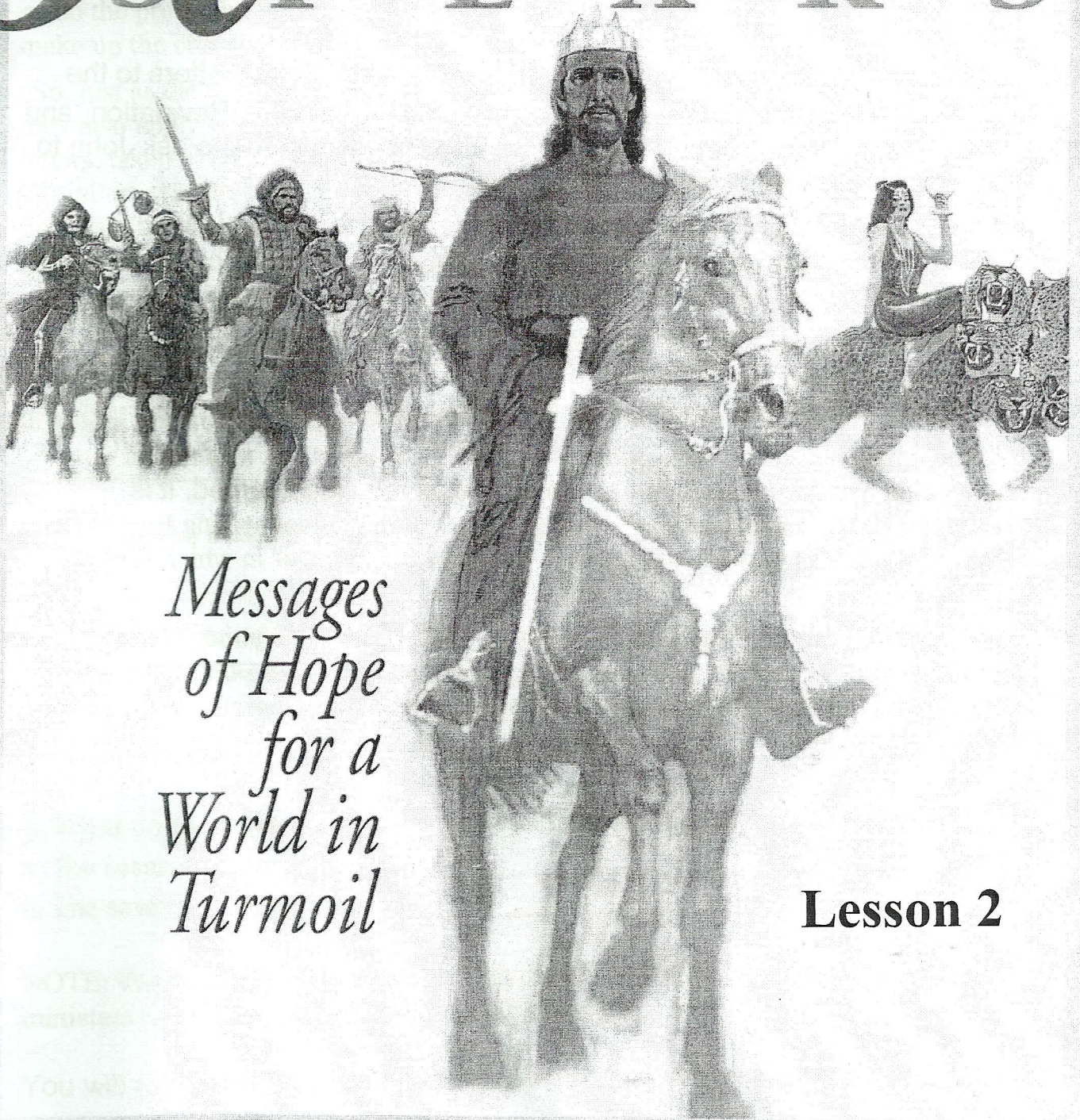


Revelation

S P E A K S



*Messages
of Hope
for a
World in
Turmoil*

Lesson 2

The Seven Churches Part 1

[This chapter is based on Revelation, Chapters 2 and 3]

It is surprising to find that John was told to write these seven letters to the angels of the seven churches. Angels are mentioned often in Revelation, and usually they are supernatural beings. It seems foolish for God to ask John to write letters to supernatural, invisible, heavenly angels.

"The explanation is that the word 'angel' comes from a Greek word 'aggelos,' which really means 'messenger'. . . in the ordinary nonsupernatural meaning of the word.

"The human-being angels, or messengers of the seven churches, are the ministers who bring God's message to their congregations. Jesus says that He holds these messengers in His right hand (Revelation 1:16; 2:1).

'At the time when Jesus asked John to write these seven letters, a Christian congregation had been established in each of the seven cities named. It is fascinating to read that these cities were so located on interconnecting Roman highways that it was possible to visit each of them in the order in which they are listed.

'Are the seven messages general admonitions intended for everybody? Do they stand for seven successive phases in the experience of the whole church from John's day to the end of the world? . . . Let us look at these possibilities." -*God Cares*, Vol. 2, p. 90.

READ: Revelation 1:20 - Revelation 2:17.

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1. What words show that the seven letters deal with conditions that apply to more than just John's day or time and place? Revelation 1:19

- a. "Write the things which you _____
- b. and the things which _____
- c. and the things that _____

NOTE: We discover that the messages or letters apply to everyone, everywhere. And so do the promises! However, the letters are addressed to "churches." Of course, we make up the church; we are a part of that body.

"So, just as the letters applied to seven local churches at one time, it is evident that they also apply to the various conditions of the church at all times. . . . The seven letters, taken in order, march in step with the predominant experience of the Christian church during seven successive eras. Now that it has taken place, we believe! II-God *Cares*, Vol. 2, page 93.

So we discover that the seven churches are symbolic of seven time periods that span the period from the time of John to the end of time. And each local church is symbolic of what the church would face on its journey to the promised land.

2. When do the things that John saw start taking place? Revelation 1:1, 3.

3. What is the message that John wrote called? Revelation 1:3.

4. What beginning and ending events in Christ's life are referred to in John's introduction to the seven churches?

- a. Revelation 1:5 _____
- b. Revelation 1:7 _____

5. What do the seven stars and seven candlesticks represent? Revelation 1:20.

- a. The seven stars are _____
- b. The seven candlesticks are _____

NOTE: We have already discovered that the seven angels are messengers, or ministers who bring God's message to the seven churches

You will remember that we have discovered that seven is very common

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number used in Revelation: seven angels, seven candlesticks or lamp stands, seven spirits, seven heads, seven mountains, seven kings, seven trumpets, seven seals, seven churches, et cetera. Most scholars agree that the number seven represents completeness or perfection.

Ephesus

(The Apostolic Church) A.D. 31 - 100

The name *Ephesus* means "desirable." No doubt it *was* very desirable, since it was located on a beautiful harbor in the Aegean Sea. Although it was not the capital of the Roman province of Asia, it was no doubt the most important city. It was situated on the east-west highway, which was advantageous to the commercial and cultural interests of the city. It was here that we find one of the Seven Wonders of the World—the temple dedicated to Diana, the pagan goddess of fertility.

This is the church that Aquila and Priscilla, with the help of Apollos, the evangelist, raised up. Of course, Paul helped, and later John, the scribe of the Book of Revelation, pastored this church. It is thought that Timothy may have been the pastor at the time this message was given to the church.

6. What pleasant commendation did Jesus have for this church? Revelation 2:1-3.

NOTE: Here we see that this church was commended for its untiring zeal and patience, as well as its loyalty to the doctrines of the Bible. They tested their teachers to make certain they were accurate in their doctrines. They were very protective of their faith. Wouldn't that be a wise thing for every church today to follow? As we face the end time, we are told that there will arise false teachers claiming to be something they are not. Early Christianity had purity and power. In the first century a faithful church proclaimed the message of Christ throughout the Mediterranean world.

7. But despite their zeal and labor, what rebuke was given to this church? Revelation 2:4, 5.

NOTE: The church of Ephesus was a bright spot for Christianity, but as time passed, the members lost something very special—their first love! Their first ardent love for God and their warm affection for each other had dimmed. All labor is dead unless inspired by love. Jesus had said, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples,

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if ye have love one to another" (John 13:35). The light and love of their witness to the world was lacking.

8. What did Jesus counsel this loveless church to do? Revelation 2:5.

NOTE: In other words, Jesus was saying, "Remember your early joy, when true love filled your heart. Repent of your sin; realize your perilous condition. Return to your original state, or else I will have to remove you." *Unfolding the Revelation*, p. 17.

9. How did Jesus feel about the deeds of the Nicolaitans? Revelation 2:6.

NOTE: The Nicolaitans claimed to be Christians but refused to live obedient lives. Their leaders taught that obedience to God's law was unnecessary. They believed and practiced adultery, and they ate things sacrificed to idols. John spoke about a similar group of people in 1 John 2:4.

10. What is promised to the overcomers, or those who repent and return to their first love? Revelation 2:7.

Smyrna

(The Persecuted Church) A.D. 100 - 313

The city of Smyrna was located approximately 40 miles north of Ephesus on a beautiful inlet of the Aegean sea. We are told by church historians that Smyrna means "sweet smelling." This city is one of the oldest cities in the world and is the only one of the seven cities that exists today as a strong city. Today it is called "Izmir."

This church would pass through bitter persecution, but instead of destroying her, the fierce agony of persecution provided the deep soil in which the seed of faith could grow strong as a mighty oak tree.

11. What words of love and commendation did Jesus have for the Smyrna church? Revelation 2:8, 9, 10.

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NOTE: What encouragement this must have been to this poor, persecuted congregation and its minister!

Jesus said, I am aware of your good works, your poverty, and the terrible persecution you are experiencing for your faith-but you are rich! They were rich in faith, works, love, and in their ultimate reward!

12. What tribulations did this church experience?

ANSWER: "Within about seventy years after this prophecy was made, Smyrna became the site of a notable series of martyrdoms. . . the twelfth and last of the martyrs was grand old Polycarp, who by the time he died served as principal minister of the Smyrna church for at least forty years. At a very advanced age, Polycarp was arrested. . . one Friday night. . . the governor asked Polycarp to curse Christ. . . But Polycarp gave a ringing response: 'Eighty and six years have I served Him, and never has He done me wrong. How then can I curse my King, who saves me?' . . . so the crowd demanded that Polycarp be burned to death." -*God Cares*, Vol. 2, pp. 102, 103.

13. What reward was promised to the ones who would be faithful unto death? Revelation 2:10 (last part) and verse 11.

NOTE: This promise is twofold: 1) to those who conquer, and 2) to those who are faithful unto death. They are Christians who would rather die than lie, commit adultery, trample on God's Sabbath, or steal.

Pergamos

(The Exalted Church) A.D. 313 - 538

The city of Pergamos is called "Pergamum" by some writers. Pergamos means "height" or "elevation." This city was located north of Smyrna on a high mountain. It was a famous cultural center with a tremendous library of scrolls. It had several pagan temples-the greatest was the temple dedicated to pagan gods and the worship of the Roman emperors. It was a rather sophisticated city-the capital of the Roman province of Asia.

Jesus said, "I know where you dwell." In other words, He was saying, I understand the pagan environment and temptations in that place and I'm pleased that you have not denied your faith.

14. What was Jesus' commendation and His rebuke for this church? Revelation 2:12-15.

a. Commendation: _____

b. Rebuke: _____

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15. What counsel was given to the church of Pergamos? Revelation 2:16.

16. What reward was promised to the overcomers of this church? Revelation 2:17.

17. What lessons do you think the church of today might learn from studying the Smyrna church?

My Response

___ I choose to be an overcomer and stand "faithful unto death" for God and His Word.

___ I want my life to be a bright spot in this world so that others might be attracted to Jesus and His truths.