean period? The Great Disappointment. Once again, Jesus addressed His church on earth. He is the faithful and true witness, the Amen, the beginning of the creation of God. (Revelation 3:14)
19. Read Revelation 3:14-22. Compare Matthew 25:1-13. The Laodicean period is the one in which we are living. How does God describe us? The picture is not pretty! If we are not willing to follow God by buying from Him the gold, the white raiment, and the eyesalve, it may be necessary for Him to vomit us out of His mouth. (Revelation 3:16) But, incredible as it may seem, to those who remain faithful, Christ stands at the door knocking, asking an entrance
20. What is implied by this picture? Christ is asking permission to come into our homes to sit down with us and fellowship with us in one of the most intimate pictures of Jesus in the entire New Testament.
21. Do we take the message to Laodicea seriously? Do we recognize that Jesus Christ Himself, the divine Son of God, is speaking to us? He is the one who came, lived, and died for us.

Since the divine law is as sacred as God Himself, only one equal with God could make atonement for its transgression. None but Christ could redeem fallen man from the curse of the law, and bring him again into harmony with Heaven. **Christ would take upon Himself the guilt and shame of sin—sin so offensive to a holy God that it must separate the Father and His Son.** Christ would reach to the depths of misery to rescue the ruined race.—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* 63.2; *GAG* 42.2; *RC* 50.2. [Bold type is added.]

22. God Himself came to this earth to make it clear to us what He wants of us and what He is willing to do for us, not only by telling us what to do but also by demonstrating it. By His death Jesus demonstrated several absolutely essential truths.

But the plan of redemption had a yet broader and deeper purpose than the salvation of man. It was not for this alone that Christ came to the earth; it was not merely that the inhabitants of this little world might regard the law of God as it should be regarded; but it was to vindicate the character of God before the universe. To this result of His great sacrifice—its influence upon the intelligences of other worlds, as well as upon man—the Saviour looked forward when just before His crucifixion He said: “Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all unto [69] Me.” John 12:31, 32. The act of Christ in dying for the salvation of man would not only make heaven accessible to men, but before all the universe it would justify God and His Son in their dealing with the rebellion of Satan. It would establish the perpetuity of the law of God and would reveal the nature and the results of sin.—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* 68.2; *RC* 50.3. [Bold type is added.]

23. When the Great Disappointment took place on October 22, 1844, a large proportion of those who had been “adventists” abandoned the cause and went back to their old ways.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church was not organized until almost 20 years after the Great Disappointment. But, fairly early during that 20-year period, Ellen White gave us this message.

As I have of late looked around to find the humble followers of the meek and lowly Jesus, my mind has been much exercised.

Many who profess to be looking for the speedy coming of Christ, are becoming conformed to this world, and seek more earnestly the applause of those around them, than the approbation of God. They are cold and formal, like the nominal church that they but a short time since separated from. The words addressed to the Laodicean Church, describe their present condition perfectly.—Ellen G. White, *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, June 10, 1852, par. 2.

24. Serious students of the history of the Christian church and these messages in Revelation 2&3 have recognized that not every Christian living in each of the time periods fits the descriptions of that time period. For example, the description of the church at Ephesus might apply to some of the people living in the times of Thyatira and vice versa. People in our day probably represent the full spectrum of experiences from Ephesus to Laodicea. Which of those church experiences do you think best describes you? Christ is reaching out with His great heart of love to every one of us, warning us of the dangers which are ahead. He has waited 2000 years for a group of people who will stand up faithfully for His side in the great controversy and who will not be deceived or disheartened by the Devil's attacks. When that final group stands up like a pillar for God's church, Satan will be defeated.
25. So, if Jesus were to speak to you or to your church today—and He is speaking to us—what might He say about your spiritual condition? How should we respond when a trusted friend points out some of our problems? As we noted in previous lessons, the church on earth is Christ's special group, His holy priesthood, His chosen people. Where are those people today? Have we as a Seventh-day Adventist Church left our first love? Are we being attacked by the synagogue of Satan? Are we studying our Bibles as intensely as did William Miller and some others 200 years ago? Will Christ finally be able to point to us and say: "Here are my faithful ones who will stand firm no matter what Satan does to them"? Or, will Jesus have to vomit us out of His mouth?
26. The real question is really one of priorities and choices. Are we going to choose God's side and remain faithful to Him, making Jesus Christ the first priority in our lives? Or, will we cozy up to the world around us, pretending to be Christians but truly being enemies of God?
27. Clearly, God's churches down through the ages have been the targets of Satan's special attacks. It will take more than ordinary faith to survive those attacks and represent God correctly and clearly at the end. Are we up to that task?

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