

Ministry of Grace

Revelation Chapter 2

The First 4 Messages to the Churches

General

Chapters two and three contain messages to the seven churches of the Roman province of Asia (Western Turkey). According to church tradition, John's home church was the church in Ephesus. But it is believed that the Apostle John also had an itinerant ministry to these seven churches.

There is significant commonality in the structure of these seven messages. Each one, with a few exceptions, contains:

- **A Signature with a Divine Attribute**, indicating that the message was directly from God and expressing the tone of the ensuing message.
- **A Commendation** (except for the church at Laodicea), indicating what God was pleased about regarding the church.
- **A Reproof** (except for the churches at Smyrna and Philadelphia), indicating God's displeasure with certain aspects of the church.
- **A Warning**, instruction regarding what needs to be done to continue in God's blessing.
- **A Promise**. In each case the admonition, "[He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches,](#)" is accompanied by a promise made to "[the one who conquers.](#)"

In addition to the five things said to each church, we will see that each of these churches, with their strengths, weaknesses, and other characteristics, is generally representative of the church-universal in successive periods of history. We will refer to this as a *Historical Representation*.

Also, we can see in these seven churches, descriptions of churches around the world today. We will note these *Church Characteristics* and *Modern-Day Equivalences*.

Before we dive in, though, let's look at a couple of words in this chapter. The first word for us to look at is the word "angel." For each of the 7 churches, John addresses the message to the angel of the church. The word angel is actually a transliteration (a word brought directly from one language into another) of the Greek word *aggelos* (pronounced awn-gel-os). This word refers to "A messenger, one who is sent to announce or proclaim a message." In the New Testament, this word is most often used of an angelic being sent from God with a message. However, in its use here, it is unlikely that this refers to angelic beings, as we discussed in the study of chapter 1. It may be a reference to people who were assigned by each of the seven churches to carry John's message to each church. More likely, however, it is a reference to the leaders of the seven churches whose job it was to deliver God's message to the church members just as a church pastor does today.

Next, let's look at the word "[conquers.](#)" It is translated from the Greek verb *nikaō*, which means, "to be victorious" or "to prevail." The English word "conquer" implies overt, aggressive action 'against' the enemy. Other translations use the English word "overcome." I like this better because it does not imply aggression, rather it implies perseverance. Yes, we are engaged in warfare with our adversary and we are commanded in the book of Ephesians to put on the armor of God so that

we may be able to withstand, but the only offensive part of our armor is the sword of the Spirit (the Word of God).

So, the next two questions we have to ask ourselves are, “Who are the ones who conquer (overcome)?” and “What is it that conquers (overcomes)?” The answers are given to us in the book of **1 John**, where he says,

For everyone who has been born of God **overcomes** the world. And this is the victory that has **overcome** the world--our faith. Who is it that **overcomes** the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? (**1 John 5:4, 5**)

So, the bottom line is that all Christians are overcomers! If you are a Christian then all the messages in chapters two and three of Revelation written to the conquerors (overcomers) are for you, so pay close attention!

Finally, as we go through these two chapters, it would be prudent for us to look at ourselves and our own church to see what messages God may be giving us today.

The Church at Ephesus

Ephesus was the capital city, and the greatest city in terms of size and importance, in the Roman province of Asia. At the time that John wrote the book of Revelation it was a port city, though some three miles from the sea. It was located on the Cayster River and possessed one of the largest and most magnificent temples of the day (the temple of the Roman goddess Diana, known to the Greeks as Artemis), which became known as one of the Seven Wonders of the World. It was probably because of the city’s location and strategic importance that the Apostle Paul spent three years ministering in Ephesus and later sent his letter to the church there. Timothy was assigned by Paul to minister in Ephesus, having written both 1 Timothy and 2 Timothy to him while he was there. According to church tradition, the Apostle John made Ephesus his home from about AD 70 until his death. In addition, some scholars believe that this is the church where Mary, the mother of Jesus, lived out her life. Today, there is not a single building that remains standing in this once great city.

Divine Attribute: Revelation 2:1

¹To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: 'The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands.

The fact that God holds the seven stars in His right hand (the hand of power and honor) indicates that He has complete control over these messengers and provides ultimate protection for them. We also see Him walking around among the seven churches. This is an indication that God protects His churches and freely communes with the believers there.

Commendation: Revelation 2:2-3

²I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false. ³I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary.

“Know” is from the Greek *oida*, implying complete and thorough knowledge based on observation, as opposed to beginning or growing knowledge.

The church at Ephesus was an active church, working hard to accomplish the things that God had directed them to do. Apparently, they were not a church full of complainers because they were patient. They endured the hard work they were performing and the oppression that they were experiencing. Specifically, they were commended for their hard work, their patience, the fact that they can't bear evil people, and the fact that they tested false apostles and proved they were false. In verse 6 we will learn that they were also commended because they hated the deeds of the Nicolaitans.

Reproof: Revelation 2:4

⁴But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first.

This is the only church to which letters were written (and which were later included in the Bible) by two different apostles; John, in this letter, and Paul. When Paul wrote to this church some twenty-five to thirty years earlier, he commended them for their love (*agapē*) and later in the same letter prayed that they be grounded in love.

For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your **love** toward all the saints, I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, (Ephesians 1:15, 16)

so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith--that you, being rooted and grounded in **love**, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. (Ephesians 3:17-19)

It seems that this church had allowed other things to become more important than love. They had abandoned the love that they had for God in the beginning. The notion that love is the foundation for all true worship of God is embodied in the two most important commandments as quoted by Christ:

And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets." (Matthew 22:37-40)

Warning: Revelation 2:5

⁵Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.

Their instructions were to "remember, repent, and redo." In other words, they were to recall the love that they had at the beginning and turn-around, change direction, and then pursue those first works once again. It appears that they had lost their fervent love of God, having turned instead to programs.

God then warned the church at Ephesus that if they did not remember, repent, and redo, He would take action against them. He said he would "remove your lampstand from its place." This is an obvious reference to the seven lampstands in John's earlier vision (**Revelation 1:13**). Today the city of Ephesus is gone as is its church. Instead, there is a tiny Islamic village without a single Christian, the great temple of Diana is a mass of shapeless ruins, and its former harbor is marshland. God has, indeed, removed their lampstand.

Additional Commendation: Revelation 2:6

⁶Yet this you have: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

This is the only one of the seven letters to the churches that has the commendation separated into two parts. In verses 2 and 3 they were commended for their work ethic, their efforts to keep their doctrine pure, and for their patient endurance in spite of their oppression.

This particular commendation has to do with their hatred for the works of the “Nicolaitans.” Mentioned also in the letter to Pergamos, this cultic group cannot be positively identified. Writings of some of the early church fathers indicate that these were followers of Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch, who was one of the Deacons identified in **Acts 6:5**. The fact that he is referred to as a proselyte indicates that he had been a non-believer and converted to Judaism. Then, apparently, he converted to Christianity. But many people believe that he never really left the roots of his paganism and tried to intermingle the practices of his former beliefs with those of Christianity.

The deeds of the Nicolaitans appear to have involved sensual temptations leading to sexual immorality and eating things sacrificed to idols (**Revelation 2:14**) without regard for the offensiveness of such behavior, all in the name of Christian liberty. It has been suggested that the teaching of the Nicolaitans was an exaggeration of the doctrine of Christian liberty which attempted to compromise with heathenism. Irenaeus, one of the early church fathers (who lived in Smyrna during the middle of the second century AD) wrote of the Nicolaitans, indicating that they “lived lives of unrestrained indulgence.”

Later, in verse fourteen, we will see that the church at Pergamos embraced the doctrine of the Nicolaitans rather than resisting it as this church did. We’ll talk more about this in the letter to Pergamos.

Promise: Revelation 2:7

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

“He who has an ear, let him hear” – This is an admonition to pay close attention to what follows. This statement basically means “he who is willing to learn, listen-up!”

“what the Spirit says to the churches.” – Because this is addressed to the churches (plural), it has applicability to all Christians of all times. In other words, it is a message for you and for me!

“the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God” – you may recall from the end of Genesis chapter three that God cast Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden so that they could not eat of the tree of life, lest they live forever in their sinful state. According to the current verse, the tree of life is currently in Paradise. And - according to Jesus, this is where believers go immediately upon physical death:

And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise." (**Luke 23:42-43**)

When the current heavens and earth are destroyed and the new heavens and new earth are created, the tree of life will be lining the street of the New Jerusalem for all believers to partake of:

through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. (**Revelation 22:2**)

Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates. (**Revelation 22:14**)

Historical Representation: this church represents the Post-apostolic Church Age in the 1st century A.D.

Church Characteristic: Lots of action (programs) but a waning love of God, of the brethren, and of the lost.

Modern-Day Equivalent: This church represents the modern day “Program Church,” full of programs and activities for everyone, but waning in true love for God and for the unsaved.

The Church at Smyrna (modern day Izmir)

Smyrna (meaning myrrh) was a large and wealthy city 35 miles north of Ephesus. It was intensely loyal to Rome, having a strong emperor-worship cult, and was a center of science and medicine. Some fifty years after this letter was written, Polycarp, one of John’s disciples and pastor of the church at Smyrna, was burned alive for refusing to worship Caesar. At the time of this writing it was called The Crown of Asia. Like Ephesus, it was a seaport. In contrast to Ephesus, which today is a deserted ruin, Smyrna (now called Izmir) is still a large seaport with a present population in excess of 200,000.

Divine Attribute: Revelation 2:8

⁸And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: 'The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life.

“who died” is *hos egeneta nekros* which literally means, “the one who became dead.”

Commendation: Revelation 2:9

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

“poverty” is *ptochian* meaning not just poor but “*extremely poor.*” James uses this same word in his letter to Christians:

Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are **poor** in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him?
(James 2:5)

This was a very poor church in the midst of a very rich city. In spite of their economic poverty, they were spiritually rich. Contrast that to the church in Laodicea (**Revelation 3:17**), which was a rich church economically, though spiritually impoverished.

“**and the slander of those who say that they are Jews**” – A true Jewish believer is one who believes in the Messiah, Jesus. These Jews (unbelievers) laid blasphemous charges against true believers in Christ and against their own Messiah.

“**who say that they are Jews**” – Much of the persecution of the early church came from people of the Jewish faith who rejected Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah. John tells us here that their synagogue, outwardly a gathering place to worship God, was void of any true faith in God. John says that instead of worshipping the true God, they worshipped their god, Satan.

Reproof: There is none. Only this church and the one in Philadelphia were lacking in a reproof from the Lord. In spite of the persecution that these Christians were suffering at the hands of the Jews and Romans, they remained faithful to God.

“It is a very remarkable thing,” wrote G. Campbell Morgan, “that the church of Christ persecuted has been the church of Christ pure. The church of Christ patronized has always been the church of Christ impure.”

Warning: Revelation 2:10

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

“suffer” – There are four possible reasons for Christian suffering:

1. Disciplinary chastening by the Lord. (1 Corinthians 11:30-32)
2. To maintain an attitude of humility in a Christian, like Paul’s thorn in the flesh. (2 Corinthians 12:7)
3. To teach a child of God how to be obedient like Christ was. (Hebrews 5:8)
4. To be a testimony for Christ as Paul was. (Acts 9:16)

The Christians in Smyrna were persecuted for their faith but showed themselves to be faithful to God. They are warned here that suffering is coming and that the source of such suffering is the devil himself.

“for ten days you will have tribulation” – This is probably not a literal ten days of tribulation. It is more likely a reference to the fact that the tribulation would not last for a long time.

“crown of life” – The word “crown” is translated from the Greek word *stephanos*, which is the wreath that was awarded to victors at athletic events. It is not a reference to a royal crown (a crown of authority), for that is the Greek word *diadema*. This victor’s crown is the same crown promised by James (James 1:12) to those who endure temptation. Here it is implied that it will be granted to those who lose their physical life because of their stand for Christ. Or, perhaps it is to be granted to those who remain faithful until the end of life. Some Christians believe that the crown of life is a reference to eternal life itself.

Promise: Revelation 2:11

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

The expressions “he who has an ear, let him hear” and “the one who conquers” are used in the promise to all seven of the churches.

“the second death” – According to Revelation 20:14, 15, the “second death” is when someone is cast into the lake of fire, which happens to all unbelievers at the Great White Throne Judgment.

Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. (Revelation 20:14-15)

Historical Representation: This church represents the age of great persecution for the church - 2nd & 3rd centuries A.D.

Church Characteristic: Persecuted and/or martyred for their faith.

Modern-Day Equivalent: This church represents the persecuted church throughout the world.

The Church at Pergamos (modern day Bergama)

Pergamos was about 20 miles north of Smyrna. Like Ephesus and Smyrna it was a wealthy city, but it was wicked. People in its pagan cults worshiped Athena, Asclepius, Dionysus, and Zeus. Pergamos was famous for its university with a library of about 200,000 volumes, and for

manufacturing parchment resulting in a paper called *pergamena*. The social structure of this city was adverse to any effective Christian life and testimony.

Divine Attribute: Revelation 2:12

¹²And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: 'The words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword.

“Sword” is the Greek word *ramphaia*, meaning a long sword used for swinging with great force and deadliness. The Greek reads literally, “the sword, the two edged one, the sharp one” which places greater emphasis on its having two sharp edges. This is different from the *machaira* spoken of in Hebrews, which is a short stabbing or piercing sword such as the Roman army used.

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12)

The sword mentioned in Hebrews is the Word of God in its ability to discern between good and evil. The sword mentioned here with regard to Pergamum is, instead, the sword of judgment spoken of in Christ’s return at Armageddon:

From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. (Revelation 19:15)

This is the same sword that Christ threatened to bring to judge the church at Pergamos in verse 16. In looking at the two edged nature of this sword, it appears to be a reference to the Word of God that carries the message of salvation to those who believe it and the message of judgment and condemnation to those who disbelieve.

Commendation: Revelation 2:13

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

“Where Satan’s throne is” could be a reference to the magnificent temple of Zeus that dominated the acropolis in Pergamos, or to the temples erected for Roman emperor worship, or the temple of Asclepius, the serpent god, and it’s associated medical school (the current medical symbol of two intertwining snakes is believed to come from here). It may be a reference to all of the heathen worshippers there.

“Antipas” – Tradition indicates that Antipas was the pastor of the church in Pergamos and that he was burned to death inside a brass bull.

“witness” – This is from the Greek word *martus*, meaning “a witness.” Because many early church members were killed for their witness, the English word “martyr” has come to mean “someone who was killed for their faith.”

Reproof: Revelation 2:14, 15

¹⁴But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality. ¹⁵So also you have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans.

“hold the teaching of Balaam” – Not only did this church not resist doctrinal error, some members of this church held to the teaching of Balaam. The story of Balaam is told in the Old Testament in Numbers chapters 23 through 25. In **Numbers 31:15, 16** Moses rebuked the children of Israel for following the practices of Balaam.

Moses said to them, "Have you let all the women live? Behold, these, on Balaam's advice, caused the people of Israel to act treacherously against the LORD in the incident of Peor, and so the plague came among the congregation of the LORD. (**Numbers 31:15, 16**)

The specific problem introduced by Balaam was that of intermingling with the world around them. By taking wives of the native people of the land, the children of Israel eventually adopted the worship of their idols, which God considers spiritual adultery. Some in the church at Pergamos had become worldly and had adopted the principles and values of the pagan Roman world around them, buying into the world system instead of remaining spiritually holy and pure. The problem was that the others in the church at Pergamos did not take action against those who were teaching and living false doctrines.

“the teaching of the Nicolaitans” – Not just the deeds of the Nicolaitans, as the church at Ephesus was warned about. This church has now fully adhered to the **teaching** of the Nicolaitans. This church had become so worldly that they were now teaching that sexual immorality and idol worship were permissible under Christian liberty.

Warning: Revelation 2:16

¹⁶Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth.

“Repent” – This is from the Greek word *metanoēō*, which means “to change one’s thinking.” It does not simply mean “stop doing what you have been doing;” it means “stop thinking the way you have been thinking and think (and act) differently!”

“soon” – From *tachu*, which means “without delay, soon, or suddenly.” This is not to be seen as a reference to “the coming of the Lord,” but to “the coming of the Lord’s judgment.”

Promise: Revelation 2: 17 ¹⁷He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it.

“manna” – This is transliterated from the Hebrew word *man*, meaning “what is it?” Manna was called “bread from heaven” in the Old Testament. Jesus said that He was this “bread from heaven:”

Then Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." (**John 6:32-33**)

“stone” – This is from the Greek word *psēphos*, meaning “a small stone or a pebble.” These pebbles were used in the courts of justice, a white pebble being given to someone who was acquitted of a crime and a black pebble being given to someone who was convicted of the crime. A white stone with a person’s name on it was used to gain admittance to a place of entertainment or celebration. The white stone pictured here represents our righteousness (innocence) before God and our admittance into heaven.

Historical Representation: This church is a picture of the Imperial Church Age, the 4th century through the early 6th century. This was the time when the church became united with the ruling class. It was during this period that the church brought in paganistic symbols and worldly practices.

Church Characteristic: Worldly, intermarrying, and compromising with the world, including the acceptance of its principles and morals.

Modern-Day Equivalent: The Worldly Church, the church which tries to make Christianity more palatable to people by including worldly practices.

The Church at Thyatira

The city of Thyatira was 40 miles southeast of Pergamos and was a much smaller city. It boasted a special temple to Apollo, the “sun god.” Thyatira was situated in an area noted for its abundant crops and the manufacture of purple dye. It became a center of trade with all areas of the Roman and pagan worlds. There is also evidence that Thyatira was a center for professional “trade guilds,” which often encouraged idolatry and immorality. The church was small, probably the smallest of the seven churches, but it was singled out for this penetrating letter of rebuke.

Divine Attribute: Revelation 2:18

¹⁸And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: 'The words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze.

“Son of God” – This is the only time in Revelation that this expression is used. It is contrasted with the expression “Son of man” used of Christ in chapter 1, where he appears as the savior. “Son of God” is a reference to his appearance as judge.

“who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze” – Whereas the sharp two-edged sword referred to the *threat* of judgment for the church at Pergamos, these are symbols of actual judgment. The eyes like a flame of fire represent anger and all-seeing judgment, while brass is a symbol of purifying judgment. Christ was warning the church at Pergamos that judgment would come if they did not repent. In Thyatira the judgment was on its way.

Commendation: Revelation 2:19

¹⁹I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first.

This church was characterized by its works. Works are well and good. James says that they are an indication of faith, but when they are practiced instead of faith, they are empty and odious to God.

But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. (James 2:18)

Though this church was performing genuine works of faith, service, and love, they were allowing the paganistic works of penitence to infiltrate their true works of faith. Works of penitence are actions taken to “make up for” or to “counteract” sinful deeds. Christians are never instructed to perform acts of penitence because there is **nothing** that we can do to make up for, or to pay for, our sins. Our Lord commended the people of Thyatira for their genuine works, but will follow up His commendation with a stern rebuke.

Reproof: Revelation 2:20-23

²⁰But I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols. ²¹I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality ²²Behold, I will throw her onto a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation, unless they repent of her works, ²³And I will strike her children dead. And all the churches will know that I am he who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you according to your works.

It is interesting to contrast the churches at Ephesus and Thyatira. The Ephesian church was weakening in its love, yet faithful to judge false teachers; while the people in the church at Thyatira were growing in their love, but too tolerant of false doctrine and the actions of the world around them. Both extremes must be avoided in the church.

“Jezebel” Probably not actually a woman named Jezebel but a prominent woman in the church who was allowed to teach and call herself a prophetess. The apostle Paul had previously written that women were not permitted to teach in the church.

I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. (1 Timothy 2:12)

She is referred to here as Jezebel because her teaching was, like Jezebel of the Old Testament, mixing paganism with the true faith.

“practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols.” – This is very similar to the doctrine of Balaam. This church, however, had gone one step further than the church at Pergamos, allowing this woman to openly teach these doctrines and to encourage believers to partake of such wickedness.

“I gave her time to repent” – Our God, being longsuffering, gave this woman (and the entire church) plenty of opportunity to repent of the wicked teaching and immoral practices, but they did not.

“I will throw her into a sickbed” – The verb translated “I will throw” is in the present tense indicating action of judgment that is currently taking place (“I am throwing” or “I throw.”)

“will strike her children dead” – Her children were the people in the church who were following her teaching.

“all the churches will know” – God was making an example of this church and His judgment against unrepentant wickedness.

Warning: Revelation 2:24, 25

²⁴But to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not learned what some call the deep things of Satan, to you I say, I do not lay on you any other burden. ²⁵Only hold fast what you have until I come

Not everyone in the church had succumbed to the wicked teaching. The leader of the church and others apparently did not agree with the doctrine that “Jezebel” was teaching and they were encouraged to hold fast to their beliefs.

Promise: Revelation 2:26-29

²⁶The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, ²⁷and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father. ²⁸and I will give him the morning star. ²⁹He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

“He will rule them with a rod of iron” – Later in this book, when the Messiah comes in judgment at the end of the Tribulation, He is described as ruling with a rod of iron (during the Millennial Reign):

From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. (Revelation 19:15)

“I will give him the morning star.” – Jesus describes Himself as the “bright morning star” in Revelation 22:16. Here He suggests that he belongs to those who keep themselves clean from wickedness.

"I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star." (Revelation 22:16)

Historical Representation: This church represents the Papal Church Age (Roman Catholic) from the 6th century through the 16th century. This is the period when paganism was accepted and infused into the church beliefs and practices. Such pagan beliefs and practices continue in Catholicism even to the present day.

Church Characteristic: Pagan practices and rites have been incorporated into the practices of the church. This has been characteristic of the Roman Catholic Church from the 6th century to the present.

Modern-Day Equivalent: The Pagan Church.

So What?

If we look at the things that the first four churches received reproof about, we see a waning love of God and a growing love for the things of the world. In the case of Pergamos and Thyatira, this love of the world was in the form of idolatry and sexual immorality. These resulted from following the teachings of Balaam, who convinced the children of Israel that it was okay to be like the heathen people who lived around them, to intermarry with them, and to participate in their practices.

In the book of Numbers, chapters 23 through 25, you will see that Balaam was a prophet of God who was willing to sell his ability to prophesy for King Balak. Balak wanted Balaam to curse the children of Israel as they were about to enter into the Promised Land. Balaam, however, was not able to curse the children of Israel and could only proclaim a blessing on them, because as a prophet of God, he could only speak what God gave him to say. So, since Balaam was not able to proclaim a curse on them, he convinced the Israelites that it was okay to socialize with and intermarry with the people of the land. The result was, the children of Israel began to worship Baal and joined in with the local people in their feasts to Baal, which included eating food that was offered to the false god and committing sexual immorality. The bottom line is that the Israelites turned from their love for God and became heavily involved in worldliness.

So, what does all this have to do with the church in the 21st century? We are constantly under attack from our adversary who is doing everything he can to trap us the same way he trapped the Israelites. The world system is constantly before our eyes and it is always presented as something desirable, something attractive, and something that will make our lives better. The writer of this book of Revelation, John, gave us a very good description of the world system in his first general letter.

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. (1 John 2:15-16)

These have been the Devil’s tools from the beginning. You will recall that Eve was tempted in these three ways.

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. (Genesis 3:6)

The Devil also tried to tempt our Lord with these three elements of the world system. If you read the first eleven verses of the 4th chapter of Matthew’s gospel account you will see that Satan tempted our Lord with “the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life.” But our Lord resisted by quoting from the Scriptures. In essence, He demonstrated that His love for the Father was greater than His love for the things of the world by being obedient to His Father’s will.

And that’s where we are today. We are surrounded with the things of the world and we are constantly being told that we will be happier, healthier, and more fulfilled if we just join in with those around us. On the surface and in the near term the promises of the world system seem to be reasonable and seem to be working. But, just as the Israelites discovered, the promises of the world are never fulfilled, no matter how hard or how long we try.

Now What?

As we face the temptations of the world system that are constantly bombarding us, keep in mind that those who reject Christ as Lord and Savior will someday spend eternity in the lake of fire. We who overcome the world, we who believe that Jesus is the Son of God, the Lord of all creation do not need to fear the lake of fire. We have eternal life and are not subject to the second death because we are overcomers!

It is not enough to read our Bibles every day, to pray every day, and to go to church every week. These are good things, for sure, and necessary for a successful Christian life. But what’s more important is for us to focus on loving God with a pure heart and to avoid the temptations of the world around us.

I challenge each one of you to take time this week to assess how much you are focused on the world around you, versus how much you are focused on God. Let’s all decide to focus more on God and less on the world.

Let’s Pray.

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