

Revelation Chapter 2

An Interpretation

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Revision of 7/17 NASB Printed 1/26/2026

Introduction:

1. Jesus dealt with believers through the local church. A part of becoming a Christian was to be a visible part of the church. The view in America is that of total independence - and sometime isolation (via TV) - of believers from church.
2. Jesus did not dictate this letter to the church at Ephesus plus Jim, Mary, Susie, Kim and Howard in their homes. His people were in the church.

EPHESUS

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

- The **church in Ephesus** had also received a letter from Paul. Of the seven churches, it was the closest to Patmos and a logical first stop for a messenger delivering the complete scroll.
- Ephesus was the foremost city of Asia Minor. It was home of the temple of Artemis (Diana), home of magic arts, and the home of mystery cults. Paul had stayed here three years. Aquila and Priscilla and Apollos had been there, and Timothy worked for the Lord there.
- See that the **One holds** (present tense) and **walks** (present tense).
- Aaron, the first High Priest, walked among the **golden lampstands** in the tabernacle each morning and evening to trim them. Exodus 30:7-8. So, Jesus is inspecting the light put out by the churches and especially **Ephesus** at the present.
- Before John was banished to Patmos, he had lived at **Ephesus** for many years, so this first letter was like a report card to his home congregation.

(2) I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false; (3) and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary.

- This is the first of seven times Jesus says **I know...** His knowledge of what was happening in each church is added proof of his divinity.
- We take the statements literally. **Deeds, toil and perseverance** were not figures of speech pointing to yet something else. While some of the drapery in the communication requires some background in previous portions of Scripture, yet the points of commendation and warning are clearly stated.
- This was a busy church (**toil**). That was on the plus side.
- Paul had warned the Ephesian elders that wolves would come to ravage the church. (Acts 20:28-30.) And they tried, claiming to be **apostles**. But they were **tested** and found to be **false**.
- **Loren Brink:**
There must have been a plague of false apostles upon the churches of the first century impersonating the twelve. Paul was alarmed about this when he wrote to the Corinthian church some years before (2 Corinthians 11:13).
- To **grow weary** would be to drop out because of trouble. The Ephesian church held on to their faith in Christ tenaciously in spite of all their opposition.

(4) But I have this against you, that you have left your first love.

- The church had heart trouble. They had **left** their **first love** for the Lord.
- **Brink:**
The Church at Ephesus was coming up short in affection. They could bear up under trouble and fend off false apostles, but they had a great weakness in the department of love.
Many churches have developed great strength in the area of doctrine but become impatient with one-another. This lack of love was about to destroy the Ephesian church if left uncorrected, according to verse five.
Herein lies a great danger for churches today. We can become so down on false doctrine that we become down on everything, including our brethren. A feeling of good will toward our fellow Christians is absolutely essential for any church to function properly.

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

- Now the solutions directly from the Lord:
 - **Remember.** Review their past whether by written congregational histories or living memories.
 - **Repent** of the slow change that has come over the church as a generation has passed on. The new generation had not followed in the footsteps of their fathers.
 - **Restore.** Get back to the way things used to be.
- Failing to take these three steps means their **lampstand** would be extinguished.

Discuss: What kind of information needs to be preserved in a congregation's history?

- **Brink:**

This lack of love was not some minor problem at Ephesus that needed a little attention. It was a major problem that was about to destroy the church if left unchecked. The physical body may have a good liver and a good stomach, but if the heart is diseased, there is real trouble.

Love is the heart of Christianity. When love goes, the church goes. Jesus considered it so important that he said, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:35). Unity is built on patience with one another, courtesy, and a genuine appreciation for each one who loves the Lord. Without this there can be no lasting relationships.

- It is interesting to observe that John's epistles of I, II, and III John, which may have been written after he returned from Patmos to Ephesus, are so full of the subject of Christian love. Could this "star" (John) be working on the bad marks received by the Ephesian church on this spiritual report card?

(6) 'Yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. (7) He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who over- comes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.

- Being like Christ includes some **hating—the deeds** of a group in the church.
- It is appropriate to call false teachers by name, especially those within the church.
- **James E. Smith:**

One of the Apostolic Fathers writing about AD 107 described the Nicolaitans as "lovers of pleasure" and

“devoid of the Holy Spirit and ... corrupters of the flesh ... monuments and sepulchers of the dead.

- **Brink:**

To have “ears to hear” means to have a heart that is inclined to hear God's instruction.

“What the Spirit saith.” Notice how the three persons of the godhead are used interchangeably as the authors of this book. Chapter one presents both God the Father and Jesus the Son as addressing these churches. Now the Spirit is designated as the third source of authority.

- While Christ was dictating these comments, yet it was the word of the **Spirit**. Jesus and the **Spirit** are one.
- The Christians of the seven churches would have known about the **Tree of Life** in the Garden of Eden (Paradise in the Greek version of Genesis 3:24). Because of sin, Adam was driven from the Garden so he would not have access to the **Tree**. In a figure of speech, **overcomers** will be in Eden and can access **the tree of life**.
- In Revelation 22:2, **the tree of life** is growing in the New Jerusalem.
- Ephesus is today a very worthwhile tourist attraction in Turkey.

SYMRNA

(8) And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: The first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life, says this: (9) 'I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich), and the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

- While the town of Ephesus is only a tourist's attraction, **Smyrna** thrives. Now called Izmir, it is Turkey's third largest city. This writer stayed there two nights while visiting Ephesus.
- The Lord reminds them of his eternal nature (**first and last**) and that **death** is not the end. He lives now and has authority because of it.
- Jesus had three things to say about this church:
 - They were under **tribulation** or pressure, just like John who was doing the writing. Pressure is part of living for Christ.
 - They experienced **poverty** money-wise even though they are rich in Christ. Their stand for Christ had hurt their income in the community. Businesses were boycotted and advances in employment did not happen, keeping them poor.

- **Blasphemy** is speaking against God and here the synagogue was speaking against the people of God. In spite of their claims to be the **synagogue** of God, they were a **synagogue of Satan**.

- **Brink:**

"**Tribulation**" is from a Greek word that means "pressure, distressing circumstances, trial, affliction." The shock waves of persecution had reached all seven of these churches, and perhaps their "**poverty**" was a result of their faith, like the Hebrew churches of Hebrews 10:34.

However, lack of money does not mean lack of spiritual wealth. A poor church financially may be a rich church spiritually, and vice-versa.

"**Blasphemy**" The church at Smyrna and the church at Philadelphia (see chap. 3:9) both faced a strong synagogue, that had a big mouth against the church. They were descendants of Abraham, but their hearts were hard and unapproachable to the gospel. Romans 9:6 teaches that it is one thing to be a Jew outwardly, and quite another to be one inwardly. To be a Jew inwardly is to have a sensitive faith and obedience toward God like Abraham had (Romans 4:12).

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

- Jesus here predicts **suffering** ahead for this church. Knowing this would cause **fear**. But there is strength in knowing that trouble is on the way, and our Lord knows that we can handle it. The devil will be working through some of his lackeys to have them imprisoned. That could lead to the death of some of them.

- **Brink:**

In spite of the prospect of death for their faith in Jesus Christ, they were not to deny him, no matter what the cost. We are all born into this life to die. How foolish it is to cast aside Jesus in order to prolong life for a few more years and miss the fantastic reward which he has for all who are faithful unto him until death (see II Timothy 4:8).

- The **ten days** could be a literal 10 days, but that is not likely in a document given to figures of speech. These saints would be familiar with the day-for-a-year rule from Daniel chapter 9. If applied here, it would mean a decade of persecution was ahead for them.

- The Lord bargains: "You be faithful to me, even if it means that you die, and I will give you the garland **crowns** called **life**. Like me, if you die, you shall live. (vs. 8)" They would be winners in the great game of living with a purpose.

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

- Listening to **the Spirit** here is essential to life. But more than hearing is the requirement to overcome. They may experience the first death earlier than normal, but they would not experience the **second death**. A definition has not been given of the **second death** yet, but even the words do not seem attractive. In Revelation 21:8 it is clearly defined as the lake of fire.
- James E. Smith cleverly states, "Born twice, die once; born once, die twice."

PERGAMUM

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

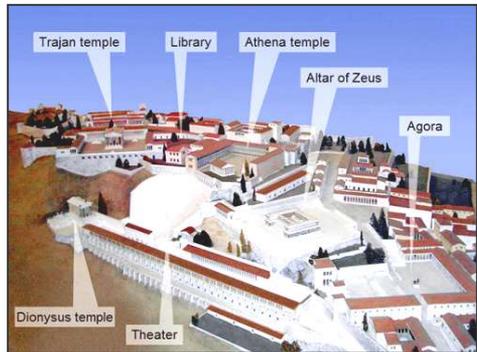
- The **two-edged sword** of Scripture was important to these saints because they were up against a center of idol worship plus a world-class library.
- The *Complete Word Study Dictionary* says:
 - Pergamos was famous for its literary character and idolatry. Since the Egyptians, who controlled the production of papyrus, would not give Pergamos the paper to build a rival library, the people of Pergamos perfected the art of preparing animal skins for writing. Our word "parchment" is derived from the Latin pergamena, Pergamos. Pergamos had a vast library of 200,000 volumes (rolls), rivaling that at Alexandria.
- Christians had a library of sixty plus titles. These are the real words of life.

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

- The Acropolis had a temple of Dionysus and from there, one can look out at other places for worshiping idols as seen in the drawing.
- Christians were under pressure to renounce the name of Jesus, evidently by calling someone else Lord. This pressure led to the death of **Antipas**. We have no other information about him, but this hero's name was recorded for millions like us to see. He was faithful to the Lord and wouldn't stop talking about him (**witness**).

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

- Jesus commended the good, but also focused on a serious internal matter. Their good did not obliterate their shortcomings.



- **B.W. Johnson:**

(They had) "teachers like Balaam who seduce the true Israel into sin. Balaam showed Balak how to lead the children of Israel astray. See Numbers

25:2, and Numbers 31:16. In the same way there were false teachers at Pergamos who taught that Christians might join the idol feasts and in heathen fornication."

- Avoiding **idolatry** and **immorality** were key components from the Jerusalem Conference in Acts 15:20 and they were being ignored. Where saints go and what saints do matters a great deal to the Lord.
- Peter had foretold the coming of these teachers. 2 Peter 2:12-16.

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

- A second group in the church did the same thing. There were not random practices by a few but actual teaching. *The Message Translation* says,

"And why do you put up with the Nicolaitans, who do the same thing?"

- Unlike the church at Ephesus, these teachings were being allowed at Pergamum. Jesus wanted it stopped.

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

- Jesus wanted action by the church against the false teachers or He would come and do the job.
- Albert Barnes:

He would come against the church for tolerating them, but his opposition would be principally directed against the Nicolaitanes themselves....The church always suffers when it has offenders in its bosom; it has the power of saving them if it will repent of its own unfaithfulness, and will strive for their conversion.

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

- **Brink:**

The promise to the church at Pergamum about the "hidden manna" teaches that God would sustain the Christians on their journey through the wilderness of this life, if they would be faithful to him. Our "manna" is the bread that came down out of heaven, which is Jesus Christ (John 6:57-58). Jesus said, "man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). The true church never tires nor complains of this diet. It is a spiritual sustenance that sees us through to our promised land, heaven.

- Verse 14 shows this was about banqueting with idolaters. Jesus offers a lasting **manna** instead.
- Pages upon pages have been written about the **white stone**. We favor the view that the **stone** was presented to the victor in the games. The promise of verse 7 is Paradise and the promise of verse 11 is to avoid the second death so it is reasonable that the reference here is to heaven as well.

THYATIRA

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

- In the two previous letters, Jesus has identified himself by

attributes from chapter one. Here he marshals full authority when he said he is **the Son of God**. There are times when a speaker will need to use their full title in order to get attention and change, like “This is your mother speaking.”

- Lydia, who was converted to Christ in Philippi (Acts 16:14) was from **Thyatira**. She sold expensive purple cloth, for which the city was famous. She may have been instrumental in getting the church started here.

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

- **Brink:**

This church at Thyatira stands in contrast to the church at Ephesus. At Ephesus, their works and patience were in good shape, but their love was greatly deficient. In Thyatira things were going better. They were growing in "deeds" (everyday righteous conduct), "love" (appreciation for one another), "faith" (correctness and strength of what they believed), "service" (service rendered in the name of, or for the sake of the Lord), and "perseverance" (enduring, even in the face of trouble.) You would think that spiritual soundness in all these areas would give them a clean bill of health. But they had one great weakness.

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

- **Brink:**

The church at Pergamum had a man by the name of "Balaam" who was leading them into fornication and idolatry. Here in Thyatira it was a woman called "Jezebel" who was leading them into the same miserable sin. It doesn't seem that their "angel" was able to do much against her. "Jezebel" is taken from the OT model, and what she was to Israel, this woman was to the church. Jezebel was an outsider to Israel, being the daughter of the king Ethbaal, King of Tyre. She was raised in idolatry and imported it into Israel when Ahab took her as his wife. She brought with her all the immorality and paganism that she grew up with in Phoenicia, and became a staunch

enemy of Jehovah in Israel.

Whoever this idolatrous person was, like Jezebel of old, she had come from an idolatrous background. She was among the people of God as a member of the church, but had not been converted from idolatry. As an insider, she was causing strife by promoting the ways of idolatry, and opposed those who would correct her.

- Jezebel is probably one person, not a faction. In the previous letters, Jesus has identified false apostles, Nicolaitans (twice), the synagogue of Satan and some who hold the teaching of Balaam. These are clearly groups. So Jezebel probably stands for one Jezebel.
- She not only claims inspiration and teaches, reaching the intellect, but she reaches the emotions by her seductions like having dinner at the idol's temple and coming home for some romance.

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

● **Brink:**

Jesus is patient with us in our infirmity. He gives us time to be taught and grow. But there comes a limit to his forbearance. A little leaven leavens the whole lump (I Corinthians 5:6), so also a condition such as this could not be allowed to go on too long.

(22) 'Behold, I will throw her on a bed of sickness, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds.

- In verse 20, Jezebel seduced her victims into **bed**. Here Jesus said that he would throw her into a bed of **tribulation** along with her willing victims. The only way out was repentance.
- Note that **adultery** and immorality are not separate actions. Immorality is a broad word that includes any kind of sexual activity not permitted by God. **Adultery** is usually reserved to describe those who are unfaithful to their marriage vows.
- Jezebel must have been the leader all of the way because people were to repent of her **deeds**.

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

- The **children** of the historical Jezebel, Ahaziah and Jehoram, died early deaths because of their sins. So will their modern

counterparts.

- The Lord will punish these loose-living people in a way that will be known among the **churches**. It will be open and visible.
- The Lord knows what motives propel each person. He searches **the minds and hearts**.
- Becoming a saved person is not earned by **deeds**, but it takes godly **deeds** to maintain our standing with the Lord.

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

- The congregation was not rejected by the Lord because of Jezebel and her ilk. Each person stands on their own record.
- The faithful were following the now-written Word of God.
- Jezebel offered an advanced seminar (**deep things**) on wickedness. She was a prophetess, but not for the Lord. For those who hadn't been vacuumed up in her food and sex program, the Lord was not going to bring anything else to their attention.

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

- Adam Clarke suggests:
 ". . . till I come to execute the judgments which I have threatened." Several translators tie this "coming" to the judgment that the Lord will bring soon on the Jezebel faction.

(26) 'He who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, TO HIM I WILL GIVE AUTHORITY OVER THE NATIONS; (27) AND HE SHALL RULE THEM WITH A ROD OF IRON, AS THE VESSELS OF THE POTTER ARE BROKEN TO PIECES, as I also have received authority from My Father; (28) and I will give him the morning star. (29) 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'

- **J.E. Smith** says aptly:
 As a shepherd uses his rod to smite those animals that molest his sheep, so Christ protects his people from their enemies. Overcomers are given Christ-like authority. After death the souls of faithful Christians go immediately to heaven, there to share in the power of Christ. In heaven even now Christ is ruling the world from his position at the right hand of the throne of God. Believers sit at the side of Jesus as he subdues all enemies. Thus, they share in Christ's glory and

power.

- Besides giving **overcomers authority**, Jesus promises the **morning star**. Just as Christ is the **bright morning star** (Revelation 22:16), so will his saints be bright and glorious.

What can I say?

And if someone asks about your Christian hope, always be ready to explain it.

1 Peter 3:15 New Living Translation

Questions by Charles Dailey

1. Ephesus was the foremost city of Asia Minor. (Page 1)
2. How many time does Jesus use "know" when dictating to these churches? (1)
3. What did Jesus have against the Ephesus Church? (2)
4. Is it appropriate to label false teacher within the church (3)
5. Does the town of Ephesus still exist? (4)
6. Does the town of Symrna still exist? (4)
7. Finish: Born twice, die once; born once, _____ (6)
8. What did the people of Pergamum write on? (6)
9. What lady in Scriptures came from Thyatira? (8)
10. Is the patience of Jesus with false teachers unlimited? (10)