

## I. The Importance of Sevens in the Bible

We started our first sevens in the book of Revelation. As you are well aware, we have been coming through the system of sevens in the Bible, and I showed you how the whole Bible lays itself out, built around that structure. Over 800 times in the Old Testament, after Genesis 2, you find where God tells you that the number seven is going to be key to your Bible.

We have gone through a lot of different things, and we still have some to go through, but I wanted to show you now that you have got your feet wet, how these sevens actually break down books of the Bible. The greatest book that it does this for is the book of Revelation. So we started talking about that last week and got an introduction to you. This is why it is so important for you and for me.

I gave you that great verse in Job 24:1 that talks about finding God's footsteps. It talks about why, as God's people, we do not know where God has been and what God is doing. I think that is probably one of the greatest questions asked throughout the Bible. A long time ago, I saw the importance of the questions in the Word of God. When God wrote the Bible, He did not just write it like somebody writes a novel or a book, even a book on history. Everything in that Bible is there for a reason. When you come through and you lay it out and you study it, you find that God wants us to know what He is doing.

I find a great cloud of confusion in God's people's minds today about where they are at with the Lord. We are about ready to start the book of Numbers in our little groups of coming through the books of the Bible. The book of Numbers is a great book. I had my first group the other night, and I have about eight or nine more groups to do, but I told them that the greatest thing about the book of Numbers that it shows me is that in the book of Numbers, the children of Israel are numbered for war. They are getting ready to face the opposition before they get into the Promised Land.

I told them that the greatest thing the book of Numbers has always done for me is it showed me why 99% of God's people will never in their lifetime do anything effective for the Lord Jesus Christ. That is a tragic statement, taking an understanding that God saved you for a purpose. When you took God's salvation, you took it in a contract deal that you were going to let Him save you and give your life to Him. Now we find in the day and age that we live in today, God's people reneging on the deal. They take the salvation from God, but when it comes to doing something for God, it is another whole story. That is what I think the book of Numbers does for me more than anything else. It shows me in this world called Christianity why many of God's people, most of God's people, will never do what they need to do.

Now I know that in this church, we are the exception to that rule, and I really mean that. I believe, just like I told you last week, where God, I think the different churches in the book of Revelation, lay out the different personalities of churches. I also believe that what God does is He groups some people together who really want to do what is right, and He will band those

folks together for the purpose of getting it done. If He just sprinkled 10 people in a church of 500 and three people in a church of 300, it would never get done. So I really believe that God concentrates in certain churches, all based on that church and the pastor's attitude toward the Word of God. I believe that He will concentrate people into those things, that in these last days, He will give you an abundance of people that will want to do what is right and want to stand for the Word of God.

I think that one of the things that we have to get down as a church, if you are ever going to really be used of God in any way, shape, or form, you are going to have to be able to find God's footsteps, not in your own life, but in the history of Christianity and where God is going.

## II. Daniel and Revelation: God's GPS System

I told you last week that the two key books in the Bible that really kind of go hand in hand are the book of Daniel and the book of Revelation. That is so true. The book of Daniel lays out for us what is commonly called in the Bible, and you find this in Luke 21:24, a thing called the "times of the Gentiles."

When you start coming through the Bible, you will find phrases like this, and most of God's people have no idea. Of course, in our time in the study from Thursday night and Sunday morning and our one-on-one time, this is what we want to do. We want to answer these unanswerable questions for you so you have a being able to put it together.

The times of the Gentiles, very frankly, is just when God begins to deal and rule the world through Gentile nations after the demise of the nation of Israel. If you want to go back on a calendar, it would be when Nebuchadnezzar comes down and destroys the nation of Israel in 606 BC. The times of the Gentiles started in 606 BC, and we are still living in the times of the Gentiles today. The times of the Gentiles started in 606 BC and run up to the rapture of the church, and the book of Daniel covers that period of time.

Now remember, God wants you and I to know His footsteps. I said it a couple of weeks ago, if you do not know where you have come from as a child of God, then you are going to have trouble figuring out where you are going as a child of God. If you do not know where you have been and you do not know where you are going, please do not kid me that you know where you are at.

I told you that the Bible is your GPS system. I use that terminology; everybody understands it. You can buy them in your cars now, you can buy them handheld. They will tell you where you are at any place on planet Earth within 12 inches. It is incredible technology. But long before man ever put satellites up to give you a GPS positioning on Earth, God gave you a book called the Bible, which is your GPS positioning in the spiritual world, and it shows you exactly where you are at. I am trying to show you how to work your GPS. This one is a lot easier than the one you will buy, trust me.

The book of Daniel covers that period of time. For most of you that do not know the book of Daniel, let me just give you a brief overview of it because it is very important. Daniel and his

three friends are taken captive. He is taken captive at the beginning of the times of the Gentiles. He is taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar, and he is taken captive right at 606 BC at the start of the times of the Gentiles. So, in the book of Daniel, if you remember that, then Daniel lays out to us what the times of the Gentiles are going to be all about.

Daniel, the book of Daniel, shows us every Gentile kingdom that is going to be on this planet from 606 BC right up to the Antichrist and the Second Coming of Christ. You know why? Because God wants you and I as a New Testament believer living in 2006 AD to find God's footsteps. That is why, because it is important for you and I to know this, because if we do not, we will never accomplish what God wants us to accomplish.

Now I understand that you are all in different stages of spiritual growth. I realize that, and I understand that many of you have been around for a while; you have a good handle on the Bible. Many of you are grasping the truth; we are meeting on a weekly basis, and you are growing. Many of you have just come in, and you are still in the discipleship mode; you are learning. I do not care where you are at. I will get you to where you need to be if you just follow the plan that God has enacted for us of laying out the Word of God.

Nebuchadnezzar has a dream in Daniel 2, and in that dream, he sees this great image, and he is confused about this dream. He has no idea what it is. In fact, it frightens him. He calls all the great magicians and all the great wise men of Babylon, which is a type of the world, to try to figure out what this image is, and none of them can do it. The king is really kind of upset because he has been very much disturbed by this image, this dream he had, and he wants to know what significance it has in his life. He is kind of put out that all the great wisdom of his kingdom, Babylon, cannot find the answer.

Well, somebody says, "Hey, King, we got a guy down here named Daniel, and he is a pretty sharp kid, and I think he probably can figure this thing out." So they get Daniel and they bring Daniel in before the king, and Daniel tells the king what the dream and the interpretation of the dream, as far as this image is concerned.

Now let me stop there for a moment, and I will put it all that much in perspective for you. That is a picture of what God wants you and I to be able to do versus the world. The greatest advantage that you and I should have as Christians is that we have the answers that the world does not have, and God wants to use you. Many of you work in an office, some of you work at home, some of you work in factories, some of you work in all kinds of scenarios. Maybe you have your own business, some of you do not. But no matter what, God wants to use you where you are at, and God wants to put you in the same scenario if you can just see this thing for what it is.

Forget Nebuchadnezzar is the king of Babylon. Forget Daniel as a captive of the nation of Israel. Put it into a modern day. Babylon is a type of the world. Nebuchadnezzar is a picture of people out there that are afraid of what is going on, that have heard things and see things but do not understand them. You, Daniel, are a picture of you and me, God putting us into that scenario that you can say, "Hey, look, this is what is really going on." That is the picture.

All the king's men had no answer for the king, and you will not find the answer in Bill O'Reilly. You will not find the answer on Rush Limbaugh. You will not find the answer on CNN, CBS, Fox News, ABC, NBC, XYZ. You will not find it there. All the wise men in the world will not come up with what is going on. It is going to take somebody like Daniel.

Let me just say this too while I am here. When Daniel came into the nation of Babylon as a captive in Daniel 1, and this is a great chapter, and every young man and young lady in here that is single ought to read that chapter, but mom and dad, you need to read it too. It has a couple of different applications to it. But the first thing the king tried to do was to get Daniel and the three Hebrew children to eat all the junk from Babylon. In fact, he prepared a daily portion that he wanted them to eat. Now that is a picture of the world serving up for you every day of your life what they want you to believe and what they want you to buy into.

Daniel and the Hebrew children refused to do that. They said, "No, we are not going to do that." In fact, Daniel said, "Let's put it to the test. You give your guys a period of time and feed them all the junk you want. Let us eat what we eat as Hebrew children." By the way, when you go back there, everything they ate is a type of the Word of God in the Bible. At the end of a period of time, let's see who is better. You know what the Bible says? At the end of that period of time, they brought them together, and Daniel and the Hebrew children, who had simply had a diet of the Word of God, the Bible says were 10 times better than all the rest that the king of Babylon had to do. 10 times better!

I will make you, by the grace of God, not because of me, but I can make you 10 times smarter, better, more efficient than anybody out there, no matter what they are doing and what they are saying, if you will just get the Word of God into your life. That is how it works. We can take this whole thing of Daniel and put it right down where we are at in 2006. This whole book of Daniel shows us what we are up against, and this is why it is so important to learn the footsteps of God. I am going to drive Job 24:1 into your brains. If I do not get anything else done, I mean, if you get killed in a car wreck out there in some place, the last breath, the last thing you are going to say is Job 24:1. I am going to infuse it into your mind, the importance of finding God's footsteps, the importance of understanding the days of the Almighty.

They have this dream, and Daniel finally comes up, and he interprets the dream in Daniel 2. Daniel alone is the only one that tells the dream. This is where the great parallels come in between Daniel and John, who wrote the book of Revelation, because the parallels show that just as God revealed the times of the Gentiles and the footsteps of the Almighty to Daniel, and just as God through His Spirit revealed the end times and everything historically, in the present, in the future to John, He will reveal it to you and I. That is my goal for you. It is not going to be easy. It is going to require a lot of work on your part, but you know what? Those of you who want to learn it will learn it.

In Daniel 2, we have the picture of Daniel's image, a gigantic beast. When you come down through there, the Bible says that his head is the head of gold, his breast and his arms are of silver. The Bible talks about his belly and his thighs being like brass, his legs being like iron, and his feet being like iron mingled with clay. Nebuchadnezzar does not understand this, and Daniel,

because of his wisdom in the Word of God, he immediately sees through the Holy Spirit of God exactly what God is showing him here. So he begins to say to Nebuchadnezzar, "Nebuchadnezzar, what you have here in this beast are the kingdoms of the Gentiles that are going to run down through history right up to the Second Coming of Christ."

So he begins, and he says, "O King Nebuchadnezzar, you are the head of gold." The time frame at this point is 606 BC. He says, "You are the head of gold, but after you, another kingdom is going to arise, and it is going to be a kingdom of silver, brass, in the breast and the arms, silver in the breast and the arm." That is going to be Persia. Persia defeats Babylon about 536 BC, and Persia becomes the Gentile power that is going to run the world.

Then the next kingdom, he says, is brass, the belly and the thighs. He says that is going to arise after Persia, and that is going to take over the world, and we know that as in 330 BC, Alexander the Great through Greece. Then he says the iron legs. The iron legs are going to be the Roman Empire. In about 100 BC, the Romans defeat the Greeks, and Rome now becomes the great power. Then he says the feet are going to be the kingdom of the Antichrist, and the kingdom of the Antichrist is going to bring in and usher in the end of that chapter, of chapter 2, the Second Coming of Christ.

### III. The Seven Churches and Church History

Now the book of Revelation 1, 2, and 3, where we are at on the seven churches, fills the gap between the iron legs of Rome and the iron feet and clay of the Antichrist. This is found in Revelation 17 and 18 and described as "Babylon mystery religion, the mother of harlots." Notice you have a Babylon in Daniel and you have a Babylon in the end of Revelation. This is Revelation 1, 2, and 3, and the study of the seven churches. What we are getting through the seven church study is exactly the time frame we have to understand what goes on in that time period from when Rome comes into power.

You notice there is no other kingdom between the Roman kingdom and the Antichrist kingdom. There is a reason for that, and that reason is found in the study of the Babylon mystery religion, the mother of harlots, Revelation 17 and 18. But the inside material that we are about to study is found in the study of the seven churches. They bridge that gap, and it is an incredible story.

We saw last week, the book of Revelation picks up the story there in 50-60 AD and then takes you through history right up to 2006, where you and I are at today, and it gives us an understanding of why things are the way they are. I want to tell you something, my job in doing this is twofold: one, I want to show you the next structure of sevens, but I want to clear up a lot of confusion in your life. I do not want you walking around where you work and in your families and in your own personal life not having the ability to see things as it is in focus, because without this thing in Revelation, it is really confusing. It is really confusing. I will show you what I mean.

In history, you have all the different churches, all the different denominations, and all the different religions, and I will tell you what, it is absolutely confusing. You have a group over here called Catholics, and then adjacent to them, you have a group over here called Protestants. The Protestants would be the Presbyterian, the Anglicans, the Church of England, the

Episcopalian, the Methodist, the Greek Orthodox, and the Russian Orthodox. I mean, look at that list. Now we have to ask ourselves, how did they all come into being? In the book of Acts, did they just say, "Okay, you guys be Methodists, you guys be Presbyterian, you guys be Church of England, you guys be Catholic?" Is that how it happened?

It even gets worse than that as you come down through time in our own world today. In our own world today, you walk down the street, drive down the street, drive to any town, on every corner, you know what you will see? You will see Nazarene churches, Bible churches, community churches, Pentecostal churches, charismatic churches, Assembly of God churches, Church of God, and they are all denominational, non-denominational churches. Now where did they come from? You do not find them back in when you find the Presbyterian, the Anglican, Lutherans, and all the rest of them. Where did they come from? How did they get in here?

Then on top of that, you drive around town, you know what else you find? You find what we commonly call the cult churches. You find the Mormon, the Jehovah's Witness, the Seventh-Day group, the Church of Christ, the Unity, the Christian Science. Where did they come from?

Then last but certainly not least, you have the Baptist churches, and they are their own brand of lunacy. I mean, you drive down the street, you have Southern Baptist. Southern Baptists, if you go to any town, I will give you a clue, they will always be the First Baptist Church. Any time you find a church, First Baptist Church, it is a Southern Baptist Church. There is a history of that, but that is just a little clue. You walk into town, you tell me, "Well, I am a member of the First Baptist Church." You ever wonder why there is not a Second Baptist Church? Does that ever bother you? Because nobody wants to be second.

You see, right out of the back, "Hi, two pastors. Hi, what's your name?" "Pam." "My name is Bob. I am pastor of the First Baptist Church." "Hi, your name was what?" "I am pastor of the Second Baptist Church." Which one are you going to go to? You want to be second, Pam? Do you want to be second? No, do not get spiritual on me, Pam, just play along with my role here. I do not need anybody who knows the Bible here. You want to be first, then you are going to go to First Baptist. That is how it works. That is what I do. I would automatically think, "Well, if you are first and you are second, why would I want to go second best when I can have first?" That is why nobody in this town will call their church, "We are the Second Baptist Church." No, they always make it something else. I can just see it. I am, "We are the 25th Baptist Church." Nobody would go to it. The pastor would not even show up. He would go to the First Baptist Church.

Then you have a group called the GARBs. That is called the General Association of Regular Baptists. That is a group. Then you have a group called the American Baptist. Then you have a group called Independent Baptist. Then you have a group called Fundamental Baptist. Then you have some that are Freewill Baptist. There is nothing free there, but it is just in the word. Where did it all come from? This is what the average person is faced with. The average person is faced with churches today that is very confusing. It is absolutely, and when you try to find some rhyme or reason to it, there is no rhyme or reason to it.

Let me show you what I mean. It even gets more confusing. You would ride the church down here, and you go down here, and there is a church building over here, there is a church building

over here, and some of them would look just plain Jane, some of them look like the Taj Mahal, somewhere in between. I am not fighting it. We do not have a church building as such. We rent this place, but maybe at some point we will. I do not know. I am not against that. I am not against any of this. I am just saying, here is the problem: you do not find any place in the New Testament anywhere where anybody was told to build a church building. Now what do you do with that?

I am not saying it is wrong. Now do not get me wrong, I am not one of these snake handlers that want to meet in a tent. It is too cold in the wintertime, too hot in the summer. I am just showing you what the issue is here. It is confusing. Somebody says, "We got a great church building." Where in the Bible do you find anybody is told to build a church building? I am not saying you should not have one.

I will tell you something else. There is no, you do not find any place in, you have churches around here that they say, "Oh, they got a beautiful choir." I defy you to show me one place in the New Testament anywhere where any pastor, and there is a number of pastors listening to New Testament, First and Second Timothy. First and Second Timothy were the instructions explicitly by Paul, the guy who started it all, to a young man who was the first pastor listed in the Bible in detail, and he is told the instructions. Nowhere in there is he supposed to set up a building or a choir. Why do we have them? I am not fighting it. I think they are beautiful. I am just saying, where does it come from?

You know about churches, you see their sign, "Sunday school starts at 9:30, church at 10:30." Now we do not have a Sunday school. I am not saying we will not at some point. I am not against it. We do not have one because I am this guy over here and said, "Well, I ain't having a Sunday school." No, we just at this particular point, we do not need one. I am not saying down the line we will not need one. But I will tell you this, when the church starts in Acts, you do not find Sunday schools coming into place till 17 centuries later. Why is that? How can something so important seemingly today in churches not be important for 17 centuries in the history of the church? That is all I am saying.

In 1 Timothy 5, the church is told to take care of the widows. You know what that means? That means when a woman falls into the parameters given in the New Testament as a widow, and she falls into the guidelines, that the church is supposed to take her in and supposed to support her and pay for her needs and to take her in and to take care of her. Do you find any church doing that today? Why not? It is in the Bible, is it not? It is amazing how the things that are not in the Bible we find okay to do, but the things that are in the Bible we just do not do. I am not fighting it. I am just pointing it out.

Now when you come up and you grow up in most churches, and you feel the call to preach, and you feel the call to do something for God, you know what? Pastor comes down and he says, "You know what? You need to go to Bible college, Mike. You want to use the Word of God. You can really learn the Word of God. Let me send you off to my favorite school because I am getting a kickback from you when everybody I send down there." So we have this idea, Bible colleges and seminaries that train young men for the ministry. I am not fighting it. I have been accused all my life of being anti-education. I am not anti-education, not anti-education at all. I just think that

salvation without, or education without salvation, equals damnation. That is all. But I am not against it.

But I will tell you this, you will be hard pressed to show me any place when this New Testament church started sending out, sending that first, the first mission. Where did the first, when the first missionary trip started in Acts 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, down through there, what college did they go to to get their missionary training? Not in there. Show me in the New Testament where any church, any place, anywhere, is supposed to put a school together, a seminary together, and then send their. I do not care. I am not fighting it. I am just saying, not in the Bible.

Now take your Bible and look at anywhere. I do not care, just open it up. You know what you have in your Bible? You have chapter and verse markings in your Bible. Where did they come from? The Greek and Hebrew when it was set up, they were not set up that way. Those chapter and verse markings do not show up in your Bible till around the 10th, 11th century. How did you get along without those before, and why did it show up then?

The world system recognizes two main breakdowns of religion as far as the world is concerned: one Catholic and one Protestant. Which one are you? All over the world today, the two in Christianity, the two most famous days of the year in religious worship are Christmas and Easter. One of them representing the birth of Christ, the other representing the death of Christ. How come in the New Testament there is not anybody told anywhere recognizing, having a service recognizing Easter or recognizing Christmas? You could not find that in any church on this planet till 300 years after Christ is dead.

I am not fighting it now. I am not a Jehovah's Witness that does not recognize Christmas. We have a Nativity scene in our house. We have a Christmas tree. I am not a Scrooge. I like getting gifts. Man size 33, 15 and a half large. Love your pastor week. I am all for it. I am not against it. I am not one of these guys that says, "Well, you have a Christmas tree, you are all dying and going to hell." No, I do not believe that at all. There are lots of people dying and going to hell, never have Christmas trees, especially Jehovah's Witnesses. But that is beside the point. I am just saying, why is that?

Now if you cannot answer those questions in great detail, and you cannot go to your Bible or go to the history of your Bible and the church and find the footsteps of the Almighty and answer those questions in detail, you are going to get confused in time if you do not learn. I promise you. You want to have some fun with some of your Christian friends who think you are an oddball? Just throw some of them questions at them and pin them to the mat, and we will find out a new definition of stupidity. God's people are famous for buying into things about God without ever finding out why they believe what they believe.

I do not want you that way. I am not interested in turning out clones. I am not interested in turning out people who do not think for themselves. I do not want you to go through life becoming like me. God knows one of me is enough in this world. I want you to be your own person, your own personality, given over to the Holy Spirit of God and the Word of God, and let God through you be everything He wants you to be. I want you to think for yourself because there may come a day that I may get off track. There may come a day that I may sneak in some

heresy. There may come a day that I may go off the deep end, and I may start, "I want you all to drink some punch in the back." I want you to be smart enough on your own, and just let me say this, and then I will apologize later, kick my butt out of here if I ever deviate from this book. That is what I want. I do not want you just patronizing me, then let me do whatever I want to do. I hold you accountable to the Word of God. As a member of this church, you need to hold me accountable as a member of this church. We are both accountable to the same book, and I never want you to be anything but a free thinker, and as long as it is based in the book, and as long as you can, it is what this church stands on as a Bible-believing church, then that is what it is going to be.

That is basically why the seven churches were given to you in the book of Revelation. It is your GPS positioning system in history. It is like if you are not a great football fan. I like football. I thought the Ohio State game yesterday was a great game. I am from Ohio, so I am somewhat of an Ohio State fan. Never been to a game, never been to a game, but I like, I enjoyed it. I like watching the Chiefs. I do not know at all about it. Some of you know much more about it than I do. I am the kind of guy that if I went to any football game, especially I like the Chiefs, I would enjoy it a lot more if I had a program because I do not know who anybody is. I hear all these names floating around, and I get an idea about them, but I do not know who they are. I guess a great, this Bo Schembechler died the other night. I tell the truth, I do not know who he was. Great, I believe that. I found that out, but I did not know who he was. I mean, and now I found out from watching a little bit of television last night that he was Michigan's coach for a number of years, great coach. But I am not even on those things right. When I go to a Chiefs game, I just see a bunch of guys running around there with numbers on it. Now you give me a program, then I get real personal because I can find out who the person is. I can find out his stats. I can find out where he went to school and find out all the things about him and find out how good he is, and they always give little profiles, and it just helped. Well, that is what the Bible does for you. It gives you the program of life to tell you who the players are. Just like you go to a football game and do not know anything about it, you do not know who the players are. When you do not know church history and you do not know how the Bible lays itself out, you see the Methodists, the Presbyterians, the Anglicans, the Baptists, and everybody. You know who the players are, and that is where the confusion comes in.

Now take your Bibles and turn over to Revelation 2:1, and let us start reading here our first church.

## IV. Prayer

Father, we thank You and praise You for all that You do. We love You. We thank You for the time that You have given us today. We will just come to You, Lord, this morning and ask You to, Father, help us in everything that we need to do today. We love You. We love Your Word. We believe it. Lord, I want to raise up in this church men and women that will simply love Your Word and believe Your Word and be everything that, Lord, they need to be for You. I do not want this church to be like the churches, Lord, that train up men and women that never do anything for God. I want this church to make a difference, and it will only make a difference as the people

make a difference, and they only make a difference as I make a difference. Lord, we are all in this boat together, and we need You today. Help everyone here that has any kind of attitude toward really serving You. Anyone here that has a spark in their heart that You can see, Father, wants to be effective for You. I pray, Lord, that You will touch their hearts with this, that You will help them invoke and begin to grasp all the things that we say to put their life in perspective, that they can see the footsteps of the Almighty. Lord, we will thank You and praise You in Jesus' name, for His sake, we ask You. Amen.

## V. The Church at Ephesus

Now Revelation 2:1, we have our first church. Allow me, if you would please, to read this for you. It says this:

*Revelation 2:1-7*

*> 1 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;*

*> 2 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:*

*> 3 And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted.*

*> 4 Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.*

*> 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.*

*> 6 But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.*

*> 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.*

Last week, I kind of laid the foundation for this, and remember, I showed you how the book of Acts fits into all this. I showed you that the last church that Paul makes a reference to in the book of Acts is in Acts 20, the church at Ephesus. In that great chapter, he basically says goodbye to the elders. It is a very moving time in Paul's life and their life. If you have a temperature on Paul's life and what he is doing, it is very, you can see the emotion that must have been into that farewell. Paul is getting ready to go down to Jerusalem. When he gets to Jerusalem, he gets into trouble. He winds up in prison. He finally gets shipped to Rome, and they kill him by the end of the book of Acts. So technically speaking, church history starts right here in Acts 20. The rest of the book is Paul's imprisonment.

I made the point that the last church Paul talks about is the church at Ephesus, and then the first church that John talks about is Ephesus, showing you the connection, and that is where we are at.

I told you that, and I gave you these already, but we will get them again as we go through, that each one of these seven periods of church history represent a period in the history of the church. John is pulled ahead, and he looks back, and he sees the church in the church history. The church at Ephesus would fit into about Acts 20, around 50 AD, somewhere in there, 55, maybe right up to about the 200 AD mark. These things are not exact, but they are just, they are periods. They overlap a little bit, but that is about where it would come to.

These names of these churches are very instructive. Each one has its own name, and the name means something, and they are very, very important and very, very instructive. The name Ephesus means "fully purposed." Now that carries with it a great concept. This church was fully purposed to do the job. It is the first church that is recorded in the New Testament after everything is up and running. It is the church that, it is God, when He closes out church history in the book of Acts, or really began church history and closed the book of Acts, this is where, this is the church that has the ball in their hand.

If we could liken church history in the book of Acts to a football game, the devil is the opposition. He is trying to stop the home run or the touchdown. The Holy Spirit of God is the quarterback, and the apostles are the blockers, and the church of Ephesus is the fullback, and the Holy Spirit of God snapped the ball and handed off to the church at Ephesus and said, "Run for the goal post." That is how it works. The devil out there tried to stop him and tackle him and keep him from getting that. Just that simple.

This church has everything that it needs, and when we see by chapter 2, some great things about this church.

1. First of all, it is a working church, and it has a labor for God in verse 2.
2. The second thing I see here, which is very good, is it is an intolerant church. It cannot stand them that are evil, but yet the Bible says that it was a patient church.

You know what this church has? It has a good balance. It is patient, but it is not intolerant. It is intolerant. It will let people get to the point where they work through some things, but it will not stand bad teaching, and it will not stand heresy to come in. It is an intolerant church.

We see by these passages that somebody is showing up in these churches early on, and we are going to see this in great detail a little bit. Somebody is showing up in these churches, and they are coming into the church services, much like today, and they are saying, "Oh, I was an apostle. I was an apostle. Yeah, I was an apostle. Oh, I was with the Lord, and I heard a lot of things He said, and I would like to get up and I would like to say some things that I learned from God." This church knew, because it was real close to the source, it knew what was real and it knew what was phony. The Bible said that this church is not politically correct. They do not care who is who or who is what. This church, as any church, are following the New Testament principles laid down as Paul wrote to the churches.

This church has somebody coming in, and they are saying, "Oh, I am an apostle. I am an apostle." And yet the church is following 1 Thessalonians 5:21, where it says, "Prove all things." They are not a gullible church. They are patient, but they are also intolerant, and they are not

gullible. They are not allowing somebody just to come in and say, "Well, I was an apostle," and they are stupid enough to say, "Well, then just come on up and tell us what you got." No, no, no. This church understands the great principle that I try to put into your hearts and minds every time we are together: the number one thing we have to guard as a church is the doctrine of this church, because you are going to see today, when the devil attacks it, that is where it goes.

I told you before, in all of my years in the ministry, I have never seen a church destroyed from the outside by the unsaved world. They are all destroyed from the inside by God's very own people. Remember the greatest opposition that Christ had at the first coming of Christ was not the Roman Empire. It was the scribes and the Pharisees that were leaders of His own religion. Remember those things. Those things will serve you well as you grow down through your years in the Lord.

This church does what 1 John 4:1 says. It tries the spirits because the Bible says not every spirit is of the Lord. Now let me tell you how this works. When you get saved, you have the Spirit of God. I have the Spirit of God. Good to see you today, by the way. Thank you for being here. When you get saved, you have the Spirit of God. Now I know you are saved. I know you are saved because when we talk, my Spirit of God bears witness with the Spirit of God that is in you. That is the way I know you are saved.

You know how when I used to go around the world and go to all these countries, I got into situations with people that I did not speak the language. I have been into Russia before, and I did not speak, I stayed with Russian families, and I did not know how to speak one word of Russian. Try to go in four days trying to figure out the word for bathroom in Russia. I wonder, I got a bad attitude about things. I have been in places where they spoke Spanish, where they spoke German. I stayed with German families, Spanish family. I did not speak one lick of English, and I did not speak one lick of their language. But the moment I met them, the moment we had any contact together, I could feel the Spirit of God in them, and the Spirit of God, because the Bible says that in Romans 8, that God's Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are the sons of God.

In many, many cases, when somebody gets up to start to say something or you meet somebody, you can tell if the spirits are kindred spirits, the same Spirit of the Lord. But not all of them are. I can tell by listening to a person when they get up and speak that what they are, if they are not, what they are saying is correct in the Bible from a doctrinal standpoint, that it, that does not, because the Spirit of God always lines up with the Word of God. When somebody says something that is not in the Word of God, then that spirit collides with the Word of God. If you are really in tune with God, it is just like rubbing your fingernails on a chalkboard. That is what this church did. They tried the spirit.

Then they did the other thing that Paul said in Romans 16:17. This is not popular today. They marked them that caused division. They had somebody come in, and they passed the word around, "Do not let this guy into your church. He is a troublemaker." This guy here, he is a heretic. He causes division. The Bible says down here, if you look down here, it says that they found somebody out to be a liar. They did not, they gave out names and telephone numbers and addresses on the liars. They had no business saying, "You know what? That is heresy. I am not

going to permit it. If you continue to teach it, you are a liar." They did not pull any punches. It is a good church. This church understands that its number one mission was to protect the doctrine of this church.

This church starts with the apostles. We see Paul, one of the apostles. He obviously started this church. We see Barnabas and Mark and the three missionary journeys coming out of this church. Around this period of time, after the apostles die off, as this church goes down through time, the apostles die off. The men that the apostles went to Christ, the men that they disciplined, the men that were taught by Paul, Barnabas, Timothy, the men that were there at the beginning who knew exactly what was right and what was wrong, those men carry on the church.

Now this is where another great problem comes in that you have to see and understand. The farther you get away from the original source of truth, the more chance error is going to creep in. This is what the lessons of church history teach us. In Ephesus, they are close to the hotbed. They are close to the source. Paul started this church. They have regular contact with him. There is no question about what is right or wrong. If there is a question, they call Paul on their cell phone and said, "Hey, Paul, we got a guy over here says he is an apostle. His name is Ralph Swartz. Was there a Ralph Swartz running around with you guys?" Now, 100 years later, there is nobody to call. There is nobody to call. So the Ralph Swartzes show up in great numbers. See the problem?

Now we stand here today at least 2,000 years removed from the original source, and what you see with everything that I showed you, that the confusion of God's people do not know today, is because from that point to this point, the farther we got from the original source, the more corrupt and polluted it became. That is the issue, and the only way you stay on track is to keep your GPS with you. Keep your position. Keep your position.

We have seen all down through the history now of all of this thing, and I gave it, some of you remember, I told you, I remember I told you this, we, in fact, we had a couple Sundays on this. I showed you, I showed you this, do you not remember? I came through the laws of the Bible, seven laws of the Bible, when I told you one of the laws was the law of human collapse. This is always in effect. The moment you put something in effect, it starts to degrade. Some of you this morning will get challenged by this message, and you will say, "Boy, I am going to really learn this, and I am going to really get this down, and I am going to really get this material." You know what? The moment you walk out of here, your best intentions are going to start to erode. Just the way it is.

I showed you last week how our founding fathers put the Bible and God into the Constitution, and we talked about that and showed you how the Bible impacts on all cultures, nations, and countries. As that thing went through, it got farther from the original source. It is true of everything. It is true of the book of Acts with the Bible, but it is also true when every movement starts. When this country got founded last week, it was founded on the principles of the Word of God. We are now 200 and some years removed from the original point source, and in that time, we have had a lot of things change. In that time, you will find that God has reintroduced Himself into this country in seven modes. We call it the seven great awakenings in America.

You will find all the cults like the Mormons and the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Seventh-Day guys and the Church of Christ and all that. The reason why you cannot find them anywhere before the 1800s is because it was a satanic induction that takes place every time God gave an intervention of the Holy Spirit of God in one of the greater awakenings in America. The devil counterfeited with one of the cults: Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, Seventh-Day Adventists, right on down the line. That is what he does. He always tries to counterfeit the real thing, and that is another thing you have to see. The devil will always counterfeit the real thing with something that is phony, and if you do not have the GPS system, you are going to get confused.

Paul makes a reference in 2 Corinthians 2:17. This is 57 AD. He is not even dead yet, 30 some years after Christ died on the cross. You know what he says? He says there is somebody already corrupting the Word of God in 57 AD. The devil did not lose any track on it. What the devil does is he floods the market. I told you Thursday night, somebody asked this question, and we talked about it a couple of Sundays ago, last Sunday, how that a little leaven leavens the whole lump. That leaven in your Bible is likened to bad doctrine. Somebody on Thursday night asked a question at Matthew 13, and I showed you how in that great parable, how that it was a picture of the devil taking false truth or error, heresy, and mixing it into the church like somebody takes a lump of dough and is going to make some bread, and they take leaven and mix it in, and it shows you that the mixing of bad doctrine is a picture of that.

Paul's greatest fear, he tells the church at Corinth in 2 Corinthians 11:3, he says:

*2 Corinthians 11:3*

*> But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.*

You see, God makes it easy. Man makes it complicated. That is how it works. God's original plan was so basic and so simple. It is the devil who added the confusion to it, and when you do not have your GPS positioning system to find out where you are at and in your program of who the players are, you get into trouble.

During this time of Ephesus, I will tell you what happens. The devil floods the market with counterfeit books of the Bible. Remember last year sometime, you always hear where they found the Gospel according to Judas. Down at the, down at the, not Liberty Memorial, down at the train station down there, Grand Central Station or whatever, Union Station, they got to have it. Not there already. It is coming, the Dead Sea Scrolls. I used to, I used to belong to these book places, you know, where you buy books for a buck. I mean, I do not know where they get them at. I mean, they are no-name books, and they, and you could buy a hundred books for 20 dollars, and you just, and I used to get some great books. I used to get books like, "All the Lost Books of the Bible That You Need to Know About." I got one one time, it had 57 gospels that were lost to history. I got one about all the men in the Bible and their stories that you never heard about. Incredible stuff.

My point is this, you could find anything you want because the devil flooded the market in this church period, in the first 20 years of Christianity. He flooded the market. There were gospels

flying everywhere. There was a Gospel of Mary, the Gospel of Agribus, the Gospel of Judas, the Gospel of this, the Gospel of that. Everybody had a gospel. There were all kinds of books running around. Everybody wrote a book, and everybody thought their books should be in the Bible. I mean, it was confusing then, except they are close to the source, and the point, because they were close to the source, they knew what books were in the Bible and what books were not. This church is trying the spirits. This church is trying those that say they are apostles and finding out they are liars. Oh yeah, this church did not miss a lick.

## VI. The First Love and the Nicolaitans

But with all of that, look at verse 4, chapter 2:

*Revelation 2:4*

*> Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.*

I guess that is probably the single most important verse in all of the Bible for the church, because what you have here in this first church period is what you begin to see where the confusion starts within the body of Christ. Yes, not unsaved people. I told you, the church has never been corrupted from the outside. It is always corrupted from the inside.

Within this church that was fully purposed to do the job, we find in verse 4, there are some people who leave the Bible. That is what it means when it says, "thou hast left thy first love." Your first love should be the Word of God. You say, "Well, my first love is Jesus." You would not even know there was a Jesus if you did not have a Bible. Our first love is your GPS system that tells you where you are at. Your first love is this book right here that God gave you that leads you through everything and keeps you close to the original source, even though you are 2,000 years from it. The devil will do everything in his power to get you to turn off your GPS, to lose your point source, and in this early church, we see the first deviation of saved, good, godly men who began to leave the clear, plain teachings of the Word of God and bring in something else. I am telling you, this is the single most important verse in all of the Bible to the church. You miss this, you miss it all.

It is no wonder the devil wants to mask the book of Revelation as non-importance to you and to me in an everyday sense. I have told you this before, I am going to tell it to you again, I am going to drive this into your brain. Matthew 4, the Lord Jesus Christ, without a doubt, is our greatest model and our greatest example of everything that we do. Remember I told you that yesterday on the phone, Christ, when you called me, asked me some questions in the Bible, when I told you, I said the Lord Jesus Christ was you. I said that too, was it not? Yeah, He was. He is the greatest model above everybody else. Paul is good, Timmy is great, they are all good. Jesus is number one because all the other ones had flaws in their lives, and I can learn a lot from them, but there is one man who took on the role model of a servant to His Father that is my exact, infallible example.

In Matthew 4, you have a picture of what happened to the church at Ephesus. The devil shows up to Christ, and he tries to get Christ to do something that is already recorded in the Bible a

different way. Those three things that the devil tempts Him with are found in the Word of God, and they are all issues concerning the coming of Christ. The devil wanted Him to get out of order and do them outside the structure of the Word of God. In other words, he wanted Christ to be, stay Christian, but just not be biblical anymore. He wanted Christ to stay spiritual, but just not be scriptural anymore. So the devil comes to Him in Matthew 4, and he tempts Him three times. Jesus never argues with him. He never calls for the exorcist. He never calls for, he never pulls out holy water. Never burns a crucifix into His forehead. He never gets garlic and hangs around His neck. He simply says, "It is written." The devil comes back at Him the second time, "Book, chapter, verse." The devil comes the third time, "Where at in the Bible does it say that?" The devil says, "I am done with you. I am out of here." That is called in Ephesians 4:27 as giving no place to the devil. That is what He did. That is what you and I have to do. That is what the church at Ephesus began not to do. When you begin to look at this, you begin to see that the devil wants to destroy the simplicity that is in Christ.

Now what you have is this, you have here the key to this is in verse 6. Look at this now. Here is where the trouble began. Here is where it starts, and it always will start.

#### *Revelation 2:6*

*> But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.*

Now let me talk to you about the Nicolaitans. The word Nicolaitan is a combination of two words: "Nico" means "to conquer," "Laos" means "the laity." It is a word that means within the church, the church leaders conquered the lay people. We see this in history of the rise of Gnosticism or the Gnostics. Do not get confused about that word. The word Gnostic or Gnosticism means that there is a man in your church that has a greater spiritual revelation from God than you could ever hope and possibly to have. That word means that within this church, if we were going to put Gnosticism into effect, here is what it would be: I would get up here and tell you that you hopeless individuals will never understand God. How fortunate you must be that God brought you into my presence today. Stay with me, and I will show you the way. Of course, you will never get where I am at. You will never be able to attain the truths that I have because I am a Gnostic. The word Gnostic means "knower, seer." I know things that you do not know. I see things that you do not see. I am glad you are here today, but do not ever hope to be like me. You will never get there, but you hang out with me, I will keep you informed. God speaks to me, I will tell you what He says. You give up reading your Bible, quit studying your Bible. You know what? It is worthless. You just come to me, and I will tell you everything you need to know. That is Gnosticism.

That is exactly what they began to do. Somebody started teaching that a bishop or a pastor was higher spiritually than his people. Let us face it, there are some people who like that. There are some people who like somebody else taking care of their religion for them, and Baptists are famous for it. Now if you want to see this thing on the flip side of where we are at today, do not tell me that in 99.9999% of the Baptist churches today are out there, forget everybody else, I will pick on our group, that Gnosticism is not alive and well, because you are told today if you do not know Greek and Hebrew, you will never figure out the Bible. The pastor stands up there,

titillating words that you do not understand, and then feeding you poor, stupid people what they mean so you will come back for more peanuts. Yes, he is probably as big and relevant, and he just goes off with all this gas. He is like the Goodyear blimp. He is just filled with hot air, and he wants to tell you everything you need to know. Everybody looks at him as saying, "Wow, you know what? Whatever he says goes." That is your first mistake in any church. It is not what I say that goes. It is what the book says that goes, because you take that position, and somebody will set you up royally.

The Gnostics are alive today. It started back there. It comes through history, and it is alive today, and you know what it winds up? It winds up the pastor being high up here like some king sitting on a throne, and everybody else out there just to do his will and bidding, and you pay for it. You pay for it. So when you go to take a church, here is what you look for. If you are a pastor, not only do you want a fat cat salary because your knowledge is just indispensable, you want a church to pay for your house, a nice house. We call it a parsonage now. Because the pastor has to do the pastor's work, he needs a car. Oh, not a Honda Accord. That is what they had in Acts 1 when it says they all the apostles were in one accord. No, no, no, no. I need to have a Lexus. That was not right, huh? Oh yeah, I need to have a Hummer. I need to have a Cadillac. Why? Because, no, no, no, why? Because my position as pastor has to hold prestige. Would anybody come to this church if I drove a Ford Ranger? Would anybody come to this church if I just drove an old beat-up car? No, no, no. They need to know that I, that our church is special. I need a bigger house than everybody else. And you need to pay for it. No, no, I need a bigger car than everybody else. Oh, and I need an expense account. Oh yes, yes, yes, yes. And all I need to go out three times a year to conferences so I get my batteries charged spiritually so I can come back and be a minister. And all these conferences, one in Hawaii, I want to go to one in Florida in February. The fact that it is by the golf courses, God, from whom all blessings flow.

I even know pastors that say, they told their pastor, "Hey, I will tell you what." I know a combination group that was flying around for a while, and I knew these guys. The one guy was a missionary, and he wanted money. The other guy was a pastor, and his church was about 200 people, and they were good people. I preached at his church. You hire up bozo number one, he comes into your church and takes a passage out of the New Testament that says a pastor is worth double honor, and then beats the people over the head that whatever they are paying him, if they want to do what is right, they need to double his salary on the spot. "This is your chance to do what God and be right with the Bible." Well, the people are good people, and they want to do what is right, so that is what they did. And then once the pastor got that, he kicked back the money to the missionary to take care of his deal. You know, "Oh, you scratch my back, and I will scratch yours." That is how it works today, and the tragedy is, is the good people.

Now let me just say this, and I say this all the time, but it needs to be said every once in a while. Church does not pay for my house and never will. Church does not give me a car. Church does not provide a 401k where I put in 20, you put in 2,000. You do not pay for my convert. You do not pay for my trip. When we play volleyball, we write our check out for 25 just like everybody else does. The moment I get better than you, the moment I have everything I need and do not have to pray and be faithful anymore, we are moving toward Gnosticism.

I talked to a pastor over here a couple of months ago, and he was bragging about the fact that he was so popular and so valuable, he needed to have two bodyguards, and he sat down in the front, and after the service, he slid out, and the two bodyguards just stood there so nobody could get to the preacher. He is bragging to me about his bodyguard. Come here, Mike. Matt, come up here. Come here. Come on, both of you, come up here. Come up here. Come up here. Come up here. Over here, over here, over here. Now beat that. Come on. Will not take me on. You got something you want to say to me? Thank you, boys.

Now why is Christianity such a mess today? God help us to see it, and we start to see this become the problem.

## VII. Deviation from the Word of God

Along with this, we find the first deviation from the Word of God. After the death of the apostles, we had some good men who led the church. Some of these men, believe it or not, were men who actually knew the apostles. One of them's name is Ignatius. He lives about 50 AD up to 115 AD. Ignatius was around. He probably knew Paul. He may be one to Christ by Paul. I do not know. But when the apostles die off, he carries some of the church stuff on. These church fathers, you have to remember these church men, we call them church fathers in history, not in the Roman Catholic sense, but just in the sense that they were leading up the church. This church father, as all the church fathers, were writing letters of encouragement to the church, and this guy wrote 15 letters. They still have the letters.

In one of his letters, he is the first man in the history of the world to use the word "Catholic." Now the word "Catholic" is a word that means "universal." It comes from the pagan Greek literary style of writing. So when Ignatius here got a little creative and wanted to find the church, he used a term that was not found in the Bible. So he uses the word "Catholic," not in the sense that we find it today in the Catholic Church, but in the sense of the universal church. But if you would ask the Roman Catholic priest or any Catholic who knows anything about his religion, most of them do not, but if you would ask a Roman Catholic priest why they are called Catholic, he would go back to the writings of Ignatius, and he says, "Because one of the early church fathers wrote in a letter that the church was called Catholic." You see where it started? You do not find the word "Catholic" anywhere in the Bible. You do not find the word "Baptist" anywhere in the Bible either, but you have to begin to understand these things.

Polycarp was another one, 69 AD to 155 AD. He writes a number of letters. In one of his letters, you know what he says? He gets creative and expressive, and he says, "The church is the mother of us all." Hey, Galatians 4:26 says the New Jerusalem is the mother of the church. But you see, we are deviating from the Word of God. So when somebody wants to apply a term in a Protestant sense to the church being your mother or the mother church, they go back to a writing of the church father right in the time period.

Now it even got worse. By 66 AD to 130 AD, there was a guy by the name of Papias. He now is writing the church was not born in Bethlehem in a stable. He was born in a cave someplace. Then you have about 130 AD to 202 AD, as it moves on, you have a man by the name of

Irenaeus. He is talking about the fact that if you want to get saved, you have to get sprinkled with water. See, all this began to deviate from the Word of God. The devil did his work. He wanted to take the GPS systems out of the people's hands all the way to the church at Ephesus, and some of them fell for it, just like a lot of them fall for it today.

What happened was the devil replaced the clear, plain teachings of the Word of God with words that were not found in the Bible that God never used. The devil used to set up teachings out there that would destroy a man's faith in God and the Word of God. The Bible teaches that if you think baptism will save you and get you into heaven, no matter what you are, you have got a big surprise coming. It is through the blood of Christ.

While the church of Ephesus starts this deviation, we begin to see in history, your GPS begins to point it out. You begin to see two lines begin to develop in your Bible. Now these lines start in the book of Ephesus and the seven churches, and as we go through the seven churches, these lines get wider apart, and pretty soon every church, every denomination, every Christian, every religion, and everything in church history will fall down on one line or the other. One line is God's line, the other line, the devil's line. It is just that simple. It is not hard as long as you keep this turned on, as long as you do not get away from the point source. There are those that stay with the book, and there are those that leave their first love. There are those that will die for the book and believe the Word of God is everything, and there are those that believe the Word of God is essential, but it is not the real truth.

I do not know what to tell you. A guy by the name of Basilides, he is a little bit later on, you know what he is teaching? He is teaching that Christ did not die on the cross. It was Simon the Cyrenian, and you know who he was? He was the guy that helped carry the cross for Christ. Well, he teaches now that they got messed up, and all the confusion crucified Simon instead of Christ. Oh, it is terrible. Just in the martyr, he teaches Christ was a great philosopher and not the Son of God.

When all this stuff, and I just gave you four or five, I mean, there are hundreds, some lesser known than others, but there are hundreds, and the devil is just, he is dumping all this stuff. He is trying to confuse the church. He is trying to take from them the Bible. He is coming at them from every angle, and now the Gnosticism is rising. The pastors are taking over the people. They are telling the people not to read the Bible, and they are infusing all this bad doctrine. So it is no wonder we see in this early church the great issues of, "Did Christ really die? Did He really resurrect from the grave?" The issue of the resurrection comes up. The issue of His virgin birth comes up, and there are men that dispute that He was even the Son of God. They say He was just a philosopher. They say that His father and mother really produced Him. There is teaching going around that Jesus was an illegitimate child, that Mary had had sexual relations with a Roman soldier, and that was where the baby came from. Anything that is questioned about His deity, there is questioned about His teaching. There are over 80 gospels flowing around, and yet your Bible only has four. They are arguing about what books should be in the Bible and what books should not. You have at the end of this time, at the year 200, you have churches out there that are adding more books to your Bible than should be in your Bible, and they are accepting everything that is out there.

This begins to show you the real issue of the seven periods of church history and why it is so important to see how this fits in with the times of the Gentiles from Daniel up to where we are at, and how it covers that blank space, and it shows you why there is so much confusion and why God's people do not have the answer they need to have today when they talk to people because they do not know where they come from themselves. Hey, I am not expecting all of you to know it today, but I am expecting that those of you who want the truth will learn this and will become more valuable to God because you will know how to use this GPS system that God has given you.

God gave His Word very clear, very direct to the church, absolute, infallible, without error. God's mind in a book that a man can know exactly what God required of him. The Bible talks about it in 1 Corinthians 2:16, Philippians 2:5, but we do not have to go through those verses. The devil, through all of his devices, he gets man to look at himself, not the Bible, for truth. Higher education, the Gnostics, the exalting of men over the Word of God, and we begin to see the two lines clearly developed.

I told you, I have never seen a church destroyed from the inside. It will always be from the outside. It is always destroyed from the inside. The devil's number one job is to get any church, this church, every Christian, to lose its first love and to accept the teachings of man over the Word of God.

I told you when we come through the great study on Exodus, and you are going to see how it played out in the book of Numbers. When we studied Exodus, remember we got back there in Exodus, I do not know, it was back there in Exodus 18, I think it was, when Moses, who was the man of God, who was the man of God used to lead the nation of Israel, and God met with him face to face on a daily basis and gave him the instructions, how that his father-in-law Jethro came to him and said, "Moses, I do not think you are doing this thing right." You know what Moses did? Moses put away his Bible and started listening to Jethro. When we start coming through the book of Numbers here in this next study, you are going to find the disastrous results of Jethro's advice to Moses. God did not need Moses. He chose Moses. He chose Moses to be the leader, and He said, "I will be with you." Moses did not need advice from Jethro. My goodness, the Bible says that Moses met, spoke with God face to face like a man speaking with his friend. He did not need advice from Jethro.

But it shows you very clearly the great issue we each of us have to deal with. Every young man called to the ministry, every young lady that wants to serve God, every couple that want to do what is right with God, everything and your judgment seat of Christ rewards and your millennial heritage hangs on it. Everybody is faced with the same issue: you are either going to accept what God says or you are going to take what man says. That is what the issue has been down through the churches. That early church was fully purposed to do the job. It had everything it needed to accomplish the task. It was close to the point source. It had everything that it needed, and we find the devil bringing the onslaught of all the other teachings that got them to deviate from the Word of God.

That is what you find today. You find today a lot of God's people who have no idea why they believe what they believe, and they could not explain what they believe about their salvation, where they are going to spend eternity, anything that they are holding on to as the real truths that are alive. They would not know for themselves where to go to figure it out, and yet they claim to be a child of God. I am telling you, the devil has done his work, and the confusion exists today because what started in the church at Ephesus kept moving right through church history.

But I want to tell you this, and then I am done. I am going to tell you this, one of the things you are going to see no matter what period of church history we come through, the first little act, you are going to find this one principle, and it is a true principle. Wherever you go in history, whatever you look at, whatever you study, you are going to find no matter how dark it gets, no matter how the devil seems like he has got the upper hand, and it is certainly true today, there is always that faithful few that stay right with God in His book, that through the overriding circumstances and the incredible things that they have to deal with, that they stay true to the Word of God right up to the end. That is the great thing about this study, and you and I want to be found in that faithful few, believe me. But it is going to take you understanding where you come from, where you are going, and where you are at. It is going to take you learning your fixed position from that book that God has given you, your GPS of life that shows you everything you need to know about where you are at in relationship and shows you the footsteps of the Almighty and His days. Job 24:1. Wow, what a great concept, knowing the steps of the Lord. Every head bowed. Father, we thank You and praise You today.