

# Revelation 02 - Letters to the Churches of Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira

## III. Things Which Are (Rev 2:1—3:22)

- (1) Letter to the Church at Ephesus (2:1-7)
  - (A) Destination (2:1a)
  - (B) Description of Christ (2:1b)
  - (C) Commendation (2:2-3,6)
  - (D) Rebuke (2:4)
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  - (B) Description of Christ (2:8b)
  - (C) Commendation (2:9)
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    - (c) Persecution (2:9c)
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  - (E) Exhortation to change (2:10a-c)
  - (F) Consequence (2:10d)
  - (G) Exhortation to listen (2:11a)
  - (H) Promise to overcomers (2:11b)
- (3) Letter to the Church at Pergamum (2:12-17)
  - (A) Destination (2:12a)
  - (B) Description of Christ (2:12b)
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    - (b) Did not deny His faith (2:13b)
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    - (a) Teachings of Balaam (2:14)
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- (E) Exhortation to change (2:16a)
- (F) Consequence (2:16b)
- (G) Exhortation to listen (2:17a)
- (H) Promise to overcomers (2:17b)
  - (a) Hidden manna (2:17b)
  - (b) White stone (2:17c)
  - (c) New name (2:17d)
- (4) Letter to the Church at Thyatira (2:12-17)
  - (A) Destination (2:18a)
  - (B) Description of Christ (2:18b)
  - (C) Commendation (2:19)
    - (a) Deeds (*ergon*) (2:19a)
    - (b) Love (2:19b)
    - (c) Faith (2:19c)
    - (d) Service (2:19d)
    - (e) Perseverance (*hypomonē*) (2:19e)
    - (f) Your latter deeds are greater (2:19f)
  - (D) Rebuke (2:20)
  - (E) Exhortation to change (2:21)
  - (F) Consequence (2:22-25)
  - (G) Promise to overcomers (2:26-28)
    - (a) Authority over the nations (2:26-27)
    - (b) The morning star (2:28)
  - (H) Exhortation to listen (2:29)

### **Pattern of the Letters in Rev 2-3**

Jesus follows a basic eight-point pattern in each of His letters to the seven churches. And while all eight points are present in most of the churches, He does take creative deviations. For instance, Smyrna and Philadelphia neither receive a rebuke from Christ because they have been persecuted to purity. To Laodicea, Jesus skips the commendation as He could not find anything redeeming or commendable with this church.

- Destination
  - Each of these seven epistles was written to a literal church in a specific geographic location
  - When you understand the background details of each of these locales, you can see how the Lord uses analogies from their own time period that they would understand as illustrations for spiritual truth
- Description of Christ
  - Christ describes Himself in each letter

- He specifically selects names or images from Rev 1
- For each of these churches, Jesus will go back to the imagery of Rev 1 to highlight something and apply it to that particular church
- Commendation
  - What they are doing right
- Rebuke
  - A sharp rebuke on what they are doing wrong
- Exhortation to change
- Consequence
  - If the church did not heed Christ's rebuke, He gives them the consequences
  - The consequences have nothing to do with going to heaven or hell; it always revolves around a temporal benefit that they would give up
  - If a Christian is involved in sin, they do not lose their salvation, but there are a number of things of value that they will forfeit
- Exhortation to listen
  - "To him who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches"
- Promise to overcomers (Rev 21-22)
  - Jesus taps into glorious promises to come in the Eternal State and promises them to the overcomers in these churches
  - He encourages each church in their destiny in God; if you understand your destiny, the trials of this life are much easier to endure.
  - "Overcomers" refers to all believers:
    - To Ephesus, the overcomers will eat from the tree of life (2:7); all Christians will eat from the tree of life (22:2,14)
    - To Sardis, the overcomers will not be hurt by the second death (2:11); all Christians will escape the second death (20:6,14; 21:8)
    - To Philadelphia, overcomers are in the Book of Life and no one can erase it (xx:xx); all Christians are written in the Book of Life (20:12,15)

## DESCRIPTION OF THE SEVEN CHURCHES

### Revelation 2–3

CHURCH	SCRIPTURE	DESCRIPTION
Ephesus	2:1-7	Loveless
Smyrna	2:8-11	Persecuted
Pergamum	2:12-17	Compromised I
Thyatira	2:18-29	Compromised II
Sardis	3:1-6	Dead
Philadelphia	3:7-13	Missionary
Laodicea	3:14-22	Man-centered

#### Revelation 2

##### II. Things Which Are (Rev 2:1—3:22)

##### (1) Letter to the Church at Ephesus (2:1-7)

##### (A) Destination (2:1a)

##### (B) Description of Christ (2:1b)

**1** "To the **angel** of the church in **Ephesus** write: The One who **holds** the **seven stars** in His right hand, **the One who walks among** the **seven golden lampstands**, says this:

**1** "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this:

**1** "To the messenger of the church in Ephesus, write: 'The one who holds the seven stars in his right hand, the one who walks among the seven gold lamp stands, says this:

**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 lampstands;

- "...angel" - *angelos*, typically refers to angels, but literally refers to a messenger

— In this case, it likely refers to the pastor of the church at Ephesus (see note on 1:16)

- "...Ephesus" - Paul planted the church at Ephesus on his 3rd missionary journey (Acts 19) when he set up shop initially in a Jewish synagogue, then later in the School of Tyrannus, and taught there for a total of three years

— Many churches were planted, including many of these seven churches, as a result of Paul's initial ministry there

— Ephesus was the most prominent church at that time; Paul, Timothy and John himself were all pastors of this church. Paul wrote Ephesians directly to this church, and wrote two letters to Timothy, the pastor (1&2 Timothy). Plus, Jesus epistle to that church here.

- "...holds" - *kratein*, when this Greek word takes a direct accusative after it (as it does here), it means that the whole object (in this case the seven stars [seven churches]) is gripped and grasped within the hand

— This means that Christ has all seven stars in His hand, meaning that he has the whole of the Church in His hand, the hand of honor (Cf. 1:20)

- "...seven stars" - the seven angels (pastors) of the seven churches (Cf. 1:20)

- "...the One who walks among" - Jesus intimately knows everything going on in the local church; He's present, He's engaged, He knows

- "...seven golden lampstands" - the complete, universal Church

For problems with the Historico-Prophetic View, see Revelation 06 The Death of Discernment (Rev 2:1-3).

#### (C) Commendation (2:2-3,6)

**2 'I know your deeds and your labor and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil people, and you have put those who call themselves apostles to the test, and they are not, and you found them to be false;**

**2 'I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false;**

**2 'I know what you've been doing, your toil, and your endurance. I also know that you cannot tolerate evil people. You have tested those who call themselves apostles, but are not, and have found them to be false.**

**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:**

- "I know" - *oida*, reflects full and exact knowledge retained from absolute clearness of vision

— It is always the word used to describe Christ's knowledge in Revelation

— The other Greek word for knowledge (*ginosko*) speaks of "progress of knowledge" in Revelation

- "...labor" - *kopos*, labor to the point of exhaustion

- "...perseverance" - *hypomone*, patience endurance of circumstances under affliction

— The church at Ephesus had remained faithful to Christ for over 40 years, from the mid-50s AD when Paul planted the church, to the mid-90s AD when John wrote to them

- "...cannot tolerate evil people" - discernment; today's post-modernism teaches you to be open to everything but certain of nothing; if you want to be certain of something, the only thing you can be certain of is your own uncertainty
- While Jesus commends the church of Ephesus for their discernment of false teachers, it's one of the things He rebukes to the church at Thyatira (Cf. v20)
- Paul warned the elders of the Ephesian church that false teachers would come (Acts 20:29-31)
- By the time Paul had written 1 & 2 Timothy, the false teachers had arrived and were causing corruption in the church (1 Tim 1:3-4,18-20; 6:3-10,20-21; 2 Tim 2:14-18; 4:1-4)
- "...call themselves apostles" - not everyone who claims to speak for God speaks for God
- The false teachers in Ephesus claimed to be "functional apostles" (Cf. "emissaries," 2 Cor 11:3) rather than official apostles (Acts 1:15-26)
- They claimed apostleship in a wider sense, as itinerant teachers with a mission which placed them on a higher level than the local elders (1 Cor 12:28; Eph 4:11)
- "...test" - we're constantly called to "test" what people say by confirming it with Scripture (1 John 4:1; Cf. Deut 13:1-5)
- Ephesus was a discerning church; they weren't open to everything and certain of nothing, and Jesus commends them for it

3 and you have **perseverance** and have endured on account of My name, and have not become weary.

3 and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary.

3 You have endured and suffered because of my name, yet you have not grown weary.

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

- "...perseverance" - *hypomonē*, the capacity to bear up under difficult circumstances

- The same word is used in v2 ("perseverance") and by John to describe his own trial of being exiled to Patmos (1:9)

- The Ephesians were persevering for the Lord's name's sake, and were not becoming weary. They kept on keeping on (Gal 6:9).

- Sometimes we don't receive the blessing from God because we give up too soon. We're so close to entering the promises of God, but weariness and apathy kicks in and we miss the blessings because we gave up on God too soon.

- Ephesus did not let fatigue short-circuit their work for God. For this, they draw Jesus' commendation.

- The church did a good job of rooting out bad doctrine (heresy)

- Paul's farewell warnings about testing doctrines were apparently heeded (Acts 20:25-31; Cf. 2 Cor 11:14-15; 1 Thess 5:20-21); John's warnings (1 John 4:1-3; 2 John 9-10)
- When Timothy went to Ephesus, Paul urged him not to fail in his hard work, patience and perseverance (2 Tim 2:24-25)
- They were committed, obedient; exhausting labour guarding doctrinal purity; persistent
- Right doctrine matters...bad doctrine destroys lives

#### (D) Rebuke (2:4)

- 4 But I have *this* against you, that you have **left your first love.**
- 4 But I have *this* against you, that you have left your first love.
- 4 However, I have this against you: You have abandoned the love you had at first.
- 4 Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.
- "...left your first love" - the busyness of church work had eclipsed the intimacy they used to have with Christ; activity replaced intimacy
- This was a fairly recent problem with the church at Ephesus because 35 years earlier, Paul indicated that they didn't have any problem with love (Cf. Eph 1:15)
- They were serving Christ and maintaining orthodoxy as a habit, rather than out of fervent love: they were too busy on the business of the King to have time for the King...
- The second generation of believers had grown lax and become cold; they did not have the fervor of the first generation of believers
- Our good works are to flow out of our love for and relationship with God, but are never meant to eclipse or take the place of our intimacy and relationship with Him
- Anything we put, even something good like good works, in place of our intimacy and relationship with God, it becomes an idol
- Over time, you begin to try harder to please God, doing more good works, all in the power of your flesh, not in the power of the Spirit (Gal 3:3)
- We need to *bear* fruit, not *produce* fruit: bearing fruit comes from the priority of intimacy with God (it comes naturally); producing fruit comes from the flesh, with the focus on production, not Jesus.
- The letter addressed genuine believers, who were doing what was correct, but for the wrong reason. Good deeds and orthodoxy are important, but Jesus also wants our love.
- Work and service without love results in a critical spirit; God would prefer to have devotion rather than doctrine
- If you lose your love, you lose your witness
- When questioned by an expert in Mosaic Law about the greatest commandment (Matt 22:35-40), Jesus replied: Love God, Love Others.
- The night before the Cross, Jesus told His disciples about a "new" command: love others as Jesus loved you; by this, everyone will know that you are my disciples (John

13:34-35).

[OT reference: Jer 2:2]

(E) Exhortation to change (2:5a)

(F) Consequence (2:5b)

5 Therefore, **remember** from where you have fallen, and **repent**, and **do the deeds you did at first**; or else I am coming to you and I will **remove your lampstand** from its place—unless you **repent**.

5 Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place—unless you repent.

5 Therefore, remember how far you have fallen. Repent and go back to what you were doing at first. If you don't, I will come to you and remove your lamp stand from its place—unless you repent.

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 lampstand out of his place, except thou repent.

- Jesus gives Ephesus three verbs, all in the imperative tense (commands) to correct the ship:

- "...remember" - go back to the "honeymoon period"; recollect what it was first like when you fell in love with Christ

— You don't need all these activities, as good as they are, if you forget the original intimacy you had with Christ

- "...repent" - *meta*, to change (metamorphosis); *noeo*, notion of idea; the idea is to change your mind

— It doesn't mean to feel bad, to be sorry (*metamelomai*, Matt 27:3), as Judas did after he betrayed Christ. Feeling bad or sorry is not part of repentance, as Judas felt bad but did not repent.

— If the Reformed/Calvinist doctrine of Perseverance of the Saints was true, that believers would automatically be sanctified, why does Jesus call on Ephesus to repent?

- "...do the deeds you did at first" - repeat; go back to the deeds you did at first when you bore fruit instead of produced fruit

— Jesus urged them to return to the love that formerly motivated them, the activities that fanned the flames of their love in the beginning. To rekindle their "first love" there needs to be a return to "first works." There is a close relationship between love and good works (1 John 5:2).

- "...remove your lampstand" - doesn't not imply that this church will lose salvation, but they can lose something of value not related to salvation...



- The lampstand represents the church, so removing their lampstand means to remove the influence of this church, removing their lighthouse capacity
- Ephesus was an effective church for many decades, from the time of Paul and Timothy (their pastor) through the 60s, 70s, and 80s, but if they didn't repent and begin to do the deeds they did previously, Jesus would go to them and put their light out. He would make the church irrelevant, and their mission of being salt and light to the Greco-Roman world was in danger of being removed.
- Jesus warned them that He personally was going to do this when He comes to the Church at Ephesus—if they didn't repent
- But didn't the good the church was doing outweigh losing their first love? Not in this case, because God is relational...the first priority of God is our relationship with Him. If we lose this relationship, we lose our capacity to be the light bearer that God wants us to be.
- Evidently they didn't repent because we don't hear anything else about this church after 1000-1100 AD, and it's possible that they lost their "salt & light" effectiveness in the world long before that time.
- "...repent" - subjunctive mood, the mood of possibility
- Jesus moved from the imperative of repent earlier in the verse, to the subjunctive mood here

## Return

What things were they called to "redo"? Perhaps the Holy Spirit purposefully left this open for each Christian to consider individually. Likely it included thinking deeply about God and His grace, His loving redemption, and the inheritance he promised those He has adopted as children (Eph 1:1-7,14). When passion for Christ wanes, we must purposefully focus our thoughts and actions on Him, what He has done, what He will do, and what He has called us to do. We must constantly and intentionally remember and be amazed (and thankful) for God's grace, extended through Christ.

### (C) Commendation (2:2-3,6)

- 6 But you have this, that you **hate** the deeds of the **Nicolaitans**, which I also **hate**.
- 6 Yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.
- 6 But this is to your credit: You hate the actions of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.
- 6 But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.
- "...hate" [2x] - the God of love gives us permission to hate certain things...the same things that He hates (Ps 119:104)
- We define what we love by what we hate...if we love life, we hate abortion, murder and violence
- "...Nicolaitans" - two opinions:

1. An untranslated word: *Nicao*, to conquer, overcome, rule; *Laos*, laity or people, meaning to use clerical stature or position to rule over the laity (vs. washing of feet, John 13)
    - Nicolaitanism has come down through history as typifying any system that seeks to dominate rather than serve people
    - The meaning of the name implies that they attempted to divide and make a distinction between the clergy and the laity, thus creating a division in which the clergy exercised rulership over the laity.
    - They would use this distinction to rule over the people; an early form of gnosticism, where they would teach that the only way to understand God's truth is to go through them and their system
    - Elders had the biblical authority to determine the policy of that local church. But the authority described here probably went much further than the issues in the local church and may have extended to the personal lives of the members. The Ephesians hated this kind of thing and are commended by the Messiah for it.
  2. A first-century sect claiming apostolic authority for their opinions
    - Nicolas, one of "the seven" chosen to have the oversight of "the daily ministration" to the poor of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 6:5); called "a proselyte of Antioch" (the other six were therefore probably Jews by birth)
    - Some of the church Fathers (Irenaeus, Hippolytus, Pseudo-Tertullian) state that he was the founder of a sect called "Nicolaitans." Other Fathers suggest that a vain claim made by this sect was in promoting apostolic authority for their opinions. Others state that they were without restraint in indulging the flesh, practiced fornication and eating food sacrificed to idols
- Note: He hates the *deeds*, not the Nicolaitans themselves. These will become *doctrines* in the Letter to Pergamus.



## Grant R. Jeffrey

*Apocalypse: The Coming Judgment of the Nations*, p. 72-73.

“There is a lot of disagreement about who these Nicolaitans were...Christ created a universal ‘holy priesthood’ (1 Peter 2:5) where every believer is a priest. The Nicolaitans attempted to re-create the hierarchy of the Old Testament priesthood. They sought to establish a priestly authority over laymen. The Greek word is derived from *Nike* meaning ‘victory’ and *Laos* meaning ‘people.’ It suggests a group of people who seek to elevate themselves into a special class of priesthood over other Christians. Jesus told us in 1 Timothy 2:5: ‘For there is one God and one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus.’ Such men sought the sole right to interpret the Scriptures for other Christians. Centuries later, after Emperor Constantine’s conversion, this Nicolaitan heresy produced the Babylonian hierarchy of priests, leading to the spiritual “dark ages” of the medieval period.”

(G) Exhortation to Listen (2:7a)

(H) Promise to the Overcomers (2:7b)

7 The one who has an **ear**, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. **To the one who overcomes**, I will grant to **eat** from the **tree of life**, which is in the Paradise of God.’

7 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.’

7 ‘Let everyone listen to what the Spirit says to the churches. To everyone who conquers I will give the privilege of eating from the tree of life that is in God’s paradise.’”

7 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcomes will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.

- Jesus is the only Person to issue this invitation in Scripture

— The Gospels record Him doing so 7x: Matt 11:15; 13:9,43; Mark 4:9,23; Luke 8:8; 14:35)

— This invitation always occurs where Jesus appealed to His hearers to make a significant change

- “...ear” - a spiritual organ for receiving spiritual truth

— When God awakens a person’s spiritual sensitivities, they are ready to receive His message; otherwise, the ear remains uncircumcised and unable to hear (Deut 29:4; Is 50:4-5; Jer 6:10)

- "...To the one who overcomes" - in addition to the implied promise of the Ephesian church's continuance if obedient (v5), Jesus also gave a promise to the individuals in the church
- While the letters are addressed to the churches as a whole, all of the promises are to individuals in the churches who overcome the problem of the church as a whole
- This verse, nor any of the promises to the overcomers in the seven churches, do not present victory as a certainty, but rather as aspiration which each individual should pursue. Jesus' words are never to "them" who overcome, but to "him" who overcomes. Victory is not a collective right, but an individual attainment.
- "...eat" - eating with someone implies fellowship, so the one who overcomes will have fellowship with the Messiah
- "...tree of life" - in the Eternal State, believers will have access to the tree of life again (Cf. 22:14)
- This promise suggests that overcomers will experience the fellowship with God in the Eternal State that Adam and Eve enjoyed before the Fall
- Jesus pulls in a blessing from the Eternal State to give the Ephesians hope for the future [OT reference: Gen 2:9; 3:22-24; Prov 11:30; 13:12; Ezek 31:8 LXX]



(2) Letter to the Church at Smyrna (2:8-11)

(A) Destination (2:8a)

(B) Description of Christ (2:8b)

8 "And to the **angel** of the church in **Smyrna** write: **The first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life**, says this:

8 "And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: The first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life, says this:

8 "To the messenger of the church in Smyrna, write: 'The first and the last, who was dead and became alive, says this:

8 And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive;

- "...angel" - *angelos*, typically refers to angels, but literally refers to a messenger

- In this case, it likely refers to the pastor of the church at Smyrna (see note on 1:16)

- "...Smyrna" - *Smurnaios*, Greek word with Hebrew root *mur*, meaning death; note the "death" theme throughout this letter

- The city today is named Ismir in modern day Turkey, about 35 miles north of Ephesus. This is the only place in Scripture where Smyrna is mentioned.

- The church was planted by Paul in his 3rd missionary journey (Acts 19:10). Smyrna had "died" as a city on several occasions, due to invasions and earthquakes, but each time it had risen again to new life because the residents kept rebuilding it.

- Smyrna comes from the word "myrrh" which is what the city was known for, used to embalm the dead

- The pastor at the church in Smyrna was Polycarp, a direct disciple of the apostle John himself

- Polycarp died by burning at the stake in 168 AD at the age of 86, so he must have been a very young man when he was discipled by John

- "...The first and the last" - the *prōtos* and the *eschatos* (Cf. 1:17)

- Mentioned 7x in Scripture: Is 41:4; 44:6; 48:12; Rev 1:11; 1:17-18; 2:8; 22:13

- The persecuted believers at Smyrna would've found encouragement in this Title of Christ; even though the prospect of a violent death threatened them, resurrection and eternal life with Christ, who also died a violent death, were certain

- "...was dead, and has come to life" - refers to Jesus' resurrection and victory over the grave (Cf. 1:18)

- Heb 2:5-18 gives us eight reasons God became a Man; reason #5 is to remove the fear of death (Cf. Heb 2:15)

- Jesus uses these descriptions of Himself from John's vision in Rev 1 to identify and provide comfort and remedy to the circumstances that each church is going through

(C) Commendation (2:9)

(a) Tribulation (*thlipsis*) (2:9a)

(b) Poverty (*ptōcheia*) (2:9b)

(c) Persecution (2:9c)

9 **'I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich), and the slander by those who say they are Jews, and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.**

9 **'I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich), and the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.**

9 **'I know your suffering and your poverty—though you are rich—and the slander committed by those who claim to be Jews but are not. They are the synagogue of Satan.**

9 **I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan.**

- "I know" - Jesus is stating that He knows everything that is happening in the church at Smyrna...He knows their feelings, their emotions, their insecurities, their fears, etc.

— Jesus knew the afflictions these Christians were experiencing as a result of their testimony for Him. He commended them for their patience in suffering.

— The fact that Jesus "knew" their suffering would have been comforting to this church

- "...tribulation" - *thlipsis*, persecution, pressing, pressing together, pressure. A metaphor for oppression, affliction, tribulation, distress, dire straits.

— This church, and all Christians today, are not immune from tribulation in life

— The Bible is clear in explaining that Christians this side of heaven must endure trials (John 16:33), man's wrath (2 Tim 3:12), Satan's wrath (Eph 6:11-12), and the world's wrath (John 15:18-19).

— The church is only promised to escape God's wrath, the Great Tribulation

- "...poverty" - two words for poverty in the Greek:

— *penia*, the state of having nothing; superfluous

— *ptōcheia* (here), the state of one who has nothing at all; implies beggary, abject poverty; the lowest level of poverty that a person could endure

— The Greek word is used only two other times in the NT: to describe the deep poverty that the Macedonians experienced (2 Cor 8:2), and it's used of Christ to describe His humiliation (2 Cor 8:9)

- "... (but you are rich)" - in spite of their financial poverty, they were rich spiritually; a contradiction to the extreme financial poverty that Jesus knew they were in

— Jesus is referring to their spiritual riches in Christ Jesus (Cf. Eph 1:3)

— Earthly wealth blinds us to our spiritual riches; Smyrna didn't have this problem

— Financial riches come and go, you can be rich one day and poor the next. However, spiritual riches are never diminished; we're just as rich at the end of our life as we were the moment we believed on Christ for salvation.

— Compare with Laodicea, who was rich materially but poor spiritually (Rev 3:17; 2 Cor 8:9)



- Smyrna was better off than they thought they were...vs Laodicea who was worse off than they thought (Cf. 3:17)
- It was Smyrna's impoverished condition which made them aware of their lucrative position spiritually in Christ Jesus
- "...slander" - persecution, blasphemy; this church is being persecuted and slandered by a group who says they are Jews, but are not; they are being specifically targeted
- "...those who say they are Jews, and are not" - unbelieving Israelites
- This group was likely of Jewish heritage, but Jesus does not call them "real Jews" because they did not accept Him as their Messiah
- They believed that somehow, because of their heritage/genealogy alone that they were right with God (Cf. Matt 3:9; Rom 2:28-29; 9:6)
- The religious crowd has always persecuted the righteous/relationship crowd throughout history (Cf. Cain & Abel, Gen 4), and Smyrna was experiencing the same thing in the first century
- Today we look at trials as something unwanted, that we want to get out of or past as quickly as possible; but James 1 tells us that we should view these trials as gifts and receive them with joy, because this trial may be the best thing that ever happened to us.

### **Primary areas of Persecution in Early Church**

- Legalism: denial of Christ's completed work
- Gnosticism: denial of Christ's humanity
- Caesar worship: denial of Christ's Lordship

#### **(D) Rebuke**

Jesus does not have a word of rebuke or correction for the church in Smyrna (or Philadelphia). This isn't out of pity for the persecution, but because a persecuted church is a pure church. The Lord has no word of complaint. They were satisfying His heart (2 Cor 8:9).

#### **(E) Exhortation to Change (2:10a-c)**

#### **(F) Consequence (2:10d)**

10 Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for **ten days. Be faithful** until death, and I will give you the **crown of life**.

10 Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.

10 Don't be afraid of what you are going to suffer. Look! The Devil is going to throw some of you into prison so that you may be tested. For ten days you will undergo suffering. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the victor's crown of life.

10 Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.

- These persecuted Christians did not need to fear their adversaries or death, since they would live forever with Christ

- Notice how Jesus makes it clear that Satan is the enemy, not any particular person or group

- God is going to use Satan to fulfill God's purposes; God is going to use Satan as a vehicle to test this church, out of which they are going to be rewarded

- This would be a *peirasthete* ("trial") that Satan would use to try to entice them to depart from the Lord

- "...ten days" - most conservative scholars believe this is a literal 10-day period of time (24-hour days); there is nothing in the text that would indicate that this was a symbolic period of time

- Some scholars believe this is a Hebrew idiom (figure of speech) for a short period of time (Gen 24:55; Job 19:3; Dan 1:12)

- Others believe it was the persecution the church would endure under 10 Roman emperors, between 54 AD (Nero) and 304 AD (Diocletian), but that appears to be speculation and not backed up by the text (Cf. Gen 24:55; Num 11:19; 14:22; 1 Sam 1:8; Neh 5:18; Job 19:3; Jer 42:7; Dan 1:12; Acts 25:6); see note: **10 Days** below.

- "...Be faithful" - the citizens of Smyrna had a reputation for being faithful to the emperor; God desires one thing from us: faithfulness (Cf. 1 Cor 4:2)

- "...crown of life" - only crown mentioned in two passages (Cf. James 1:12); when you compare both passages, it's clear that all suffering/trials we endure in this life will be rewarded in the next life with this precious crown.

- "crown" - *stephanos*, the *fullness* of eternal life as a *reward* (Cf. 1 Cor 9:25; 1 Thess 2:19; 2 Tim 4:6-8; Heb 2:9; James 1:12; 1 Peter 5:4; Rev 4:4)

- This is a *victor's* crown (*stephanos*) given for enduring the trials and tests of life—even to the point of death, without denying Christ

- It is not the gift of eternal life itself, but the fullness of that life (Cf. John 10:10)

## 10 Days

10 Roman emperors who led persecution of Christians throughout early church and after...

10 "days" or "periods":

1. 54-68 AD - Nero (Paul beheaded; Peter crucified upside-down)



2. 95-96 AD - Domitian (John exiled)
3. 104-117 AD - Trajan (Ignatius burned at the stake)
4. 161-180 AD - Marcus Aurelius (Polycarp martyred)
5. 200-211 AD - Septimus Severus (killed Irenaeus)
6. 235-237 AD - Maximinus (killed Ursula and Hippolytus)
7. 249-251 AD - Decius
8. 257-260 AD - Valerian
9. 270-275 AD - Aurelian
10. 284-305 AD - Diocletian (worst of all)

**10 total = 250 years!**

(G) Exhortation to listen (2:11a)

(H) Promise to overcomers (2:11b)

11 The one who has an ear, let him **hear** what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who **overcomes will not be** hurt by the **second death.**'

11 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death.'

11 'Let everyone listen to what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who conquers will never be hurt by the second death.'"

11 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.

- "...hear" - the Bible commands us to "listen" about 550x

- "...overcomes" - John tells us in 1 John 5:4-5 what an overcomer is...someone who has trusted in Christ. A Christian is an overcomer (see note on 2:7).

— If our mind is on our eternal future, the problems and trials we encounter in this life don't seem all that bad (Cf. Rom 8:18; 2 Cor 4:17; 1 Peter 1:6)

— Maybe instead of focusing on our circumstances this week, what would happen if we focused on Rev 21-22 instead? What if we changed our perspective of life, death, sickness, financial struggles, relationship struggles, family problems...and put them in light of our eternal destiny?

- "...will not be" - a double negation in Greek

- "...second death" - separation of the soul from God; the "first death" is separation of the soul from the body (Cf. 20:6)

— Jesus is promising this persecuted church that man may be able to take your human life, but no one can touch your eternal life; the second death will have no affect on you

— Born once, die twice. Born twice, die once (Rev 20:6; Cf. Jude 12).

(3) Letter to the Church at Pergamum (2:12-17)

(A) Destination (2:12a)

(B) Description of Christ (2:12b)

**12 "And to the **angel** of the church in **Pergamum** write: **The One** who has the **sharp two-edged sword** says this:**

**12 "And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this:**

**12 "To the messenger of the church in Pergamum, write: 'The one who holds the sharp, two-edged sword, says this:**

**12 And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges;**

- "...angel" - *angelos*, typically refers to angels, but literally refers to a messenger

— In this case, it likely refers to the pastor of the church at Smyrna (see note on 1:16)

- "...Pergamum" - *Per*, mixed, objectionable; *gamos*, marriage, monogamy, bigamy, polygamy: so Pergamos means "mixed marriage"

— A prominent church because Pergamum was the capital of the Roman province of Asia; located 45 miles north of Smyrna

— It was the seat of the Roman "mystery religions" (strange pagan religions that were evident across the Greco-Roman world). They deified Caesar, polytheistic, sexual immorality, etc.

— Pergamum was noteworthy for three reasons:

1. It was a center for many pagan religious cults and emperor worship, more intense than any surrounding city

2. It had a university with a large library, second only to the one in Alexandria.

3. It was a leader in the production of parchment

- "...The One" - Jesus described Himself as "the One" who judges with His Word

- "...sharp two-edged sword" - the "two-edged sword" is the Word of God (Heb 4:12; Cf. Rev 1:16)

— The double-edged quality is the fact that God's Word separates believers from the world and sinners from God

— From the vision of John in Rev 1 (Cf. v16); this sword is the Word of God (Cf. Heb 4:12), who will simply speak in order to violently destroy the entire empire of the Antichrist (Rev 19:15; Cf. Is 11:4; 2 Thess 2:8)

— Roman officials who had the right to carry this sword had the power of life and death in capital cases

— The Word of God turns out to be the primary remedy for everything that ails Pergamum [OT reference: Is 49:2]

(C) Commendation (2:13)

- (a) Held fast to His name (2:13a)
- (b) Did not deny His faith (2:13b)
- (c) Positive example of Antipas (2:13c)

**13** 'I know where you dwell, where **Satan's throne** is; and you hold firmly to My **name**, and **did not deny My faith** even in the days of **Antipas, My witness**, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.

**13** 'I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is; and you hold fast My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.

**13** 'I know where you live. Satan's throne is there. Yet you hold on to my name and have not denied your faith in me, even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was killed in your presence, where Satan lives.

**13** I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth.

- Satan had a throne in Pergamum...an amazing statement! Satan "dwells" (lives) where they lived!

— In spite of the sinful pagan culture and negative circumstances, Jesus commends this church for doing three positive things:

1. they held firmly to His name
2. they did not deny His faith
3. they were witnesses for Jesus

- "...Satan's throne" - a allusion to the one or more of the pagan temples in the city;

see [Satanology: The Doctrine of Satan](#).

— One of the major idolatry sites was the Temple of Esculapius which contained an idol in the form of a serpent. "Satan's seat" may be a reference to this.

- "...name" - the name of JESUS (Cf. Acts 4:12; Phil 2:9-10)

— In most places today, you can speak of "God" but as soon as you mention the name of Jesus, people get antsy

— The "name" given to Christ in this letter (v12); they held fast to the Word of God

— Inclusivism today teaches that you can be saved through any religion, as long as you wholeheartedly seek after God. It completely discounts the name of Jesus.

— This wasn't the case in Pergamum though, they hadn't compromised with the world or the culture over the name of Jesus

- "...did not deny My faith" - without faith, it is impossible to please God

— If you insert human works as a means to be justified and loved by God, you are denying His faith; this church did not go down the road of "works salvation" thus they did not deny His faith.

- "...Antipas" - "against all"; Jesus now gives this church an example of one among them who "held firmly to My name" and "did not deny My faith"
- He is said to have been a dentist and physician, but the pagans suspected that he was promoting Christianity secretly and accused him of disloyalty to Caesar
- He was condemned to death and put in a copper bull, which was then heated until it was red-hot
- Antipas was called out by name, by Jesus Himself, as an example, because Antipas did not deny Christ's name. Antipas honored ("held firmly") the name of Christ, so Christ honored Antipas by name.
- God rewards those who do not compromise...
- "...My witness" - *martys*, where we get the English word "martyr"
- A "witness" who testifies to the things of Christ, sometimes at personal cost and sometimes at ultimate cost. Antipas paid the ultimate price for his witness of Christ. He was faithful to God to the point of death.

### **Names & Titles Demonstrating Satan's Post-Fall, Earthly Authority (Job 1:7; 2:2; Luke 4:5-8; Rom 8:19-22)**

- Prince of this world (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11)
- God of this world (2 Cor 4:4)
- Prince and power of the air (Eph 2:2)
- Who the believer wrestles with (Eph 6:12)
- Roaring lion (1 Peter 5:8)
- Whole world lies in his power (1 John 5:19)

(D) Rebuke (2:14-15)

(a) Teachings of Balaam (2:14)

14 But I have a few things against you, because you have **some there** who hold the **teaching of Balaam**, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit sexual immorality.

14 But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit *acts of* immorality.

14 But I have a few things against you: You have there some who hold to the teaching of Balaam, the one who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the people of Israel so that they would eat food sacrificed to idols and practice immorality.

14 But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.

- "...some there" - notice that not everyone at the church held to the teaching of Balaam...only "some" did
  - A glass of water does not have to be 100% poison in order to kill someone...it can be 98% pure water and 2% poison in order to do its damage. It's not necessary for all members of a church or small group to succumb to a false doctrine; as long as some of them do, the damage is done.
  - Jesus now uses an event from the OT to make a point to this church:
  - "...teaching of Balaam" - see note: **The Story of Balaam** below; Balaam's idea to curse the Israelites was that instead of cursing them directly (which didn't work), but instead to get them to fall into compromise by eating food sacrificed to idols and to commit sexual immorality.
  - To do this, Balak moved the young single girls to live at the border of the Israelite camp, to tempt the Israelite men into sexual immorality
  - This strategy of Balaam against Israel is referred to as the "teachings" of Balaam (Rev 2:14), the "way" of Balaam (2 Peter 2:15), and the "error" of Balaam (Jude 11)
  - The pagans in Pergamum, likewise, were evidently encouraging the Christians to join in their pagan feasts, and the sexual immorality that accompanied those feasts. By participating, some in the church had given tacit approval to Balaam's teaching.
  - Thus, some at the church of Pergamum were so compromised by this false teaching that God had to rectify this situation with "the sword of His mouth" (Cf. v12)
- [OT reference: Num 25:1-3]

### **The Story of Balaam**

Near the end of the 40 year wandering in the wilderness, as the older Israelites were dying off and the younger generation was taking over, they began to travel north through Moab (the Trans-Jordan), east of the Dead Sea and Jordan River. Balak did not like the fact that the Israelites were traveling through his territory, so he hired Balaam, a prophet for profit. So Balaam uttered seven oracles (outlined below), but the problem (for Balak) is that each of these oracles, instead of being a curse upon Israel, ended up being a blessing to Israel (Cf. Gen 12:2-3).

Balaam then took Balak aside, because his curses weren't working, and told him that he couldn't curse Israel outright any longer. Instead, his new strategy should be to put Israel into a position where the Israelites themselves are living in contradiction to God's commands (the Mosaic Covenant). The reasoning was that if he could get the Israelites to be disobedient and compromise their beliefs and disobey God's commands, the curses of the Mosaic covenant would kick in and punish Israel. If Balaam could get Israel to compromise and disobey the covenant, it would no longer be them trying to curse Israel, God Himself would do it.

### **Balaam's Seven Oracles Blessing Israel (Num 23-24)**

1. Balaam explained that God's blessings upon Israel were irrevocable (Num 23:1-12)
2. Balaam explained that the source of Israel's blessing was her unique relationship to Yahweh (Num 23:13-26)
3. Balaam extolled Israel's beauty (Num 23:27—24:14)
4. Balaam explained that a future messianic deliverer (Gen 49:10) would spring forth and exercise dominion from Israel (Num 24:15-19)
5. Balaam predicts Amalek's destruction. Amalek was the first foe that Israel had to fight against after leaving Egypt (Ex 17) (Num 24:20)
6. Balaam predicts the destruction of the Midianite group known as the Kenites as well as Assyria (Num 24:21-22)
7. The nations of the seventh oracle are difficult to identify (Num 24:23-24)

### **3 NT References to Balaam**

- Way of Balaam (2 Peter 2:15) - hireling; making a "market" for his gift; sold his gift of prophecy for money
- Error of Balaam (Jude 11) - sacrificing eternal riches for temporal gain
- Doctrine of Balaam (Rev 2:14) - spiritually unchaste; marriage with the world

(b) Teachings of the Nicolaitans (2:15)

15 So you too, have some who in the same way hold to the **teaching of the Nicolaitans**.

15 So you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans.

15 You also have some who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans.

15 So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.

- "...teaching of the Nicolaitans" - numerous interpretations, many without any evidence; it's a compound word: *Nicao*, to conquer, overcome, rule; *Laos*, laity or people: it means to use clerical stature or position to rule over the laity (people).

— Nicolaitanism has come down through history as typifying any system that seeks to dominate people rather than serve the people, or to divide or make distinctions between the clergy and the laity, where the clergy ruled over the laity

— The Nicolaitanism had become doctrine! Ephesus hated the *deeds* of the Nicolaitans (v6). The very group that Ephesus was commended for not tolerating, Pergamum was condemned for tolerating.

— The Nicolaitans evidently regarded these sins as acceptable under the pretense of Christian liberty

— "Balaam" in Hebrew can mean "swallow the people" so the ideological connection between the Nicolaitans ("conquer the people") and Balaam is clear

— During this period of church history, a distinction began to emerge between the clergy and the laity with different sets of laws and regulations for each group. A priestly order was set up in the church, which further corrupted and laid the foundation for what was to follow in the next phase of the Church Age.



## Grant R. Jeffrey

*Apocalypse: The Coming Judgment of the Nations*, p. 72-73.

“There is a lot of disagreement about who these Nicolaitans were...Christ created a universal ‘holy priesthood’ (1 Peter 2:5) where every believer is a priest. The Nicolaitans attempted to re-create the hierarchy of the Old Testament priesthood. They sought to establish a priestly authority over laymen. The Greek word is derived from *Nike* meaning ‘victory’ and *Laos* meaning ‘people.’ **It suggests a group of people who seek to elevate themselves into a special class of priesthood over other Christians.** Jesus told us in 1 Timothy 2:5: ‘For there is one God and one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus.’ **Such men sought the sole right to interpret the Scriptures for other Christians.** Centuries later, after Emperor Constantine’s conversion, this Nicolaitan heresy produced the Babylonian hierarchy of priests, leading to the spiritual “dark ages” of the medieval period.”

(E) Exhortation to Change (2:16a)

(F) Consequence (2:16b)

16 Therefore **repent**; or else **I am coming** to you **quickly**, and I will **wage war** against **them** with the **sword of My mouth**.

16 Therefore repent; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth.

16 So repent. If you don't, I will come to you quickly and wage war against them with the sword of my mouth.

16 Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.



- "...repent" - *metanoēō*, to change your mind; when described in the context of salvation, it is a synonym for belief
- Repentance was the solution God was offering to this church...repent from following false teaching of Balaam and the Nicolaitans
- If the erring believers did not judge themselves and repent, they could anticipate God's judgment (Cf. 1 Cor 11:31)
- "...I am coming" - this doesn't refer to the Second Coming or even the Rapture; it refers to a personal coming of Jesus Christ to this church, to wage war against those who hold to these false doctrines (teachings of Balaam and Nicolaitans)
- "...quickly" - *tachos*, does not always describe chronological time sequence; can be used qualitatively
- See note: **Timing Texts** and notes on 1:1
- "...wage war" - *polemeō*, to carry out war; to fight
- "...them" - the compromisers in the church; those in the church at Pergamum who hold to the teaching of Balaam (v14) and those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans (v15)
- "...the sword of My mouth" - the Word of God (Cf. Heb 4:12); Jesus is personally going to come to this church and expose the scandal of these false beliefs, through His Word
- God will go to war with His church to expose sin and false doctrine, and sometimes He will use the secular world to do so
- Interesting that Balaam died "with the sword" (Num 31:8; Joshua 13:22)

Jesus reprimanded the church because they failed to exercise authority over the teaching in the church. This was the opposite problem than what Jesus found in the church of Ephesus, where the heretics were rooted out, but love was missing (v2,4).

(G) Exhortation to Listen (2:17a)

(H) Promise to overcomers (2:17b-d)

(a) Hidden manna (2:17b)

(b) White stone (2:17c)

(c) New name (2:17d)

17 The one who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To **the one** who overcomes, I will give *some* of the **hidden manna**, and I will give him a **white stone**, and a **new name** written on the stone which no one knows except the one who receives *it*.'

17 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, to him I will give *some* of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it.'

17 'Let everyone listen to what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone. On the white stone is written a new name that no one knows except the person who receives it.'



**17** 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 hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.

- "...the one" - see note on 2:7

- "...hidden manna" - provision from God; a hidden storehouse of provision from which the Lord can distribute to those who please Him

— The storehouse and provision of God is so extensive that it covers physical things as well as spiritual things

- "...white stone" - innocence (Cf. Is 1:18); imperfection exchanged for perfection at the point of faith

— This becomes our new identity for eternity; old things are passed away, behold all things become new

— Jurors at the time used white stones to vote to free a person accused of a crime; they were also used as entrance tickets to plays and banquets

— Victors in contests or battles also received a white stone

— Roman entrance ticket to Colosseum: a white stone with name written on it allowed one to enter the arena

— God frees us from the condemnation we deserve, declares us righteous, and freely opens the door to His kingdom to us

- "...new name" - God will elevate the overcomer (victor) to the position of ruler, and will give him a "new name" as He did for Joseph (Gen 41:39-45), Abram (Gen 17:5) and Jacob (Gen 32:28)

— Names and the giving of names is very significant in Scripture. All the way back to Adam, names reveal destinies; the giving of a name to someone refers to authority.

— Since they did not deny God's name (v13), He will give them a new name

— "new" - *kainon*, new in the sense of different, not new in contrast to what is old

— It is unknown to others in the sense that others who are not overcomers do not possess it

[OT reference: Ex 16:33-34; Is 62:2; 65:15]

(4) Letter to the Church at Thyatira (2:18-29)

(A) Destination (2:18a)

(B) Description of Christ (2:18b)

**18** "And to the angel of the church in **Thyatira** write: The **Son of God**, who has **eyes like a flame of fire**, and **feet like burnished bronze**, says this:

**18** "And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: The Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet are like burnished bronze, says this:

**18** "To the messenger of the church in Thyatira, write: 'The Son of God, whose eyes are like flaming fire and whose feet are like glowing bronze, says this:

**18** And unto the angel of the church in Thyatira write; These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass;

- "...Thyatira" - means "perpetual sacrifice"; located 35 miles SE of Pergamum

— It was the smallest and least significant of the seven cities, but received the longest letter

— The only other time this church is mentioned is in Acts 16:14 in regards to Lydia, who was from the city of Thyatira. It is *thought* Lydia had a large role in founding the church; it is *known* that she had a role in founding the church at Philippi.

— Christ sent this letter to commend some in this church for their service, orthodoxy and fidelity, and to warn others to turn from false teaching and sinful practices

- "...Son of God" - emphasizes Jesus' deity and right to judge; the *only mention* in Revelation

— The main deity in Thyatira was Tyrinnas, who his worshippers said was a "son of the gods"

- "...eyes like a flame of fire" - speaks of judgment; He can see directly into a church or an individual's heart to, thus He is in a position to correct what is happening in a church or in a heart (Cf. 1:14; 2:23; 1 Cor 4:5)

- "...feet like burnished bronze" - it's in His feet that He stamps out judgment (Cf. 1:15; John 5:22); this is why the judgment of God is referred to as a winepress (Cf. 14:20; 19:15)

— The titles of Christ used for this church are all symbols of judgment. The point of this description of Christ is that He is going to judge this particular church.

[OT reference: Dan 10:6]

(C) Commendation (2:19)

(a) Deeds (*ergon*) (2:19a)

(b) Love (2:19b)

(c) Faith (2:19c)

(d) Service (2:19d)

(e) Perseverance (*hypomonē*) (2:19e)

(f) Your latter deeds are greater (2:19f)

**19** 'I know your **deeds**, and your **love** and **faith**, and **service** and **perseverance**, and that **your deeds of late are greater than at first**.

**19** 'I know your deeds, and your love and faith and service and perseverance, and that your deeds of late are greater than at first.

**19** 'I know what you've been doing—your love, faithfulness, service, and endurance—and that your last actions are greater than the first.

19 I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last to be more than the first.

- The good news: their deeds..love..faith..service..faith..patience..and the fact that their deeds are greater than before! Jesus names six positive characteristics of this church, and tells them they are improving!

- "...deeds" - *ergon*, because we are saved *unto* good deeds, not *by* our good deeds, God expects believers, as they abide in Christ, to produce lasting fruit (Eph 2:10; Cf. 2:2)

- "...love" - *agapē*, the opposite of Ephesus, who because so busy with activity that they fell out of love with Christ and each other

- "...faith" - *pistis*, belief begins and ends with faith alone in Christ alone

- "...service" - *diakonia*, where we get the English word "deacon"; the Lord knows and is well aware of the nameless, faceless servants of this church who did the work to make the church function

- "...perseverance" - *hypomonē*, to continue on doing the will of God, despite opposition and discomfort

— It's easy to do the will of God and persevere when circumstances are good, but God wants to develop in us a perseverance that forges forward when things aren't so good or we encounter opposition or mistreatment

- "...your deeds of late are greater than at first" - their service and sacrifice to the Lord was increasing as time went on; they were getting better

— If the doctrine espoused by some Calvinists and Arminians was true, that true Christians must increase in their faith and deeds, why did Christ praise this church for doing so?

Wouldn't it be something that was expected?

#### (D) Rebuke (2:20)

20 But I have *this* against you, that you **tolerate** the woman **Jezebel**, who **calls herself a prophetess**, and **she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray** so that they commit **sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols**.

20 But I have *this* against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray so that they commit *acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols*.

20 But I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophet and who teaches and leads my servants to practice immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols.

20 Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou suffers that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols.

- "...tolerate" - key word...they didn't necessarily *endorse* this woman and her teachings, but they *tolerated* them
- Sometimes Christians put up or tolerate things that should've been put out of our lives a long time ago (2 Cor 11:4)
- In the last days, the church will not endure sound doctrine (1 Tim 4:3-4)
- When we become tolerant to falsehood, we shut the door to what we need in terms of truth; Thyatira opened the door to something that should've been pushed out a long time ago. This is in contrast to Ephesus, who could not tolerate evil men (false teachers), but put them to the test (Cf. v2).
- "...Jezebel" - is the example God gives to this church (1 Kings 16-22)
- She was a Gentile (Phoenician) who married Ahab, a king in the Northern Kingdom. Once she married him (mixed marriage), she began to have a negative impact on his reign.
- In 1 Kings 21 is the story of Naboth's Vineyard...Ahab coveted this vineyard, but he couldn't just take it because of private property rights, and in Israel, the king was under the law just like everyone else.
- Ahab offered to buy the vineyard, but Naboth would not sell it, so Ahab went home and began to sulk. Jezebel saw him in this condition and began to mock and ridicule him saying, What kind of king are you? Where I come from, kings do whatever they want. There are no restrictions or laws the king must obey.
- So Ahab went and took the vineyard, contrary to the Mosaic Law, and murdered Naboth in the process. This is one of the reasons God judged the Northern Kingdom and sent them into exile at the hands of the Assyrians.
- If you are going to allow someone influence in your life, you better look at their spouse. Women have incredible influential power over their husbands, both for good and for bad.
- Jezebel, through her negative influence over her husband, the king of the Northern Kingdom, brought in a level of idolatry that Israel had never seen before
- "...calls herself a prophetess" - she's not a prophetess, she was not called by God, so she had to go around telling everyone she was a prophetess
- Similar to Jesus' words to Ephesus (Cf. v2) where that church tested those who "called themselves apostles"; they were not apostles, they were self-appointed, just like Jezebel
- "...she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray" - here's the issue: they had someone in the church who usurped the leadership position of a man and is now in the position of misleading the church into false doctrine (Cf. 1 Tim 2:11-14).
- She evidently misled the church at Thyatira to such an extent that Jesus is forced to address the issue in His letter, despite all the other good things that were happening in this church. The church disregarded divine direction as given by Paul in 1 Tim 2:11-14.
- Women have a vital role to play in the church, but when it comes to the roles of pastor/teacher or elder, there are gender restrictions to hold those offices

- "...sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols" - the sexual standards of God were being discarded and idolatry was taking hold
- The problem here is not Jezebel...it's the church permitting, endorsing, *tolerating* Jezebel
- The problem at Sodom & Gomorrah wasn't homosexuality...it was the fact that the whole town condoned it (Gen 19)
- The problem comes in when it is widespread and civically condoned
- These are the very things that Jezebel influenced Ahab to do, thereby corrupting the Northern Kingdom and bringing the mandatory judgment of God upon them by the Assyrians in 722 BC

[OT reference: 1 Kings 16:31-32; 2 Kings 9:7,22]

(E) Exhortation to change (2:21)

21 I gave her **time to repent**, and she does not **want** to repent of her sexual immorality.

21 I gave her time to repent, and she does not want to repent of her immorality.

21 I gave her time to repent, but she refused to repent of her immorality.

21 And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not.

- "...time to repent" - God gave Jezebel a window of grace to repent before the consequences of judgment would come upon her

- Throughout Scripture, God gives mankind an opportunity to repent of their sin
- In the case of the Canaanites, God gave them 400 years before He sent in Joshua and the Israelites to exterminate them
- God was patient for 120 years before He sent the Flood to exterminate mankind (Gen 6:3; Cf. 1 Peter 3:20)
- Sin has a magnetic pull on us like a moth to a flame and we think "I got away with it, nothing happened" so we keep indulging it over and over again
- When we do this, in reality we confuse God's "window of grace" with the idea that there is no payday; we deceive ourselves into thinking that discipline or judgment will never come because we're currently experiencing this "window of grace"
- Thyatira probably thought everything was fine...the problem is here, we never corrected it, God hasn't sent discipline, so I guess it doesn't matter. But in reality, what they did is deceived themselves that consequences for sin will never follow. They were in the "window of grace" but rest assured, judgment would come if they don't repent.
- Consequences follow sin like night follows day; it is an inevitable, immutable law of God. Just because the consequences don't overtake us immediately doesn't mean they will never come.
- Look at the things David lost because of his adultery with Bathsheba and subsequent murder of Uriah: eviction from the throne, death of his firstborn child, violence within his household, etc. (see notes on 2 Sam 13:39).

- We have the freedom to pick our sin, but we do not have the freedom to pick the consequence
- "...want" - *theleō*, wish or desire; the problem of unrepentance was not with God, it was with Jezebel and her followers
- God had given them a window of grace, to which they did not avail themselves
- This is how God deals with humanity, contrary to some of the lopsided false theologies today (which argue that man has no free will in anything): God will not override Himself by force in our lives because of how He made us, in His image.
- The fall of man has not erased our image-bearing status; post-fall and post-flood (Gen 9:6), man is still made in God's image. James 3:9 says that still in the NT age of the Church, we're still made in the image of God.
- Regarding divine sovereignty and free will, consider the paralytic man in John 5...he had been paralyzed for 38 years. Jesus asked him, do you wish to get well (John 5:6)?
- There are many people who have grown so accustomed to their sin and the consequences that they really don't want to change. We know that this man's condition was because of sin because Jesus later told him to not go back to sin or something worse would happen to him.

#### (E) Consequence (2:22-25)

- 22 Behold, I will throw **her** on a **bed of sickness**, and those who commit adultery with **her** into **great tribulation**, unless they repent of **her** deeds.
- 22 Behold, I will throw her on a bed of sickness, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds.
- 22 Look! I am going to strike her with illness. Those who commit adultery with her will also suffer greatly, unless they repent from acting like her.
- 22 Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds.
- These consequences are very severe, but they have nothing to do with salvation
- However, when we move into sin, there are all kinds of things of value that we forfeit that have nothing to do with heaven or hell
- "...her" [3x] - Jezebel
- "...bed of sickness" - because she liked her bed so much in her immoralities, Christ would throw her into it...however this time it would be a sick bed!
- God is patient, but He does not tolerate sin forever. Do not think that as the Lord gives people time to repent that He is accepting our sin (2 Peter 3:8-11).
- "...great tribulation" - don't confuse this with the "Great Tribulation" coming onto the earth later in Revelation; this refers to tribulation and struggle that will come upon this church because of their immorality

23 And I will kill her children with plague, and all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds.

23 And I will kill her children with pestilence, and all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds.

23 I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am the one who searches minds and hearts. I will reward each of you as your actions deserve.

23 And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works.

- "...I will kill" - maximum divine discipline

— Whom the Lord loves, He chastens and sometimes that chastening can be so severe that an individual can forfeit their life (Cf. Acts 5:1-11; 1 Cor 11:30; 1 John 5:19)

- "...her children" - not physical children, but spiritual children; refers to those at Thyatira who were influenced by her doctrine

- "...all the churches will know" - when God metes out maximum divine discipline, it is designed to refocus the church on His holiness and push them toward repentance (Cf. Acts 5:11)

— The maximum divine discipline that God would pour out in Thyatira was not only a message for that church, but also the other six churches, and all of the churches up to and including today

- "...searches the minds and hearts" - sin has a contaminating influence (Gal 5:9); if it's not challenged and counter-acted, it begins to have a contagious influence

— We grossly underestimate the power of sin...we think we can negotiate with it, overpower it, we think we can control it...we should go back to Gen 4:7 and learn what God said to Cain ("sin is desiring you (seeking to control you), but you must control it").

— The sin of Jezebel that had infected Thyatira was not under control, and pretty soon it was going to spread and infect other churches, and not be under control anywhere. So God is bringing maximum divine discipline so that all the churches will know that God searches the minds and hearts, and will give to us according to our deeds.

[OT reference: Ps 7:9; 26:2; 28:4; Jer 11:20; 17:10]

24 But I say to you, the rest who are in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not known the **deep things of Satan, as they call them**—I place no other burden on you.

24 But I say to you, the rest who are in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not known the deep things of Satan, as they call them—I place no other burden on you.



24 'But as for the rest of you in Thyatira—you who do not hold to this teaching and who have not learned what some people call the deep things of Satan—I won't burden you with anything else.

24 But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak; I will put upon you none other burden.

- There was a group at Thyatira who held to the teachings of Jezebel, but there was another group of people who did not

- Jesus comforts the latter group that they will not be part of the maximum divine

- discipline that He will mete out against the former group, those who would not compromise

- Jesus tells them that He puts no other burden upon them; this consequence only relates to those following the teaching of Jezebel

- "...deep things of Satan" - Satan has doctrine and teaching (Cf. 1 Tim 4:1)

- "deep things" - *bathys*, profound

- "...as they call them" - "so-called"; people called the teaching of Satan "deep" but Jesus says here that they aren't really that deep; they have the illusion of depth; an artificial substitute

- God's teaching in Scripture, however, is deep (1 Cor 2:10; Col 2:2-3; ); His love is also deep (Eph 3:18)

- Jezebel was a "so-called" prophetess (v20), just as some at this church believed in her "so-called" deep teachings of Satan

25 Nevertheless what you have, hold firmly until I come.

25 Nevertheless what you have, hold fast until I come.

25 Just hold on to what you have until I come.

25 But that which ye have already hold fast till I come.

- Jesus is telling them to remember what you have and hold on to it firmly until He comes

- In Jer 6:16, the Lord told Israel to "stand by the ways and see and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; then you will find a resting place for your souls."

- The Lord told Israel if you want victory, rest, invigoration, nourishment, encouragement...then go back to what you already know is right. Likewise here, Jesus is not putting a complex set of spiritual criteria on these non-compromisers in Thyatira...other than to know what they do to be true.

- Problem is, like today, people always want to hear something new. "There is nothing new under the sun" (Eccl 1:9); what is new is not true, and what's true is probably not new.

- People don't need to hear something new, they need to be directed back to that well-trodden ancient path



— Unfortunately, after Jeremiah told Israel to follow in those ancient paths, Israel responded: "We will not walk in it." They were tired of the "old way," it wasn't sophisticated enough, it doesn't appeal to my pride, I want to devise my own spirituality.

Acts 17:21: (Now all the Athenians and the strangers visiting there used to spend their time in nothing other than telling or hearing something new.)

(G) Promise to overcomers (2:26-28)

(a) Authority over the nations (2:26-27)

26 The **one who overcomes**, and the one **who keeps My deeds until the end**, I will give him **authority over the nations**;

26 He who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations;

26 To the person who conquers and continues to do what I've commanded to the end, I will give authority over the nations.

26 And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations:

- "...one who overcomes" - believers

- "...who keeps My deeds until the end" - an additional requirement, to finish well (persevere) over and above simply being a believer

— Describes a person who continues to make progress in the sanctification process throughout their life, until the end

— The prize for those who overcome, and finish well, was salvation and authority to reign with Christ in His earthly kingdom (Cf. 1:6; 12:5; 19:15; Ps 2:8-9; 2 Tim 2:12; Rev 20:4-6)

- "...authority over the nations" - describes rewards for the believer

— Because we are sons and daughters of the King, we'll be right there with Him ruling and reigning, under His delegated authority

— All Christians will rule and reign with Christ, but some ("those who keep My deeds until the end") will be given a greater degree of authority than others (Luke 19:16-26)

27 AND HE SHALL RULE THEM WITH A ROD OF IRON, AS THE VESSELS OF THE POTTER ARE SHATTERED, as I also have received *authority* from My Father;

27 and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are broken to pieces, as I also have received *authority* from My Father;

27 'He will rule them with an iron scepter; shattering them like clay pots.'

27 And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father.

- Quoting from Ps 2:9, describing Jesus' second coming as a Conquering King, who will rule over planet earth for 1,000 years (Cf. Rev 12:5)
  - When Jesus receives the authority to rule over the entire earth from the Father, He will share that authority with those "who keep His deeds until the end"
  - The privilege to rule and reign with Christ, part of the grace package we receive at the moment of belief
- [OT reference: Ps 2:7-9; Is 30:14; Jer 19:11]

(b) The morning star (2:28)

- 28 and I will give him the **morning star**.
- 28 and I will give him the morning star.
- 28 'Just as I have received authority from my Father, I will also give him the morning star.
- 28 And I will give him the morning star.
- "...morning star" - Jesus (Cf. 2 Peter 1:19; Rev 22:16)
  - Jesus is called the Morning Star because it is the star that appears just before dawn, while night still lingers
  - Just like the morning star, Jesus will come for His bride, the Church, without warning before commencing the great and terrible Day of the Lord (Grant R Jeffrey)

We look at the world today and see it's getting pretty dark. We should look at the world today and say, It's getting pretty dark, but it's the perfect time for the Morning Star to show up. It's in the darkest time of the night when the Morning Star first appears.

The things of this world are not falling apart, they are falling into place.

(H) Exhortation to Listen (2:29)

- 29 The one who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'
- 29 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'
- 29 'Let everyone listen to what the Spirit says to the churches.'"
- 29 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.
- One of the earliest commands God gave to Israel is to "listen" or "hear" (Deut 6:4)
- LISTEN and SILENT are spelled with the exact same letters.*