

Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near.
Rev. 1:3

Verse by Verse Through the Book of Revelation

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Revelation Chapter 2

I. **Unto the angel** messenger

Of the church of Ephesus write; In John's day Ephesus was the leading city of the Roman province of Asia, and later was its capital. Christianity appears to have been preached there first about A.D. 52 by Paul, when he stopped for a short time while homeward bound to Jerusalem and Antioch from his Second Missionary Journey. His friends Aquila and Priscilla settled there at that time and, together with Apollos carried on the work of evangelization until Paul's return a year or so later. (See Acts 18:19 to 19:7). This time the apostle remained in Ephesus for three years—longer than any other place. Luke declares in Acts 19:19 that "all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks." Later, Paul left Timothy in charge of the church at Ephesus (see Tim. 1:3)



Nothing further is definitely known of the church at Ephesus until its name appears three decades later in the Revelation.

Tradition indicates that John became the leader of the Ephesus church. Its central location to the Christian world as a whole makes all the more understandable that its spiritual condition could well be characteristic of the whole church during the apostolic period.

These things sayeth he that holdeth the seven stars (angels or messengers) **in his right hand,** In a special way the leaders of the church on earth are to be under the protection and control of Christ's angels

Who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks. The church enjoys the watch care, attention and ministry of Christ. He walks among us.

2. **I know** God is fully acquainted with the problems of each church and is therefore able to recommend an appropriate and effective solution.

Thy The singular is used here because Christ is addressing the “angel” who represents either each member of the church individually or the church as a single, corporate unit.. Christ deals both with men both on a group basis and on a personal basis.

Works (Greek erga “deeds” or “actions”) The whole life and conduct of the church is known to Jesus Christ.

And thy labour, (Greek kopos “toil”)

And thy patience, (Greek hupomone “perseverance”) Literally ‘remaining under.’ It’s as if Christ is saying, ‘I know what you have done and I also know the toil and perseverance that were necessary to do it.’

And how thou canst not bear Ministers of Christ may find it easier to remain silent concerning the pet sins of their congregations than to take a bold stand for truth. The church at Ephesus was to be commended for making a clear distinction between truth and error, whether in doctrine or in the life and for taking a firm stand.

Them which are evil: This refers to evil teaching and practices in the church

And thou hast tried (Greek “to test”) Genuine “fruit of the Spirit” does not grow in the lives of those who teach and practice error. (see Gal 5:22,23)

Them which say they are apostles and are not and hast found them liars: An early tradition indicates that an Gnostic named Cerinthus visited Ephesus and fomented trouble for John and his congregation.

Gnostic: They did not believe that a real Jesus was really crucified.

Agnostic: A person who believes that nothing can be known about the existence or nature of God.

3. **And hast borne, and hast patience,** They endured patiently the unavoidable affliction caused by the false teachers and the persecution that befell it at the hands of fanatical Jews and Gentiles

And for my name's sake The followers of Christ were known by His name; they were called Christians first at Antioch.

Hast laboured Textual evidence attests the omission of these words (not in the original manuscripts)

And hast not fainted. (Greek kopiao "to become weary")

4. **Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.** As the testimony of those who had personally associated with Jesus ended, as one by one they died, and the vision of the imminence of Christ's return began to fade, the flame of faith and devotion burned ever lower.

5. **Remember, therefore, from whence thou are fallen and repent and do the first works:** The first work is to tell the world about Jesus Christ! Evangelize! The church had "fallen" but Divine Mercy patiently provided an opportunity to repent.

Or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent. The church would forfeit its status as an accredited representative of Christ.

(In the Prologue of his letter to the Ephesians, Ignatius [lived about 100 AD and was the Bishop of Antioch] reports that the church did heed the call from John to repent.)

6. **But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate.** The Nicolaitanes were an Gnostic sect that plagued the churches at Ephesus. The founder was Nicolas of Antioch, a convert to Judaism, one of the seven deacons (Acts 6:5). Adherents to this sect appear to have taught that deeds of the flesh do not affect the purity of the soul, and consequently have no bearing on salvation.

7. **He that hath an ear** That is, to heed the counsel given

let him hear The Greek of this passage implies that those who hear will do so with understanding

what the Spirit saith unto the churches. The promise here, addressed particularly to the church at Ephesus, belongs in a special sense to all the churches of apostolic times. It also belongs to believers of all ages.

To him that overcometh The form of the verb in Greek implies that the person “continues to overcome”

will I give to eat of the tree of life (see Gen. 2:9 and Rev. 22:2)

which is in the midst of the paradise of God. The location stresses the importance of the tree in God’s plan for a perfect world. When Eden is restored to this world earth will once more become a paradise.

The churches play a dual role: They represent periods of the Christian church.

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| Ephesus | Represents the Apostolic period from AD 31 (the year of the Lord’s ascension to AD 100. |
| Smyrna | 100 AD to 337 AD Christianity was illegal and persecution severe. |
| Pergamos | The church became popular under Constantine. In 321 BC he declared equal rights for all religions and changed the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday. This period became one of apostasy, popularity and compromise. This is the time during which the Church of Rome was consolidating its power and authority. |
| | In the year 538 the decree of Justinian giving the pope absolute political power in the West became effective. (Remember the 10 toes of Daniel Chapter Two? Justinian overthrew the Vandals in North Africa and the Ostrogoths in Italy and then gave the government to the pope—and the pope became the religious as well as the political head of state.) |
| Thyatira | 538 AD to 1798 AD This period is characterized as the era of papal supremacy. (Remember the 1260-year prophecy?) |
| Sardis | This is the church during the Reformation. 1798 AD to 1833 AD |
| Philadelphia | 1833 AD to 1844 AD The period of the great second advent awakening. |
| Laodicea | 1844 AD to the Second Coming—our church today! |

8. **And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write;** This name comes from myrron, the name of aromatic gum derived from the Arabian tree Balsamodendron myrrha. This gum was used for embalming the dead, as a salve, and was burned as incense. There is no history of who established this church. It is not mentioned elsewhere in the Bible.

These things sayeth the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive.
(See 1:8; 1:18)

9. **I know thy works,** This word probably wasn't in the original

And tribulation or distress. Persecution at the hands of various Roman emperors characterized the experience of the church during this time. May be called the age of Martyrdom. 100-337 AD.

And poverty, (but thou art rich) (Greek ptوحةia "very poor") but rich spiritually

And I know the blasphemy (Greek blasphemia "evil speaking") In this context it means slander.

Of them which say they are Jews Many of the troubles grew out of slanderous accusations of those who said they were Jews

And are not, They were hypocrites.

But are of the synagogue of Satan. The name Satan means accuser or adversary. These Jewish centers became, literally "Synagogues of the Satan." Matt. 3:7 calls them "generation of vipers."

Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: or are about to suffer.

Apparently the Smyrna church had not yet felt the full brunt of persecution. Christ sends the message to them that, despite the prospect of persecution, they need not be afraid.

Behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried (tested) God would permit the persecution as a means of strengthening and proving the genuineness of their faith. **Do you believe that God would try (test) any of us today? If so, for what purpose?**

And ye shall have tribulation ten days: On the basis of the year-day principle of prophetic time this interpretation may be applied to the period of horrible persecution from 303-313 AD. This period was the most bitter persecution that has ever occurred against Christians and it was suffered at the hands of pagan Rome under Diocletian and Galerius. Diocletian first concentrated on the clergy and spread to all followers. **Why do you think God permitted persecution of His followers?**

Be thou faithful unto death, The Greek form of the word literally means to “continue to be faithful” and Smyrna proved to be a faithful church.

and I will give thee a crown of life. (Greek stephanos “a garland of victory”) This word was used for the wreaths given to victors in the Greek games.

11. **He that hath an ear let him hear what the Spirit sayeth unto the churches.** We discussed this in v. 7.

He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death. This is contrasted with the first death which ends human life temporarily now and from which there is a resurrection both for the just and for the unjust (Acts 24:15) The second death is final (Rev. 20:4 and Rev. 21:8)

Ephesus represents the Apostolic period from AD 31 to AD 100

Smyrna represents the period of the church’s severest persecution 100 AD to 337AD

Pergamos the church of compromise 321-538 AD

Thyatira the church of papal supremacy 538 – 1798 AD

12. **And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write;** The church of Pergamos extends from 321AD to 538 AD—the year the decree of Justinian, that gave the pope absolute political power in the West, became effective. (Remember the 1260 day ?) Remember the prophecy that extended to 1798; Remember the Church in the wilderness (Remember that there were no translations of the Bible during that time?)

Pergamos had been a chief center of cultural and intellectual life of the Hellenistic world. Although by John’s time Ephesus was beginning to supercede it as the leading city of Asia.

The church during this period rose to a position of unchallenged popularity and power.

These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges We discussed this in Chapter 1:16.)

13. **I know thy works and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is** Pergamos had distinguished itself in 29 BC by becoming the site of the first cult worship of a living emperor. A temple was built and dedicated to the joint worship of the goddess Roma and the emperor Augustus. At the very time John wrote these words Christians were suffering persecution for refusing to worship the emperor Domitian (AD 81-96) who insisted on being worshipped as "Lord and God"

It was during this period that Satan established his "seat" within the church: by having Constantine change the Sabbath and by giving political power to the church.

And thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, That, is faith in Me, Jesus Christ.

Even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth Some Biblical commentators hold that a Christian by this name at Pergamos had recently been martyred for his faith for Refusing to worship the emperor.

Martyr: Greek martus "witness" A martyr is one whose death testifies to his faith.

14. **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 stumbling block before the children of Israel,** (See Numbers Chapters 22-24) The analogy with Balaam suggests that there were some at Pergamos whose purpose was to divide and ruin the church by encouraging practices that were forbidden to Christians.

To eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit fornication. The two practices here mentioned had been expressly prohibited by the council at Jerusalem (See Acts 15:29; Rom. 14:1; 1 Cor. 8:1) Balaam influenced Israel to commit "whoredom with the daughters of Moab," to sacrifice to Moabite gods, and to "eat" presumably of the meat sacrificed to these gods. (Num. 25:1, 2; 31:16)

These two sins led to a mixture of paganism with true religion.

This portrayal is peculiarly appropriate to this period of Christian history since Constantine pursued a policy of blending paganism and Christianity at as many points as possible, in a studied attempt to unite the diverse elements within the empire and strengthen it.

15. **So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which thing I hate.** (We discussed this last week.)
16. **Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly,** This sharp warning reflects the grave spiritual peril that confronted the Pergamos church.
and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth. The sword typifies the punishment that would result from a failure to repent.
17. **He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches;** (See verse 7)
To him that overcometh (See verse 7)
I will give to eat of the hidden manna (See Ex. 16:14-36) Some think the allusion here may be to the manna Aaron placed in a pot and preserved in the ark (Ex. 16:33; Heb. 9:4) In view of John 6:31-34 it seems that John here intends manna to be symbolic of spiritual life in Christ now, and eternal life in the hereafter.
and will give him a white stone Most Bible commentators believe this refers to the ancient custom of using a white and black stone by jurors to vote acquittal or conviction.
and in the stone a new name written, In the Bible a person's name often stands for his character. A new name would then stand for a different character patterned after that of God. (Isa. 62:2; 65:15; Rev. 3:12)
which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it. The experience of spiritual rebirth, of the transformation of character, can be understood only by personal experience. [Can you explain what it means to be "born again in Christ Jesus" to an unbeliever?](#)
18. **An unto the angel of the church in Thyatira write:** One of the most flourishing trades in this city was the dyeing of cloth. (See Acts 16:14) As applied to the Christian history, the message to Thyatira is particularly appropriate to the experience of the church during the Dark Ages.

Because of persecution, the flame of truth flickered and nearly went out.

Scriptures were not available to the people so tradition was exalted in their place. Works came to be considered a means of attaining salvation. A false and human priesthood obscured the true and divine priesthood of Jesus Christ.

The Reformation consisted essentially in a revival and restoration of the great truths of the gospel. It proclaimed that men are saved only by faith in Christ, that their only standard of faith and practice is Scripture, and that every man may appear on his own behalf before the great High Priest, Jesus Christ without a human intercessor.

These things sayeth the Son of God (See Luke 1:35; John 1:14) This title, like those that introduce the messages to the other churches is drawn from the description of the glorified Christ in Revelation 1:13 This specifically identifies the Author of the message as the second person of the Godhead.

who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass; We discussed this in Chapter 1:14, 15.

19. **I know thy works** See verse 2

And charity (Greek agape “love”) unselfish love

And service (Greek diakonia “ministry”)

And faith, (Greek pistis) Word used here is same as the word used for faithfulness of God” in Romans 3:3.

And thy patience, (Greek hupomone) See Chapter 1:9

And thy works and the last to be more than the first. The message to Thyatira is the only one of the seven that contains a recognition of improvement. In spite of difficulties in Thyatira, the church there experienced spiritual growth. Contrast the opposite experience at Ephesus (vs. 4,5)

20. **Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee,** Textual evidence favors the omission of this phrase. Some ancient manuscripts read “many things.” The simple reading “I have *it* against thee” is to be preferred. **The translators made the phrase make sense in English!**

Because thou sufferest (Greek aphiemi “to permit”) The church was at fault not only because many openly submitted to apostasy but also because no earnest effort was being made to check the course of evil.

That woman Jezebel For the account of the historical Jezebel see 1 Kings 16:31; 18:13; 19:1,2; 21:5-16; 23-25; 2 Kings 9:30-37. It would appear that, as Jezebel sponsored the worship of Baal in Israel (1 Kings 21:25), so in John's day some false prophetess was attempting to lead astray the church at Thyatira. The message in dictates that here, even more than at Pergamos (Rev. 2:14) apostasy was openly and defiantly rampant.

As applied to the Thyatira period of Christian history, the figure of Jezebel represents the power that produced the great apostasy of the medieval centuries — which we know to be the Roman Power

Which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed to idols. (See Rev. 2:14 and 2 Kings 9:22) This doubtless had a local application to the church at Thyatira. But, applied to the period of church history this would represent the mixture of paganism with Christianity—which was greatly accelerated by Constantine and his successors. Generally speaking, medieval Christianity was more pagan in form and in spirit than it was Christian!

21. **And I gave her space** The offer of forgiveness was extended to the unrepentant prophetess for some considerable time.

To repent of her fornication; and she repented not. The text indicates that this was not a case of unenlightened lack of knowledge but of insistent and defiant rebellion.

22. **Behold I will cast her into a bed,** This is a Semitic expression and is used to mean falling ill (See Ex 21:18 and Matt. 9:2) Compare our English expression “to take to one's bed”

and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, The persons referred to as “them” aren't identified.

Except they repent The door of mercy had not yet fully shut. God never shuts Himself off from sinners; it is they who shut themselves off from Him.

of their deeds. The original Greek reads “her deeds.” From the standpoint of God speaking to His church, the sins of Jezebel and her lovers are essentially her sins because it is she who, as a prophetess, aspires to lead the church.

23. **And I will kill her children** The fornication of this Jezebel was habitual and of long standing because she ‘had children’ meaning committed adherents or believers

(Remember that this was the era of Papal Supremacy [represented by the Church at Thyatira] and most Biblical Scholars believe that this vision is referring to the Papacy as Jezebel because of its mixture of paganism with Christianity.) Does this same condition exist today? Have other churches borrowed from Catholicism?

With death John was probably quoting Eze. 33:27, and the Hebrew is translated “pestilence” or “plague.” Possibly this is the meaning of “death” in John’s passage.

And all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: Reins are your kidneys which anciently were thought to be the seat of the will and the affections. (See Ps. 7:9) and your hearts are your mind/intellect.

This simply means that Christ penetrates both the thoughts and the emotions. Christ’s judgment is fair because He sees and takes into consideration the secrets of the heart.

And I will give every one of you according to your works. This is a call to be faithful to God and His Word. A difference is drawn here between those who were ‘faithful’ in Thyatira and those who were believing the false teachers.

Do our works matter to God? What about the fact that we are saved by faith alone? If that is true, why does this verse say that God will “give every one of you according to your works? Do works play any part in our salvation? If so, how?

The holiest and most active church has its dangers from the subtle breath of error! No Christian church is exempt from Satan’s wrath. **That is why we must continually study God’s Word!**

24. **But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira** That is, the loyal believers in Thyatira. Historically, this refers to small groups throughout the Middle Ages who sought to remain loyal to apostolic Christianity. Such groups were found both within and without the formal framework of the Catholic Church.

as many as have not this doctrine that is, the teachings of Jezebel or the false teachings of paganism that were entering the church

and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak; The Gnostics claimed to be the only ones who knew the “deep things.” They claimed that they were the ‘intellectuals.’ Here Christ takes the very term they applied to themselves and linked it with Satan.

I will put upon you none other burden. Some groups did not have the total measure of Apostolic truth that was later proclaimed by the Reformation. Groups such as the Waldenses in Europe and the followers of Wyclif in England. However God counted their faithfulness to the light that was theirs. **Will there be many people in Heaven who lived up to all the light they had?**

25. **But that which ye have already hold fast till I come.** The blessed hope of the soon coming of Jesus has ever been the stay of Christians in affliction. **Why do people seem to become better Christians under persecution?**

26. **And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works** That is, works that reflect the character of Christ

unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations. Authority to rule as kings

27. **And he shall rule** (Greek Poimaino “to shepherd” [Matt 2:6 same word is used]) The redeemed are pictured here as sharing Christ’s work (See Rev. 12:5; 20:4)

them with a rod of iron; The word used here represents the Hebrew “shebet” of Ps 2:9 which may mean a shepherd’s rod (Ps. 23:4) or a scepter (Ps. 45:6) or a rod of punishment (Ps. 125:3). The context of this verse suggests that the “rod” is used here as both a symbol of ruler-ship and an instrument of punishment.

As the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: This is referring to the destruction of the wicked (Shivers means pieces)

even as I received of my Father. Christ here refers to His divine commission to be the representative of the Father for the salvation of this world.

28. **And I will give him the morning star.** That is, Christ Himself. (See Rev. 22:16 and 2 Peter 1:19)

29. **He that hath an ear, let him hear** means to heed the counsel

What the Spirit saith unto the churches remember that the messages were given not only for John’s day but for the history of the churches down through the ages until the end of time.

REMEMBER:

The seven churches were actual churches but they also represent seven periods of history and they correspond to the seven seals and the seven trumpets (Coming up in our future studies.)

In the messages to the seven churches, Jesus unfolds the Religious History of the Christian era.

In the seven seals, Jesus unfolds the Social History of the Christian era. (Rev. 6.)

In the seven trumpets, Jesus unfolds the Military History of the Christian era as it affects Christ's church. (Rev. 8-11)