

Bible Study #18

2/8/22

Revelation 1 (Cont)

- **Revelation 1:13-16** *“And in the midst of the lampstands one like the son of man,...the sun shining in full strength”*
 - John saw Jesus, as the son of man sitting on the throne of God (**Daniel 7:13; 10:5**)
 - Father reminded us that at the end of the reigns of the four beasts (Babylon, Medo-Persians, Greeks and Romans) who came out of the sea onto the land: the kingdom of God was established
 - This kingdom began like a little stone striking the foot of the statue in Nebuchadnezzar's dream
 - In Daniel's dream, one like the son of man riding on the clouds and sat on the throne of God was given dominion and power as the ancient of days

Revelation 1 (Cont)

- As discussed, **Revelation 1** is all about **Daniel 7** which we must know in order to understand what John was writing about
- Jesus is on the throne and the Kingdom of God was being established
- With each empire, there were battles, people were killed, and finally defeated by the succeeding empire
- At this time in history, the Roman Empire was in the process of falling from within and being overtaken by the Kingdom of God (the church)
- As this was happening, the Romans were fighting, persecuting and attempting to stop the rise of the Church
- In the end the Kingdom of God was successful as discussed in **Daniel 7**

Revelation 2

Revelation 2

- **Revelation 2:1** *To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: the words of him who hold the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands”*
 - In each of these letters to the churches, we will find a little reference to Jesus
 - We obtained an explanation to the seven stars and lampstands in **Revelation 1:19-20***
 - It points to something that was going on at that time and to something that will take place later
 - It described the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches (not the seven nations of NATO)
 - The seven lampstands were the seven churches

The Seven Churches of Asia

map 114



Revelation 2 (Cont)

- Father said that this should remind us that this is talking about the actual churches in the seven real cities which were major centers of Christianity in Asia Minor
- These were seven Pauline Churches
- As you read these letters, you see that the angels get a little criticism and some complements from their author who was God as He says:

Revelation 2 (Cont)

- **Revelation 2:2-4** *“I know your works,...that you have abandoned the love you had at first”*
 - This is to someone (an Angel – the Bishop) who has done some good work, but needed to be encouraged to do things a bit better
 - Father pointed out that when we hear the word “angel,” in English, we think of an angelic messenger
 - But, the Greek word *Angelos*, simply means a messenger in general
 - In the New Testament, the messengers are the Apostles
 - Father said that the most common interpretation of this text from the Fathers of the Church is that it is talking about the Bishop responsible for that church

Revelation 2 (Cont)

- This helps make sense out of his being given a little complement followed by some criticism (needed to get things fixed up)
- This letter was first sent to the Church in *Ephesus*
- Father pointed out that every time these churches are referenced, it is always in the same order
- *Ephesus* was the closest city to the Isle of Patmos
- As you go up the coastal road, the next church was *Smyrna* followed by *Pergamum*
- Then, turning inland, you will find *Thyatira*, *Sardis*, *Philadelphia*, *Laodicea*, and *Colossi*

Revelation 2 (Cont)

- These were the seven ancient cities connected by that road
- Father reminded us that cities were built in proximity to roads that connect cities
- Many commentators surmise that this road was part of the ancient mail route
- This letter was sent from *Patmos* to *Ephesus*, and later to the rest of the seven churches that John was presiding over

Revelation 2 (Cont)

- If we read the rest of the letters, we will find references to food offered to idols, cult prostitution, and an indication that some of the Gentile Christians were being tempted by the culture to revert to these things
- But, Father said that by reading the rest of Revelation, we will find something else going on beyond what had been happening in Corinth
- This included a cultural encouragement to participating in the local pagan worship in order to protect them from Roman scrutiny, especially since Domitian was actively persecuting Christians primarily because they would not offer sacrifices to the Roman gods

Revelation 2 (Cont)

- This meant that anyone who refused to worship the pagan gods were seen by Rome as being unpatriotic
- Not only was this offensive to your fellow citizens, but it offended the gods
- The Roman leadership believed that they were losing the war (against the Church) because these folks were offending the Roman gods
- This led to the persecution of the Christians throughout the empire
- For the sake of time, Father did not discuss the rest of the letters in this introductory class
- He does provide the following information in his presentations on his parish website related to the rest of **Revelation 2 and 3** dealing with the letters to the seven churches
- We will look at the first three letters to the churches

Letters to the Churches

Revelation 2 (Cont) Ephesus

- As discussed, each of the seven churches was addressed in the Book of Revelation
- Each segment contained a short paragraph about the successes of the Bishop followed by a discussion of area(s) needing correction
- The seven angels are perceived to be the seven bishops of the seven lampstands (churches)
- Some see them as possibly a guardian angel of each church, but this not supported theologically

Revelation 2 (Cont)

- The Greek word *angelos* means “messenger” (or as Father suggested, the mailman delivering the message of the good news)
- Once again, Jesus appears as the “ancient of days” from **Daniel 7**, and his relationship to the four kingdoms
- Father reminded us that this reflects the theme of the entire book: how to endure the tribulation
- The church in *Ephesus* (as well as the others) had been around for some time
 - Paul visited *Ephesus* during his second and third journeys, and he wrote a letter from prison in Rome to this community during the persecution of Domitian

Revelation 2 (Cont)

- At the time of Revelation, these churches were under the direction of John
- *Ephesus* was a major Roman administrative capital linked to the rest of Asia Minor by the great road erected by the Mesopotamians from *Ephesus* deep into *Babylon*
- *Alexander the Great* defeated the *Medo-Persians* by the use of this road
- Later, he used it for commerce
- At the time of John's writing, the church in *Ephesus* was doing okay as they had condemned and refused to listen to the "false prophets"
- Earlier, *Timothy* had been left in *Ephesus* by Paul as its bishop, and warned to remove the false prophets from the Church

Revelation 2 (Cont)

- At this time, the church of *Ephesus* got a good report, but not perfect as they had abandoned the love they had for each other
- For John, love meant being willing to lay down one's life for his friends
- During the persecution, the Christians of *Ephesus* were being killed
- This letter called them to, once again, be willing to die for the faith (avoid apostasy) or risk the total loss of their church

Revelation 2 (Cont)

- Father explained that if they were not willing to die for Jesus and their Christian friends, there would soon be no Christians left in the city
- Next, John told them to hate the works of the *Nicolaitans* (an early heresy of one of the seven deacons from **Acts 6:5** who proposed a dangerously casual attitude toward idolatry and sexual immorality)
- Father pointed out that this implied that Jesus hated heresy

Revelation 2 (Cont)

- Murder killed the body, but heresy killed the soul
- Heresy caused the people to apostatize and fall away from the faith
- These heresies call the people to abandon the faith and go and worship pagan fertility gods
- Jesus promised those who resisted these heresies the ability to eat from the tree of life (paradise)
- Father discussed a similar situation concerning the rebellion of *Demetrius*, the silversmith and his relationship to the goddess *Artemis* (**Acts 19:24**)

Revelation 2 (Cont)

- This foretaste of that tree reflected the imagery of the fruit Israel would obtain upon entry into the Promised Land, just as Manna was the flesh and bread from heaven as is fulfilled in the Eucharist
- This takes us back to the promises of Jesus in **John 6** (the Bread of Life Discourse), promising a raising from the dead on the last day
- Paul (in **Romans 6**) promised a resurrected life by virtue of our baptism which in the first century included the laying on of hands and the Eucharist which already provided them with a spiritual resurrection that will lead to a physical resurrection at the end of time

Revelation 2 (Cont)

- Father said that each of these short letters gives a little conclusion encouraging them to hold fast to the faith, not to give up even if they died, and they will eat from the tree of life
- That meant that they would not be hurt by the second death at which time they will receive a bodily resurrection and enter the Garden of Eden