

How Do We Know That God is There?

Introduction to Revelation 2 & 3 (Go To Meeting)

Michael Heiss—January 19, 2024

Well, thank you very much, Steve, and good evening, everyone. I guess we are going to get into Revelation at some part tonight. I'm not too worried about completing it because the way the schedule has worked out, I'm on tap to speak tonight as well as a week from tonight. So, you're all stuck with me for two weeks in a row. Hopefully you won't get too tired of me. Maybe a little itty bitty bit, but hopefully not very much.

Before we get into the messages of Revelation, which will be a continuation of a message I had started some weeks ago, something else has come to mind. I'd like to bring that out first.

- How do you know?
 - ✓ we believe in God
 - ✓ we're part of His Church
 - ✓ we love Him.
 - ✓ we know He loves us
 - ✓ we know He wants us in His Kingdom
- How do you know that?
- How can you be sure?
- Have you seen God? *No!*
- Have you talked to Him?
- Have you touched Him?
- Have you felt Him?
- I mean, physically? *No!*

Yet, we know He's there!

But how do we know He's there? *He has a mechanism that he uses!* And I thought to myself, you know, I know He's there, but I'd never put in perspective; I've never strawn pearls on a string in the form of Scriptures to help me understand the process. That's what I would like to do first. Call this a prologue if you want, an introduction.

- How do we know God is really there?
- What tells us that?

Let's start out with two Scriptures on faith. Because without faith, we don't have anything. So, that's our starting point.

Rom. 1—this is the most familiar one to us; the Apostle Paul's epistle, his letter to the Romans.

Romans 1:17: "For therein *the* righteousness of God is revealed from faith unto faith, **according as it is written: 'The just shall live by faith.'**"

Notice what Paul said, "...according as it is written..." Where else is it written?

I'm visual, so I like to read it. I like to actually see it. Different people learn by different ways. We have:

- visual people
- audio people
- feeling people

Audio people hear by the hearing of the ear. Do you ever listen to any of the radio talk show hosts? They're all *audio!* They can pick things up fast and shoot right back at you. They're very good! announcers are usually pretty good also; they're audio.

Now, me, I'm *visual*. You can say things to me and I try to take notes and did I get it right? I'm just slow in picking up stuff from lectures.

The *feeling* person just picks stuff out of the air. They can look at you and say that he's a phony. I remember that my wife was very good at that. She was always a people person, and she would say, 'That's a bunch of hooley.' I would look at her and say, 'What are you talking about?' And sure enough, it was! She could just pick things out of the air.

Well, I'm visual, so I have to see things. The other place that is found is in the Old Testament:

Habakkuk 2:4: "Behold, his soul is puffed up, *and* is not upright; but **the just shall live by his faith.**" *Old Testament/New Testament!*

When Martin Luther read that in Rom. 1, he had to insert '*alone.*' None of this change business of faith with words. Well, we're not here to discuss Martin Luther.

But we need to expand on *faith* because there's *belief!* We know God is there, *because we can combine **faith** with **belief!*** Look what Paul said in the book of Hebrews

Heb. 11—we always recall this the *faith chapter* because there's a lot of talk about faith in here.

Hebrews 11:6: "Now, **without faith it is impossible to please God.** For it is mandatory *for* the one who comes to God to believe that He exists, and *that* He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him." *You have to believe that God exists!* But ask yourself:

- How do you know and know that you know that there is someone there who *you cannot*:

- ✓ see?
- ✓ hear?
- ✓ touch or feel?
- How's that possible?

It's very possible! (But that's a few minutes later on; we'll come to that.)

The point is that ***faith and belief*** do go hand-in-hand. We cannot scientifically prove that God exists. There was in the opening prayer—and I appreciated that prayer—asking God to help me and to help us all. To use the old expression, 'Lord knows, I need all the help I can get!'

How can I be sure that there's a God up there Who heard?

- I can't see Him
- I didn't see Him nod His head

He did, He heard, but we couldn't see him!

- How do we know that He knows?
- How do we know that he's there?

There's a mechanism and He's revealed it to us. (But it'll take a few minutes further into the message to come up with that.)

Humans have no way to detect spirit. That has been brought out in a nocturnal conversation, or if we want to get cute about it, we'll talk about a nocturnal tryst, take it to that language, between Jesus and a man named Nicodemus. So, let's turn to that conversation in the Gospel of John.

John 3:1: "Now, there was a man of the Pharisees, Nicodemus by name, a ruler of the Jews. He came to Jesus by night and said to Him, 'Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher *Who* has come from God; because no one is able to do the miracles that You are doing unless God is with him'" (vs 1-2).

Verse 3: "Jesus answered and said to him, 'Truly, truly I say to you, unless anyone is born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God.'"

Nicodemus responds logically; v 4: "Nicodemus said to Him, 'How can a man who is old be born? Can he enter his mother's womb a second time and be born?'"

Verse 5: "Jesus answered, 'Truly, truly I say to you, unless anyone has been born of water and of Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God.... [because physical is physical; electrons, protons and neutrons] ...That which has been born of the flesh is flesh; and that which has been born of the **Spirit is spirit**'" (vs 5-6).

We have, for example, Geiger counters that can detect radiation and uranium. We have other devices with round disks at the end of them and you can haul them along on the ground and they can

detect metal underneath the ground or sand. *But that's physical, detecting something that's physical! But there's no device that humans have that can detect spirit!*

How does God reveal Himself to us? *He did it the old fashioned way in the Old Testament, but today He does it a different way!* Let's take a look and see how God revealed Himself to man in Old Testament times. Let's look at the book of Genesis.

Every one of these Scriptures we all know; we've read them before, there's nothing new here. But watch while we try to 'string our pearls' along in a certain way. We're going to look at how the Lord God came down and talked to the man, talked to Adam and Eve.

Genesis 2:15: "And the LORD God took the man and put him into the Garden of Eden to dress it and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, 'You may freely eat of every tree in the garden'" (vs 15-16).

The point is, *God manifested Himself!* You cannot detect spirit, But if a spirit being manifest himself, yes, you can.

Genesis 3:8: "And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day. Then Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD..."

They had taken of the fruit that they shouldn't have, and they didn't want to face God.

Verse 9: "And the LORD God called to Adam and said to him, 'Where *are* you?'"

God openly communicated with Adam; so we have that example.

Num. 12—This is a situation, the circumstances, where Miriam and Aaron criticized Moses because of his relationship with the Ethiopian woman. Look at what God said.

Numbers 12:5: "And the LORD came down in the pillar of the cloud and stood *in* the door of the tabernacle, and called Aaron and Miriam. And they both came forward. And He said, 'Hear now My words. If there is a prophet among you, I the LORD will make Myself known to him in a vision, and will speak to him in a dream. Not so with My servant Moses. He *is* faithful in all My house. I will speak with him mouth to mouth... [face-to-face, eyeball to eyeball] ...even clearly, and not in dark speeches....'" (vs 5-8).

There was a close relationship between God and Moses, but the point is ***Moses openly communicated with God and vice versa!***

Now let's look at a grandiose revelation in Deut. 4. This is the time when Moses is rehashing what God did when He gave the Ten Commandments.

Deuteronomy 4:32: "For ask now of the days past which were before you, since the day that God created man upon the earth, and from the one end of the heavens to the other end of the heavens, where there has been any thing as great as this, or has been heard anything like it. **Did any people ever hear the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire as you have heard and live?**" (vs 32-33).

God spoke to them vocally, but ever since the canonization of the New Testament, the canonization of the book of John and the whole Bible, you don't see that. Let's say from the days of the apostles until now, **Who has heard the literal voice of God? I don't know if anybody has! Yet, you're all here, God communicated with you!**

- He called you!
- He touched you!

But

- How did you know that?
- How did you recognize it?

God gave us a mechanism!

I remember back in the vassal college in 1962 and '63 where there's a whole study going on by Mr. Armstrong and the evangelists, and they came up with the mechanism, even though they didn't fully understand it as the mechanism, and it came out to be in:

Job 32:8: "But **there is a spirit in man and the inspiration of the Almighty gives them understanding.**"

Remember in Gen. 2, the LORD God came down, formed man of the dust of the earth, fashioned him, breathed into his nostrils a breath of life, and man became a living being?

Well, it wasn't so stated back then, but at the same time, ***God put a spirit in man!*** Now, this is a spirit that we know provides intellect. Man can read, write, build things, build a civilization. ***No animal can, because no animal has that spirit!***

We'll see that when God deals with us, He doesn't talk to us verbally, but it's His Spirit—we call His Holy Spirit, His essence—that *communicates to the spirit in man!* So you see, ***it is Spirit to spirit!***

If we didn't have that spirit, we could never really receive God's instruction, but it is Spirit to spirit. That's what He did, and it's God's genius how He can:

- communicate with us
- teach us
- motivate us

Blind sight without anybody else ever knowing it!

1-Corinthians 2:7: "Rather, we speak *the* wisdom of God in a mystery, *even* the hidden *wisdom* that God foreordained before the ages unto our glory, which not one of the rulers of this world has known (for if they had known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory)... [now we get into the subject] ...but according as it is written, '*The eye has not seen, nor the ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.*'.... [True, but how?]: ...**But God has revealed them to us by His Spirit, for the Spirit searches all things—even the deep things of God**" (vs 7-10).

Paul is talking about God's Spirit interfacing with our spirit to bring us to Him.

Verse 11: "For who among men understands the things of man except *by* the spirit of man, which *is* in him? In the same way also, the things of God no one understands except *by* the Spirit of God. Now, we have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that *is* of God, so that we might know the things graciously given to us by God" (vs 11-12).

That's how we know, Spirit to spirit! We don't hear His voice, we don't see Him, but yet, our mind becomes open to Him, ***because it's Spirit to spirit!***

I remember when I first came to Ambassador College, I remember Herbert Armstrong—who was the pastor general of the Church at that time—would advise us; he would say:

Now look, don't try to preach to your relatives, don't try to preach to your friends, they don't know, they don't understand! You're only going to bring trouble upon yourself.

But at that time he had not fully come to the understanding of the spirit of man. For example, as a Jew I was brought up in a Jewish home, and I got 'the straight scoop' about this person Jesus of Nazareth. Believe me, I got the 'straight scoop' on Him:

He was a troublemaker, too bad they had to make a martyr out of Him.

Or when I would talk to certain individuals in Jewish bookstores about:

Yeah, but look what we also have these books on Jesus, oh well, you know, He had to be different.

Or my grandmother, who when she saw me listening to the radio... When I was a young, when I was a teenager, God was calling me. I didn't fully know it, but I wanted to learn all I could about various religions. I was open to the name of Jesus. I did not have a negative reaction to it.

- Why?
- Why did I not have the same negative reaction?

It's very simple, I know now, ***because God's Spirit was working in me!***

Remember the song, America the Beautiful? There are a couple of verses in there, stanzas, that are just unbelievable:

America, America, may God Thy gold refine,
till all success be nobleness and every grace
Divine.

God has the capacity to look at all of us and come to a conclusion about, concerning who He can use at this time. He has His own standards. I don't know what they are, but He looked at me and said:

I want him. I'm going to get him. I'm going to send My Spirit to connect with his spirit, and I will gradually lead him.

That's exactly what happened!

Look what Jesus said, as recorded in the Gospel of John. In fact, He says it twice in the same chapter.

John 6:44: "No one can come to Me unless the Father, Who sent Me, draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day."

Verse 65: "And He said, 'For this reason, I have said to you, no one can come to Me unless it has been given to him from My Father.'"

- that's why I could come
- that's why I could see things
- that's why you could see things

Because God's Spirit was uniting with the spirit in you and increasing! Then you could see. How could that have happened without the hand of God?

- you can see it
- you can feel it
- *through the Spirit*

That's how God educates us!

Isaiah 50—we'll see the same thing. We'll see what it says of the Christ when He was just a young boy, and who knows, I suspect even in His mother's womb.

Isaiah 50:4: "The Lord GOD has given Me the tongue of the learned, to know to help the weary ***with a word. He awakens Me morning by morning, He awakens My ear to hear as one being taught.***"

How did God do that? *Again, through the Spirit!* Jesus had the Spirit without measure, and He had the Spirit from the beginning! God could communicate with Him through the Spirit, training him even from his mother's womb to grow up, to be blameless, and to be our Savior, living a perfect life. ***This is how it works, and it takes that Spirit!***

Let us now look at a closing Scripture for this particular section. God guides us through His Spirit. Look at the prophet Zechariah.

Zechariah 4:6: "Then he answered and spoke to me, saying, 'This is the Word of the LORD to Zerubbabel, saying, "Not by might, nor by power, ***but by My Spirit,***" says the LORD of hosts.'"

In other words, not by human might or human power or human understanding, but "***...by My Spirit...***"

That's how I [God] uphold the universe, the power of My Spirit. I speak, and the Spirit does it all.

I wanted to start out with that, to show us, as I would say, a little prologue, because:

- that's how we know things
- that's how we understand God is there
- that's how we can confidence that God is there *even though*
- we cannot see Him,
- we cannot touch Him
- we cannot hear Him

Because He doesn't speak directly to us, but through the ***spirit ears, eyes, it all happens through God's Spirit!***

All right, now that is my, what shall I say, that is the ending of my little prologue. Now, let's look at Revelation.

Revelation 1:1: "*The* revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave to Him, to show to His servants the things that *are* ordained to come to pass shortly..."

All right, here's a revelation, a message, came from the Father to Christ, and of course, to John and to all of us.

Verse 8: "I am the Alpha and the Omega, *the Beginning and the Ending,*' says the Lord, 'Who is, and Who was, and Who *is* to come—the Almighty.'"

Now the last time I spoke on this, I made reference to the incident in Exodus. I was asked a question, and so I want to answer it tonight for all of us.

Exodus 3:13: “And Moses said to God... [this is in response to God saying, ‘Go to Pharaoh, tell them to let my people go.’] ...*And Moses says, ‘...Behold, when I come to the children of Israel, and shall say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they shall say to me, ‘What is His name?’.... [Who is He?] ...What shall I say to them?’*”

Verse 14: “And God said to Moses, ‘I AM THAT I AM.’ And He said, ‘Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”

This phrase is three Hebrew words: ‘Hayah, asher, Hayah’ and is traditionally translated, *I AM that I AM*, but it is so much more than that.

Hebrew, as I’ve tried to explain, is a very compact language, and there’s so much that is just put in a few words. It could take almost a volume sometimes to explain what the words mean. So, I went on and tried to put it like this, “I AM that I AM” really means in totality, *‘I was what I Was, I AM what I AM, I will be what I will be.’* So, a person wrote me and said, ‘But it doesn’t say that. It just says “I AM that I AM.”

The answer is true. We have to understand what is compacted in that Hebrew phrase. This is saying, ‘I AM *the* I AM, I AM the Being One.’

So, if you want the full understanding of it, it would go like this:

I was what I was in the way or manner that I was what I was. I AM what I AM today in the manner that I AM what I AM. And further, I will be what I will be in the manner that I will be what I will be.

That is all encompassing, and I thought, well, maybe I could get some confirmation of that because that was my understanding of the Hebrew. So, I decided to check out my handy-dandy little copy of Dr. Everett Fox’s Schocken Bible, which I happen to have right here. Many of you also have your copy of it. But read how Dr. Fox translates it. He just uses the future, but this is how he puts it:

‘I will be there, howsoever I will be there,’ which is the same thing. *God is the Being One. He has no beginning, no middle, no ending!*

I bought a book one time and it was written by a third grade teacher who just was bemused and befuddled by some of the things that his third graders were saying. So, he had to write them up,

put them in a book, and was a best seller. For example, be ready for some humor:

- Rigor mortis—Do you know what rigor mortis is? *That’s what you sit in after you’re dead!* You didn’t know that, but a third grader did.
- Noah Webster: a Biblical king who ‘R-A-I-N-E-D, for 40 days and 40 nights.
- Another third grader was asked about eternity: How long eternity? The 3rd grader thought, and he replied, *forever and ever, and maybe even longer!*

Now, I like the *‘and maybe even longer.’* But that’s right. He is the Being One. When you realize that, you realize how all-encompassing God really is.

Now, let’s take a look at our first Church: Revelation 2:1: “**To the angel** of the Ephesian Church, write...”

I think we may have to think of this like we think of messengers in terms of Hebrew. There’s a Hebrew word for messenger, which is ‘malak’, or ‘malakim’ in plural. It could be literal spirit beings, or it could be humans. Because a messenger can be a human, or a messenger can be a spirit being. It is said that Jacob sent messengers to Esau. Well, obviously, they were human. They weren’t angels.

And then it also says, ‘...and Jacob saw the ‘malakim’ of God,’ you know, the ascending and descending a ladder. Those were spirit beings. So, when it talks about here, “...the angel of the Ephesian Church...” I suspect he’s talking about a physical leader. Perhaps the one who’s in charge of the congregation, or maybe several congregations there in Ephesus.

Now before we go into what God said in the message, let’s take a little look about Ephesus. Ephesus was a remarkable city. I want to make sure I get my facts straight here. It was a jewel of the Roman Empire. Caesar Augustus in the year 27_{B.C.} moved the proconsulship to Ephesus.

Not every city had a proconsulship, so Ephesus was a very important city. It was also a wealthy city. If you’ve ever seen that section of Asia Minor, which is western Turkey, it’s near the coast in the trade route and was immensely wealthy.

There were about 150,000 people living in Ephesus. That’s a lot of people in that day and age. And Strabo, the great Roman historian and geographer, known as a person that he said that Ephesus was ‘a city second only to Rome itself.’ Now, that is a tribute coming from Strabo.

Ephesus was also a religious institution. The city itself was a religious institution like many of the other Greek cities. They were protectors of the cult

of Artemis, also known as Diana. (We're going to read about that in Acts 19 in just a few minutes.) The Great is Diana of the Ephesians.

Remember that in those days, *no such thing as separation of church and state*; did not exist! You were either a devotee and one who honored Ephesus or you were not. And if you were not, to use the old expression, *God help you!* After all, Ephesus was bound to protect and honor those who honored Diana. If you didn't honor her, you were a traitor.

It was very, very difficult for God's people, the Gentiles who lived in Asia Minor in these Greek cities. The Jews did not have to worry, because they had special privileges coming down from the days of Caesar Augustus, and they could have their own system, their own method of doing things, their own slaughterhouses, which is one reason why you've heard about how Jews wouldn't eat with Gentiles.

Well, that's not quite right. They would eat with Gentiles in *their* home. Why? *Because they would slaughter the meat correctly!* Nothing would be strangled. The animal would be properly bled. Its throat slit properly. So, they knew that the rules of slaughtering animals was intact.

But when they went to a Gentile's home, they had no idea what they were getting. So, no way would they eat with a Gentile in a Gentile's home. That's just the way it was.

Anyway, these individual members of God's Church had it rough; they had it tough. So let us now look a little at the cyst in the book of Acts. Paul founded this Church. He founded a number of churches, as we know.

Acts 19:1: "Now, it came to pass *that* while Apollos was in Corinth, Paul traveled through the upper parts *and* came to Ephesus..." *So, Paul is in Ephesus!*

There he met a group of people who had been baptized by John the baptizer—John the Baptist—but they hadn't received God's Spirit because they hadn't been actually baptized unto the Spirit. So, Paul baptized them and look what happened.

Verse 5: "And after hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. Now, when Paul laid *his* hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with *other* languages and prophesied" (vs 5-6).

Verse 8: "Then he entered into the synagogue *and* spoke boldly for three months..."

There was a lot of opposition, so Paul withdrew.

Verses 26: "And you see and hear that not only in Ephesus, but almost all of Asia, this Paul... [he was getting opposition] ...has persuaded a great multitude to turn away, saying that they are not gods, which are made by hands." *Paul's a troublemaker. Oh, he is.*

Verse 27: "Now, not only is our business in danger of coming into disrepute, but also the temple of the great goddess Diana, whom all Asia and the world worship, is in danger of being regarded as nothing, and her majesty also is about to be destroyed."

That temple of Artemis in Ephesus was so magnificent, it was considered one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. I don't remember all of them, but you had:

- the Colossus of Rhodes
- the Great Pyramid in Giza
- the Hanging Gardens of Babylon
- the Temple of Artemis, also known as Diana,

depending upon whether you're using the Greek name or whether you're using the Roman name!

Verse 34: "But when they recognized that he was a Jew, there was a unified shout from all for about *the space of* two hours *as* they cried out, 'Great *is* Diana of the Ephesians!'" Paul spent about two years, it specifically says:

Verse 10: "And **this took place for two years**, so that all those who inhabited Asia heard the message of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks." *Actually he spent close to three years there.* This is interesting because it's 54-57_{A.D.}

The book of Revelation, as far as we can tell, was compiled and finished for the end of the first century, 96-98. I use that because Jesus talks about the works, as we'll see the works of those Churches.

How long a period of time is he talking about? Well I'm going to use a little, get personal here, but both Fred Coulter, Durrell Brown and I were—all three of us—students at Ambassador College in the early to mid 1960s. I'm using 1964 as the date for two reasons:

1. nostalgia, Fred and I both graduated in 1964
2. it's easy to traverse according to decade, 64, 74, 84, 94, cleared out to 2024—that's 60 years!

But when John was recording Revelation, he wrote down what Jesus said, 'I know your works...' but those works are over a period of 40 years! So, we can get a feel of what was happening during those 40 years.

All right, now let us look at the first letter to the Ephesians. And that's about as far as we'll get. But let's look at it closely and let's not take anything for granted. What does Jesus say?

Revelation 2:1: "To the angel of the Ephesian church, write: 'These things says He Who holds the seven stars in His right hand, Who walks in *the* midst of the seven golden lampstands.'"

This is an example of how he explained, how you read the Bible:

- Do you read it figuratively?
- Do you read it literally?
- Do you read it literalistically?

No, we don't read it literalistically!

Jesus was not holding the seven stars, He's talking about angels; He wasn't holding seven angelic beings in one hand. It's not to be taken like that.

Verse 2: "I know your works... [remember those works were over a period of 40 years] ...and your labor, and your endurance, and that you cannot bear those who are evil; and *that* you did test those who proclaim *themselves* to be apostles, but are not, and did find them liars" *This is a glowing report. This is good!*

Verse 3: "And *that* you have borne *much* and have endured, and for My name's sake have labored and have not grown weary; nevertheless, I have *this* against you, that you **have left your first love**. Therefore, remember from where you have fallen, and repent, and do the first works; for if *you* do not, I will come to you quickly; and I will remove your lampstand out of its place unless you repent. But this you have: **that you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate**" (vs 3-6).

We won't be able to go full bore into the Nicolaitans tonight, but we'll get partially there. What does it mean to **lose a first love**? *I have to admit that I am not 100% sure.* We can say that means that **they lost their zeal!** I mean, it was still God's Church, and they were fired up at first, but as the years went on, they did it more perfunctorily, perhaps more mechanically, but that's not what Jesus said. Let's read this closely:

- v 2: "I know your works..."
- v 5: "...do the first works..."

What Jesus is saying is that the Ephesians were doing something toward the beginning of when Paul was teaching them, but somehow sloughed off to the end. It wasn't that they lacked zeal, it was

something they weren't doing. But what was it? *Truth is, we don't know!*

It's like one minister said years ago, I'd like to say I came up with it, but I didn't, but it's true. He was talking about the apostles, he talked about the epistles, too. But in particular the Epistles of Paul, this minister said:

Remember, when you're reading the Epistles of Paul, and for that matter, James, Peter, John and Jude, here are these letters, and you're reading somebody else's mail.

We don't get it all! We're only getting one side of it. So we do have to be careful what conclusions we jump to.

It's like 1-Corinthians. In reality, we know that 1-Cor. is not really 1-Cor.; it may be 2-Cor., and 2-Cor. might be 3-Cor., because Paul says that 'as a result of what you asked me.' See, Paul had written them a previous letter. They responded by asking him some questions about what he said. So therefore, when we read 1-Cor., we're reading at least the second letter.

- What happened to the first letter?
- What happened to the letter that the Ephesians wrote to Paul?
- *We don't know!*

God decided not to preserve them! There was something in them we did not need to know, or maybe there was something in them that God did not want us to know. We can't be sure. But at any rate, we've got to be careful here.

*Jesus does say, v 6: "But this you have: **that you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.**"*

But that comes at the end. So overall the Church of Ephesus comes out with a pretty good report. Remember:

Verse 2: "I know your works, and your labor, and your endurance, and that you cannot bear those who are evil; and *that* you did test those who proclaim *themselves* to be apostles..."

Verse 3: "And *that* you have borne *much* and **have endured**... [they weren't slacking off] ...and for My name's sake have labored and have not grown weary."

So, it can't be that they're slacking off in praying to God or in zeal. But loves think they lost some conviction they were taking. I don't know if we'll ever know.

But it does say that they "...hate the works of the Nicolaitans..." (v 6).

So let's start a little bit into the Nicolaitans. There were two groups, two different courses of action here. They weren't just one unified group.

One of the groups was that of growing in power. Nicolaitans comes from the Greek, 'nikolaites': for *power, dominant, one who rule, one who lords it over*, and has reference to the nascent beginning of the power structure in the Roman Catholic Church.

It was beginning in the first century, you did not have a powerful pope flanked by cardinals, archbishops, and so forth, but they were starting there.

So God hated the fact that here was a group of clergy growing in power, coming between Him and His people, dictating to them what they should do. That was one part of the Nicolaitans.

Now, there was a second part. But to understand them, we have to go to Pergamon.

Verse 14: "But I have a few things against you because you have there *those* who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit fornication."

So, this has to do with food, but it has to do with immorality, as well.

The Nicolaitans, actually, the great Hebraist, John Lifeford, pointed out that really, it's written in Greek, comes from Hebrew and Aramaic.

And Nicolaitans means to eat, which means let us eaters be, referring to those who are eating all kinds of food: food strangled and food sacrificed to idols. Remember, 90-95% of all meats sold in the shambles or sold in the markets in these Greek cities had been sacrificed to pagan gods, almost all of them, except, of course, for the Jews; they had their own slaughterhouse, so they didn't have to worry about it, but the Christians did. He's talking about Balaam.

Acts 15:28—this is the final decision rendered by the Jerusalem Council. We'll go into more detail next week.

Acts 15:28: "For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us, to lay no further burden upon you than these necessary things: To abstain from things sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality..." (vs 28-29).

This was what the Nicolaitans were doing, because look back at Pergamon:

Revelation 2:14: "But I have a few things against you because you have there *those* who hold

the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel... [What were they doing?] ...to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit fornication."

This was going on among some of the congregations in Pergamon.

Now just before we close, I want to clarify a matter that some have wondered about. This has to do with the Balaam.

Remember that John the Baptist was delivering the message to the Church and he warned them, 'Hey, look at the people back in the days of Balaam and what he was doing and what he was teaching.'

Balaam was taught by God and he was taught that you don't go with them. Balaam figured, 'Okay, I'll try one more time with God; I'll try one more time.'

Numbers 22:8: "And he said to them, 'Stay here tonight, and I will bring you word again, as the LORD shall speak to me.' And the leaders of Moab stayed with Balaam."

Verse 12: "And God said to Balaam, 'You shall not go with them. You shall not curse the people, for they *are* blessed.' And Balaam rose up in the morning and said to the leaders of Balak, 'Go into your land, for the LORD refuses to let me go with you.' And the leaders of Moab rose up. And they went to Balak and said, 'Balaam refuses to come with us'" (vs 12-14).

Finally Balaam says—v 19: "“But please now stay here also this night so that I may know what more the LORD will say to me.’ And God came to Balaam at night and said to him, ‘If the men come to call you, rise up, go with them. But only the word which I shall say to you, that you shall do.’ And Balaam rose up in the morning and saddled his donkey, and went with the rulers of Moab” (vs 19-21).

God said, 'If they want you to go, go with them.' So the next morning he saddles up to go with them and God's anger was kindled because he went.

Well, wait a minute. Couldn't God make up His mind? He said the night before, 'If they say go, go with them...' Then when he went up to go with them, He was angry. Why? *God's not double-minded!* Yes, God makes up His mind. God knows what He's doing at all times.

Well, the key is when it says go with them, we're dealing with two separate Hebrew words and they don't all mean exactly the same thing.

So, God said, "...If the men come to call you, rise up, go with them..." *meaning*: 'Okay, go ahead, ride your donkey with them, and chit-chat with them; it's okay, go with them.' **But** when it says in:

Verse 21: "And Balaam rose up in the morning and saddled his donkey, and went with the rulers of Moab"—*this has a different connotation!*

This Hebrew word means *to be part of, to join them in their mission*, which was *to curse Israel!* God never authorized that. So, it looks as though God can't make up His mind, but, oh yes, **God can make up His mind!**

One means to go ahead, join them, talk to them. When it says Balaam went up to go with them, that meant *to be part and parcel and meant to join them in their mission*, which **God never authorized!**

We're going to come back next week and we're going to cover it in more detail on the Nicolaitans and on the other churches.

Hopefully was our introduction, and next week all the introductions will have been completed, so we'll get right into the meat of all the letters, looking at the background of all those cities and why God said certain things to them that he did, because of reference to what was going on in those cities.

So in the words of from the South, when I first went south of the Mason-Dixon Line, I went into a store and the clerk said, 'Hi, ya'all.' I looked around, 'ya'all—this is me. What do you mean, 'ya'?'

I finally realized that's an expression. But tonight in closing, I can literally say, 'Next week, ya'all come back for part three.'

Scriptural References:

- 1) Romans 1:17
- 2) Habakkuk 2:4
- 3) Hebrews 11:6
- 4) John 3:1-6
- 5) Genesis 2:15-16
- 6) Genesis 3:8-9
- 7) Numbers 12:5-8
- 8) Deuteronomy 4:32-33
- 9) Job 32:8
- 10) 1 Corinthians 2:7-12
- 11) John 6:44, 65
- 12) Isaiah 50:4
- 13) Zechariah 4:6
- 14) Revelation 1:1, 8
- 15) Exodus 3:13-14
- 16) Revelation 2:1
- 17) Acts 19:1, 5-6, 8, 26-27, 34-35, 10

- 18) Revelation 2:1-6, 14
- 19) Acts 15:28-29
- 20) Revelation 2:14
- 21) Numbers 22:8, 12-14, 19-21

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