

## Chapter XIV

### A CLEAR PERSPECTIVE

In our previous chapter, *The Mystery of God*, we became acquainted with two more overviews in the Scriptures, the mystery of the seven parables in the thirteenth chapter of the Gospel of Matthew, and the mystery of the woman in the twelfth chapter of the book of the Revelation. While these two overviews span approximately the same period of time, the overview provided by the mystery of the woman starts first and ends last. Its perspective is Jewish. The woman, as we have seen, is Israel. In the first five verses of the twelfth chapter of the Revelation, she *pained to be delivered* (which speaks of the birth of Jesus into the nation of Israel); the dragon sought to devour her child as soon as it was born (when Herod ordered the death of all of the Jewish children, *from two years old and under*); and the man child, who is to rule all nations with a rod of iron, was caught up to God and to His throne (when Christ ascended from the mount of Olives). After the ascension of the Lord in verse five, in verse six the woman has fled into the wilderness where for the last twelve hundred and sixty days (three and one-half lunar years) of the

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great tribulation period she is fed of God. Her flight into the wilderness is according to our Lord's instructions to the Jews in His Olivet discourse (Matthew 24:15-21).

It is important to understand that this overview has been given from the perspective of Daniel's vision of the seventy weeks, which were determined upon Daniel's city, Jerusalem, and upon Daniel's people, the Jews (Daniel 9:24). The New Testament church has been left out of this overview. The reason for this is that the church age lies between the sixty-ninth and the seventieth weeks of Daniel's vision and is therefore not a part of it. Israel has been the *treasure hid in the field* for the greater part of the church age. She was buried in the nations of the world with the destruction of Jerusalem and the Roman captivity in 70 A.D. She remained buried until her resurrection out of the nations of the world on May 14, 1948, when she became a nation again among the nations of the world. Despite her resurrection from the nations of the world and her present status as a nation, Israel's prophetic history will not begin again until the revelation of the antichrist at the end of the church age. At that time the prophetic clock of Daniel's seventy weeks will start its countdown to the second coming of Jesus Christ, when the antichrist will make a covenant with Israel for one week (Daniel 9:27) to complete the final week of the vision of the seventy weeks.

Thus the overview of the mystery of the woman spans chapters six through nineteen in the book of the Revelation. These chapters have taken us from the revelation of the antichrist to the revelation of Jesus Christ: for in our studies thus far we have considered the revelation of the antichrist; the appearance of the one hundred and forty-four thousand on mount Zion; the many judgments that shall be loosed from the seven sealed book during *the time of Jacob's trouble*,

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which will culminate with the second coming of our Lord, the salvation of Israel and the establishment of the Kingdom of God upon this earth.

The other overview provided by the mystery of the seven parables in the thirteenth chapter of the Gospel of Matthew starts last and ends first. It spans the first five chapters of the Revelation. Its perspective is the perspective of the New Testament church. It stands in the gap between the ascension of our Lord and the first resurrection prior to the great tribulation period. It stands, as we have seen, in the position of the feast of Pentecost, between the first three feasts of the Jews (which were fulfilled in the first advent of Christ) and the last three feasts of the Jews (which will be fulfilled in bringing about His second advent).

The seven parables of our overview reveal seven influences that shall come upon all churches in the age between the ascension of our Lord and the first resurrection. These influences have found an historical expression in the seven churches to whom John wrote in chapters two and three of the Revelation. This historical expression has also given us a prophetic expression of these same influences upon all churches throughout the church age. A consideration of the seven churches to whom John wrote will show us how any church in any age can respond positively or negatively to any or all of the influences that are contained in the seven parables of our Lord. Over the course of the church age then, the responses of the churches may be like the two faithful churches, Smyrna and Philadelphia, or they may be like the responses of the other five. The various responses of the churches ultimately become a matter of whether they walk according to the Word of God, preaching and teaching the truth, or whether they walk according to *a way which seemeth right unto a man* (Proverbs 14:12).

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Since the Scriptures prophesy *a great falling away* (an apostasy) in the final age before *our gathering together unto him* (II Thessalonians 2:1-3), five of the seven parables spoken by our Lord show a progression of influences that shall ultimately produce this apostasy. This means that in the final age before the first resurrection, the majority of the churches of the last days will have succumbed to the tares among the wheat; the mustard seed that grew into a tree; the leaven that the woman hid in three measures of meal; and to the evangelistic methods of a net let down into the sea. Some churches will also have been affected by the fact that Israel was the treasure hid in the field. They will have persecuted the Jews and assumed that the promises God made to Israel were to be fulfilled in the church, and not in Israel. Even so no church in any age need be apostate. They may faithfully preach and teach the truth of the Word of God, without trying to manipulate the results. This was illustrated by the different grounds upon which the seed fell in the parable of the Sower, and the principle was reiterated by the apostle Paul in his letter to the Corinthians: *I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase* (I Corinthians 3:6-7). The churches which shall be faithful to the task of preaching and teaching the Word of God, and allowing God to give the increase without manipulation, will make a positive contribution towards the redemption and instruction of the pearl of great price.

Except the LORD of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah. (Isaiah 1:9)

The book of the Revelation begins with the revelation of Jesus Christ to John who conveyed this revelation to seven churches in Asia, Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea. Internal evidence in the seventeenth chapter of the Revelation reveals

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that John wrote to these churches before the death of Nero in 68 A.D.

And here is the mind which hath wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth. And there are seven kings: five are fallen [Julius, Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, and Claudius], and one is [Nero], and the other [Vespasian] is not yet come; and when he cometh, he must continue a short space. And the beast that was, and is not, even he is the eighth, and is of the seven, and goeth into perdition (Revelation 17:9-11).

Since none of the churches except the church at Ephesus is mentioned in the book of Acts, it is unlikely that any of these churches was more than fifteen years old (if that) when John wrote to them. This emphasizes how rapidly the negative influences that were portrayed in our Lord's parables changed some churches from faithful churches, proclaiming the unsearchable riches of Jesus Christ, to apostate organizations drawn away by the lure of another gospel, riches, fame, political power, and the false doctrines of the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Herodians. The subtle manner in which this began is seen in the church at Ephesus:

Unto the [messenger] of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden [lampstands]; I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: and hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted.

Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy [lampstand] out of his place, except thou repent. But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God. (Revelation 2:1-7)

An examination of this address reveals that the church at Ephesus was fundamentally sound in almost every respect. It had labored faithfully, it was patient, it was able to identify false prophets, and it hated the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which the Lord also hated. Even so one of the

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influences that had been revealed in our Lord's parables had caused this church to change its mind from the adoration it had towards the Lord when it was first saved, to another mind-set. Therefore our Lord said, *I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.*

On the surface it is difficult to recognize how this happened. This church seems to have been faithful in so many respects. Even so the church's fault is revealed in our Lord's instructions, *Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent and do the first works.* This statement shows us that this church had left the adoration of the Person and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ for its own self-righteousness. The word translated *do* in this text is the Greek word *poieo*. *Poieo* as we have already learned can mean to make or to do. Herodotus used it, as we have seen, in the sense of making something one's own. The first works are the works of the Lord Jesus Christ in behalf of sinners. Thus to make the first works one's own was for them to remember the pit from which they had been dug by the atoning work of the Lord Jesus Christ. This agrees totally with Paul's instructions to Titus regarding salvation, *Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; that being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life* (Titus 3:5-7).

Despite the fact that salvation is by God's grace, apart from the deeds of the law, this church had been infected with the leaven of the Pharisees:

And [Jesus] spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this

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publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.

And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted. (Luke 18:9-14)

There is nothing intrinsically wrong with doing the right things, but when the things that believers do or do not do become badges of pride, this becomes a source of self-righteousness and minimizes the One Who stood in their stead in life and in death to redeem them from their sins. Remember the question Paul asked the Roman Christians after showing the depravity of the Jews and the Gentiles in chapters one and two of the book of Romans, *What then? are we better than they? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin; as it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God* (Romans 3:9-11).

Believers are in no way better than the unsaved of the world, whether they are Jews or whether they are Gentiles. The difference between believers and unbelievers is that unbelievers are still under the condemnation of their sins, while believers have received the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ and stand justified before God, because the blood of Jesus Christ God's Son has cleansed them from all sin. Indeed there are changes in the lives of believers (I Peter 4:4). These have been wrought by the Word of God and by the indwelling presence of the Spirit of God, but these changes provide no basis for boasting. Thus Paul asked, *Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law* (Romans 3:27-28).

The second church that John wrote to, the church at Smyrna, reveals a church which

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willingly took upon itself the responsibility of preaching the Word of God to a lost world. They were empowered to do this by means of the gifts and callings of God. Obedience to our Lord's great commission had given them the opportunity to express their thanksgiving for their salvation by declaring the grace of God to others. When souls were saved by the preaching of the Word of God and the quickening power of the Spirit of God, they provided these converts with the fellowship of the saints and instructions in the truth of the Word of God: that they might *grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ* (II Peter 3:18).

And unto the [messenger] of the church in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive; I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan.

Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death. (Revelation 2:8-11)

This church had remembered the pit from which it had been dug. It recognized that it was saved by grace through faith. It recognized that it had no merit of its own, and so it saw the world in the same condition that it had been in before its salvation. Therefore it faithfully preached salvation to a world that was dead in trespasses and in sin. It did this with compassion and without coercion, expecting God to give the increase according to His elective purpose. It understood and heeded Paul's instructions to Timothy:

But thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience, persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra; what persecutions I endured: but out of them all the Lord delivered me. Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived.

But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of,

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knowing of whom thou hast learned them; and that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. (II Timothy 3:10-4:4)

The church at Smyrna understood that it had one mission in the world, as all faithful churches from the first century to the present have known. That mission was characterized in our Lord's parable of the Sower, just as the product of that mission was characterized in the parable of the pearl of great price. So the church at Smyrna willingly took to heart the commission of our Lord to the church, not out of duty, but out of thanksgiving:

All [authority] is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen. (Matthew 28:18-20)

The church at Smyrna recognized that this mission could be fraught with danger, and indeed she was persecuted as she exercised her ministry in this world. She recognized that it is the church's responsibility, yea it is the church's privilege, to diligently proclaim the truth, no matter the cost; and she recognized it is the Spirit of God's work to quicken the truth of the Word to the hearts and minds of those who hear the gospel, so that ... *when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed* (Acts 13:48). The church at Smyrna did not possess a great deal of material wealth. Our Lord acknowledged their material poverty, nevertheless He said, *but thou art rich*. They were

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rich because they had operated in faith by means of the gifts and callings that God had given them; and without fear of reprisal from the world, and in the face of further persecution, they willingly proclaimed the unsearchable riches of Jesus Christ to the honor and glory of their Lord and Savior.

The third church that was addressed by the apostle John was the church at Pergamos. This church, unlike the church at Ephesus, was affected by all five of the negative influences that were portrayed in the parables of our Lord:

And to the [messenger] of the church in Pergamos write; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges; I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth.

But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.

Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it. (Revelation 2:12-17)

The church at Pergamos, like the church at Ephesus, did not fail in its relationship with the Lord all at once. It had a faithful beginning. It, like the church at Smyrna, had known persecution (*in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr*), but there came the time when this church developed two forms of doctrine, the doctrine of Balaam and the doctrine of the Nicolaitans. These doctrines in turn manifested themselves in this church with the negative influences that were contained in the parables of the tares among the wheat, the mustard seed that grew into a tree, the woman that placed leaven in three measures of meal, and in the treasure hid

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in the field.

To determine what the doctrine of Balaam was, it is necessary to consider the account of Balaam in the book of Numbers, chapters twenty-two to twenty-five. Balaam was an Old Testament prophet who was approached by messengers from Balak the king of Moab. Balak had sent them to Balaam to get him to curse the Jews. He was afraid the Jews would attack his kingdom like they had defeated Sihon and Og, kings of the Amorites and the Bashanites. So when Balaam received these elders and lodged them, God questioned, *What men are these with thee?* Balaam explained that Balak wished him to curse the Jews:

And God said unto Balaam, Thou shalt not go with them; thou shalt not curse the people: for they are blessed. And Balaam rose up in the morning, and said unto the princes of Balak, Get you into your land: for the LORD refuseth to give me leave to go with you. And the princes of Moab rose up, and they went unto Balak, and said, Balaam refuseth to come with us. (Numbers 22:12-14)

Nevertheless Balak persisted in offering riches and honor to Balaam if he would curse the Jews; and while Balaam overtly refused, in his heart he desired to go with the servants of Balak. *And God came unto Balaam at night, and said unto him, If the men come to call thee, rise up, and go with them; but yet the word which I shall say unto thee, that shalt thou do* (Numbers 22:20). While this seems to bear the approval of God, God knew Balaam's heart and the incident with Balaam's ass (which had more understanding than the prophet and saved his life) reveals God's displeasure with Balaam. After that ... *the angel of the LORD said unto Balaam, Go with the men: but only the word that I shall speak unto thee, that thou shalt speak. So Balaam went with the princes of Balak* (Numbers 22:35). Consequently every time Balaam and Balak went to a different vantage point to curse the Jews, God blessed them, and this frustrated both Balak and

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Balaam. Balaam's heart was set upon the riches and honor that had been promised him (Jude 1:11); so in counsel with the Midianites, he determined to vex the Jews with craftiness (Numbers 25:17-18).

It is probable then that Balaam taught Balak that Moab (the progenitor of the Moabites) had been born to the eldest daughter of Lot, through a relationship with her father, Abraham's nephew. This made the Jews and the Moabites brethren. It is probable Balaam taught Balak to stress this relationship in any encounter with the Jews. Since they were brethren, wouldn't it be proper for the Moabites and the Jews to consider marriage relationships between their children? This was a subtle ploy to get the Jews to violate their separation from the idolatrous practices of the Moabites, who worshipped Chemosh. It is probable that this was the manner in which Balak *cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication*. It seems then that the doctrine of Balaam was the violation of the separation of the people of God from that which was religiously false; and the ploy then, as now, was to minimize the truth of the Word of God and to maximize the term *brethren*.

Much later in the history of the nation of Israel, Jehoshaphat king of Judah made a similar misjudgment in his relationship with Ahab king of Israel, which confirms our suppositions about Balaam's counsel to Balak:

Now Jehoshaphat had riches and honour in abundance, and joined affinity with Ahab. And after certain years he went down to Ahab to Samaria. And Ahab killed sheep and oxen for him in abundance, and for the people that he had with him, and persuaded him to go up with him to Ramoth-gilead. And Ahab king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat king of Judah, Wilt thou go with me to Ramoth-gilead? And he answered him, *I am as thou art, and my people as thy people; and we will be with thee in the war*. (II Chronicles 18:1-3, emphasis mine)

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This text reveals that Jehoshaphat and Ahab had entered into a marriage alliance, which was a rather common practice between neighboring kingdoms throughout much of history. Even so this was an alliance that never should have been. Ahab and the northern kingdom of Israel were idolaters, and Jehoshaphat and the southern kingdom of Judah had removed the idols from their land and at that time had rejected the worship of idols for the worship of the true and living God. Nevertheless because they were brethren, Jehoshaphat violated his relationship of separation from that which was religiously false and said, *I am as thou art, and my people as thy people; and we will be with thee in the war.* When the war was ended, and Ahab was dead:

Jehoshaphat the king of Judah returned to his house in peace to Jerusalem. And Jehu the son of Hanani the seer went out to meet him, and said to king Jehoshaphat, *Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the LORD? therefore is wrath upon thee from before the LORD.* Nevertheless there are good things found in thee, in that thou hast taken away the groves out of the land, and hast prepared thine heart to seek God. (II Chronicles 19:1-3, emphasis mine)

Jehoshaphat's statement defines the doctrine of Balaam, *I am as thou art, and my people as thy people; and we will be with thee in the war;* and the statement of Jehu defines the consequences of the doctrine of Balaam, *Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the LORD? therefore is wrath upon thee from before the LORD.* Jehoshaphat's sentimentality had evoked a pledge from him to aid the enemies of God, just as the church at Pergamos and many other present-day churches (that practice this doctrine) have done. Ahab cared nothing for Jehoshaphat, but he was willing to use him and put him at risk. So as they prepared for battle he disguised himself, but he persuaded Jehoshaphat to wear his kingly garments (II Chronicles 18:28-32); and so it is with those who ignore our Lord's warning about wolves (false prophets) in sheep's clothing (Matthew 7:15) when they join together to purportedly serve the Lord.

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We have already seen the results of the violation of separation from that which is spiritually false in the parable of the net let down into the sea, which has become the methodology of the mass evangelists and of the interdenominational churches. Coupled with these sweeping tactics to reach the masses, the other gospel of the tares and the wheat is a close companion. This in turn produces the numbers that can (with excessive growth) change an herb into a tree, so that it might become home to the birds of the air (i. e., the devil). Further, this type of growth would not be possible without an acceptance of or an overlooking of the many false doctrines of the woman who hid leaven in three measures of meal. Thus the doctrine of Balaam involves the negative influences of at least four of our Lord's parables, and probably five.

The second form of doctrine held by the church at Pergamos was the doctrine of the Nicolaitans. According to the Scofield Reference Bible this name was not ascribed to any known sect in the history of the church. The name is derived from two Greek words, *nikao*, to conquer, and *laos*, the people (the word from which we get the term laity). Dr. Scofield proposed that this compound word was used to describe the differences between the priesthood and the laity, with the priesthood ruling the common people (Scofield Reference Bible, Oxford University Press, New York, Copyright, 1909, 1917, 1937, 1945, note 1, pg. 1332). While this concept has an historical basis in the Roman Catholic Church, it is not supported (to my knowledge) with Scriptural illustrations. Since Scripture is used to interpret Scripture, Scofield's suggested answer for the doctrine of the Nicolaitans does not seem to fit. However the original Greek provides another meaning for *nikao* which does have support with Scriptural illustrations. *Nikao* means to conquer, but it was also used by the Greeks to speak of *opinions*. Hence it was used to convey *the prevailing opinion* or *the vote of the*

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*majority* (*Greek-English Lexicon*, Liddell & Scott, Oxford, First Edition, 1889, Seventh Edition, 1961, pg. 533). This definition brings to mind three major incidents in the Scriptures as well as numerous lesser incidents.

The first incident is found in the book of Numbers. God had commanded Moses to choose twelve princes of the tribes of Israel to spy out the land:

And they returned from searching of the land after forty days. And they went and came to Moses, and to Aaron, and to all the congregation of the children of Israel, unto the wilderness of Paran, to Kadesh; and brought back word unto them, and unto all the congregation, and shewed them the fruit of the land. And they told him, and said, We came unto the land whither thou sentest us, and surely it floweth with milk and honey; and this is the fruit of it. Nevertheless the people be strong that dwell in the land, and the cities are walled, and very great: and moreover we saw the children of Anak there. The Amalekites dwell in the land of the south: and the Hittites, and the Jebusites, and the Amorites, dwell in the mountains: and the Canaanites dwell by the sea, and by the coast of Jordan.

And Caleb stilled the people before Moses, and said, Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it. But the men that went up with him said, We be not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we. And they brought up an evil report of the land which they had searched unto the children of Israel, saying, The land, through which we have gone to search it, is a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof; and all the people that we saw in it are men of a great stature. And there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants: and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight. (Numbers 13:26-33)

After receiving this report, the congregation wept that night (Numbers 14:1), and they said, *Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt! or would God we had died in this wilderness!* (Numbers 14:2). Then the congregation wished to stone Joshua and Caleb for encouraging them to go into the land (Numbers 14:10):

And the LORD spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying, How long shall I bear with this evil congregation, which murmur against me? I have heard the murmurings of the children of Israel, which they murmur against me. Say unto them, As truly as I live, saith the LORD, as ye have spoken in mine ears, so will I do to you: your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness; and all that were numbered of you, according to your whole number, from twenty years old and upward, which have murmured against me, Doubtless ye shall not come into the land, concerning which I sware to make you dwell therein, save

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Caleb the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua the son of Nun.

But your little ones, which ye said should be a prey, them will I bring in, and they shall know the land which ye have despised. But as for you, your carcasses, they shall fall in this wilderness. And your children shall wander in the wilderness forty years, and bear your whoredoms, until your carcasses be wasted in the wilderness. After the number of the days in which ye searched the land, even forty days, each day for a year, shall ye bear your iniquities, even forty years, and ye shall know my breach of promise. I the LORD have said, I will surely do it unto all this evil congregation, that are gathered together against me: in this wilderness they shall be consumed, and there they shall die.

And the men, which Moses sent to search the land, who returned, and made all the congregation to murmur against him, by bringing up a slander upon the land, Even those men that did bring up the evil report upon the land, died by the plague before the LORD. But Joshua the son of Nun, and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, which were of the men that went to search the land, lived still. (Numbers 14:26-38)

The second incident is also found in the book of Numbers. Korah, Dathan and Abiram led a revolt with two hundred and fifty princes of the assembly of Israel against the authority of Moses and Aaron:

Now Korah, the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, and Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, and On, the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took men: and they rose up before Moses, with certain of the children of Israel, two hundred and fifty princes of the assembly, famous in the congregation, men of renown: and they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron, and said unto them, *Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them: wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the LORD?* (Numbers 16:1-3, emphasis mine)

The third incident is found in the book of first Samuel:

And it came to pass, when Samuel was old, that he made his sons judges over Israel. Now the name of his firstborn was Joel; and the name of his second, Abiah: they were judges in Beersheba. And his sons walked not in his ways, but turned aside after lucre, and took bribes, and perverted judgment.

Then all the elders of Israel gathered themselves together, and came to Samuel unto Ramah, and said unto him, Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us like all the nations. But the thing displeased Samuel, when they said, Give us a king to judge us. And Samuel prayed unto the LORD. And the LORD said unto Samuel, *Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them.* (I

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Samuel 8:1-7, emphasis mine)

There are other incidents in the Scriptures when the people of God rebelled against the authority of the man of God, but these three are sufficient to establish what the doctrine of the Nicolaitans actually was. In the first incident the congregation rejected the opinion of Caleb and Joshua, which agreed with the promise of God, for the opinion of the majority, which reflected unbelief. In the case of Korah, Dathan and Abiram there was a direct attack upon Moses and Aaron, two men chosen of God to lead the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt. It is interesting to note that had the congregation had its way, the Jews never would have departed Egypt in the first place; for each time trouble arose from Pharaoh, the Jews murmured against Moses. This was not only their pattern of thought before they left Egypt, it continued to be their pattern of thought throughout their forty years of wandering in the wilderness.

In the third incident the people rebelled against the authority of God that had been placed in the hands of Samuel. They sought a king to rule them rather than submitting to the rule of God through the man of God. Samuel was broken-hearted over their request, but the Lord consoled him by telling him, *[F]or they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them.* Then the Lord told Samuel to give them a king, but to protest solemnly and to tell them what the king would do in terms of taxes, conscription, confiscation of property, etc. Even so the people still stood in rebellion against the rule of God and for the rule of man (I Samuel 8:7-22).

In two of these three incidents, the choice of the people provided a usurpation of the priesthood of God. In the case of Korah, Moses reminded him of the position he had as a Levite

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in the service of the tabernacle, and he said, *and seek ye the priesthood also?*

And [Moses] spake unto the congregation, saying, Depart, I pray you, from the tents of these wicked men, and touch nothing of theirs, lest ye be consumed in all their sins. So they gat up from the tabernacle of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, on every side: and Dathan and Abiram came out, and stood in the door of their tents, and their wives, and their sons, and their little children.

And Moses said, *Hereby ye shall know that the LORD hath sent me to do all these works; for I have not done them of mine own mind. If these men die the common death of all men, or if they be visited after the visitation of all men; then the LORD hath not sent me. But if the LORD make a new thing, and the earth open her mouth, and swallow them up, with all that appertain unto them, and they go down quick into the pit; then ye shall understand that these men have provoked the LORD.*

And it came to pass, as he had made an end of speaking all these words, that the ground clave asunder that was under them: and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up, and their houses, and all the men that appertained unto Korah, and all their goods. They, and all that appertained to them, went down alive into the pit, and the earth closed upon them: and they perished from among the congregation. And all Israel that were round about them fled at the cry of them: for they said, Lest the earth swallow us up also. And there came out a fire from the LORD, and consumed the two hundred and fifty men that offered incense. (Numbers 16:26-35, emphasis mine)

After such a demonstration of God's power and God's will, you would think that the congregation of the Jews would have then been submissive to the will of the Lord and to the God given authority of Moses and Aaron, but they were not: *But on the morrow all the congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron, saying, Ye have killed the people of the Lord* (Numbers 16:41). It then took the budding of Aaron's rod to convince the congregation that Aaron was God's chosen priest. Thus God said:

And it shall come to pass, that the man's rod, whom I shall choose, shall blossom: and I will make to cease from me the murmurings of the children of Israel, whereby they murmur against you. And Moses spake unto the children of Israel, and every one of their princes gave him a rod apiece, for each prince one, according to their fathers' houses, even twelve rods: and the rod of Aaron was among their rods. And Moses laid up the rods before the LORD in the tabernacle of witness.

And it came to pass, that on the morrow Moses went into the tabernacle of witness; and, behold, the rod of Aaron for the house of Levi was budded, and brought forth buds,

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and bloomed blossoms, and yielded almonds. And Moses brought out all the rods from before the LORD unto all the children of Israel: and they looked, and took every man his rod.

And the LORD said unto Moses, Bring Aaron's rod again before the testimony, to be kept for a token against the rebels; and thou shalt quite take away their murmurings from me, that they die not. And Moses did so: as the LORD commanded him, so did he. (Numbers 17:5-11)

Saul, who was king by the will of the people, also usurped the authority of the priesthood when Samuel did not come to Gilgal at the appointed time:

And some of the Hebrews went over Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead. As for Saul, he was yet in Gilgal, and all the people followed him trembling. And he tarried seven days, according to the set time that Samuel had appointed: but Samuel came not to Gilgal; and the people were scattered from him. And Saul said, Bring hither a burnt offering to me, and peace offerings. And he offered the burnt offering.

And it came to pass, that as soon as he had made an end of offering the burnt offering, behold, Samuel came; and Saul went out to meet him, that he might salute him. And Samuel said, What hast thou done? And Saul said, Because I saw that the people were scattered from me, and that thou camest not within the days appointed, and that the Philistines gathered themselves together at Michmash; therefore said I, The Philistines will come down now upon me to Gilgal, and I have not made supplication unto the LORD: I forced myself therefore, and offered a burnt offering.

And Samuel said to Saul, Thou hast done foolishly: thou hast not kept the commandment of the LORD thy God, which he commanded thee: for now would the LORD have established thy kingdom upon Israel for ever. But now thy kingdom shall not continue: the LORD hath sought him a man after his own heart, and the LORD hath commanded him to be captain over his people, because thou hast not kept that which the LORD commanded thee. (I Samuel 13:7-14)

The doctrine of the Nicolaitans is characterized by rebellion against the authority of God and the vested authority of the man of God, as well as by unbelief. So as the negative influences that were characterized in five of our Lord's parables began to spread throughout the churches, this unbelief and rebellion manifested itself in the other gospel of the Judaizers. This in turn produced excessive growth in the church, which attracted those who thought according to *a way which seemeth right unto a man*. Consequently the many doctrines of the woman who hid leaven

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in three measures of meal, demanded some means of atoning for the sins of believers which were committed after they were saved. The reasoning of man denied the eternal security of the believer, which was predicated upon the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead: *Because I live, ye shall live also* (John 14:19), and the fact that Christ is our eternal Priest (Hebrews 7:23-28). This unbelief resulted in the formation of a priesthood and a sacrificial system to deal with the sins of the people, *after the commandments and doctrines of men*, a concept which was refuted completely by the writer to the Hebrews:

And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: but this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; from henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool.

For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified. Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us: for after that he had said before, This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more. Now where remission [forgiveness on the basis of a payment] of these is, there is no more offering [sacrifice] for sin. (Hebrews 10:11-18)

It wasn't the clergy conquering the people that produced a counterfeit priesthood, but the people in rebellion against the Word of God and the man of God that produced it. Even though, as suggested by Dr. Scofield, as time went on and the church increased in power and wealth, a corrupted priesthood did indeed oppress the people, it also oppressed the *treasure hid in the field*. Thus the Roman and Greek Orthodox churches exacted many pogroms against the Jews.

The fourth church to whom John wrote was the church at Thyatira. This church was a product of all of the negative influences that were contained in five of the seven parables spoken by our Lord, but the emphasis in this church was upon the woman who took three measures of meal and hid leaven in them:

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And unto the angel of the church in Thyatira write; These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass; I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last to be more than the first.

Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols. And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not. Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds. And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works.

But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak; I will put upon you none other burden. But that which ye have already hold fast till I come. And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father. And I will give him the morning star.

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.  
(Revelation 2:18-29)

The prophetic extension of this church into the last days provides a clear picture of the harlot who sits upon many waters in the seventeenth chapter of the book of the Revelation. This church is in fellowship with the ten toes of Nebuchadnezzar's image (described as horns in the Revelation), which are apostate Protestant churches that have reunited with Rome. This church as a whole will be cast into the great tribulation period. Yet despite the depths of her degradation, the Lord makes an appeal to the redeemed who are within her, *hold fast till I come*. These will, of course, escape the wrath that is to come (I Thessalonians 5:9).

The fifth church was the church at Sardis. This is a church in its prophetic extension which portrays an almost completely apostate membership because it has a name that it lives, but it is dead:

And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the

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seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God. Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.

Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy. He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. (Revelation 3:1-6)

Apostasy begets apostasy, and so once the other churches in Asia began to see the apparent successes of the apostate churches, the negative influences of five of our Lord's parables manifested themselves in all of the churches but the two faithful churches, Smyrna and Philadelphia. Yet our Lord could say, *Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy.*

This bespeaks the fact that it does not take a lot of faith to be saved. Even apostate churches, despite their apostasy, may from time to time give some testimony to the truth. It is the Word of God and the quickening power of the Spirit of God that produces salvation. Thus there were a few even in Sardis that shall walk with the Lord in white.

Since we have already considered the Laodicean church in great detail in previous studies, the last church we will view in order to gain a clear perspective of the events of the last days is the church at Philadelphia:

And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write; These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth; I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name. Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee.

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Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown. Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. (Revelation 3:7-13)

This church, like the church at Smyrna, was a church that was faithful to what the Lord had committed to its trust. Its position in the book of the Revelation, after Sardis and before Laodicea, connotes the idea that in its prophetic extension this church portrays a faithful church unto the first resurrection: *Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.*

At the end of each of the messages to the seven churches, there is a promise to those who overcome. It is important that we understand what it means to overcome. John, who wrote the Revelation, also wrote a Gospel and three epistles. In the fifth chapter of his first epistle, he wrote:

For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God? (I John 5:4-5)

Overcoming is not obtained by personal struggle. Overcoming is a product of salvation. Even so in the arena of life, as a church of Jesus Christ, each church has the capacity to make a choice to be faithful to that which has been committed to its trust, or it can be caught up in the apparent successes of the five negative influences in our Lord's parables. When God opens doors before us, we are to step through them and continue to proclaim the unsearchable riches of Jesus

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Christ, faithful unto the end. *The just are to live by faith; the law is not of faith; whatsoever is not of faith is sin; and their sins and iniquities will I remember against them no more.* Therefore the Lord is ready to reward His faithful churches with crowns of righteousness; He is ready to make us inhabitants of the new Jerusalem and to bring to fruition all that He has promised the redeemed in every age.

This chapter has been about *A Clear Perspective*. The overviews which we have considered respecting things Jewish and things connected with the church should help us with our perspective. God has a national future for Israel. He has promised to redeem them, and He will, but the prophets, who were inspired of God, have told of terrible judgments that are yet to come upon this earth. Jeremiah has told us that this is *the time of Jacob's trouble*. Zechariah has told us that Israel will be saved when they look upon Him Whom they have pierced. At the same time, God has promised the redeemed of this age (both Jews and Gentiles) that we are not reserved unto wrath. He has told us that the apostasy of the last days, and the revelation of the antichrist, are the two signs that must precede the coming of our Lord; but the antichrist cannot be revealed while that which hinders is in the way. We have also learned that the church age is between the sixty-ninth and seventieth weeks of Daniel's vision and is, therefore, not a part of them. This should give us a clear perspective of last-day events.