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OUR ROOTS: A HISTORY OF THE CHURCH PART ONE: WHERE DID PAGANISM COME FROM?

In 1976 there was an incredible event on American television. The broadcast of Alexander Haleys Roots became one of the most watched TV shows in history. Roots was billed as the true story of Haley's family, traced back six generations to a west African called Kunta Kinte who was captured by slave traders in The Gambia and sold to American plantation owners. It was a cultural phenomenon when it appeared in 1976 and earned Haley 200 literary prizes, a 32 million dollar estate, the friendship of President Jimmy Carter. The lesson is that people like to know where things, ancestors, traditions and so on, came from.

This evening we start a look at our Spiritual Roots. The way that the church, the denominations, the traditions we now hold dear came to us. First a brief overview of Church History will help. Many Bible teachers have seen the Seven Churches of Revelation as being representative of the course of the church from Pentecost to the end.

DID YOU KNOW JESUS WROTE SOME LETTERS TO HIS CHURCH?

Two thousand years ago Jesus wrote letters to His beloved church. He sent it by way of the last living Apostle, John. These letters were a group message, customized for seven churches representing all of the churches then and now.

Ask any Bible student how many epistles (letters) are in the New Testament. He will probably answer 21: 13 authored by Paul, plus Hebrews, which appears anonymous; and the seven "general epistles" by Peter, James, John, and Jude.

We usually overlook the seven most important letters: the seven authored by Jesus personally. For many reasons, these seven letters, comprising Chapters 2 and 3 of the Book of Revelation, are probably the most important part of this book for you and me.

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DID YOU KNOW THE BIBLE IS SUPERNATURALLY ENGINEERED?

The Bible is like many textbooks in school, all the answers are found at the end of the book. The end of the Bible is of course the Revelation of Jesus Christ to John.

The Bible is made up of 66 books, written by 40 authors over 15 centuries yet possessing a supernaturally engineered message. Every word, every letter, every name, every place and every number was placed there by the guiding hand of God through the Holy Spirit inspiring each human author. Thus every detail of God's Word was planned by God for revealing Himself and His plan.

And nowhere is this more clearly demonstrated than in the last book of the Bible, the Revelation of Jesus Christ. Each of its 404 verses which hold allusions to over 800 Old Testament verses and passages tie the entire Bible together in a grand finale.

JESUS WROTE TO SEVEN SO WE ALL WOULD HEAR!

There were many other churches at that time that would seem to be more historically significant than the seven that Jesus addressed: the churches at Jerusalem, Rome, Galatia, Corinth, Antioch, Colossae, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, Miletus, to name a few. Why did Jesus select just these seven Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea? Simply because these seven represent four levels of His message.

- ⇒ 1st: JESUS GIVES A SPECIFIC MESSAGE: First, "to the church at . . ." He spoke to the local churches that were in those geographic places then. Jesus still is interested in His local, geographic churches. He speaks to individuals by name, He knows what they are doing at church, at work and at home.
- ⇒ **2ND**: **JESUS GIVES A UNIVERSAL MESSAGE**: Second, "Hear what the Spirit says to the churches . . . " This is plural and speaks of an admonition to all churches throughout all the history of the church. Here Jesus addresses His divine expectations of all churches for all of history!
- ⇒ **3RD : JESUS GIVES A PROPHETIC MESSAGE**: Thirdly, Jesus was describing the seven types of Christians that would make up the visible church throughout all the church age. This is perhaps the most fascinating part of the book as Jesus describes with divine precision the seven

- successive eras the church would pass through from Pentecost to the last days of Apostasy.
- ⇒ 4TH: JESUS GIVES A SPIRITUAL MESSAGE: Finally, "He that hath an ear, let him hear . . ." Note the singular "ear" this is the practical and personal message from Jesus to each of us, this may be the most valuable part of the entire book.

These letters describe the unfolding of all subsequent church history. In any other order, this prophetic panorama would not be true! These letters seem to be the explanation for the interval between the 69th and 70th "weeks" of Daniel 9. Just as the Book of Acts covers about 30 years of the growth and ministry of the church; the 2nd and 3rd chapters of the Book of Revelation cover the next 1,900 years.

THERE WILL BE SEVEN STAGES OF CHURCH HISTORY

CHRIST FADING FROM HIS CHURCH: The Church throughout the Ages: SEVEN SUCCESSIVE STAGES¹ IN CHURCH HISTORY. For just a moment, let me give you a perspective- there are seven letters in Revelation 2 - 3 that give us the church in prophetic perspective - the church from Christians ascension until He comes to take His church - from century one to the rapture. In the first place, the seven Churches represent seven phases or periods in the Church's history, stretching from the time of the apostles to the coming again of Christ, the characteristics of which are set forth partly in the names of these churches, but more fully in the epistles addressed to them.

- ✓ There was the <u>Ephesian period</u>--30-60 AD a period of warmth and love and labor for Christ, dating directly from the apostles, in which defection began by the gradual cooling of the love of some, the false professions of others and the incoming of undue exaltations of the clergy and church offices.
- ✓ Then came the <u>Smyrna period</u>--60 -300 AD the era of martyrdom, and of the sweet savor unto God of faithfulness unto death, but marked with further developments of defection in the establishment of castes and orders, the license of Judaizing propensities, and consequent departures from the true simplicities of the Gospel.
- ✓ Then followed the <u>Pergamite period</u>, 300-500 AD in which true faith more and more disappeared from view, and clericalism gradually formed itself into system, and the church united with the world, and Babylon began to rear itself aloft.
- ✓ Then came the <u>Thyatiran period</u>-- 500-1500 AD the age of purple and glory for the corrupt priesthood, and of darkness of truth; the age of effeminacy and clerical domination, when the church usurped the place of Christ, and the

¹ This material drawn from J.A. Seiss, The Apocalypse, pp.

- witness of Jesus were give t dungeons, stakes and inquisitions; the age of the enthronement of false prophetess, reaching to the days of Luther and the Reformation.
- ✓ Then came the <u>Sardian period</u>--1500-1800 AD the age of separation and return of the rule of Christ; an age of many worthy names, but marked with deadness withal, and having much of which to repent; an age covering the spiritual lethargy of the Protestant centuries before the great evangelical movements of the last hundred years.
- ✓ Next was the <u>Philadelphian period</u> 1800-1950 AD is a time of great missionary fervor, evangelistic outreach and devotional godliness. in this time the world was penetrated with the gospel like no time since Pentecost.
- ✓ Which brings us to the <u>Laodicean period</u>, 1950 AD present they is lukewarmness, self-sufficiency, empty profession, and false peace, in which the day of judgment is to find the unthinking multitude who suppose they are Christians and are not.

TONIGHT WE NEED TO LOOK AT JUST THIS 3RD ERA THE PERGAMITE PERIOD REVELATION 2:12A

First the <u>Assembly</u> - The word Pergamum literally means, "mixed marriage".

- ✓ Geographically, this city was 80 miles north of Smyrna, 15 miles inland from the Aegean on a hill 1000 feet above the fertile valleys.
- ✓ Historically in 95 AD as John wrote it was an old city, it had been the capital
 of Asia Minor for 300 years.
- ✓ Culturally it was a university town (with the largest library in the ancient world rivaling with Alexandria) w/200,000 volumes, in fact, Pergamos is noted for parchment (boiled animal skins) that books were written on.
- ✓ Religiously it was a sacred (to pagans) city.
 - 1. Dionysisus (Bacchus) worship Gods of orgies, wine and debauchery.
 - 2. Zeus worship (King of Greek/Roman Gods). Largest and most famous wonders of ancient world the altar of Zeus was extending 40' over cliff.
 - 3. Ascelapius worship (God of healers) snakes that slithered over people on dark and wet floors to cure them.
 - 4. Satan's throne (He was running his global operation out of this city) Ephesians 6 thrones, dominions. Two times says it, look at you.

So this assembly was right in the middle of:

- 1. The IMMORALITY CENTER OF THE ANCIENT WORLD. Bacchus/Dionysisus
- 2. The IDOLATRY CENTER OF THE ANCIENT WORLD to the king of the gods of the pagan Graeco-Roman religion of Zeus or Jupiter.

- 3. The FALSE HEALING CENTER OF THE ANCIENT WORLD with drug induced stupors, snakes and the false god of healing: Ascelapius
- 4. Finally, SATANIC CENTER OF THE ANCIENT WORLD, the Devil himself had a personal throne there for the time as headquarters for his global rebellion.

Christ has one messages to this church: Repent of being wed to the world, stop worldliness... with unbelievers.

- ✓ The majority of those who call themselves Christians in our world today follow a way of worship that would have offended the apostles and early saints.
- ✓ What do I mean?
 - 1. The statues of Christ and saints with candles and incense burning before them are idolatrous.
 - 2. The incense, the orders of priests and monks (would be contradictory to Christlike humility), the calendar of observances, the titles of pontiff, vicar, most excellent, holy water, purgatory, and so much more. All that came directly from the pagans. The early saints tried to convert! How did this happen? Remember the progression?
- There was the <u>Ephesian period</u>--30-60 AD a period of warmth and love and labor for Christ, dating directly from the apostles, in which defection began by the gradual cooling of the love of some, the false professions of others and the incoming of undue exaltations of the clergy and church offices.
- ⇒ Then came the <u>Smyrna period</u>--60 -300 AD the era of martyrdom, and of the sweet savor unto God of faithfulness unto death, but marked with further developments of defection in the establishment of castes and orders, the license of Judaizing propensities, and consequent departures from the true simplicities of the Gospel.
- ⇒ Then followed the <u>Pergamite period</u>, 300-500 AD in which true faith more and more disappeared from view, and clericalism gradually formed itself into system, and the church united with the world, and Babylon began to rear itself aloft.
- ✓ So this period is the historic portrait of the era when the true Holy Catholic Church united with Roman paganism.
- ✓ It is the timeless portrait of any so called Christian who loves and joins in with unbelievers and in the world system.

It warns of the deadly sin of being in love and communion with that which God has condemned and will destroy.....G has told us there is only one action to take when confronted with worldliness and apostasy: SEPARATE FROM IT!

- ✓ 2 Corinthians 6:14-17 Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?15 And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever?16 And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people." 17 Therefore "Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you."
- ✓ James 4:4-8 Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.5 Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, "The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously"? 7 Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.8 Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.
- ✓ 1 John 2:15-17 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.16 For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world.17 And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever. (Remember how the Apostle John dealt with the infidel apostate Celsius? He ran out of the bath house when he was told Celsius was in there!)
- ✓ Revelation 18:1-4 And after these things I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with his glory. 2 And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird. 3 For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies. 4 And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.

LISTEN TO THE ADMONITION REVELATION 2:14-15

Christ said you are in sin "I have few things against you!"

- 1. First, you have BALAAM'S DOCTRINE = what is that?
 - ✓ "Put stumbling block..." Numbers 22-25 records how Moabites contacted Balaam prophet for hire, he prophesied 4x promising Israel's conquest of

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- Moab and Christ's coming, they angrily fired him and God killed 24,000 of Israel with a plaque.
- ✓ What? 24,000 Israel Yes, that's the doctrine of Balaam, "If you can't
 defeat it, join it and defile it and God will judge it". Balaam said get them
 involved in sexual sin and God will judge them and did...
- ✓ Balaam's doctrine is still here -- people actually say they are Christians and live in sexual sin. And today if you are living in such sin and drawing in others, to you Christ says "I am coming to war against you".
- 2. Second, NICOLAITANS, what's that? Nicolas supposedly started a cult but no record in church history. Many pastors through the centuries take this to be Nike-laios conquered people.
 - ✓ Yes, self made prophets ruling with rods of iron, building ecclesiastical kingdoms of wealth and power---still with us sadly.
 - ✓ Just quickly aside How did it happen? How did the pure, simple gospel get in purple robes with gold rings and set in paganism, idols and false work your way to heaven doctrines?
 - ✓ In short, it happened in 313 AD, 2 generals were fighting to take Diocletian's (persecutor of last week) kingdom. The place : Maxentius in East, Constantine in West.
 - ✓ One made a deal with some supernatural being and said if you help me win at a bridge over a river called Milvian, I'll make the empire Christian...he won and overnight the priests of pagan, Godless roman temples were part of the New Roman Catholic Church. The soldiers baptised, the old rituals renamed and everything was confused.

DID YOU KNOW SATAN ALSO HAS A CHURCH?

God had no sooner begun the blessed work in preparing for himself a people than the Devil did likewise. In fact, the first baby to be born on this earth later became Satan's original convert! In Genesis 4:8 we have what we could call the start of religion. Mankind trying to make his way to God by self effort. Infact the inspired commentary on his life says:

1 John 3:12 not as Cain, who was of the evil one, and slew his brother. And for what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil, and his brother's were righteous.

Also the next book Jude has similar warnings:

Jude 11 Woe to them! For they have gone the way of Cain, and for pay they have rushed headlong into the error of Balaam, and perished in the rebellion of Korah.

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- ✓ So we may say that Satan's church began officially at the tower of Babel in Genesis 11:1-9 which was the advent of what we would call *Organized Religion*. This was nearly 24 centuries B.C. Here, in the fertile plain of Shinar, probably very close to the original Garden of Eden, the first spade of dirt was turned for the purpose of Devil-worship.
- ✓ The first full-time minister of Satan was Nimrod, Noah's wicked and apostate grandson (Gen. 10:8-10). Secular history and tradition tell us that Nimrod married a woman who was as evil and demonic as himself. Her name was Semerimus. Knowing God's promise of a future Savior (Gen. 3:15), Semerimus brazenly claimed that Tammuz, her first son, fulfilled this prophecy.

TWO BABYLONS?

Alexander Hislop², the great 19th century historian traced the concept of false religions under the idea of Babyloniansism. From various ancient sources, it seems that Nimrod's wife, Semiramis (the First), apparently was high priestess of the Babel religion and the founder of all mystery religions. After the tower was destroyed and the multiplicity of languages developed, she was worshiped as a goddess under many different names. She became Ishtar of Syria, Astarte of Phoenicia, Isis of Egypt, Aphrodite of Greece, and Venus of Rome—in each case the deity of sexual love and fertility. Her son, Tammuz, also came to be deified under various names and was the consort of Ishtar and god of the underworld.

According to the cult of Ishtar, Tammuz was conceived by a sunbeam, a counterfeit version of Jesus' virgin birth. Tammuz corresponded to Baal in Phoenicia, Osiris in Egypt, Eros in Greece, and Cupid in Rome. In every case, the worship of those gods and goddesses was associated with sexual immorality. The celebration of Lent has no basis in Scripture, but rather developed from the pagan celebration of Semiramis's mourning for forty days over the death of Tammuz (cf. Ezek. 8:14) before his alleged resurrection—another of Satan's mythical counterfeits.

The mystery religions originated the idea of baptismal regeneration, being born again merely through the rite of water baptism, and the practice of mutilation and flagellation to atone for sins or gain spiritual favor. They also began the custom of pilgrimages, which many religions follow today, and the paying of penance for forgiveness of sins for oneself and for others.

Several pagan practices were especially influential in the church at Corinth. Perhaps the most important, and certainly the most obvious, was that of ecstasy, considered to be the highest expression of religious experience. Because it seemed supernatural and because it was dramatic and often bizarre, the practice strongly appealed to the natural man. And because the Holy Spirit had performed many miraculous works in that apostolic age, some Corinthian Christians confused those true wonders with the false wonders counterfeited in the ecstasies of paganism.

Mary was a woman of singular virtue, or she would never have been chosen to be the mother of the Lord Jesus Christ. For that role she deserves respect and honor (cf. Luke 1:42). But she was a sinner who exalted God *her* Savior. She referred to herself as a humble bondslave to God, who needed mercy (cf. Luke 1:46–50). To offer prayers to her and elevate her to a role as coredemptrix with Christ is to go beyond the

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² Adapted from Two Babylons quoted by MacArthur in Acts and I Corinthians. (For a discussion of the relationship of the pagan mother-child cults to Roman Catholic teachings about Mary, see Alexander Hislop, *The Two Babylons* [Neptune, N.J.: Loizeaux, 1959].)

bounds of Scripture and her own confession. The silence of the epistles, which form the doctrinal core of the New Testament, about Mary is especially significant. If she played the important role in salvation assigned her by the Roman Catholic Church, or if she were to receive prayers as an intercessor between believers and Christ, surely the New Testament would have spelled that out. Nor do such Roman Catholic teachings as her virgin birth and bodily assumption into heaven find any biblical support; they are fabrications. The unbiblical elevation of Mary has its roots in paganism, some of it dating back to the tower of Babel and Nimrod's wife Semiramis. She, along with her son Tammuz, formed the basis for the many counterfeit mother-child cults of antiquity. The Roman syncretism of such pagan beliefs with Christianity led Catholicism to unbiblical teaching about Mary.

- ✓ Semerimus thereupon instituted a religious system which made both her and her son the objects of divine worship. She herself became the first high priestess. Thus began the mother-child cult which later spread all over the world.
 - 1. From Babylon it spread to Phoenicia under the name of <u>Ashteroth and Tammuz</u>.
 - 2. From Phoenicia it traveled to <u>Pergamos</u> in Asia Minor. This is the reason for John's admonition to the church of Pergamos in the book of Revelation: "I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is..." (Rev. 2:13).
 - ✓ In Egypt the mother-child cult was known as <u>Isis</u> and <u>Horus</u>.
 - ✓ In Greece it became *Aphrodite* and *Eros*.
 - ✓ In Rome this pair was worshiped as <u>Venus and Cupid</u>.

Dr. J. Dwight Pentecost writes, "Several years ago I visited an archeological museum in Mexico City. A recent find had just been put on display which Mexican archeologists had authenticated as belonging to the period about 200 years before Christ. The object was the center of religious worship among some of the early Indians in Mexico. To my amazement, it was an image of a mother with a child in her arms. This Babylonian religion spread abroad to become the religion of the world...."

What was the teaching of Semerimus' satanic church? It was simply this, Semirimus was herself the very pathway to God. Infact, the title she took for herself was the "Queen of Heaven"!

Her claims were along these lines:

- 1. That she alone could administer salvation to the sinner through various sacraments, such as the sprinkling of holy water.
- That her son Tammuz was tragically slain by a wild boar during a hunting trip.
- 3. That he was, however, resurrected from the dead forty days later. Thus, each year afterward the temple virgins of this cult would enter a forty-day

¹ J. Dwight Pentecost, Prophecy for Today, p. 133.

- fast (what we now know as Lent) as a memorial to Tammuz' death and resurrection.
- 4. After the forty-day fast, a joyful feast (see the origins of *Easter*) called Ishtar took place. At this feast colored eggs were exchanged and eaten as a symbol of the resurrection (see the reasons for modern Easter eggs and Easter bunnies?). Finally hot cakes marked with the letter T (to remind everybody of Tammuz) were baked and eaten! (see where the wafer of the host in Roman Catholic mass comes from?)

Ezekiel 8:14 Then He brought me to the entrance of the gate of the Lord's house which was toward the north; and behold, women were sitting there weeping for Tammuz.

THE APPEAL REVELATION 2:16

Finally now, the heart of the message this morning. Let's review the lessons we've learned.

- ✓ God can save the vilest offender even Pergamum or you.
- ✓ The same Word of God that saves, can dawn the destiny of one who neglects
 to be saved.
- ✓ Watch out since Satan can't conquer you he will seek to defile you!