

Revelation Chapter 2

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Now we will begin with the letters of Jesus to the seven churches. Why did Jesus pick these seven particular churches? Why not the Apostle Paul's home church at Antioch or the headquarters church in Jerusalem? The church in Ephesus is the only one of the seven that is also prominent in other parts in the NT. Before we get into the first letter, I want to give an overview and some background. In these seven letters there are at least four levels of meaning or application.

- 1) Local: They were actual churches with valid needs there in the first century.
- 2) Admonitory: "Spirit says to the churches" ...(plural) all seven letters apply to all seven churches of the first century, all churches there would ever be, including our local church here.
- 3) Personal: "He that hath an ear." It applies to you and me personally. If you have an ear to hear with, then the Lord wants you to listen, because what he is saying applies to you individually.
- 4) Prophetic: In their particular order, they lay out the entire history of the church. They fill the gap implied in Daniel 9:26, and between Rev 12:5 and 6, etc. The Book of Acts covered the first 30 years of the church, the Book of Revelation takes it from Acts to His Second Coming (covering about 2000 years). We are now looking back and as we shall see in subsequent studies, the order in which the seven churches are listed fits church history.

Since the church is not complete, the last 4 churches also are yet future, and therefore apply to us. We will see how this fits in subsequent studies.

Letter	Church Age	Dates (A.D.)
Ephesus	Apostolic Age	to 100
Smyrna	Age of Persecution	100 - 313
Pergamos	Imperial Church	313 - 590
Thyatira	Age of Papacy	590 - Tribulation
Sardis	Reformation	1517- Tribulation
Philadelphia	Missionary Church	730 - Rapture
Laodicea	Apostate Church	1900- Tribulation

•*The city of Ephesus at that time*

Before we get into the text, I want to give some background on this beautiful city of the first century Roman world.

•*History*

Tacitus records that the city was founded in 1400 B.C., with an early temple to the Mother Goddess and ancient Hittite fertility deity who subsequently became identified with Diana. Ionian colonists from Athens settled there about 1100 B.C.

In the middle of the 6th century B.C., the Lydians captured the city. Croesus, their king, was routed by the Persians in 541 B.C. and Ephesus was joined to other cities in the Ionian confederation. It was at this time that the tutelary deity became identified with Diana (daughter of Zeus, sister of Apollo) also sometimes called Artemis. (Acts 19:34-35) Ephesus was involved to its own disadvantage in the Peloponnesian and Persian wars

Peloponnesus--A peninsula forming the southern part of Greece south of the Gulf of Corinth. It was dominated by Sparta until the fourth century B.C..

and served as a key naval base. In 334 B.C. it fell to the Macedonians under Alexander. After his death, Lysimachus became master of the city and added great improvements.

Ephesus unwisely sided with Antiochus of Syria against the Romans. It eventually became the Roman capital of the province of Asia. But as a free city, Ephesus had its own municipal government and senate.

•*Geography*

Ephesus was called the "Queen of Asia": she was the proud capital of Ionia and chief harbor of proconsular Asia. It was an extremely wealthy and beautiful city, located near the mouth of the river Cayster (now Lower Meander). It was the principal line of communication between Rome and the eastern provinces. One major road ran eastward through a pass to Sardis and then to Galatia and beyond. Another led to Magnesia and up the valley of the river Meander to Iconium; a third ran through Collasae and Laodicea to the Euphrates. Trade with Greece and Italy ran through the port regularly.

•*Architecture*

Architecturally superb, its theater was 495 feet in diameter and held 25,000 people (Acts 19). The Marble Way, lined with statues and fountains, ran from the temple of Artemis (Diana) through the city to the Megnesia Gate. The Arcadian Way, another main road from the theater to the harbor, was 1735 feet long and 70 feet wide, lined with columns and shops and illuminated at night. The most outstanding architectural feature was the temple of Diana .

The temple of Diana, one of the "seven wonders" of the ancient world, was four times as large as the Parthenon at Athens, and stood on a platform 425 feet by 220 feet. The building itself was 340 by 165 feet, had 120 Ionic columns, each 60 feet high.

Ecstatic, sexual rites took place at the temple, involving both male and female prostitutes. Its income was threatened by Paul's preaching— this led to his departure. The temple was also an asylum for the criminals. One of the first banks, much as we have them today, functioned at the temple under the chief priests.

•*New Testament Period*

In the New Testament period Ephesus was the largest city of its day. As the harbor through silt deposits gradually became unusable, traffic diverted to Smyrna.

Ephesus was the center for the study of arts and magic; renowned over the world for talismans, incantations, books, charms, etc. (Burnings, Acts 19:19).

Paul's first visit was brief and was directed toward the Jewish community; he later made a second visit-- he was driven from the synagogue and settled in the school of Tyrannus for two years until the uproar in 58 A.D. (Acts 19:24-41; 20:1). Ephesus later became the center for missionary operations throughout Asia. Imitators followed, but without power. (Seven sons of Sceva: Acts 19:12-17.) After Paul left Ephesus and journeyed through Macedonia, he returned (to Miletus) for his famed farewell to the Ephesian elders.

Timothy is alleged to have become its first bishop (1 Tim 1:3). It is here that we find Aquila, Priscilla and Apollos. I Corinthians was penned during his second visit. Paul's Epistle to Ephesus was written from Rome.

John is said to have spent time in Ephesus with Mary, the Lord's mother. According to Eusebius and others, John returned there in 95 A.D. after Patmos, and spent his closing years there. His Gospel was apparently written from there. His tomb is there. The reputed home of Mary is now a shrine.

•*Later History*

The bishop of Ephesus was accorded rank and authority of a patriarch over the churches in the province of Asia. In 431 A.D., Emperor Theodosius II called a general church council at Ephesus to consider the hotly argued question of the time whether the Virgin Mary should be described as the mother of God, and 200 bishops at this Third Ecumenical Council decided in the affirmative.

Its chief rival city was Miletus, but alluvial deposits gradually silted up the harbor of Miletus also. Ephesus (for a while) eclipsed its rival in importance. The Romans stripped the wooded mountains of trees and soil eroded so that the resulting silt transformed the harbor to a swamp. Today 20 miles of land has cut off the city from the sea. (Even in the first century, Paul landed at Miletus—after one of the many dredgings—in Acts 20.

The present unpretentious village of Seljuk (Ayasuluk?), built by the Byzantines, is but a sad remainder of its former glory. After its destruction by the Goths in 262 A.D. it never regained its former glory.

The First of the seven letters -- to Ephesus

To begin our study, let's read the letter to Ephesus, Rev 2:1-7

Revelation 2:1 (NIV) *"To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands:*

Revelation 2:1 (KJV) *Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks;*

•*The word --> angel*

aggelos {ang'-el-os}

from aggelos -- to bring tidings, derived from the root word to bring, literally a bringer, usually translated as "angel"

1) a messenger, envoy, one who is sent, an angel, a messenger from God

In this case, from the context it appears that whoever was the normal bringer of the word of God in the church at Ephesus was to be the addressee of this as well as all the other six letters that Jesus dictated to John. In the 1st century, long before the printing press was invented, few people knew how to read and write. So this messenger would have to have the ability to read and write in order to read this special letter to the Ephesian church. It is also probable that before the letter was sent on it was carefully copied for the Church archive.

•*The church -- the light bearer*

A lampstand is a bearer, not a source, of light. The lamps integral to the lampstands commonly used in those days were fueled by oil, usually olive oil. Oil is emblematic of the Holy Spirit. Jesus is in (our) midst, yet He holds us in His nail-scarred hands (John 10:28).

John 10:28 *I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand.*

The commendations

•*Jesus knows*

Revelation 2:2 (NIV) *I know your deeds, your **hard work** and your **perseverance**. I know that you **cannot tolerate** wicked men, that you **have tested** those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have **found them false**.*

Revelation 2:2 (KJV) *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:*

Revelation 2:3 (NIV) *You have persevered and have **endured** hardships for my name, and have **not grown weary**.*

Revelation 2:3 (KJV) *And **hast borne**, and hast **patience**, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and **hast not fainted**.*

Jesus knows all the good things you are doing for Him, such as giving for example if you are doing it in a way not to be seen by men (Matt 6:2-4)

Matthew 6:2 *"So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full.*

Matthew 6:3 *But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing,*

Matthew 6:4 *so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.*

He knows and commends the Ephesians here for their 1)labour 2)patience and 3)their efforts to maintain truth and expose falsehood.

•*Testing evil teachers of false doctrines*

Jesus commends them for being intolerant of wickedness in their midst and exposing and rejecting those who teach falsehood. Paul gives some strong warnings and exhortation to do this. (Acts 20:28-31)

Acts 20:28 *Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.*

Acts 20:29 *I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock.*

Acts 20:30 *Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them.*

Acts 20:31 *So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.*

John also gives solemn warnings on this matter (1 John 4:1-3)

1 John 4:1 *Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.*

1 John 4:2 *This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God,*

1 John 4:3 *but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.*

The age we live in today is characterized by many things, and deception is perhaps one of the biggest. We live in an age of deceit (2 Cor 11:14-15)

2 Corinthians 11:14 *And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.*

2 Corinthians 11:15 *It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve.*

with many charlatans out there. Jesus commends the Ephesians for exposing and rejecting such.

When you hear of prophecies and predictions supposedly from the Lord, do not categorically reject them, but test them according to the scriptures. (1 Thess 5:20-21)

1 Thessalonians 5:20 *do not treat prophecies with contempt.*

1 Thessalonians 5:21 *Test everything. Hold on to the good.*

Notice here again one of the many sevens of the book of Revelation. The Lord tells us in many places in scripture how we, like the Ephesians here, may be strong. One of a number of scriptures is (Isa 40:31)

Isaiah 40:31 *but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.*

The criticism

•Nevertheless

Revelation 2:4 (NIV) *Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love.*

Revelation 2:4 (KJV) *Nevertheless I have against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.*

The boss calls you into his office and tells you that you are doing a good job in certain areas, but then he says "Nevertheless...." and you feel a lump in your throat and in your mind's eye you can see the pink slip enclosed with your final paycheck.

•Love of espousal

Jesus here is talking about the love of espousal. The very names of the churches in these letters are significant: "Ephesus" = maiden of choice; darling.

•The word --> first

protos {pro'-tos}

1) first in time or place

1a) in any succession of things or persons

2) first in rank

2a) influence, honour

2b) chief

2c) principal

3) first, at the first

God uses the marriage relationship to communicate His most intimate and important truth, that He wants a love relationship with us. Paul in his epistle to the Ephesians taught them this, but apparently they had forgotten it by this time. (Eph 5:22-28)

Ephesians 5:25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her

Ephesians 5:26 to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word,

Ephesians 5:27 and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.

Never were they busier... but activity in the King's business is no substitute for time with The King. He wants devotion, not doctrine. The Lord complains about the lost bridal love of Israel. (Jeremiah 2:1-2)

Jeremiah 2:1 The word of the LORD came to me:

Jeremiah 2:2 "Go and proclaim in the hearing of Jerusalem: "I remember the devotion of your youth, how as a bride you loved me and followed me through the desert, through a land not sown.

God wants us to seek His face in humility. (2Chron 7:14)

2 Chronicles 7:14 if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

Spend time with the King. He did not create you for service-- he has angels for that -- (Hebrews 1:14)

Hebrews 1:14 Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?

He created you for fellowship and love. The kind of love that has action attached to it is what He wants.

•*King David compared to Solomon*

Compare David's reign with Solomon's. By earthly standards Solomon was a great success. He took Israel to a peak, which they never regained, and won't until Messiah reigns in Jerusalem. David pervades the Scripture; Solomon is mentioned only with adverse comments (Matt 6:28 -29).

Matthew 6:28 "And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin.

Matthew 6:29 Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these.

Solomon sought wisdom, but later became apostate through his foreign wives. David simply sought fellowship: to dwell in the house of the Lord forever (Psalm 23:6).

Psalms 23:6 Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

Even though David had many shortcomings, God testified of him that he is a man after His own heart. (1Samuel 13:14)

1 Samuel 13:14 But now your kingdom will not endure; the LORD has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him leader of his people, because you have not kept the Lord's command."

Even after David sinned by committing murder, he finally cries out to the Lord in Psalm 51:12 .

Psalms 51:12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

The joy of salvation is bound up in love. Many of his Psalms have been put to music in our day and are used regularly in worship of our Lord.

•*Fruit of the Spirit and first commandment*

The first-named fruit of the Spirit is love (Gal 5:22)

Galatians 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

It is also the first commandment Sh'ma: Thou shalt love... not serve (Deut 6:4-5) The Supreme importance of love is not a New Testament idea. For the Jews back then as well as today this is one of the most important scriptures.

Deuteronomy 6:4 Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.

Deuteronomy 6:5 Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

First love is the abandonment of all for a love that has abandoned all. No thought of self. "If I speak with the tongues of men...." 1 Cor13:1-8)

Exhortations and warnings

Revelation 2:5 (NIV) Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.

Revelation 2:5 (KJV) Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.

•Remember, repent and repeat

Jesus gives them a threefold admonition: Remember, repent and repeat Do you remember how you first felt when you became a christian? God wants you to recapture the joy of your salvation. Repent -- aorist tense -- imperative to do it immediately without delay. Repeat -- go back and do what you did earlier.

•Lost witness

Is there a church in Ephesus today? A church or a person loses attractiveness to non-christians by a lack of love. The Lord gives the world where right to judge us who call ourselves Christians I our display to the world of genuine love. (John 13:35)

John 13:35 By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

No one can love God and not also love their fellow humans. (1John 4:20)

1 John 4:20 If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen.

•Mysterious commendation

Revelation 2:6 (NIV) But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

Revelation 2:6 (KJV) But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

•Nicolaitans

Some have interpreted this as some kind of sect. Irenaeus alleges a sect founded by Nicolas of Antioch, (one of the 7 deacons of Acts 6:5).

Acts 6:5 This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism.

Tertullian describes the sect as gnostics and libertines. Clement of Alexandria refers to their unbridled and excessive lusts. It is important to remember that Jesus hates the deeds, not the Nicolaitans. These deeds will become doctrines in the Letter to Pergamos. It has also been suggested that the Greek word represents a translation of the Hebrew name "Balaam"

Most likely it is an untranslated name of some heretical group of that day. Their name comes from 2 words: nikao (conquer) + laos (people). It marks the earliest beginnings of the concept of the division of the clergy from the laity. The idea of ranks and privileges within the church is not biblical. Jesus is very much against this. (Matt 20:25-26)

Matthew 20:25 Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them.

Matthew 20:26 Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant,

In (1 Pet 5:2-3) Peter, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit who knows the future, wrote very strongly against this division,

1 Peter 5:2 Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers--not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve;

1 Peter 5:3 not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.

perhaps knowing by the Spirit that he himself will be used to strengthen this division of the church into two levels.

Jesus commends the Ephesians for hating these deeds, which as we'll see when we study the letter to Pergamus become doctrines later in church history.

•Promise to the Overcomer

Revelation 2:7 (NIV) He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

Revelation 2:7 (KJV) He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.

•Have an ear?

This phrase is repeated in all of the seven letters, and Jesus used it (Matt 11:15; Luke 14:35) quite a number of times while He sojourned here on Earth.

Matthew 11:15 He who has ears, let him hear.

Luke 14:35 It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out. "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

It underscores the importance of what He is saying to us. The structure and location of the promise to the overcomer is different in the first three letters than in the last four and we'll look at that in more detail in the later letters.

If you have an ear, then use it to listen to Jesus! He speaks to you personally through His word.

•The Tree of Life

Some of the myths concerning this tree:

--> The homa-tree of the Persians, growing at the spring Arduisur, which comes from the throne of God;

--> The halpasoma-tree of the Hindus, which furnished the water of immortality, the libation of the gods;

--> The tuba-tree of the Arabs;

--> The lotus-tree of the Greeks;

--> The tree of Assyrian adorned by royal figures and guarded by genii, similar to the cherubim..cf. Ezek 47:12.

It has been said that the Bible is the story built around three trees. 1)The tree of good and evil in the garden; 2)The tree (cross) upon which Jesus died and 3) the tree of life.

•In summary

The church at Ephesus represents the Apostolic age, and even then, in the very beginnings, false doctrines arose from within the church. Even at the end of the first century when this was written the church already had problems. Thus, even the "Church Fathers" are not a reliable model. Paul's letter to Galatians exhorts not to "perfect in the flesh what was begun in the Spirit." The only proper model for us is the Book of Acts. If you study it you will notice the emphasis is on:

1) The focus on the teaching of the Word. Satan's first challenge is against God's Word and then to castigate God's character. They used Scripture to authenticate their experiences. They also had:

2) Commitment to assembly and fellowship;

3) Breaking of Bread ("in remembrance of me");

4) Commitment to prayer.

Ephesus, as many churches still today was very zealous of guarding the truth of the gospel, but lost the closeness to the Lord. Jesus wants us to keep the truth, but not to forget that He is at the center. He said the God wants to be worshiped in Spirit and in truth. (John 4:24)

John 4:24 God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth."

Let us pray that we will be such worshippers.

The Church at Smyrna

•Background and history

Today Smyrna is called Izmir, and it is the third largest city in Turkey (pop. 300,000; NT: 100,000?). It exports tobacco, grapes, figs, cotton, olives, and olive oil.

Smyrna possesses an excellent harbor and is encircled by cypress-clad hills. Smyrna was inhabited by the Asiatic Leleges in about 3000 B.C., with indications of later Hittite influence. In the 11th century B.C. Aeolian colonists from Cyme settled in the area. About 900 B.C., according to Herodotus, the area fell into the hands of the Ionians from Colophon, and there commenced the most glorious phase of Smyrna's history. During this period the poet Homer was born, lived and died in Smyrna. Three centuries of greatness ended, however, with the attack of the Lydians.

Smyrna stood at the entrance to the broad fertile valley of Mermus, at the mouth of the river Meles, and on the well sheltered gulf of Smyrna. It was strategically placed for trade between Europe and Asia. It was, thus, a rival to Sardis and the Lydian kingdom. It was about 42 miles north of Ephesus and possessed an excellent double harbor. The outer harbor was a deep water mooring ground; the inner (now silted in) had a narrow entrance that could be blocked with a chain.

An expedition under Gyges was defeated and driven back, but a later one under Alyattes, then king of Lydia, was successful. Smyrna was devastated and ceased to exist for three centuries. A pathetic end to a history of two and one-half millennia.

In the 4th century, Alexander the Great, in response to a dream, ordered Lysimachus, one of his four generals, to build a strong, well planned city, the most beautiful in Ionia, which became known as "the Flower of Ionia." It prospered into one of the greatest of the then known world.

Smyrna came under control of the Romans in 27 B.C., having proved a faithful ally to Rome in the Syrian and Mithridatic wars. From 27 B.C. to 324 A.D. she enjoyed great material prosperity. Strabo described it as the most beautiful city in the world.

The city suffered many setbacks. In the reign of Tiberius, it was almost blotted out by an earthquake. Between 178 and 180 A.D. it suffered a succession of seismic disturbances which again reduced the vulnerable city to ruins. Marcus Aurelius once more restored it (and parts of the new agora are still standing). In 378 another earthquake demolished the city, but the intrepid Smyrneans again rebuilt. Even today, bustling Izmir has been termed the "Paris of the Levant." (Levant = countries bordering the eastern shore of the mediterranean)

•Pagan Worship

Smyrna was richly embellished with temples and splendid buildings, and the perfection and symmetry of those encircling Mount Pagos resulted in the title "the crown of Smyrna." At the foot of the mountain stood the temple of Zeus, the father of the gods, reputed to be the lord of the sky, rain, clouds, and thunder. Along the Golden Street stood the shrines of Apollo the sun-god, Aphrodite the goddess of love and beauty, Aesculapius the god of medicine, and finally, close to the sea, Cybele, a Phrygian nature goddess. At the Agora (the commercial and political center) were statues of Poseidon the sea-god, and Demeter the goddess of corn.

The priests of the various deities were termed stephanophori, in reference to the laurel or golden crowns which they used to wear in public processions. They were awarded this honor at the end of their year of office. (The term stephanos is alluded to in Rev 2:10.)

The tutelary goddess of Smyrna was Cybele (later, the Greek Rhea, the daughter of the sky and the earth and the mother of Zeus, Poseidon and Hades). Her worship was wild and unrestrained. As the

giver of wealth, she became recognized in the great cities as the goddess of the settled life and of towns, hence her crown of walled cities. She appears on Smyrnead coins depicted as enthroned and wearing a crown of battlements and towers. [Goddess of fortresses, ("god of forces") Daniel 11:38?]

•*Caesar worship*

In addition to the usual deities, Smyrna readily accepted Caesar worship. In 196 B.C. the Smyrneans erected a temple to Dea Roma, the goddess of Rome, and they subsequently built one to Tiberius. The worship of the emperor was compulsory. Each year a Roman citizen had to burn a pinch of incense on the altar and to acknowledge publicly that Caesar was supreme lord. In return, he received a formal certificate that he had done so. Originally the action was intended simply as proof of political loyalty, since the individual was permitted to worship whatever god or goddess he chose once he had offered to Caesar. This was a means of unifying and integrating the many and varied elements in the vast empire of Rome. However, this act of worship presented a vital test for the Christian, and many who refused perished at the stake or by wild beasts in the arena.

The Letter to the Church at Smyrna

One of the first things that jumps out when reading this letter is that it has death written all over it. Jesus refers to Himself as the one who was dead. He admonishes them to be faithful unto death and promises the overcomer immunity from the second death.

Revelation 2:8 (NIV) "To the angel of the church in Smyrna write: These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again.

Revelation 2:8 (KJV) And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive;

•*The word Smyrna*

The name "Smyrna" comes from the Greek word "Smurnaioi" from a Hebrew root that is translated "myrrh."

Myrrh is a bitter gum and costly perfume which exudes from a certain tree or shrub in Arabia and Ethiopia, or is obtained by incisions made in the bark. It was used as an antiseptic and also for embalming. It was also an ingredient in perfume (Psalm 45:8),

Psalms 45:8 All your robes are fragrant with myrrh and aloes and cassia; from palaces adorned with ivory the music of the strings makes you glad.

prominent in Song of Solomon, etc. It was also an ingredient in holy anointing oil for priests (Exodus 30:23)

Exodus 30:23 "Take the following fine spices: 500 shekels of liquid myrrh, half as much (that is, 250 shekels) of fragrant cinnamon, 250 shekels of fragrant cane,

Exodus 30:24 500 shekels of cassia--all according to the sanctuary shekel--and a hin of olive oil.

Exodus 30:25 Make these into a sacred anointing oil, a fragrant blend, the work of a perfumer. It will be the sacred anointing oil.

and the purification of women (Esther 2:12).

Esther 2:12 Before a girl's turn came to go in to King Xerxes, she had to complete twelve months of beauty treatments prescribed for the women, six months with oil of myrrh and six with perfumes and cosmetics.

It was used in embalming and was a gift of the Magi at Christ's birth(Matthew 2:11)

Matthew 2:11 On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh.

Gold = royalty

Frankincense = deity, priesthood

Myrrh = suffering, death

In Jesus' Second Coming gold and frankincense are offered, but no myrrh (Isaiah 60:6)

Isaiah 60:6 Herds of camels will cover your land, young camels of Midian and Ephah. And all from Sheba will come, bearing gold and incense and proclaiming the praise of the LORD.

since his death is now behind him but it was offered to Christ at cross (Mark 15:23).

Mark 15:23 Then they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it.

The body of Jesus was embalmed by Joseph & Nicodemus (John 19:39-40).

John 19:39 He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds.

John 19:40 Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs.

Myrrh yields fragrance by being crushed. There is a certain "death" theme throughout this letter. Jesus refers to himself as the eternal one, and yet also as the one who died.

•*No critique*

Smyrna was one of the two churches that received no "F" on their report card from the Lord.

Commendation

Revelation 2:9 (NIV) I know your afflictions and your poverty--yet you are rich! I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

Revelation 2:9 (KJV) 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.

Jesus knows about our suffering. Has anyone here gone through trials? Be comforted, Jesus knows.

•*The word -> tribulation*

thlipsis {thlip'-sis}

- 1) a pressing, pressing together, pressure, persecution
- 2) metaph. oppression, affliction, tribulation, distress, straits

•*Not "the" tribulation*

We must distinguish between the great tribulation and the fact that we all shall have tribulation, trouble, persecution (John 16:33; 2 Timothy 3:12)

John 16:33 "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

as long as we live here on earth. Jesus does not say we may or might have trouble, but tells us straight out that trouble is a certainty. The Apostle Paul puts it very bluntly:

2 Timothy 3:12 In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,

Notice it applies to those who desire to live a godly life. By implication then if we don't live a godly life we'll escape that kind of tribulation. "I know your suffering". It could have been relieved by simply a pinch of incense offered to Caesar, but the Christians at Smyrna and throughout the Roman empire would not acknowledge Caesar as lord.

•*The word --> poverty*

In the Greek there are two words for poverty, one is penia, which is the state of having nothing superfluous and as used here:

ptocheia {pto-khi'-ah}

- 1) beggary
- 2) in the NT poverty
- 2a) the condition of one destitute of riches and abundance

Because the Christians were severely discriminated against in commerce and employment they were poverty stricken. Smyrna was a prosperous city; their destitute poverty is probably due to persecution by confiscation - one of the most common forms of persecution in the world today. Your estimation of yourself is far less important than God's estimation of you. There was no welfare or other government

handouts as we have in our society. The outward poverty but spiritual riches of the Christians in Smyrna reminds us that there is nothing inherently spiritual in being rich, though there is also nothing inherently spiritual in being poor, either.

•*Jesus sees them as rich*

By the world's standards they were miserably poor, in sharp contrast to the last church Jesus writes to: Laodicea (Revelation 3:17). Jesus knows about poverty (2 Corinthians 8:9).

2 Corinthians 8:9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

The one who made the universe did not have a place to call His own while he lived on earth.

Matthew 8:20 Jesus replied, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."

•*Blasphemy*

The Writer knows about blasphemy of Jews (John 8:44), having witnessed their interactions with Jesus.

John 8:47 He who belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God."

John 8:48 The Jews answered him, "Aren't we right in saying that you are a Samaritan and demon-possessed?"

John 8:49 "I am not possessed by a demon," said Jesus, "but I honor my Father and you dishonor me.

In reading the whole chapter of John 8, the tension between the Jewish religious leadership and Jesus is very evident. Legalism is a form of blasphemy, since it negates the precious sacrifice of Jesus and substitutes the keeping of the law.

Some Jewish Christians demanded Gentile circumcision (Acts 15:1-11) which caused much dissension in the early church. Paul wrote the epistle to the Galatians to counter this legalism which even today still rears its ugly head in certain messianic christian groups. Peter is rebuked by Paul (Gal 2:11-14) (Galatians 3:1-3).

Galatians 2:11 When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong.

Galatians 2:12 Before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group.

Galatians 2:13 The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray.

Galatians 2:14 When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter in front of them all, "You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?"

Paul likens legalism to witchcraft, a serious sin.

Galatians 3:1 You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified.

Early persecution was brought on by the Jews, not the Romans in Antioch (Acts 13:50),

Acts 13:50 (NIV) But the Jews incited the God-fearing women of high standing and the leading men of the city. They stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region.

Iconium (Acts 14:2-5),

Acts 14:2 But the Jews who refused to believe stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers.

Acts 14:3 So Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders.

Acts 14:4 The people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews, others with the apostles.

Acts 14:5 There was a plot afoot among the Gentiles and Jews, together with their leaders, to mistreat them and stone them.

The legalistic Jews also stirred up trouble for the Christians in Lystra (Acts 14:19),

Acts 14:19 Then some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and won the crowd over. They stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city, thinking he was dead.

and motivated by jealousy in Thessalonica (Acts 17:5).

Acts 17:5 But the Jews were jealous; so they rounded up some bad characters from the marketplace, formed a mob and started a riot in the city. They rushed to Jason's house in search of Paul and Silas in order to bring them out to the crowd.

In both the gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts the Jews are always painted as the troublemakers (which they were) and the Roman centurions as the good guys. This may be because these two books together may have served as part of the trial documents required by law to be sent ahead of Paul in his appeal to Caesar.

Early on and continuing in the city of Smyrna, the Christians suffered much at the hands of the Jews and was no small contributor to the anti-semitism that later arose in the church.

•Israel still on God's agenda

Jewish Christians believed that a gentile first had to become a Jew and then a Christian. If this is no longer true, then what happens to the law and the centuries of Jewish traditions? One of the most tragic heresies that arose in the church is the view that Israel is cast away from God and the church is the inheritor of God's promises. James understood that there would be time when God is preparing a people for Himself out of the gentiles (Acts 15:13-16) and then James says in verse 16 "after this....."

Acts 15:13 When they finished, James spoke up: "Brothers, listen to me.

Acts 15:14 Simon has described to us how God at first showed his concern by taking from the Gentiles a people for himself.

Acts 15:15 The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written:

Acts 15:16 "'After this I will return and rebuild David's fallen tent. Its ruins I will rebuild, and I will restore it,

God has a very distinct set of unconditional promises made to Abraham and to Israel which he will fulfill. He also has a set of distinct promises to the church. For the church (Matthew 16:18) for example he says:

Matthew 16:18 And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.

"the gates of hell...." and yet in (Revelation 13:7) it talks about the saints being overcome.

Revelation 13:7 He was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them. And he was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation.

This is not a contradiction, just two different groups of people. In addition to these two groups, the third group are the gentiles.

Very early in Church history the Church became antisemitic. This was tragic for the Jews who suffered atrocities under the banner of "Christ", but also for the Church because we lost our Jewish "roots." The Church's knowledge of the Old Testament is tragically lacking. God reminds us as members of the church (Romans 2:28-29),

Romans 2:28 A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical.

Romans 2:29 No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men, but from God.

as well as Israel (Deuteronomy 10:16; 30:6) that circumcision (the hallmark of Jewishness) is an inward thing.

Deuteronomy 10:16 Circumcise your hearts, therefore, and do not be stiff-necked any longer.

Deuteronomy 30:6 The LORD your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live.

•Polycarp martyred

In 155 A.D., the bishop of Smyrna, Polycarp, refused to recant. "Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He never did me wrong. How can I now speak evil of my King who has saved me?" The old man of 86 was burned at the stake on the sabbath day, an object of Jewish hatred as well as from the Roman persecution.

•Don't fear

Revelation 2:10 (NIV) Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.

Revelation 2:10 (KJV) 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.

•A scapegoat

Diseases brought back from the Parthian wars devastated much of Rome. Inundation from the Tiber put many of the grain storehouses under water. The result of was famine and pestilence. The Christians were made a convenient scapegoat. The claim was that these disasters were brought on by the gods provoked by this new religion, and Christianity became a crime. Why couldn't these Christians in Smyrna just rebuke Satan out of this attack upon them? Because God had a purpose in their suffering: to purify them [1 Peter 1:6-7];

1 Peter 1:6 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.

1 Peter 1:7 These have come so that your faith--of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire--may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

to make them like Jesus [Romans 8:17];

Romans 8:17 Now if we are children, then we are heirs--heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

and to be a witness.

•10 days

For 250 years the church went through persecution by the state. In Fox's Book of Martyrs we read that five million believers died for Christ during this period.

Nero (54-68)	Paul beheaded; Peter crucified upside down.
Domitian (95-96)	John exiled.
Trajan (104-117)	Ignatius burned at the stake.
Marcus Aurelius (161-180)	Polycarp martyred.
Septimus Severus (200-211)	He killed Irenaeus.
Maximinus (235-237)	He killed Ursula and Hippolytus.
Decius (249-251)	.
Valerian (257-260)	.
Aurelian, (270-275)	.
Diocletian (303-313)	The Worst of all!

A careful study of the Caesars that severely persecuted the church in the Roman empire reveals that there were 10 emperors who persecuted christians until the church was made legal under Constantine.

Fortunately there were some Caesars who did not enforce the laws against the Christians as vehemently as did these 10, giving the Christians some much needed respite and recovery times.

•*Persecution still today*

Although, the day of martyrs is definitely not past; all over the world, Christians are facing persecution, especially in Asia, Eastern Europe, and in the Muslim world. Some people estimate that more Christians have suffered for their faith and have been martyred in the 20th century than in all previous centuries combined. Who knows when our time of persecution will begin here in the USA.

•*Three heresies*

Major heresies arose within the church during the Smyrna period and are with us to this day.

- 1) Legalism: denial of Christ's completed work;
- 2) Gnosticism: denial of Christ's humanity;
- 3) Caesar worship: denial of Christ's Lordship.

Exhortation & Promise

First, there is no promise that they would escape their suffering but that there is a reward for faithfulness, even "unto death". The pagan priests in Smyrna were given golden crowns after having completed their terms of office. These crowns the Lord promises are special rewards for faithful service.

-> Crown of life (James 1:12) for those who have suffered for His sake;

James 1:12 Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.

-> Crown of righteousness (2 Timothy 4:8) for those who loved His appearing;

2 Timothy 4:8 Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day--and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

-> Crown of glory (1 Peter 5:4) for those who fed the lambs, sheep, flock;

1 Peter 5:4 And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.

-> Crown everlasting (1 Corinthians 9:25) for those who press on steadfastly;

1 Corinthians 9:25 Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.

-> Crown of rejoicing (1 Thessalonians 2:19) for those who win souls.

1 Thessalonians 2:19 For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you?

•*Promise to overcomer*

Revelation 2:11 (NIV) He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death.

Revelation 2:11 (KJV) 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.

•*Twice dead*

Jesus, as usual in these letters admonishes us who have ears to listen individually and also addresses us as a church body. Here the death flavor of this letter comes through once more. The second death is for all those who are not born twice. (Revelation 20:6)

Revelation 20:6 Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.

Jude writes who those are that are subject to the second death. (Jude 1:12)

Jude 1:12 These men are blemishes at your love feasts, eating with you without the slightest qualm--shepherds who feed only themselves. They are clouds without rain, blown along by the wind; autumn trees, without fruit and uprooted--twice dead.

We as members of the body of Christ, the church will participate in the first resurrection

We get confirmation of this in (1 Corinthians 15:52)

1 Corinthians 15:52 in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.

along with some details of how and when God will complete our salvation by giving us the promised resurrection bodies, which will no longer be subject to the laws of entropy and decay. Are you eagerly looking forward in hope to that time? I am!

The Church at Pergamos

Pergamos is the feminine form; Pergamum is the neuter form of the name; both were used. Pergamos was located 80 miles north of Smyrna. Smyrna was the great commercial center; Ephesus, the great political center; Pergamos, the great religious center.

Its early history is obscure; there are evidences that it was occupied during the stone and bronze ages, but prior to Alexander the Great, Pergamos was little more than a castle on top of a hill.

Its foundation is ascribed to Arcadian colonists under the Heracleid Telephus (who routed the Achaeans on their landing in Mysia to attack Troy). Its name is said to have been derived from the son of Pyrrhus and Andromache who made himself king of Teuthrania by killing the king in single combat. After the defeat of Antigonos at Ipsus in 301 B.C., the northwest Asia Minor was united to the Thracian kingdom of Lysimachus. Its impregnable position lent itself to its use as a treasury. However, Philetaerus betrayed Lysimachus' trust by allying himself with Seleucus, Lysimachus' rival. Subsequent rulers skillfully established themselves as a dominant power in Asia Minor and one of the principal centers of Hellenistic culture. Wisely allying with Rome, it became an extremely wealthy and prosperous city, and for two centuries it became the fiducial capital of the Roman province of Asia. Lacking proximity to the key trade routes, it eventually yields economic advantages to its better located rival, Ephesus.

Pergamos is about 18 miles from the sea, about 80 miles north of Smyrna. The present city of Bergama has a population of only 20,000 (vs. almost 200,000 of old).

Zeus is said to have been born there. The great altar stood on a foundation 125 ft by 115 ft, over 50 ft high, set in a colonnaded enclosure (Satan's throne? Rev 2:13).

The Aesculapium was what we might call a hospital today. Health institutions before the scientific medical practice begun by Hippocrates prospered for eight centuries. Functioning mostly by psychiatry and suggestion; sleep was induced and priests used their own methods (drugs and others) to cause patients to dream, and then interpret, etc. Bathing, whispered consultations, music, plays, and other techniques were employed as therapeutic aids.

Long before the New Testament days, Aesculapius had been recognized as a god. He was said to be the son of Apollo and the virgin Corniois. He was termed "Savior" and it was claimed that he had the power to avert death. He was originally represented by the Anatolians as a serpent, and the Greeks later depicted him holding Hermes' staff (the Caduceus) with the two-headed snake. The original idea emerging from the brazen serpent of (Numbers 21:8-9; John 3:14) (Bible taken literally); (2 Kings 18:4). The serpent is a symbol of sin and brass being able to stand fire a symbol of judgement. The Caduceus is the official emblem of the city. Hermes is the god of commerce, invention, cunning, and theft, who also served as messenger, scribe, and herald for the other gods.

Although not the seat of imperial and judicial authority, Pergamos became the center of the official religion of emperor "Caesar" worship. Augustus inaugurated emperor worship in order to give the empire a bond of common sentiment, and the first temple of this cult was erected at Pergamos in 27 B.C. Under Vespasian and his successors, it became a test of one's faith if one would or would not offer incense to the statue of the emperor. Aesculapius was identical to Phaethon—or Nimrod—who founded the original Babylonian religion—eventually developing into the worship of his widow Semiramis and his posthumous son. She was the Ashtoreth and Tammuz of Phoenicia, Isis and Horus of Egypt, Aphrodite and Eros of Greece, Venus and Cupid of Rome.

When Cyrus conquered Babylon, they founded a new center at Pergamos and that king became Pontifex Maximus, the high priest of that pagan system.

Historians trace the subsequent transfer of the cult from Pergamos to Rome, with the appointment of successive Caesars as high priest and ultimately, to that office in 378 A.D. of Damasus, the Bishop of Rome, with the complete and permanent absorption of "Babylonianism" into the Roman Church. Damasus is known as Pope St. Damasus and has his commemorative day in the Catholic church on December 11.

In 312 A.D., Constantine set out to defeat the forces of Maxentius, his rival, for supreme power in the empire. His father had prospered when he had prayed to the God of the Christians, and Constantine, in his extremity, resorted to the same action. It is said that on the next day he saw a shining cross in the sky with an inscription above it: *in hoc signo vinces*. "In this sign thou shalt conquer." He defeated Maxentius at the Milvan bridge, and immediately declared his conversion to Christianity. He assumed headship of the church, repealed the persecution edicts of Diocletian, and advanced Christians to high office in the state. He did not make Christianity the state religion. This was done by one of his successors.

Heathenism was Christianized. The pagan temples became Christian Churches. Many heathen festivals were converted into Christian ones. Many pagan priests slipped into office as Christian priests. Change was mostly in name only.

The Letter to the Church at Pergamos

Revelation 2:12 (NIV) "To the angel of the church in Pergamum write: These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword.

Revelation 2:12 (KJV) And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges;

•*The word --> Pergamos*

Jesus' choice of the name of the church and the city it was in was very appropriate for the conditions in this church and the time in history this church represents. Satan evidently decided that almost 300 years of persecution did not accomplish what he wanted. The attack from the outside has never succeeded against the church. Now he would try to pollute it and dilute it from within. The emblem of Pergamos was the serpent on a pole.

The roots of this combined word come from Per = mixed, unnatural and objectionable (pervert, perturbation, etc.) and gamos = marriage (bigamy, monogamy, etc.)

•*Sharp, two-edged sword*

Jesus using an earlier description of Himself as being the one having the "Two-edged Sword" (Rev 1:16; Heb 4:12).

Revelation 1:16 In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.

Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

He writes in effect that He has the ultimate "jus gladii" -> The "Right of the Sword"; the highest official authority, the power of life and death. The Sanhedrin who decreed His death did not have the power to execute him, they had to convince the Romans to put Jesus to death. Jesus still uses this sword (His word) to cut apart the dead from the living, the flesh from the spirit.

Commendation

Revelation 2:13 (NIV) I know where you live--where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith in me, even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city--where Satan lives.

Revelation 2:13 (KJV) 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.

•*The ancient Babylonian religious system*

The whole satanic system of pagan worship originating with Nimrod can be traced through history, finally having one of its greatest strongholds in the city of Pergamos. All these idolatries came to Rome, where they were christianized.

Nimrod was the originator of these Babylonian idols. He was also known as Phaeton or Aesculapius and other less common aliases. The serpent (Caduceus) was the emblem of Pergamos.

Aesculapius marries Semiramis who bears Tammuz their son. This mother-son combo was known by many names in ancient cultures. (Astoreth - Tammus in Phoenicia), (Isis - Horus in Egypt) (Aphrodite - Eros by the Greeks), (Venus - Cupid in Rome).

Tammuz was said to be supernaturally born to Nimrod and Semiramis. Tammuz is associated with the sun god; he "dies" at the winter solstice (Dec. 22, 23) and is "resurrected" as the days get longer.

In Pergamos, as throughout the Roman empire this was celebrated by burning a "yule" -> Chaldean -> infant log, replaced by a trimmed tree the next morning. Also involved was mistletoe representing fertility. Wassail, the practice of alcohol saturated festivities, celibate priests, the crucifix, purgatory, infallibility, Mary worship, the yule log, the Christmas tree, mistletoe – all trace their origins to pagan Rome and on into antiquity. During the time to which this letter applies historically, the process of placing a thin veneer over the Babylonian system (Rev 17:15-18)

Revelation 17:15 Then the angel said to me, "The waters you saw, where the prostitute sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations and languages.

Revelation 17:16 The beast and the ten horns you saw will hate the prostitute. They will bring her to ruin and leave her naked; they will eat her flesh and burn her with fire.

Revelation 17:17 For God has put it into their hearts to accomplish his purpose by agreeing to give the beast their power to rule, until God's words are fulfilled.

Revelation 17:18 The woman you saw is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth."

took root in the Christian church and is with us to this day in many ways. One way the Babylonian system finds its expression among us today is the New Age movement, which is really nothing new.

•*Hanging in there*

In spite of being surrounded by all this idolatry Jesus commends them for holding on to His name and faith in Him.

According to Tertullian, Antipas is said to have been a dentist and a physician, accused of disloyalty to Caesar, condemned to death by being shut up in a brazen (or copper) bull which was then heated red-hot. In Revelation 17 we see the fate of the system that was drunk with the blood of the saints. (Revelation 17:6)

Revelation 17:11 The beast who once was, and now is not, is an eighth king. He belongs to the seven and is going to his destruction.

The Criticism

Revelation 2:14 (NIV) Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality.

Revelation 2:14 (KJV) But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.

The whole book of Revelation is deeply rooted and connected to the old testament. Homework: Read Numbers 22 & 23. At the heart of this "Doctrine of Balaam" is the idea of spiritual unchastity. It is the marriage and conformity (Romans 12:2) with the world system, which has no place in the true church.

Romans 12:2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will.

At Pergamos, as in certain churches today some had gone "Way of Balaam" (2 Peter 2:15),

2 Peter 2:15 They have left the straight way and wandered off to follow the way of Balaam son of Beor, who loved the wages of wickedness.

who was a hireling marketing his gift.

There were those then and are today who have gone after the "Error of Balaam". (Jude 1:11-12).

Jude 1:11 Woe to them! They have taken the way of Cain; they have rushed for profit into Balaam's error; they have been destroyed in Korah's rebellion.

Jude 1:12 These men are blemishes at your love feasts, eating with you without the slightest qualm--shepherds who feed only themselves. They are clouds without rain, blown along by the wind; autumn trees, without fruit and uprooted--twice dead.

Balaam was hired by the enemies of the People of God to curse them. He was warned not to by God (Num 22:12).

Numbers 22:12 But God said to Balaam, "Do not go with them. You must not put a curse on those people, because they are blessed."

Not satisfied with this sufficient answer, he makes further request to go. He is given permission but not allowed to utter anything but blessings because God loves His people. (Deut 23:4-5).

Deuteronomy 23:4 For they did not come to meet you with bread and water on your way when you came out of Egypt, and they hired Balaam son of Beor from Pethor in Aram Naharaim to pronounce a curse on you.

Deuteronomy 23:5 However, the LORD your God would not listen to Balaam but turned the curse into a blessing for you, because the LORD your God loves you.

Deprived of rewards promised by Balak, King of Moab, Balaam's covetous heart conceived an evil thought. He would counsel the women of Midian and Moab to tempt the Israelites and cause them to sin. Balaam knew that God would have to punish His people. Balak's purpose would then be served, and Balaam would be rich. The seduction worked (Num 25:2-3; Num. 31:16),

Numbers 25:2 who invited them to the sacrifices to their gods. The people ate and bowed down before these gods.

Numbers 25:3 So Israel joined in worshiping the Baal of Peor. And the Lord's anger burned against them.

Numbers 31:16 "They were the ones who followed Balaam's advice and were the means of turning the Israelites away from the LORD in what happened at Peor, so that a plague struck the Lord's people.

but Balaam had not counted on God's grace.

Balaam took the way of Cain, lived riotously afterward, but perished miserably with the enemies of God at last (Joshua 13:22).

Joshua 13:22 In addition to those slain in battle, the Israelites had put to the sword Balaam son of Beor, who practiced divination.

He sacrificed eternal riches for temporal gain. We are warned not to lust for the "pleasures of sin for a season" (Hebrews 11:24-25)

Hebrews 11:24 By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter.

Hebrews 11:25 He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time.

nor to covet the "treasures of Egypt" (Mark 8:36).

Mark 8:36 What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?

Another bad example along this line is Demas: "having loved this present world" (2 Tim 4:10).

2 Timothy 4:10 for Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, and Titus to Dalmatia.

•A stumbling block

Balaam counselled Balak to put a stumbling block before Israel to trip them up. We too must be careful about causing someone to stumble. (1Cor 10:25-29)

1 Corinthians 10:25 Eat anything sold in the meat market without raising questions of conscience,

1 Corinthians 10:26 for, "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it."

1 Corinthians 10:27 If some unbeliever invites you to a meal and you want to go, eat whatever is put before you without raising questions of conscience.

1 Corinthians 10:28 But if anyone says to you, "This has been offered in sacrifice," then do not eat it, both for the sake of the man who told you and for conscience' sake --

1 Corinthians 10:29 the other man's conscience, I mean, not yours. For why should my freedom be judged by another's conscience?

The Lord wanted Israel to be undefiled by fornication and he wants to be a pure and faithful church (2 Cor 6:14-17).

2 Corinthians 6:14 Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?

2 Corinthians 6:15 What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever?

2 Corinthians 6:16 What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people."

2 Corinthians 6:17 "Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you."

•Nicolaitans teaching now a doctrine

Revelation 2:15 (NIV) Likewise you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans.

Revelation 2:15 (KJV) So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.

Back in the letter to Ephesus Jesus commended that church for exposing and opposing the practices (deeds) of the Nicolaitans. In the church of Pergamos (and in that time frame) these deeds had solidified into doctrines. The chasm between the clergy and laity had deepened and become permanent in the church and is still with us.

Exhortation & Promise

As in the other letters, Jesus has an exhortation and a promise to those who heed His instructions.

Revelation 2:16 (NIV) Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

Revelation 2:16 (KJV) Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

First, he calls for repentance, the spiritual equivalent of a bar of soap. The well known scripture promise (1 John 1:9) is true for us today and must be applied daily.

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

•The Sword once again

The word of God is resisted or twisted by those who stand to gain by their false teaching. Later in church history (reformation) we will study how the word was resisted by the church hierarchy and literally brought the sword on countless numbers of people. The Roman armies conquered using their "machira", a short sword that the soldier needed special training in order to be used effectively in close one on one combat. (2 Timothy 2:15)

2 Timothy 2:15 Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.

We too need training in using the word of God in effective combat against the forces of darkness.

The promise to the overcomer

Revelation 2:17 (NIV) *He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it.*

Revelation 2:17 (KJV) *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].*

- *All members of the church are to listen*

Again and again Jesus repeats the refrain instructing the churches, and that includes us to carefully listen to and take heed to what He has to say.

- *Hidden manna*

Manna was special bread from heaven (Exodus 16:12-15),

Exodus 16:12 *"I have heard the grumbling of the Israelites. Tell them, 'At twilight you will eat meat, and in the morning you will be filled with bread. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God.'"*

Exodus 16:13 *That evening quail came and covered the camp, and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp.*

Exodus 16:14 *When the dew was gone, thin flakes like frost on the ground appeared on the desert floor.*

Exodus 16:15 *When the Israelites saw it, they said to each other, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, "It is the bread the LORD has given you to eat.*

In a sense the Israelites had this "hidden manna" because the word "manna" means "What is it?". They did not know what it was exactly, but it nourished them for 40 years. It is also called the food of angels (Psalm 78:24-25) and it may well be a staple food we'll eat in heaven.

Psalm 78:24 *he rained down manna for the people to eat, he gave them the grain of heaven.*

Psalm 78:25 *Men ate the bread of angels; he sent them all the food they could eat.*

- *Food for one day at a time*

It is instructive to learn that Israel were to gather only enough of the provision the Lord made for them for each day. When they attempted to keep some over to the next day, it was rotten and maggot infested.

Exodus 16:19 *Then Moses said to them, "No one is to keep any of it until morning."*

Exodus 16:20 *However, some of them paid no attention to Moses; they kept part of it until morning, but it was full of maggots and began to smell. So Moses was angry with them.*

Exodus 16:21 *Each morning everyone gathered as much as he needed, and when the sun grew hot, it melted away.*

- *Enough, but not too much*

The Lord supplied Israel with just the right amount, those who worked harder by gathering more did not end up with more than those who gathered less, everyone had just the right amount they needed.

Exodus 16:16 *This is what the LORD has commanded: 'Each one is to gather as much as he needs. Take an omer for each person you have in your tent.'*

Exodus 16:17 *The Israelites did as they were told; some gathered much, some little.*

Exodus 16:18 *And when they measured it by the omer, he who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little did not have too little. Each one gathered as much as he needed.*

- *Daily supply*

It is a divine promise to meet our needs as they occur. The Lord did this for Israel and He promises to do the same for us.

Matthew 6:31 So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'

Matthew 6:32 For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.

Matthew 6:33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Matthew 6:34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

In what we call the Lord's prayer, (Matt 6:11) he instructs us to ask for our daily, not weekly or monthly bread.

- *Jesus our manna*

Jesus is our manna, the bread of life. (John 6:35)

John 6:35 Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.

Surely, this daily sustenance also applies to the spiritual sustenance He gives us.

- *A white stone*

Pergamos worshipped an Asiatic goddess whose symbol in the temple was a black meteoric stone. If an accused was in court, the jurors cast either white or black stone to indicate guilt or innocence. Jesus gives His innocence to us now and will someday symbolize this by a special personal recognition tailor made to our unique personality. Names in biblical times always had a meaning (Genesis 2:19). The first job man was given by God himself and this was to name animals; thus the oldest profession is not what some say it is, but a scientist, specifically a zoologist.

Genesis 2:19 Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name.

Names usually were descriptive of the person or thing that received the name. Another example of this is in the naming of the righteous man Noah. (Genesis 5:29)

Genesis 5:29 He named him Noah and said, "He will comfort us in the labor and painful toil of our hands caused by the ground the LORD has cursed."

The Tesserá, a white square stone was given to the winners of sporting events of those days. The Tesserá hospitalis, was bestowed on close friends and passed on as guarantees to heirs. (Zechariah 3:9)

Zechariah 3:9 See, the stone I have set in front of Joshua! There are seven eyes on that one stone, and I will engrave an inscription on it,' says the LORD Almighty, 'and I will remove the sin of this land in a single day.

The idea of a stone is used often throughout scripture, but it takes its culmination in Jesus Himself. We, as partakers of Him are also included as living stones (1 Peter 2:4-8)

1 Peter 2:4 As you come to him, the living Stone--rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him--

1 Peter 2:5 you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 2:6 For in Scripture it says: "See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame."

1 Peter 2:7 Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone, "

1 Peter 2:8 and, "A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall." They stumble because they disobey the message--which is also what they were destined for.

- *A new name*

The concept of a new name is something the people of biblical times understood more than we do in our culture. Still, unless she is "liberated", when a woman marries she takes on the name of her husband.

God himself initiated the change from Abram and he became Abraham (Gen 17:5);

Genesis 17:5 No longer will you be called Abram ; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations.

Jacob becomes Israel at Peniel (Gen 32:28)

Genesis 32:28 Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome."

and when Jesus returns, the nation Israel herself (Isaiah 62:2) will receive a new name.

Isaiah 62:2 The nations will see your righteousness, and all kings your glory; you will be called by a new name that the mouth of the LORD will bestow.

•Summary

Pergamos means "mixed marriage." The virgin Bride of Christ became married to the world and thus no longer virgin, but polluted by fornication. God's message to us is to come out of the world (Rev 18:4). Next we'll continue with the letter to the church at Thyatira.

The Church at Thyatira

The road from Istanbul to Izmir runs through the small and unattractive town of Akhisar (population: 30,000) which now occupies the site where once stood the important military city of Thyatira. In New Testament times, the city stood at the junction of three main roads leading to Pergamos, Sardis, and Smyrna.

It was originally a Lydian town bearing the name of Pelopia, then Semiramis, and then Euhippia. It was taken by the Persians and then Alexander, and is ultimately passed to the possession of Lysimachus, one of Alexander's four generals. In 301 B.C., however, Lysimachus was defeated by his rival Seleucus I whose name was also Nicator and it thus became part of Syria. The city was converted into a frontier fortress to guard the way to Pergamos.

Nicator named it "Thyatira" (Greek, *thygater*, for daughter) on being informed that a daughter had been born to him; cf. "Jezebel." [Another meaning is "continual sacrifice" which many scholars associate with the doctrine of the mass.]

Growing in commercial importance, Thyatira became a well-known center for trade guilds. Membership in these was compulsory and essential if one was to pursue a trade. These were well-organized corporate bodies, providing specific benefits and taking actions to protect their interests, often owning considerable property. Each guild was under the patronage of some pagan deity, and all proceedings and feasts commenced with paying homage to the patron god or goddess. The dilemma of the Christian tradesman continues in our own day: Is it necessary for the believer to participate in the production of films, plays, books, or music which have an essential appeal to the flesh? It is a choice between Christ or the world.

Thyatira was known for its dyes—particularly its purple (which was scarlet rather than purple, derived from the madder-root which is prolific in the area. (Alternatives also included the murex, a shell-fish from whose throat a drop of dye could be extracted.) Lydia, dwelling in Philippi (Acts 16:14-15), was a wealthy sales rep for Thyatira dye manufacturers.

As we'll see a bit later in our study, Thyatira historically portrays the medieval papacy from 600 to 1500 A.D. and in a larger sense still the Roman Catholic Church still today. The dream to establish and enforce the pretensions of the Roman church constitute the major part of the history of the Middle Ages.

The Chaldean priest who interpreted the esoteric doctrines of the Babylonian mysteries was called Peter (i.e. "the interpreter"). He wore an insignia of the two keys of Janus and Cybele, which still appear on the Papal arms as symbols of spiritual authority.

The danger to the church at Thyatira did not arise from the persecutions of imperial Rome nor from the animosity of Jewish attitudes. It arose from within the church itself—all the more serious and dangerous

to deal with. In fact a study of church history shows that injury and loss to the church never came from the outside, but always from within through heresies and leaving the centrality of Christ.

The Letter to the Church at Thyatira

Revelation 2:18 (NIV) "To the angel of the church in Thyatira write: These are the words of the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze.

Revelation 2:18 (KJV) 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;

In this longest and central letter of the seven Jesus asserts His power and authority as the Son of God. This is the only time in the whole book of Revelation that Jesus is referred to by that title. He uses this title as opposed to the queen of heaven (semiramis, one of the other names of this city) or the mother of God in the worship of Mary in the Roman church. The main goal of the Roman church has always been to have power and authority over men. In the promise to the overcomer this power theme surfaces again. The eyes of blazing fire and the feet of brass are symbols of judgement and power.

Son of God

While Jesus lived here in the flesh, he did not directly refer to himself as the son of God, but used the term Son of Man, (Matthew 19:28; Matthew 20:28) to identify Himself closely with us in His humanity.

Matthew 19:28 Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

Matthew 20:28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Commendation

Revelation 2:19 (NIV) I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first.

Revelation 2:19 (KJV) 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.

Again and again in these letters to the churches, Jesus emphasizes that He knows what's going on and that nothing escapes His notice. He also notices that they are improving in the things they are doing right. He is not vague, but names 5 specific things: deeds, love, faith service and perserverance. Many, especially those in the various denominations have criticized the Roman church, and rightly so, yet Jesus has a commendation for them. Before anyone gets too loud in the criticisms let him see how they are doing in comparison to this list of positives.

The Criticism

Revelation 2:20 (NIV) Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols.

Revelation 2:20 (KJV) Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest 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.

Revelation 2:21 (NIV) I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling.

Revelation 2:21 (KJV) And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not.

•Inaction against evil

The chief sin of this church — which was fatal — simply consisted of failing to raise a protest against this woman, who claimed to be a prophetess, who led them into idolatrous doctrines and practices. (Acts 15:29)

Acts 15:29 You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things. Farewell.

Theirs was not a failure to protest against something the Government was doing or some other social ill, but failure to eliminate evil in their midst. In their local setting, meat sacrificed to idols was a common problem which compromised their faith and opened the door to the worship of those idols.

•*Jezebel*

Jezebel was the daughter of Eth-Baal, King of Sidon, Priest of Astarte, the murderer of his predecessor, Pheles, whom he killed to seize the throne. She married King Ahab to seal a profitable trade alliance between Israel and Phoenicia. A worshipper, in fact a priestess of Baal and Astarte both of which are from Babylon, she and King Ahab usher in the worst period in Israel's history (1 Kings 16:30-33).

1 Kings 16:30 Ahab son of Omri did more evil in the eyes of the LORD than any of those before him.

She seeks to exterminate prophets of YHWH (1 Kings 18:13). The queen is running the show. Of all the women seen in the Old Testament, none was more cunning or more daring or more unscrupulous. Obediah, still faithful, tells his fears to Elijah:

1 Kings 18:13 Haven't you heard, my lord, what I did while Jezebel was killing the prophets of the LORD? I hid a hundred of the Lord's prophets in two caves, fifty in each, and supplied them with food and water.

Jezebel obtained lands and property through "inquisition ." Read the incident of Naboth's Vineyard (1 Kings 21). Here we see a vivid picture of the medieval church for about a thousand-year period, including the Dark Ages.

1 Kings 21:1 Some time later there was an incident involving a vineyard belonging to Naboth the Jezreelite. The vineyard was in Jezreel, close to the palace of Ahab king of Samaria.

1 Kings 21:2 Ahab said to Naboth, "Let me have your vineyard to use for a vegetable garden, since it is close to my palace. In exchange I will give you a better vineyard or, if you prefer, I will pay you whatever it is worth."

1 Kings 21:3 But Naboth replied, "The LORD forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers."

1 Kings 21:4 So Ahab went home, sullen and angry because Naboth the Jezreelite had said, "I will not give you the inheritance of my fathers." He lay on his bed sulking and refused to eat.

1 Kings 21:5 His wife Jezebel came in and asked him, "Why are you so sullen? Why won't you eat?"

1 Kings 21:6 He answered her, "Because I said to Naboth the Jezreelite, 'Sell me your vineyard; or if you prefer, I will give you another vineyard in its place.' But he said, 'I will not give you my vineyard.'"

1 Kings 21:7 Jezebel his wife said, "Is this how you act as king over Israel? Get up and eat! Cheer up. I'll get you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite."

1 Kings 21:8 So she wrote letters in Ahab's name, placed his seal on them, and sent them to the elders and nobles who lived in Naboth's city with him.

1 Kings 21:9 In those letters she wrote: "Proclaim a day of fasting and seat Naboth in a prominent place among the people."

1 Kings 21:10 But seat two scoundrels opposite him and have them testify that he has cursed both God and the king. Then take him out and stone him to death."

1 Kings 21:11 So the elders and nobles who lived in Naboth's city did as Jezebel directed in the letters she had written to them.

1 Kings 21:12 They proclaimed a fast and seated Naboth in a prominent place among the people.

1 Kings 21:13 Then two scoundrels came and sat opposite him and brought charges against Naboth before the people, saying, "Naboth has cursed both God and the king." So they took him outside the city and stoned him to death.

1 Kings 21:14 Then they sent word to Jezebel: "Naboth has been stoned and is dead."

1 Kings 21:15 As soon as Jezebel heard that Naboth had been stoned to death, she said to Ahab, "Get up and take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite that he refused to sell you. He is no longer alive, but dead."

1 Kings 21:16 When Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, he got up and went down to take possession of Naboth's vineyard.

1 Kings 21:17 Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite:

1 Kings 21:18 "Go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, who rules in Samaria. He is now in Naboth's vineyard, where he has gone to take possession of it.

1 Kings 21:19 Say to him, 'This is what the LORD says: Have you not murdered a man and seized his property?' Then say to him, 'This is what the LORD says: In the place where dogs licked up Naboth's blood, dogs will lick up your blood--yes, yours!'"

1 Kings 21:20 Ahab said to Elijah, "So you have found me, my enemy!" "I have found you," he answered, "because you have sold yourself to do evil in the eyes of the LORD.

Elijah continues pronouncing the Lord's judgement on Naboth and also on Jezebel. This tactic of bringing false witnesses and then executing the victim,

2 Kings 9:26 'Yesterday I saw the blood of Naboth and the blood of his sons, declares the LORD, and I will surely make you pay for it on this plot of ground, declares the LORD.' Now then, pick him up and throw him on that plot, in accordance with the word of the LORD."

if need be doing the same to any lawful heirs, and then taking the property, was a major reason the Roman church became extremely wealthy.

•The Queen of Heaven

One of the prominent Babylonian ideas that Israel embraced were the various female deities, such as "the queen of heaven" (Jeremiah 7:18)

Jeremiah 7:18 The children gather wood, the fathers light the fire, and the women knead the dough and make cakes of bread for the Queen of Heaven. They pour out drink offerings to other gods to provoke me to anger.

of which Ashtoreth Judg (Judges 2:13 - 14) was one of the most important.

Judges 2:13 because they forsook him and served Baal and the Ashtoreths.

Judges 2:14 In his anger against Israel the LORD handed them over to raiders who plundered them. He sold them to their enemies all around, whom they were no longer able to resist.

Jezebel was an embodiment of all that God hated about these idolatries. Israel deliberately rebelled against God and suffered the consequences. They prospered under the Babylonian system for a while, but then the judgement came. (Jeremiah 44:15-30)

Jeremiah 44:15 Then all the men who knew that their wives were burning incense to other gods, along with all the women who were present--a large assembly--and all the people living in Lower and Upper Egypt, said to Jeremiah,

Jeremiah 44:16 "We will not listen to the message you have spoken to us in the name of the LORD!

Jeremiah 44:17 We will certainly do everything we said we would: We will burn incense to the Queen of Heaven and will pour out drink offerings to her just as we and our fathers, our kings and our officials did in the towns of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem. At that time we had plenty of food and were well off and suffered no harm.

Jeremiah 44:18 But ever since we stopped burning incense to the Queen of Heaven and pouring out drink offerings to her, we have had nothing and have been perishing by sword and famine.

In the Roman Catholic Church much of the idolatry which was so prominent in Israel was given a thin christian coating. Shrines, priests, worship of female deity (Mary veneration), and the burning of incense was and still is a big factor in the Roman church, of which Thyatira is the historical type in the prophetic layout of the seven letters we are studying.

•Leaven — picture of sin

The picture of a little leaven in a large amount of dough is another portrait God uses consistently to picture sin. Jesus tells of a woman who introduced the leaven. (Matthew 13:33)

Matthew 13:33 He told them still another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough."

Likewise the woman Jezebel brought the sin of idolatry to Israel. We are told to be free of leaven. (1 Cor 5:7-8)

1 Corinthians 5:7 Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast--as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.

1 Corinthians 5:8 Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth.

•No repentance of immorality (fornication)

Central to the pagan religion were the sexual orgies and temple sex of all kinds in a very literal way. The term "fornication" was applied also in a spiritual sense in terms of being joined to false gods rather than the one true God. Both in the Old Testament and the New, God consistently uses the marriage relationship as a picture of what He desires with His people. (Jeremiah 3:20; Revelation 21:9) He contrasts the picture of the unfaithful wife and the beautiful bride.

Jeremiah 3:20 But like a woman unfaithful to her husband, so you have been unfaithful to me, O house of Israel," declares the LORD.

Revelation 21:9 One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb."

•Promise of great tribulation

Revelation 2:22 (NIV) So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways.

Revelation 2:22 (KJV) Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into **great tribulation**, except they repent of their deeds.

Revelation 2:23 (NIV) I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds.

Revelation 2:23 (KJV) 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.

Jesus uses the phrase "Great Tribulation" a time of intense suffering. He specifically speaks of a time of intense suffering for those that dwell upon the Earth just before His return.(Matt24:21-22)

Matthew 24:21 For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.

Matthew 24:22 And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened.

Matthew 24:21 For then there will be great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now--and never to be equaled again.

Matthew 24:22 If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened.

It's implied that if they repent, they won't be in the Tribulation. Only the unrepentant church will be subject to "the hour of trial" (Revelation 3:10) from which the church of Philadelphia is specifically exempt.

Revelation 3:10 Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth.

Jezebel who is a symbol of the Babylonian world system is finally destroyed

•Rewarded according to works

There are only two paths open to man, either receive according to their works (Jeremiah 17:10)

Jeremiah 17:10 "I the LORD search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve."

or God's grace by faith (Ephesians 2:8).

Ephesians 2:8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--

The works of man bring only death.

•Promise for a remnant

Revelation 2:24 (NIV) Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan's so-called deep secrets (I will not impose any other burden on you):

Revelation 2:25 (NIV) Only hold on to what you have until I come.

Revelation 2:24 (KJV) 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.

Revelation 2:25 (KJV) But that which ye have [already] hold fast till I come.

The church was called upon to repent as a whole and did not, they are beyond repair. There is the impression that only a remnant survives. Within this church was an evil for which no remedial measures are sufficient. In our subsequent study of the church at Sardis (Revelation 3:4) we will see a similar situation. This remnant within the church at Thyatira was not immersed in the depths of Satan, but were still searching after the deep things of God. (1 Corinthians 2:9-10)

1 Corinthians 2:9 However, as it is written: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him" --

1 Corinthians 2:10 but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God.

•Promise of His coming

This is the first of the seven letters where Jesus explicitly speaks of His second coming. In the other letters he speaks of coming to judge but not the actual promised coming again. In our historical context of the churches, this means that the Roman church, as well as the others we will still look at soon, will still be on Earth when Jesus comes again and will be judged by Him. However those few within that church whose hearts were pure before God will at that time see the Truth and be rewarded by Jesus.

•Power over the Nations

Revelation 2:26 (NIV) To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations--

Revelation 2:27 (NIV) 'He will rule them with an iron scepter; he will dash them to pieces like pottery' -- just as I have received authority from my Father.

Revelation 2:26 (KJV) And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations:

Revelation 2:27 (KJV) 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.

It is instructive, that this promise is given to the overcomers in the very church that has aspired to and gained worldly power throughout the longest time span of history since Jesus days in the flesh. The history of Europe is mostly a struggle of the Roman church to dominate and rule the nations there and the nations trying to break free of the dominance of the popes. However, what the popes and the antichrist have wanted belongs to Jesus. (Psalm 2:7-9)

Psalms 2:7 I will proclaim the decree of the LORD: He said to me, "You are my Son ; today I have become your Father.

Psalms 2:8 Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession.

Psalms 2:9 You will rule them with an iron scepter ; you will dash them to pieces like pottery."

and through Him to us. (1 Corinthians 6:2)

1 Corinthians 6:2 Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases?

•*Morning Star*

Revelation 2:28 (NIV) I will also give him the morning star.

Revelation 2:28 (KJV) And I will give him the morning star.

We today are studying this book from a historical perspective, looking back in history, but also looking forward in eager anticipation. The Morning Star shows its light before sunrise and Jesus will come just after mankind's darkest time (2 Peter 1:19; Revelation 22:16)

2 Peter 1:19 And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.

Revelation 22:16 "I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star."

• *Admonition to hear -- that is to listen and then obey*

Revelation 2:29 (NIV) He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Revelation 2:29 (KJV) He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

As usual in these letters, Jesus closes with a personal admonition to listen to what He is saying to us individually. He says to put aside anything that would put Him in second place in our lives, which is the essence of the sin of idolatry.

Summary

In the first three letters the promise to the overcomer is after the "He that hath an ear" personal admonition. In the last four the promise to the overcomer is inside the letter and the "He that hath an ear" part is added almost as a postscript addressed to a small number within that church. In the first three epistles the church as a whole was viewed as still capable of repenting, but in the last four it was apparent that only a remnant, described as the overcomer, would hear and repent. The last four include explicit promises of Jesus' Second Coming whereas in the first three he comes to take the ministry away from the two churches he had to criticize. Many protestant Bible teachers have come down hard on the Roman Catholic Church when doing a study of this letter to Thyatira. However, Jesus still has quite a significant commendation for this church, whereas he has nothing good to say about the next church, the one in Sardis which will be our study next time.