

REVELATION 2

I. INTRO. / BKGRD.

Revelation is a book of HOPE! Jesus revealed Himself to John, now in his mid-90's, exiled on the Aegean island of Patmos. The Lord Jesus meets the aged apostle on Sunday, when John was "*in the Spirit*," and presents Himself as the victorious Lord of life who is soon coming to judge the wicked and vindicate the righteous.

Revelation is also a book of WARNING: things were not as they should be among the churches so Christ calls them to commit themselves completely to Him in righteousness and holiness.

John begins the book by explaining how he received this revelation from God (1:1-20) and the vision he had of the glorified Christ. He then records specific messages from Jesus to seven churches in Asia Minor (Turkey; 2:1-3:22). Suddenly, as John is caught up to Heaven in ch. 4 (like Paul, 2 Cor. 12 and Isaiah in the OT, Isa. 6), he witnesses a series of visions documenting end time events: the rise of evil culminating in the arrival of the person of Antichrist, the last world ruler (4:1-18:24). Then the true KING comes!

Rev. 1:19 gives us the outline of the book:

- (1) things past, "*what you have seen*," i.e. the Patmos vision (1:1 - 20);
- (2) things present, "*what is now*," i.e. the existing churches (2:1 - 3:22); and
- (3) things future, "*what will take place later* [lit. <after these things>]," i.e. events after the Church Age ends (4:1 - 22:5). It is important to observe that, beginning in ch. 4, the book presents future (not past) events.

We come now to the 2nd division of the Book of Revelation: "*the things which are now...*" (1:19).

- First, messages to these historic local churches in the first century.
- Second, they also constitute a message to similar churches today.
- Third, individual exhortations to persons or groups in the churches make it clear that the messages are intended for individuals today: "*Let he [singular] that has an ear hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches...*" If you have TWO ears, I guess that doubly applies to YOU!
- Fourth, the letters apply prophetically: the order of the seven churches follows the order of successive eras in church history from the first century until now.

Similar outline used in each of the 7 letters to the 7 churches:

- Each has a unique description of Christ; a unique revelation of Jesus to meet each church's unique needs;
- In each one Christ declares that He knows their works;
- In 6 of the 7, there is something first commended (exc. Laodicea);
- In 5 of the 7 (exc. Smyrna and Philadelphia) there is something to be corrected (rebuke):
 - (1) Jesus diagnoses the PROBLEM;
 - (2) He tells them what to DO ABOUT IT, and:
 - (3) what will happen if they DON'T do anything about it!
- Each has an encouragement to hear/heed;
- Each has a promise to OVERCOMERS! (2:7,11,17,26; 3:5,12,21) -- it is the Lord's intention that EVERY church be an "overcoming" church! Overcoming the world, self, sin, laziness, corruption, compromise, the flesh, false teaching, Satan... What they need to overcome is the thing that Jesus just pointed out!

vv. 1: Ephesus - major seaport; great temple of Artemis (Diana to the Romans) one of the 7 wonders of the ancient world. Paul had visited there in 53AD (43 years later Revelation was written) -- cf. Acts 19.

"Angel" is *angelos*, also used for human "messengers" (Mal. 2-3; Mt. 11;10; Mk. 1:2; Luke 7:24, 27; 9:52). "Stars" = angels or messengers of the churches (pastors; cf. 1:20); "Lampstands" = churches (cf. Rev. 1:20).

vv. 2-3: Commendation: hard work, perseverance; identification of false apostles (in first 4 chs. of Ephesians).

vv. 4: Rebuke: forsook first [*protos*; first, not in numerical order, but first in the sense of priority] love (*agape*); in Eph. 1:15-16 Paul had commended them for it! Eph. 1:15f "For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers." But over time, love became less and less important. These were now 2nd generation believers; lesson: ORTHODOXY/SERVICE not enough!

vv. 5-6: Exhortation: **REPENT!** (turn around; change!) -- or the light of their witness would be removed (v.5) -- the church would cease to be effective.

- What were you doing when you were on fire for the Lord? "Church?" DO IT AGAIN!
- "Early morning devotions?" DO IT AGAIN!
- Singing praise to the Lord on the way to work? DO IT AGAIN!

After the 5th c. AD, the church and city declined; the immediate area has been uninhabited since the 14th century . . . Apparently, they did not listen; sad...

vv. 7: Promise: eat of the tree of life (Gen. 2:9; 3:22 > Rev. 22:2).

* PROPHETIC APPLICATION: 30-100 AD. Apostolic church: correct doctrine, circumspect conduct (as love); zealous labor (sense of duty), but wayward attitudes (led to legalism and works attitude). As LOVE decreased, a sense of DUTY increased; led to increased legalism/works attitude.

vv. 8-11: "**Smyrna**" -- Large, wealthy city 35 miles north of Ephesus and considered the safest seaport of its time; it is still a thriving seaport to this day! (modern Izmir, Turkey); sat on the major trading routes between Rome, India and Persia; population of 200,000 people; closely aligned with Rome and emperor worship: large temple to Tiberius Caesar; on one end of the main street, the "street of gold," stood the Temple of Zeus, and at the other end stood the Temple of Cybele, "the mother of the gods."

"**Myrrh**" (perfume), anointing oil in tabernacle and embalming dead. Christians here were opposed by Jews and emperor-worshippers. Largely hostile Jewish population. Polycarp, a disciple of John's, was bishop of Smyrna (martyred: burned at the stake).

The shortest of the seven letters. Jesus did not call the Church of Smyrna to repentance because He knew they would be purified by the sufferings they would endure. In verse 10 Jesus spoke of death, because many of them were to be martyred.

v. 8 "**Angel of the church**" -- *angelos* simply means "messenger," whether a divine heavenly messenger known as an angel or an earthly messenger. Here it appears to mean the one who brings the message in the local church: the pastor.

v. 8 is a claim to deity. "Alpha and Omega" is God; in 22:13. Jesus applies it to Himself! Christ here as a fellow-sufferer, yet **TRIUMPHANT!**

v. 9 "**I know**" (*oida*; Latin: *video* -- "I see/perceive").

Christians very materially poor in a wealthy, godless metropolis. They stored their treasure in the right place (Mt.6:19ff)! JESUS' PERCEPTION vs. theirs -- rich vs. poor; cf. Laodicea. "*Has not God chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith?*" (James 2:5). Racially "Jews", not spiritually (Rom. 2:28f);

"Satan" mentioned in 4 of the 7 letters (2:9, 12, 24; 3:9) - he's alive, well, active!

NO REBUKE! No call to repentance; they would be purified by the suffering they would endure; persecution kept them pure.

v. 10 Lit., "*Stop being afraid.*" Notice persecution and suffering come from Satan, not God (cf. Job 1:22 "*In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrong-doing.*")

Don't let hard times turn you away from God; your reward is sure; "no fear!" Don't give up!

"Devil" - Greek, *diabolos*, "slanderer" or "accuser.;" "Satan" means "adversary." **"Persecution"** warned of by Jesus (Jn. 15:20) and Paul (2 Tim. 3:12). **"10 days"** - 10 Caesars? Probably = limited time. "Suffering" can be:

- 1) disciplinary (1 Cor. 11:30; Heb. 12:3-13);
- 2) preventative (Paul's thorn, 2 Cor. 12:7);
- 3) learning of obedience (like Christ, Heb. 5:8);
- 4) providing a better testimony for Christ (Acts 9:16).

Polycarp died (cf. Foxe's Book of Martyrs), bishop of Smyrna, John's disciple, died in his 90's by being burned at the stake. Five to six million died under these 10 Caesars:

- Nero, 64-68 AD;
- Domitian, 90-95AD;
- Trajan, 104-117AD;
- Aurelius, 161-180AD;
- Severus, 200-211AD;
- Maximus, 235-237 AD;
- Decius, 250-253AD;
- Valerian, 257-260AD;
- Aurelian, 270-275AD;
- Diocletian, 303-312 AD).

Constantine eliminated persecution against Christians with the Edict of Toleration in 313 AD.

v. 11 Promise: he who overcomes (Greek present tense, active voice, indicative mood: "continuously continues to overcome") will not be hurt by the "second death" -- eternal torment in Hell, Rev. 20:14-15. This is the Great White Throne Judgment where everyone **EXCEPT** Christians stand; Book of Life opened > if not listed > Gehenna (Hell).

Prophetic Application: 100-312 AD. The suffering of the church at Smyrna was prophetic of the great era of intermittent persecution lasting 200 years under 10 diabolical Caesars. The Church was purified by the persecutions; millions died cruel martyr's deaths rather than renounce Christ or swear allegiance to Caesar as Lord. The floor of the Great Coliseum in Rome is still stained with blood of martyrs. This was a period of tremendous witness, heroic faith, shaking even the mighty Roman Empire itself.

vv. 12-17: Pergamum – (some versions have *Pergamos* leaving untranslated from the orig. Greek form of the nominative noun)—Built on a hill 1000' above the surrounding countryside, the city was a blend of political power, pagan worship and academic sophistication at its university. It was the capitol city of Asia Minor, and the royal officials filled it with beautiful palaces, temples and idols.

There was an altar to Zeus that was one of the 7 ancient wonders of the world. The patron god of the city was Aesclepius, the god of healing. In his temple a large living serpent was the symbol of worship. All the pagan rites of antiquity were practiced here.

Pergamum also contained a temple to Octavius Caesar where Caesar-worship flourished. Each citizen was required to offer incense to the emperor once a year and declare, "Caesar is lord."

A.T. Robertson's Word Pictures in the New Testament: In a north-easterly direction from Smyrna in the Caicus Valley, some 55 miles away, in Mysia, on a lofty hill, Pergamum was a great political and religious center. Eumenes II (B.C. 197-159) extended it and embellished it with many great buildings, including a library with 200,000 volumes, second only to Alexandria, Egypt. The Kingdom of Pergamum became a Roman province B.C. 130. Pliny termed it the most illustrious city of Asia. Parchment (*charta Pergamena*) derived its name from Pergamum. It was a rival of Ephesus in the temples to Zeus, Athena, Dionysios, in the great grove Nicephorium (the glory of the city). Next to this was the grove and temple of Asklepios, the god of healing, called the god of Pergamum, with a university for medical study. Pergamum was the first city in Asia (A.D. 29) with a temple for the worship of Augustus (Octavius Caesar). Hence in the Apocalypse Pergamum is a very center of emperor worship "where Satan dwells" (2:13). Here also the Nicolaitans flourished (2:15) as in Ephesus (2:6) and in Thyatira (2:20). Like Ephesus this city is called temple-sweeper (*neōkoros*) for the gods.

v. 12 "The sharp double-edged sword" -- This item repeated from 1:16 in the same order of words with the definite article three times (*the sword the two-mouthed the sharp*) singling out each point. This sword is not the Roman *macheira*, but the huge Thracian war sword, the dreaded *romphaia* (not unlike the huge medieval English broad sword).

v. 13 Commendation: "Where Satan has his throne" -- Pergamum was the first city in Asia (A.D. 29) with a temple for the worship of Augustus (Octavius Caesar). Thus, Pergamum became the epicenter of emperor-worship: "where Satan dwells" (2:13). Here also the Nicolaitans flourished (2:15) as in Ephesus (2:6) and in Thyatira (2:20).

"Satan's throne" -- Satan did not simply resided in Pergamum, but his "throne" or seat of power of king or judge was centered there. The symbol of Asklepios was the serpent as it is of Satan (Rev 12:9; 20:2). There was, besides, a great throne altar to Zeus cut on the Acropolis rock, symbol of "rampant paganism" and the new Caesar-worship with the recent martyrdom of Antipas made Pergamum the very throne of Satan.

v. 14 Rebuke: "The teaching of Balaam" (Num. 22-25; 31:15f) – intermarriage with pagans/idol-worshippers, idols, fornication, sexual immorality. These early Gnostics practiced sexual immorality as a principle since they were not under law, but under grace (Rom. 6:15). The pagan temples had priestesses who were actually prostitutes, and the revenue for most of the pagan temples was gained through prostitution.

v. 16 "REPENT!" -- aorist (tense of urgency) active imperative of with the inferential particle *|oun|* (as a result of their sin). "Repent...or be judged."

Prophetic Application: 312-590 AD. – During the historical period the church at Pergamum symbolized, the Church slowly merged with the State. Constantine's famous Edict of Milan in 313 granted Christianity status as an officially recognized religion in the empire. Constantine's toleration of Christianity gave way to his personal acceptance of Christ ca. 324 AD. Now, anyone who wanted to get ahead in Constantine's court proclaimed their devotion to Christianity as a means to serve their ends.

The Church also compromised its position more and more to gain favor and power in Constantine's court. A church hierarchy began to develop with the Bishop of Rome claiming pre-eminence due to his proximity to the emperor and the fact that Peter and Paul died there. He sought to strengthen his claim with the declaration of apostolic succession – alleging that his office in Rome was linked directly to Peter and that the Big Fisherman was the foundation of the Church.

The church at Pergamum compromised with the world's paganism and immorality; so its historic counterpart in the 4th and 5th c. committed spiritual adultery in its impure alliance with the Roman Empire.

vv. 18ff Thyatira: The longest of the seven letters is written to the least important of the seven cities. Thyatira was located about 40 miles SE of Pergamum, the capitol of the province, and was the hometown of Lydia, Paul's first convert in Macedonia (Acts 16:14). The name may mean "Continual Sacrifice." Thyatira (modern Akhisar, Turkey; population 50,000+ at the end of the 1st c. AD), was founded by Alexander the Great's general, Seleucus I (311-280BC) as a military outpost town of little significance by comparison to the other 6 cities, had commercial importance as a fabric-dyeing center. Had a temple for fortune-tellers here with a powerful female oracle presiding over it: *Sambathe* oversaw a lucrative fortune-telling business.

v. 18a The Address: "to the angel of the church in Thyatira" – "Angel" (Greek, ἄγγελος) can mean a heavenly messenger ("angel") or an earthly messenger; the one who brings the message in the local church: the pastor.

v. 18b The Description of Christ unique to Thyatira: Christ the JUDGE! "...the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze" (as Jesus is described earlier in 1:14-15). The "fire" and "bronze" (copper/tin; "brass" is copper/zinc) in the description of Christ emphasize Christ's promise to judge the false teachers of this church; it speaks of fire/judgment. Since the city was controlled by a female-dominated dye and cloth industry, it is possible that the church here suffered from female false teachers.

v. 19 Commendation: every church except Sardis and Laodicea had something that could be commended. "I know (οἶδα; Latin: *video*) your deeds: love, faith, perseverance, doing more now than in the beginning." BUT THAT IS NOT ENOUGH!

v. 20a Criticism: There was a self-proclaimed (though FALSE) prophetess tolerated at Thyatira whom Christ calls "Jezebel" (ca. 874 BC. Ahab's wife, 1 Kings 16:31; 21:25; 2 Kings 9:7). The historic OT queen was the daughter of the king-priest of Sidon, Ethbaal, who reigned over Tyre and Sidon for 32 years (acc. to the Jewish historian Josephus). She is the one responsible for promoting Baal worship in Israel and the persecution of the Elijah after he had her 450 prophets of Baal were destroyed (1 Kings 18). King Ahab named his sons after YHWH, indicating he worshiped Baal alongside of YHWH; Baal was introduced not as a replacement for Israel's God, but rather BOTH would be worshiped in a syncretistic manner. 1 Kings 21:25 says that Ahab's wife Jezebel urged him on in his spiritual apostasy and idolatry.

The false prophetess at Thyatira was leading the church into false doctrine, idolatry, and immorality just as the OT Jezebel had done to Israel.

She refused to "repent," and therefore would be judged along with her followers and her "children" (or disciples).

v. 20b "By her teaching..." indicates the Word of God was neglected and the church heeding her "prophecies" instead. "Teaching" (διδασκει) is PAI in the Greek: continuous and on-going willful action. This self-proclaimed prophetess was allowed to teach her heresies to the gathered assembly despite Paul's warnings to the contrary:

- 1 Cor. 14:33b-35 "As in all the congregations of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church."
- 1 Tim. 2:8-12 "I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing. I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God. A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent."

- Re: “sexual immorality” -- 1 Cor. 6:18-20 “*Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.*”
- Re: “food sacrificed to idols” – 1 Cor. 10:14 “*Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry. . . . Do I mean then that a sacrifice offered to an idol is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, but the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord's table and the table of demons.*”

A prophet's words were to be judged by others in the church to ascertain what was being prophesied was consonant with the Word of God or not: 1 Cor. 14:29-32 “*Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said. And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop. For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged. The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets.*”

The church at Thyatira disregarded these biblical injunctions and instructions . . . any church disregarding the Word of God to accommodate its practices is destined for judgment sooner or later.

- **Did the church at Thyatira heed Christ's warnings?** Apparently not – see v. 21 . . .

v. 21 She refused to “**repent,**” and therefore would be judged along with her followers and her “**children**” (or disciples; those that followed her teaching). Note the grace of God but her unwillingness to comply.

v. 23 “**I will repay each acc. to his deeds**” – judgment based on works is found throughout the NT as taught by Jesus, Paul and John:

Mt.16:27 Jesus said, “*For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done.*”

Rom. 2:6ff “*God will give to each person according to what he has done. To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger.*”

Rom. 14:10ff “*For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. It is written: 'As surely as I live,' says the Lord, 'every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God.' So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God.*”

1 Cor. 3:10-15 “*By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.*”

2 Cor. 5:9f “*we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.*”

vv. 24, 25. There was a godly remnant of believers at Thyatira who had not accepted these “deep teachings” or “depths of Satan.” The exhortation is to “hold fast” to what is good, and to reject evil.

vv. 26–29. The obedient believer will be given a reward of “power” or authority in the millennial kingdom as he reigns with Christ (12:5; 19:15; 20:4). The “morning star” is probably a reference to the eternal presence of Christ Himself.

Prophetic Application: 590-1517 AD. – domination of the priesthood of the Middle Ages drawing the people into idols, image-worship, and priestcraft.

III. SUMMARY / APPLICATION / RESPONSE

1) EPHESUS:

- Jesus knew each church and their precise situation - he does ours! Praised for their success; exhorted to correct their short comings. He cared for them; and He cares for us!
- **Ephesus** - Commendation: hard work, perseverance; identification of false apostles. Rebuke: forsook first love (*agape*); Eph. 1:15-16 Paul commended it! In fact, “love” is mentioned 16 x’s in the Ephesian epistle and in every single chapter! These were now 2nd generation believers; church in existence about 43 years. **ORTHODOXY / SERVICE not enough!** Don't fail to LOVE: its the "greatest" (1 Cor. 13) and commanded. First saved - zeal without knowledge. Do you now have knowledge without zeal?

2) SMYRNA: "In this world you will have persecution; but be of good cheer, for I have overcome the world!" "All who would live godly in Christ Jesus SHALL..."

- a) It's unavoidable;
- b) It's of Satan, **NOT** God - both work through people;
- c) "*All things work together for the good....*" (Eph. 2:8);
- d) DON'T FEAR (Lit. "stop fearing"); "not a spirit of fear or bondage."
- e) Our reward is SURE! "Don't fear him who is able to kill the body...."

3) PERGAMUM: The church at Pergamum illustrates the constant danger of doctrinal compromise, which is often the first step toward apostasy. Today's churches would do well to heed Christ's admonition to be **BIBLICAL** in our personal and corporate theology, doctrine and the practice of our faith, esp. in our church services!

4) THYATIRA: Some say, "It really doesn't matter WHAT you believe, only THAT you believe." However, Jesus' rebuke of this church destroys that myth. Is doctrine important? Does it **REALLY** matter what you believe? **YES!!!** Always test everything against the standard of God's Word, the Bible.