

Pine Knoll Sabbath School Study Notes
First Quarter 2016: *Rebellion and Redemption*
Lesson 12 “The Church Militant”

Read for this week’s study

Revelation 2:1–7, Hosea 2:13, Revelation 2:8–17, Revelation 2:18–3:6, Isaiah 60:14, Revelation 3:14–22.

Memory Text

“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me” (Revelation 3:20, NKJV).

Lesson Outline from Adult Sabbath School Study Guide

- I. Introduction
- II. The Church at Ephesus
- III. Smyrna and Pergamum
- IV. Thyatira and Sardis
- V. The Church at Philadelphia
- VI. The Church at Laodicea
- VII. Further Study

Questions and Notes for Consideration

Facilitator: Daniel Duda

1. How prudent is it to talk about “the Church Militant” in the age of international terrorism inspired by religious convictions? What is generally meant by this historical label, going back to at least the 13th century?
2. The apostolic confession speaks about “the communion of saints” – which is about how the members of the Church are mutually supporting each other, though they may be physically separated by the barrier of death. Thus those Christians who are alive are part of the “church militant” that struggle against sin, flesh, the world, the devil and evil powers; while the “church triumphant” are those who have died and are already in heaven. (In Roman Catholic Theology, there is also “church expectant” comprising of those who are in purgatory and thus expect the resolution of their eternal status.)
3. The Handbook of SDA Theology defines the Adventist understanding this way: “While in this world the church is a militant church, daily engaged in the battles of its Lord, and in warfare against satanic agencies. Its members are in constant conflict

with the world, the flesh, and the powers of evil (Romans 7:15-23; Galatians 5:17; 1 Peter 5:8, 9; 1 John 5:4; cf. 1 John 4:4). If this side of the Lord's return the church is the militant church, the church of the New Jerusalem is the triumphant church. It is made up of faithful disciples and conquerors in this worldly battle. They have exchanged the sword for a palm of victory (Revelation 7:9) and the cross for a crown (2 Timothy 4:8; 1 Peter 5:4). The battle is over, the mission accomplished (Matthew 25:21, 23) and the redeemed, invited to the wedding feast of the Lamb (Revelation 19:9), eat and drink at Christ's table in His kingdom (Luke 22:28-30) and reign with Him for ever and ever (Revelation 22:5)."

4. [In this lesson,] "we shall concentrate only on his description of the seven churches. We shall study them from the perspective of the original recipients, in order to enable us to glean as much from his words as possible." (Sabbath afternoon)
5. "One challenge is that these churches are shown to be struggling with their identity, just as we are today. Are their members clearly lining up with Jesus and His calling to them toward witnessing to a dying world, or are they straddling both sides, trying to look like Christians but then privately being more comfortable with the powers of darkness?" (Sabbath afternoon) So what is the struggle, or the fighting all about?
6. Historically Adventists saw in these seven churches seven periods of Christian history (although there is no indication in the text for this). The lesson takes a different approach. "Though we see ourselves as the last of these churches, it will be clear that however different the circumstances, in many ways we face some of the same challenges that the churches faced through the ages." (Sabbath afternoon)
7. How can we see the forest and not just the trees? It is easy to get lost in details explaining each individual letter. It is important to notice that all the letters follow the same pattern. Each begins with a reminder of some aspect of the description of Jesus from chapter 1. They continue by commendation of what the church has been doing well (except Laodicea and Sardis); then a warning about what has been going badly (only Smyrna and Philadelphia have no admonitions). The letters then end with a solemn warning and promise: the Spirit is calling Christians (churches) to "conquer" and promising them some aspect of the glorious future which God has prepared.
8. We should not imagine that Christians in Ephesus are only promised the right to eat of the tree of life, or that those in Smyrna are only promised that they will escape the second death, and so on. All the promises and all the warnings are for all the churches.
9. Things to notice, if we do not want to miss the "forest": The description of Jesus at the beginning of each letter goes not only back to the vision of Jesus in chapter 1, but it is also connected with the situation of each particular church! (For Ephesus who lost its first love, Christ comes closer for a walk as a heavenly groom; for Sardis where there was persecution, Jesus is presented as one who holds them in His hands; for Philadelphia, which needs to pass through a door of opportunity, Jesus is presented as the One who has the key and opens that door! For Laodicea, known as

smug, self-sufficient, complacent and therefore self-deceiving, Jesus comes as a faithful witness who is going to tell them the truth about themselves, and is not going to trick them or allow any self-deception.)

10. The order of promises: God speaks to specific people with specific needs and He gives them specific promises. The promises are not only valuable individually, but also all together in their specific order. They deal with the consequences of sin (the biggest, final, immediate and permanent consequences) and how that devastation will be undone and the whole restored, but also about the process of that restoration (the way, the place and the goal of restoration).
11. If Jesus was writing His letter to the contemporary church in the 21st century, what would He say?
12. To the Church Which Seeks Seekers: These are the words of the Seeker after lost sheep and lost coins and prodigal sons and daughters: I love your heart for lost people. I love the way you think and risk and give and stop at nothing to let all persons know that they matter to me. That's the heart of a shepherd searching for lost sheep; a father longing for his lost son. I love your devotion to community. I love to see you gathered together in order to pray and learn and grow. I love how you want everyone to discover the gifts I've given them. I love to see your service to the church, to the city, to the whole world. I love your passion, your creativity, your desire to see the church flourish and prevail.
13. But I give you two warnings: First, never stop dreaming big dreams. The day you get content and sit on your laurels or begin to look backward is the day the dream begins to die. I have such great plans for you, if you will only trust me, and not stop dreaming.
14. Second, stay humble. Remember that I have said: Not by might, not by power, but by my Spirit. As you enjoy your season of extraordinary fruitfulness, remember that I also work in hidden and obscure places. Remember that my work is not ultimately about method or technique. Remember to cherish deep thought and careful study as well as bold action. Remember that what you do, you do through my strength and in my name. So stay humble. To the one who overcomes, I will give a place in that community where finally all seekers will be one; where all that was lost will be restored and the ultimate *at-one-ment* will reign eternally...

Thoughts from Graham Maxwell

By the 90's—what had gone wrong that Jesus had not yet returned? And besides this, there were heresies in the church. Some were even teaching that Christ had not really come in human form. He had not really suffered and really died. He had faked it all. They're called the *Docetists*, who taught He just pretended to do it. And then there was great opposition, and

serious persecution. The apostles were all dead, save one. And he was the elderly John, now a prisoner on the Isle of Patmos. What good news was there, to encourage the early Christians?

And you could count on God when things were that bleak, to send a message of encouragement and enlightenment and explanation to His people. He surely wouldn't send a book of mysteries and dates and schedules of events that they could not possibly understand. Rather, that sixty-sixth book that He did send, the book of Revelation (which means clarification, not mystification), that sixty-sixth book is an invitation to discouraged early Christians to look a little higher—to take the *larger view* of things. To see how they've all been caught up in a vast great controversy that affects the whole universe! And that it's a controversy over God's own character and government. And then to read on and see that God has already won this war and the angels all agree with Him. To see that this is the good news. And then to read on and realize that God is inviting *us* to join in the celebration; and then to go out to the world and invite all others who are willing to listen, to join in God's victory in the war. And then we Christians might not seem so much on the defensive all the time; we have good news to tell. There's no way God and His side can lose. And should we not *join the winning side*? Is the invitation in that sixty-sixth book?

And the book also says that you can count on God to wait until this truth about Him—this good news about His character and government—has been spread all over the world. Because God is the kind of person who will wait until His children have had an opportunity to understand the issues in the war; and to be ready for the awesome events the Bible describes as taking place before Jesus' return. To see and to present the plan of salvation in the larger setting of the great controversy over the character and government of God is, I believe, the highest privilege of God's friends on this planet today. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, Conversations About God, #1, "The Conflict in God's Family" recorded January, 1984, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link: <http://pkp.cc/1MMCAG>*

And I believe the way one reads that last book has a great deal to do with the effect that it has. It was not intended to be read chapter by chapter, and certainly not verse by verse. As you know, there were no chapters till around 1200 AD, and there were no verses until 1551 AD. So when this document arrived from the Isle of Patmos, perhaps to the church at Ephesus, which was the publication headquarters for the early Christian church, somebody stood up and read it out loud. And you might note, as you read through, in verse 3: "Blessed is he who reads", the words of the prophecy of this book? Do you have, perhaps, "reads out loud"? And that's the Greek word. "Blessed is he who reads aloud." And that's why Romans says "faith comes by hearing." You couldn't sit down and read the Bible. Who had a copy? So you had to listen while someone read it. So when this document arrived at the first church where it was read, the

believers heard it. They listened to it. Can you imagine taking the course in Daniel and Revelation, which many of you may have done through the years, without having a copy of it in front of you? It's all read out loud.

It might have one benefit. It would keep us from getting too involved in the details, and we might get the larger view! It was never intended that one should stop in the middle of the seven churches, or the seven trumpets, or the seven seals, or the seven plagues. One should never stop until one has read the description of the new earth in chapters 21 and 22. One always ends on an optimistic note, when reading it that way. And it also helps one put everything in perspective. If you would be willing to do it, or are able to do it, and have the time, if somebody else could read Revelation to you out loud, that would be reproducing the experience of the early Christians. Or if you have it on tape, perhaps, and you could listen to it.

The early Christians did not look at it the way we do and read it to themselves. They listened as someone else read the whole thing from beginning to end. And you couldn't say, "Wait a minute. Would you go back over the seven churches? We haven't got them dated yet." In fact, do you think the early Christians were concerned about dating the seven churches? Or dating many other things in the book of Revelation, which takes so much of our time? No. They wanted to carry on until they saw what John was driving at, and eventually, in chapter 12, there's the first mention in the whole Bible of the war up in heaven. Indeed, one gets the larger view from reading Revelation as a whole. So, as far as you're able to do that, it would be very valuable, I think. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, The Picture of God in all 66 – 1, 2, and 3 John and Jude, recorded August, 1982, Riverside, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links:*

<http://pkp.cc/77MMPOGIA66> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/78MMPOGIA66> (Part 2)

He says:

I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day [now we could stop and discuss that; "the Lord's day"], and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet saying, "Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea."

And the audience hearing this—can you imagine them looking around at each other because some of them were from Ephesus and some were from Smyrna and some from Pergamum, perhaps. At least they recognized all of these cities. They were well known cities where there were churches. They didn't think about periods to come and they didn't say, "Will you stop immediately please, you who are reading this document to us, would you please give us the periods and the dates that will be covered by each of these churches?" They didn't do it. They recognized themselves. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, The Picture of God in

all 66 – Revelation, recorded August, 1982, Riverside, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links:*

<http://pkp.cc/79MMPOGIA66> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/80MMPOGIA66> (Part 2)

So there follows in Revelation 2 and 3, messages to the seven churches. Periods to come? Or the churches right there and then? Wouldn't they assume this was talking about them? I think that is far more important than working out the periods. The *condition* represented by each of these. And we can identify ourselves. See, we think we are down in the Laodicean period. Does that mean that everybody now has to be a Laodicean? Could you be a Philadelphian in the Laodicean period? Does this mean that everybody who lived in Pergamum was like that? Not necessarily, it's that it was the prevalent state of mind in those particular places. We have rather felt that we've tended toward the experience described as being Laodicean. And we could spend the rest of the evening considering the significance of that and it would be time well worth spending. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, The Picture of God in all 66 – Revelation, recorded August, 1982, Riverside, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links:*

<http://pkp.cc/79MMPOGIA66> (Part 1) <http://pkp.cc/80MMPOGIA66> (Part 2)

Further Study with Ellen White

Christ alone was able to represent the Deity. . . . God Himself must be revealed to humanity. In order to do this, our Saviour clothed His divinity with humanity. He employed the human faculties, for only by adopting these could He be comprehended by humanity. Only humanity could reach humanity. He lived out the character of God through the human body which God had prepared for Him. {TMK 25.3}

Had Christ come in His divine form, humanity could not have endured the sight. The contrast would have been too painful, the glory too overwhelming. Humanity could not have endured the presence of one of the pure, bright angels from glory; therefore Christ took not on Him the nature of angels; He came in the likeness of men. {TMK 25.4}

God's work is the same in all time, although there are different degrees of development and different manifestations of His power, to meet the wants of men in the different ages. Beginning with the first gospel promise, and coming down through the patriarchal and Jewish ages, and even to the present time, there has been a gradual unfolding of the purposes of God in the plan of redemption. The Saviour typified in the rites and ceremonies of the Jewish law is the very same that is revealed in the gospel. The clouds that enveloped His divine form have rolled back; the mists and shades have disappeared; and Jesus, the world's Redeemer, stands revealed. He who proclaimed the law from Sinai, and delivered to Moses the precepts of the

ritual law, is the same that spoke the Sermon on the Mount. The great principles of love to God, which He set forth as the foundation of the law and the prophets, are only a reiteration of what He had spoken through Moses to the Hebrew people: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord: and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.” Deuteronomy 6:4, 5. “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” Leviticus 19:18. The teacher is the same in both dispensations. God’s claims are the same. The principles of His government are the same. For all proceed from Him “with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.” James 1:17. {PP 373.2}

When one surrenders to Christ, the mind is brought under the control of the law; but it is the royal law, which proclaims liberty to every captive. By becoming one with Christ, man is made free. Subjection to the will of Christ means restoration to perfect manhood. {MH 131.1}

Men will surely set up their laws to counterwork the laws of God. They will seek to compel the consciences of others, and in their zeal to enforce these laws they will oppress their fellow men. {DA 763.2}

At the beginning of the great controversy, the angels did not understand this. Had Satan and his host then been left to reap the full result of their sin, they would have perished; but it would not have been apparent to heavenly beings that this was the inevitable result of sin. A doubt of God’s goodness would have remained in their minds as evil seed, to produce its deadly fruit of sin and woe. {DA 764.2}

The law of God, from its very nature, is unchangeable. It is a revelation of the will and the character of its Author. God is love, and His law is love. Its two great principles are love to God and love to man. “Love is the fulfilling of the law.” Romans 13:10. The character of God is righteousness and truth; such is the nature of His law. Says the psalmist: “Thy law is the truth:” “all Thy commandments are righteousness.” Psalm 119:142, 172. And the apostle Paul declares: “The law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good.” Romans 7:12. Such a law, being an expression of the mind and will of God, must be as enduring as its Author. {GC 467.1}

There was but one hope for the human race—that into this mass of discordant and corrupting elements might be cast a new leaven; that there might be brought to mankind the power of a new life; that the knowledge of God might be restored to the world. {Ed 76.1}

Christ came to restore this knowledge. He came to set aside the false teaching by which those who claimed to know God had misrepresented Him. He came to manifest the nature of His law, to reveal in His own character the beauty of holiness. {Ed 76.2}

Christ came to the world with the accumulated love of eternity. Sweeping away the exactions which had encumbered the law of God, He showed that the law is a law of love, an expression of the Divine Goodness. He showed that in obedience to its principles is involved the happiness

of mankind, and with it the stability, the very foundation and framework, of human society. {Ed 76.3}

So far from making arbitrary requirements, God's law is given to men as a hedge, a shield. Whoever accepts its principles is preserved from evil. Fidelity to God involves fidelity to man. Thus the law guards the rights, the individuality, of every human being. It restrains the superior from oppression, and the subordinate from disobedience. It ensures man's well-being, both for this world and for the world to come. To the obedient it is the pledge of eternal life, for it expresses the principles that endure forever. {Ed 76.4}

Christ came to demonstrate the value of the divine principles by revealing their power for the regeneration of humanity. He came to teach how these principles are to be developed and applied. {Ed 77.1}

God has bound our hearts to Him by unnumbered tokens in heaven and in earth. Through the things of nature, and the deepest and tenderest earthly ties that human hearts can know, He has sought to reveal Himself to us. Yet these but imperfectly represent His love. Though all these evidences have been given, the enemy of good blinded the minds of men, so that they looked upon God with fear; they thought of Him as severe and unforgiving. Satan led men to conceive of God as a being whose chief attribute is stern justice,—one who is a severe judge, a harsh, exacting creditor. He pictured the Creator as a being who is watching with jealous eye to discern the errors and mistakes of men, that He may visit judgments upon them. It was to remove this dark shadow, by revealing to the world the infinite love of God, that Jesus came to live among men. {SC 10.3}

In Isaiah's day the spiritual understanding of mankind was dark through misapprehension of God. Long had Satan sought to lead men to look upon their Creator as the author of sin and suffering and death. Those whom he had thus deceived, imagined that God was hard and exacting. They regarded Him as watching to denounce and condemn, unwilling to receive the sinner so long as there was a legal excuse for not helping him. The law of love by which heaven is ruled had been misrepresented by the archdeceiver as a restriction upon men's happiness, a burdensome yoke from which they should be glad to escape. He declared that its precepts could not be obeyed and that the penalties of transgression were bestowed arbitrarily. {PK 311.1}