

Ouachita Baptist University

Scholarly Commons @ Ouachita

Vaught Sermon Notes: A Study of the Book of Revelation

W.O. Vaught Archive

2-1-1981

The Message to the Church in Ephesus and Smyrna

W. O. Vaught

Ouachita Baptist University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarlycommons.obu.edu/vn_revelation



Part of the [Biblical Studies Commons](#), and the [Liturgy and Worship Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Vaught, W. O., "The Message to the Church in Ephesus and Smyrna" (1981). *Vaught Sermon Notes: A Study of the Book of Revelation*. 10.

https://scholarlycommons.obu.edu/vn_revelation/10

This Sermon Notes is brought to you for free and open access by the W.O. Vaught Archive at Scholarly Commons @ Ouachita. It has been accepted for inclusion in Vaught Sermon Notes: A Study of the Book of Revelation by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Commons @ Ouachita. For more information, please contact mortensona@obu.edu.

THE MESSAGE TO THE CHURCH IN EPHESUS AND SMYRNA

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION
REVELATION 2:1-11
NUMBER 3

Dr. W. O. Vaught, Jr.
Immanuel Baptist Church
Little Rock, Arkansas

REVELATION 2:1-11 "Unto the angel 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 candlesticks; 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 so the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick 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. And unto the angel 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."

This is not the revelation of St. John the divine. Divinity belongs to the Lord. This is the revelation of Jesus Christ. John was the human author who wrote the message down, but Jesus Christ was the preacher and the Holy Spirit was the divine author of the message. Remember, the book is not "Revelations" but Revelation--singular. It is the unveiling of Jesus Christ. Revelation 2 and 3 is a picture of the Church Age. The picture we see here of these seven churches is a picture of the churches throughout all the Church Age, and the trends we see here are the trends we will find in the church until Christ returns. People of that day had old sin natures also, and their sins are repeated and repeated in the church in every age. Someone has said that what we learn from the study of history is that we learn nothing from history. Revelation 2 and 3 describes the church on earth. When the Church Age ends and the church is taken out of the earth, then in chapters 4 and 5 we see a picture of the church in heaven and in chapters 6-19 we have a picture of the Tribulation. In Revelation 19 we also see the Second Coming of Christ and in Revelation 20 we see the Millennial reign of Christ. This is a sermon preached on a Sunday in 96 A.D. to one man, John, on the Isle of Patmos.

The Bible describes the church in many ways, and one phrase used to describe the church is "in Christ", such as in Romans 8:1. Then the church is also described as "The body" and this is in 1 Cor. 12 and Romans 12. The church is pictured as the body of Christ and Christ is presented as the head. One of the common words for church is the word "Ecclesia". We get the word "Ecclesiastical" from this Greek word. Originally this word was not used for church, but in the 5th Century before Christ it was used for the Greek Assembly, the gathering together of the people. In Acts 7:38 it is used for the assembly of the Jews in the Old Testament. Then in Matthew 18:17 it is used to refer to a Jewish synagogue. It was used for the gathering of the Hellenistic people in Acts 19:25. But generally through the New Testament it is used for the word "church", and it is used in two ways.

First of all, you have the church universal. The church universal is made up of every believer in the earth. Every believer, everyone "in Christ" is a member of this church. Then we have the conception of the church as a local congregation. A group of believers meeting in a certain locality. We are going to study seven of these local churches. The Church Age itself must be defined as beginning in 30 A.D. at Pentecost. There was no church in the Old Testament. The doctrine of "The Mystery" teaches us that the church was unknown in Old Testament times. (The doctrine of the mystery is explained in Col. 1:25-26, Ephesians 3:1-6, and Romans 16:25-26.) The doctrine of the mystery shows that the Old Testament revealed the death of Christ, his resurrection, his ascension, and his second advent, but the church is never mentioned in the Old Testament. There is no Church Age information in the Old Testament and we also know this from a statement Jesus made in Matthew 16 when he said, "I will build my church" and the tense was future. The church was prophesied by Jesus in Acts 1:5 and ten days later the church began. The baptism of the Holy Spirit did not occur in Old Testament times. Some few were given the Holy Spirit for special tasks but the Spirit was not given to believers until the Church Age. At the point of conversion, the Holy Spirit takes the believer and enters him into union with Christ and makes him a member of the church universal. Therefore in the Church Age for the first time in history, every believer is indwelt with Christ. Every believer is a priest and every believer has a supernatural way of life with supernatural means for accomplishing that task.

The Seven Churches of Asia

We now enter into a study of these seven churches. If you look at them on the map, they form a circle.

The Church At Ephesus

The pattern of the message will be the same to each of the seven churches.

The salutation--

The appraisal of each church--

Then there will be some criticism (if there is any to be offered)

An exhortation to each church--

A commendation to each church--

Then each church will receive some assurance. So the order is this-- SALUTATION-- APPRAISAL--CRITICISM--EXHORTATION--COMMENDATION--ASSURANCE.

So in verses 1-7 we have the message to Ephesus. "Angel" refers to the pastor, the shepherd of the flock. This same word is translated "messenger" in James 2:25. God is going to do his work through the pastor. He never bypasses the pastor. The pastor is the head of the church. He is the one in authority and this is emphasized seven times. "Of the church" is a genitive of relationship.

Ephesus was the capitol of the Roman Province of Asia. Located on a beautiful river it was a very large city, about 300,000. It was founded by the King of Athens and built as one of the most beautiful cities in the ancient world. It was destroyed in 262 A.D. It was the banking center and had millions of dollars worth of jewels and gold. The Temple of Diana, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, was located in Ephesus. The Temple had 120 pillars and each was given by a king and adorned with precious jewels. In this temple was the greatest bank of the ancient world. The church at Ephesus was founded by Paul. Timothy was pastor there and John had been pastor there.

"He that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand". In each instance where the church is addressed the description of Christ is taken from Rev. 1:14-16. These seven stars refer to the seven churches.

"Walking in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks" refers to the fact that Christ has fellowship with his churches.

In verses 2 and 3 we have the appraisal of the church in Ephesus.

"I know thy works" refers to the omniscience of Christ. He knows everything. He knows everything every believer has ever done or will ever do. This phrase will occur in all seven of the churches. God inspects the church at all times. "Thy labour" refers to their wearisome toil. The word is toil to the point of exhaustion.

"Patience" means they are using the faith rest technique. (They are claiming 1 John 1:9)

These Ephesian Christians could not put up with those who were evil. This refers to doctrinal evils. "Thou hast tried them" means to try them by doctrine. Certain men came to Ephesus and said they were apostles, but the Ephesian Christians were indoctrinated, and they knew these men were fakes. John was the last apostle and they knew it. This one who claimed to be an apostle was a woman. That in itself was wrong for no woman was an apostle. She was also involved in the tongues movement, and that was wrong. This woman was like Jezebel and she left Ephesus and went to Pergamos. Her name was not Jezebel but this name was used to characterize her so we would know the kind of a woman she was. She was beautiful and brilliant, and one of the most wicked and dangerous women who ever lived. The Ephesian church turned her out and she went over to Pergamos. She flunked the test of doctrine and went to Pergamos, and there took part in tongues and healings and God is going to chew them out but good for this.

In 1 Corinthians 9 and 1 Corinthians 15 we are given the qualifications for an apostle. They were to have seen the resurrected Christ, and receive the gift of apostleship from the Holy Spirit.

REVELATION 2:3 "And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted." This is a great compliment to the Ephesian Christians. "Have borne" means they have carried on doctrinally. They kept a pure democracy. In spite of attack and test they kept right on. They carried on because of patience. This means standing under all conditions. These people were great for carrying on under persecution. Bible doctrine made the difference. "Has laboured" means to work to the point of exhaustion to maintain the spirit filled life. "Hast not fainted" means that they had divine viewpoint in their minds. They knew doctrine.

REVELATION 2:4 "Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love." Now we come to the criticism of the Ephesian church. "But" is a conjunction of contrast. "I have" means the criticism is still outstanding and they have done nothing to change it. "Left thy first love". Their first love was the Lord Jesus Christ. This refers to occupation with Christ. They were so busy running the church they got their eyes off the Lord Jesus Christ. They had started getting out of fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ. Regardless of their past spiritual blessings and victories, they could not continue unless they used rebound every day and stayed in fellowship. You must use 1 John 1:9.

REVELATION 2:5 "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 candlestick out of his place, except thou repent." This is the exhortation. They were reminded to rebound, get back in fellowship. They were out of the bottom circle. This is what "Being fallen" means. It has nothing to do with salvation. They were to rebound and stop carnality. They could turn cursing into blessing if they would just rebound. They had become sloppy in their confession and in their rebound. "Thou art fallen" is in the perfect tense and this means that this was their constant state. "Repent" is in aorist tense and means that in the decision of a moment could break out of their fallen condition and get back in fellowship. The Greek word is "Meta-noeo" and means to change your thinking. The alternative is "Or else" God will come quickly with discipline. He said he would remove thy candlestick and this happened in 262 A.D. Candlestick referred to the witness of the whole church. It was the collective discipline that came to the whole church.

"Except thou repent" is an aorist, active, subjunctive and the subjunctive means that the way for you to repent is still open to you.

REVELATION 2:6 "But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate." This is the commendation. These Ephesians hated the deeds of the Nicolaitans. This was the cult headed by Jezebel and you are to throw such people out of the church. The Nicolaitans got their name from one of the original deacons, Nicolas of Antioch. He minimized doctrine and emphasized emotional and spiritual experiences built on superficial feelings. Like candlelight services and superficial dedication and as a result he decided to go into Hellenistic culture. He started worshipping in temples and then drifted into drinking and into immorality. Nicolas started all this "live it up" philosophy. Your body must be crushed with wine, women and song so the soul can be liberated. His doctrine spread like wildfire. Nicolas tried to combine loose living with Christianity and it can't be done. Therefore the church in Ephesus threw them out.

REVELATION 2:7 "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." This was the assurance. Those who were real Christians and had ears for doctrine would make it. The panacea for the problems of the believer is Bible doctrine. "He that keeps on having ears to hear" is present linear action and means that we must always have ears for doctrine. "Let him hear" is in the aorist tense and means that in every instance when doctrine is taught you are to listen. "What the Holy Spirit is saying" is a phrase that tells us we can count on the Holy Spirit giving us perfect truth. This is stated in John 14:26, John 16:12-15, 1 John 2:27 and 1 Corinthians 2:9-14. "The overcomer" is the one who believes in Jesus Christ. Every believer is an overcomer. "I will give" is what is called a dramatic present and is another statement of our eternal security in Christ. The tree of life refers to eternal life. "The Paradise of God" is a Persian word used to emphasize perfect environment. Here the gardens of a Persian king are used to illustrate the perfect environment of heaven.

VERSES 8-11--THE CHURCH IN SMYRNA

As in all seven of these churches, the message is to the pastor of the church. Smyrna is on the Gulf of Smyrna. Smyrna was first destroyed in 626 B.C., then Alexander The Great came by the ruins and ordered that the city be rebuilt. Smyrna was noted for its large Jewish population. Many Roman temples were located in Smyrna. Polycarp was pastor there and was martyred there in 166 A.D. Smyrna was a famous wine center.

"Write" in each of these messages is aorist, active, imperative and is Christ's command to John to write these things down so the church could have this message.

"The first and the last" is a reference to the deity of Christ.

"Which became dead" refers to his humanity and his crucifixion.

This church in Smyrna is unique in that there is nothing here stated against this church. Even though this church in Smyrna was in a city filled with Roman temples and was a concentrated center for heathen worship and wine, yet there is nothing said against this church.

"I know", as in all these messages, refers to the omniscience of God.

"Thy works" refers to divine work which was acceptable to God.

"And tribulation" means that they were strong because of the suffering through which they passed. Suffering is designed to make the believer strong. The word "Poverty" is used in an unusual way. Smyrna was a very wealthy city, but Roman tax officials could report these Christians and thereby collect 10% for reporting them, and in this way many of the Christians were reduced to poverty. But they were rich in spiritual things. These Christians in Smyrna knew what pressure really was, something like the Christians in China when the Communists came down over their land and reduced them to poverty. Some of them in Smyrna were posing to be religious Jews, very much like Saul of Tarsus in Jerusalem before his Damascus Road experience. Quite often the Christians found their worst opposition to come from the so-called religious Jews.

REVELATION 2:10 "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." "Fear not" is a present, middle, imperative. It is a command for them not to have mental fears, and the middle voice means they will be benefited by not having fear. "Those things which thou shalt suffer" was a prediction of the days that were coming from the persecution which would fall upon them. The devil was the one behind this persecution. The devil is always trying to throw Christians into panic through suffering and persecution. "Have tribulation ten days" refers to the suffering Smyrna would endure under the Roman emperors. It came under (1) Nero, (2) Domitian, (3) Trajan, (4) Aurelius, (5) Severus, (6) Maximinus (7) Delius, (8) Valerius, (9) Aurelian, and (10) Diocletian. And Diocletian was the worst of all. These Roman emperors would try to blast the church out of the earth, but the saints in Smyrna were to remain faithful. Then Constantine came and brought the union of the church and the state. But every time a Christian died, ten more rose up to take his place. The devil said to himself, "If we can whip them, then we will join them". So after "ten days" the devil changed his policy, but he never gave up.

REVELATION 2:11 "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." Here we have the assurance. So there was no criticism offered this great church. "Shall not be hurt in the second death" means that no Christian will ever stand at the judgment. The Christian will have his work evaluated, but he will never be judged.