

THE SEVEN CHURCHES.

"The Revelation of Jesus Christ,"

which God gave to him, to show unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass, is a book of pen-pictures of events and of periods of earth's history – from Christ's first advent onward – usually in groups of seven succeeding stages; several of the groups running more or less synchronous, or parallel in time, with each other.

The seven messages to the seven churches, to be in harmony with the rest of the book, must also mark or be directed to seven succeeding periods in the history of the church. The remarkable harmony between the prophecy and that history not only leaves no doubt of this interpretation, but is an unanswerable proof of the inspiration of the book, and a pledge to our faith in what remains unfulfilled.

In Ch. 1:11 we are given the names of the cities to whom the messages are sent. Seven cities then existing, and which remain (some in ruins) until the present. Whether the condition of these local churches in John's time was such as would be specially and respectively blessed by these messages, we know not; but it seems evident that these cities were chosen from a peculiarity in their names which fitted God's purpose. We will notice this in due time. In verse 12 and onward we have a description of the appearance of the glorified Saviour and his surroundings, some feature of which seems to be peculiarly fitted to each church; and is quoted in the message to it, as if saying, remember who it is that speaks.

These churches are placed in Asia. The Roman province of Asia was a part of that district which we now call Asia Minor, and embraced only the southwest half of the peninsula.

The word Asia means muddy or boggy. Any one doomed to a long journey through a wild bog would, we think, before he got through, have a tolerably correct idea of the pathway of the church during the past 1800 years; especially if the greater part was traveled in comparative darkness – what with pitfalls and treacherous ground, with will o' the wisps and fog, it would prove a hard journey. True, the church has always had a polar star, but the mists of the Babylonian mystery had nearly hidden it.

"To the messenger of the assembly in Ephesus write." [2:1.]

Ephesus was the capital or chief city of the province of Asia. Being the first or chief city of the province, and from or through which the laws, proclamations, etc., would go forth, it fitly represents the first period of the church. The church of Christ and his apostles. We believe implicitly the records left and the proclamations made by the messengers of that first church – Matthew and his three co-laborers, Peter, James, John, and Paul. But why? "These things saith he who is holding the seven stars in his right hand, who is walking in the midst of the seven lampstands – the golden." [Young's trans.] These, who were to be messengers to all the churches, were so held in the grasp of Christ that they could not waver or deviate. We accept the fact of their inspiration, and receive their writings as from the right hand of him who guided their pens.

We accept another fact, that only the spirit of him who in Spirit has walked with his church all the way down, can make clear the messages given in the Word. Moreover, we believe it is only because he is again personally present in his church, that such an abundance of light is now given – such as the church never had during his absence.

The Lord commends this church for its works, toil, and patience; and because "thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars."

Why, in apparent opposition to the general command, "Judge not," are they commended at this and only this time for trying these false teachers? Because to the first church (and to her only) was given the supernatural power of discerning of spirits. The cases of Ananias and Sapphira, of Simon and Elymas the sorcerers, and others, reveal this power.

After those gifted ones fell asleep, the enemy, without hindrance, came and sowed tares among the wheat; and then the command was not to pull them up, but to let both grow together until the harvest. In opposition to Christ's command, the servants have, all the way down, been trying to pull tares; but of course they pulled wheat, just as our Lord had foretold. Now, in the harvest, the tares are being revealed and bound in sectarian bundles preparatory to the fire. Verses 4 and 5 show us that the "Ephesus" period reaches down to where the church began to lose her first love.

"Thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate." Nicolans, in Greek, has the same meaning as Balaam, in Hebrew; and means a conqueror or lord of the people.

In the Ephesus, and also in the Pergamos periods, there were those who loved to lord it over the Lord's heritage. It was the old contention – who should be greatest in the kingdom? "Which thing I hate," emphatically says Christ. Those whom God makes leaders will be the last to boast of it.

"Him that hath an ear, let him hear what the spirit saith unto the churches." Jesus often used these words, evidently to show us that there are some messages sent which are not for all, but to those (overcomers) who are prepared to receive them. Our Lord recognizes two classes in the church all the way down – the nominal Christian, and the overcomer. To these last, who had gladly yielded up the pleasures of life for the truth's sake; who, like Paul, had spent their lives in hardship, even unto death, spreading the good news, there is

a blessed promise of rest, a feast of life, and unending joy "in the Paradise of God."

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[To be continued.]