

Things to Come

#3 Messages to the Churches

I. Introduction

- A. John is to write about three things:
 - 1. What you have seen: the vision of the Son of Man
 - 2. What is: The letters to the churches
 - 3. What is about to happen: Chapters 4-22
- B. Each message was meant for the other 6 churches (2:7, 11, 17, 23)
- C. While 2 churches do not have a condemnation (Smyrna and Philadelphia) and two do not have a commendation (Sardis and Laodicea), the words of condemnation and commendation are meant for all. "He that has an ear, let him hear..."
- D. Some see these seven churches as depicting literal periods of church history.

II. The seven churches

Note the formatting for all the messages:

- 1. A recognition of some local situation
 - 2. A statement of commendation or condemnation
 - 3. A call to respond
 - 4. A description of the rewards for the overcomer
- A. Ephesus (2:1-7) A Church who Left its First Love

It was the de facto capital of the province. The Roman governor lived there. It was a self-governed area and a crossroads for Asia Minor. Three major highways converged in Ephesus.

It was the center for the worship of the fertility god, "Diana" (Acts 19). Her temple was one of the wonders of the ancient world and attracted gross cult prostitution.

The church at Ephesus was founded by Aquila, Priscilla and later the apostle Paul on his second missionary journey. He visited also on his third journey. See Acts 18/19.

- 1. Local situation:
 - a) You have doctrinal purity, but you have left your first love.
 - b) They refused to listen to false teachers. (Acts 20:28-30)

2. Consequence: "I am coming to you, I will remove your lampstand"
3. Call to respond: "Repent...and do."

Note the Nicolaitans: these may be the same people as the Balaamites (2:14-15). This term means "to conquer the people"-it's a heresy that mixes idolatry with cult prostitution.

4. Promise of a reward: "The right to eat from the tree of life"

The tree of life: Gen. 2:9, 3:22-24 and Rev. 22:2

Paradise: This is a Persian word meaning "park or garden".

B. Smyrna (2:8-11) A Suffering Church

Located 40 miles north of Ephesus, this city was a large seaport at the mouth of the Hermus River. It was a free Roman city and the center for emperor worship. Citizens were forced to burn some incense and declare, "Caesar is Lord." It was a perilous place for Christians. Polycarp was burned at the stake in Smyrna (156AD). "Eighty six years have I served Christ, and he has never done me wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?"

1. The local situation: They persevered under persecution
2. Consequence: None (Philadelphia is the other church without a condemnation)
3. Call to respond: Don't be afraid.

The devil: Rev. 3:9, 9:11, 12:9-10, 13:4, 20:2, 7, 10

4. The promise of a reward: You will not be hurt by the "second death." See Luke 12:4-5

Crown of Life/victor's crown:

- a) The hills surrounding the city
- b) A garland of flowers worn in the worship of pagan gods
- c) The Christian's imperishable crown-James 1:12 and I Peter 5:4

C. Pergamum (2:12-17) A Worldly Church

65 miles further north, lay the Roman provincial capital, Pergamum. It housed an incredible library of some 20,000 volumes (second only to Alexandria). It had temples to Dionysus and other Roman gods and emperors. Rome gave this city the rare power of capital punishment (by the sword).

Notice how the speaker is identified: "he who has the sharp, double edged sword."

1. The local situation:
They held fast under persecution, but some were following false teaching.
Note regarding Antipas: He may have been the first or most noble of the martyrs.
2. The consequence: I am coming to make war against you.
3. The call to respond: Repent.
4. The promise of a reward: Receive manna and a stone with a new name.
 - a) Hidden manna: that which was kept in the Ark of the Covenant (Ex. 16:33-34, Heb. 9:4 and Ps. 78:24)
 - b) White Stone: this may be some kind of inscribed pebble that was used as an invitation to a banquet
 - c) New Name: This is either the precious name of Christ (3:12, 14:1) or the new name/character of the redeemed (Isa. 62:2, 65:15)

III. So What?

In each message, the Lord assesses the churches' actual accomplishments (not just their intentions). He is emphasizing the problem of self-deception.

We often have a difficulty with intentionality versus reality. "Well, I didn't mean to..."

And a difficulty with self-deception: "well, it wasn't a big deal..."

I Cor. 11:28: "Let a person examine himself..."

II Cor. 13:5 "Examine yourselves, whether you are in the faith..."

Lamentations 3:40: "Let us search and try our ways and turn again to the Lord."