

INTRODUCTORY NOTES:

- This chapter contains personal notes to four of seven churches. The other three are found in Chapter 3.
- The entire letter begins with Ephesus, the closest to John on Patmos, and runs a circuit to all the churches, ending with Laodicea. All the letters were sent to all the churches.
- Out of all the chapters in Revelation, the **ones that concern us the most are chapters 2 and 3**, the letters to the churches. These were written for the church then, and now. For all believers...for anyone who has an ear! The remaining chapters are less important, as they concern the future, especially chapters 6-18, during which the Church will perhaps not even be present. We need to focus more seriously on exactly what Jesus is saying to the Church, the Church still on earth (and to all believers) in these two chapters.
- **The letters to the 7 churches all have a similar structure, with 7 components:**
 1. Name (which is relevant to the theme for that church)
 2. A Title of Jesus (part of the description in Chapter 1, also relevant to that church)
 3. Commendation (what they did well)
 4. Concern (a condemnation, criticism)
 5. Exhortation (remedial action or....)
 6. Promise to the overcomer
 7. Closing "He who has an ear...."
- Interesting to note that for the first three churches, the promise to the overcomer comes AFTER the closing (items 6 and 7 above reversed). On the last 4, the promise is before the closing. There is meaning in everything in God's Word. We will discuss this later.

It is also helpful to remember WHY these letters are written:

1. actual churches with real needs and concerns.
 2. "hear... Churches" all seven letters apply to all seven churches.
 3. personal: "he who has an ear" It applies to all of us personally.
 4. Prophetic: In their order they lay out the entire history of the church. (Other sections of the Bible also have the same relationship) If they were in any other order, this would not work.
- **We should be watchful for what God is saying to the churches today, and to each of us. As we study these letters, ask God to show you the message He has for you personally.**
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 - **Look for the prophecy present in each letter.**

1st Letter - THE LETTER TO EPHESUS (Revelation 2:1-7)

(Note, to fully understand the church at Ephesus, it is helpful to read Acts 18-20, and Paul's letter to the Ephesians.)

¹ “To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, ‘These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands: ² “I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; ³ and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name’s sake and have not become weary. ⁴ Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. ⁵ Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent. ⁶ But this you 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 overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.””

Introductory material about Ephesus

Ephesus was an incredible place. It was an important seaport, and also the place where several main roads converged. Consequently, it was a center of trading and commerce, an intersection of all the peoples of the known world at that time. Ephesus was also a very pivotal political city for the Roman Empire. It was "free" city, one which the Romans gave the right of self-government; it was also an "assize" town, a place where Roman governors came to dispense justice (they loved the pomp and pageantry of those Roman visits!) This busy seaport was also the site of the Panionian Games, ranked with the Olympic Games, and known for its Greek athletes. Perhaps more important than trade, government, or sports, was the significance of Ephesus as the keeper of the Temple of Artemis (Diana), one of the 7 wonders of the ancient world. This temple was the pride of Ephesus, and made it one of the greatest "religious" cities. When most remember their high school mythology, they think of Diana as a lovely goddess. This was not the case. Her image in the temple was black, short, and repulsive. She was covered with many breasts, the symbol of fertility. Strange writing, which no one understood, covered the base where she stood. It is hard to believe that this image was the goddess who was so loved, served, and worshipped throughout Ephesus and the Roman world. Worship to Diana was the hysterical and frenzied exhibition of abominable deeds you can imagine. It involved sexual perversions beyond belief, and occultic ritual. This is what Ephesus was most known for.

In addition to the worship of the goddess Diana, the temple brought in another element. It was said that anyone who had committed a crime could find safety either in the temple, or within "one bowshot" (about 200 yards) all around the temple. Once reaching this area, any criminal was immune from prosecution or punishment. Consequently, can you imagine the community atmosphere in the closest proximity to the temple? It was probably the greatest collection of the worst criminals in the world. What a nice setting for a church.



Ephesus today....no lampstand here

Yet, the church in Ephesus was probably the "mother" church of all the churches established in Asia. It was started by Paul on his third missionary journey. This church was the most known and written about in scripture. You can trace its history through Acts, Ephesians, Timothy and finally Revelation (a steady decline!) The church at Ephesus began with a shout, as people turned readily from their occultic and perverse thoughts and deeds to embrace Jesus Christ. This large city was famous as a center of the magic arts, and was known the world around for its occultic books, incantations and charms. It was from this background that the original believers in Ephesus came to the Lord. They denounced their ways, even burned books and other materials that would have been worth a fortune then. When they came to Jesus, they came dramatically and completely. However, this "first love" gradually declined. It is thought that the church here began somewhere around 55-60 AD, about 30-40 years prior to the warning in Revelation.

It is appropriate that the church at Ephesus is addressed first in this series to the seven churches in Asia (region we now call Turkey, former province of Rome called "Asia" or "Asia Minor"). It was the closest to John when he was on Patmos, and it was perhaps the strongest established church in Asia, until its decline. When we think of the city of Ephesus, it easily brings to mind any modern, bustling world city today - filled with greed, crimes, corrupt politics, witchcraft and occultic practices, sexual perversions, all kinds of evil - AND a faithful following of Christian believers.

- **Ephesus** literally means "*desired one*" (like *darling*)
- **Description of Jesus used for this letter:** "*He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands...*" In other words, the One in authority, the One in their midst, the One who knows and sees all things. Remember also that the Lampstand is NOT the light. It is the BEARER of the Light. Jesus IS the Light. Although Jesus walks in our midst, He also holds us in His hand. *(also note, olive oil was used to light the lampstand (menorah). Oil is a symbol for the Holy Spirit. The Lampstand cannot provide light without oil. You and I cannot be a light without the Spirit.)*
- **The Commendation:** 7 elements (*we're going to be seeing 7's everywhere!*) Jesus knows their:
 1. works (*the deeds they were doing for Him*)
 2. labor (*the hard work they do for Him*)
 3. patience (*endurance, most likely in a difficult place, in difficult times*)
 4. that they "cannot bear" those who are evil (*do not tolerate evil*)
 5. testing of any false teachers, found them to be liars
 6. perseverance (*continuing to follow Jesus*)
 7. labor for Him without weariness (*don't give up, continue in faith*)



--and later (v. 6) He adds one more commendation: they **hate the practices of the Nicolaitans**, which Jesus also hates (*note he hates the practices, not the people*). **Nicolaitans**: We don't know much about them. *Nikao* in Greek means to conquer. *Laos* means people. Possibly about those who "Lord it over" the people. Maybe even church authority. Or, this is perhaps a sect founded by Nicolas of Antioch made up of gnostics and libertines who indulged in undisciplined lusts.

- Watch out for the word "**nevertheless**"!!
- **The Criticism** (Concern): *"...you have left your first love."* How those words should pierce our own hearts! The heart of God is to fellowship with us, to love us, and have us love Him in return. Sometimes in our efforts to know and hold doctrine, we forget about the One whose word we protect. God desires our love first. Doctrine is important, but not at the expense of our devotion. The Ephesians experienced a great love story in the beginning, but like many marriages, it became "commonplace." What a word for all of us!
- **The Exhortation** (remedial action): 1) *"remember therefore from where you have fallen"* (remember how it felt when you first came to Jesus!); 2) *"repent"* (ask forgiveness for the falling away); 3) *"do the first works"* (behave like you did in the beginning of our love story)
- **Or Else....** *"I will remove your lampstand from its place...."* (the church will die there) The entire city of Ephesus is now in ruins. A once thriving seaport, it is now 6 miles from the sea, unapproachable by ship due to dense marsh covered reeds. The church at Ephesus apparently did not heed the letter to her.
- **The Promise:** *"I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God."* In Genesis we lost our right to eat from the Tree of Life. We will regain it in His Kingdom, in Paradise with Him. We could not eat from that tree in our sinful condition, or we would continue alive in sin. We have now been redeemed and washed clean and when we eat of the Tree of Life, we will live forever free of corruption and sin.
- The Church at Ephesus is thought to **prophetically represent the earliest church, the apostolic church (age of the apostles)** in an historical timeline of the Christian Church throughout history. As each church is added, the one before it continues. All churches have the traits presented in these letters. The prophetic aspect of representing churches throughout the ages will become clearer as we go.

2nd Letter: THE LETTER TO SMYRNA (Revelation 2:8-11)

⁸ *"And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write, 'These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life: ⁹ 'I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. ¹⁰ Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. ¹¹ 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.'"*

Introductory material about Smyrna

Smyrna came under Roman control in 27 BC and enjoyed great material prosperity for several years, until about 324 AD. This is an earthquake prone region, and Smyrna suffered many such

quakes which left it in ruins on a number of occasions. Each time, however, the city was restored, exceeding the previous beauty and architecture.

Smyrna was rich with temples and splendid buildings. With the hills of Mount Pagos as a backdrop, the city was also known as the "Crown of Smyrna." At the foot of the mountain was the temple of Zeus, the father of the gods. Along the Golden Street stood the shrines of Apollo (sun god) and Aphrodite (goddess of love and beauty), Aesclepios (god of medicine) and Cybele, a Phrygian nature goddess. At the Agora (the center of town marketplace) were statues of Poseidon (sea god) and Demeter (goddess of corn). There was no lack of pagan gods in Smyrna. Worship to these gods was full of sexual immorality, and were often wild orgies.

There was also a thriving community of Jews here, who were known to persecute the believers of The Way. In addition to this threat, all citizens were required to offer a pinch of incense on an altar and publicly acknowledge the Roman Caesar as god. After doing this, the person would receive a certificate that he had done so. This so-called "act of loyalty" was, of course, a problem for true believers who would not consider any but God Almighty and His Son as the one true God. Christians were heavily persecuted in Smyrna either by burning at the stake or become lunch for the lions and other arena beasts.



Ruins of the agora in Smyrna

This letter to the believers in Smyrna acknowledges their perilous life and often death for their beliefs. But this church must have remained faithful until death," as Jesus encouraged them, since today this city remains, known as Izmir, where a thriving community of Christians still exists.

- **Smyrna** comes from a Hebrew word translated as "myrrh." Myrrh is a bitter gum and costly perfume, also an antiseptic and was used in embalming or anointing the dead. Was one of the gifts to the baby Jesus from the Magi. Interesting to note that at Jesus' second coming gold and frankincense are offered, but not myrrh. Myrrh was used to anoint Jesus' body at his death. Myrrh yields its fragrance only after being crushed (Jesus' death on a cross). There is a theme of death running through this letter.
- **Description of Jesus used for this letter:** *"First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life..."* This description is appropriate for Smyrna, who lived with the threat of death every day. Jesus has already conquered physical death. He was dead, and now is alive, waiting for these saints.
- **The Commendation:** *"I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich)..."* Jesus knows their:
 1. works (*the deeds they were doing for Him*)
 2. tribulation (*the suffering they endured for Him*)
 3. poverty (*having nothing at all, this word implies being beggars of sorts, but they are rich in spiritual things!*)

- **"and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan."** Some Jewish Christians demanded Gentile circumcision, and other strict adherence to the Old Testament Law, but Paul argued against being legalistic and keeping the Law for Gentiles. However, the new Christians' most difficult persecution came from the Pharisees and other non-Christian Jews who sought to persecute and even kill these new believers. Polycarp, the bishop of Smyrna, was burned alive on a Sabbath Day by such Jewish leadership. Jesus had the right term for these pious hypocrites - a synagogue of Satan. Before dying, Polycarp is quoted as saying: *"Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He never did me wrong. How can I now blaspheme my King who has loved me so?"*
- **The Criticism** (Concern): **None!** (*One of only two churches where no criticism is given.*)
- **The Exhortation** (encouragement):
 - (1) **"Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days."** Because both the Jews and the Romans sought the destruction of these new believers, they had tribulation from all sides, including rampant disease and other things that severely harmed the city making the Christians scapegoats and targets of persecution. There is a great deal of speculation about what the ten days means. A possible explanation is the terrible times for Christians under 10 specific Caesars over a period of 250 years:
 - **Nero** (54-68): Paul beheaded, Peter crucified upside down after watching his wife die
 - **Domitian** (95-96): John exiled
 - **Trajan** (104-117): Ignatius burned at the stake
 - **Marcus Aurelius** (161-180): Polycarp martyred
 - **Septimus Severus** (200-211): Irenaeus killed
 - **Maximinus** (235-237): killed Ursula and Hippolytus
 - **Decius** (249-251)
 - **Valerian** (257-260)
 - **Aurelian** (270-275)
 - **Diocletian** (303-313)

(It is estimated that over 5,000,000 Christians were martyred in this time under these Roman Caesars)

(2) **"Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life."** These believers suffered in ways we can't imagine. Many were faithful, literally unto death. But their death meant receiving the crown of life, permanently. The word for crown here is "stephanos" which is the victor's crown given to athletes. It is a crown of laurel leaves. (This is NOT the *diadem*, the crown of royal authority - that is reserved for Jesus!)

- **The Promise:** **"He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death."** (Notice this promise comes after the closing words *"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."*) The first death is the death of the body, a physical death. The second death is spiritual. The second death is not death of the spirit, but separation from the One who gave it life. The spirit does not die. It lives on into eternity one of two places, with God, or apart from Him. We choose.
- The Church at Smyrna is thought to **prophetically represent the Persecuted Church (age of Martyrs, 100-312 AD)** in an historical timeline of the Christian Church.



¹² “And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write, ‘These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword: ¹³ “I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is. And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. ¹⁴ But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality. ¹⁵ Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.^[a] ¹⁶ Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth. ¹⁷ “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it.””

Introductory material about Pergamos

This city, also called Pergamum, was known as the "City of the Serpent." It was located 80 miles north of Smyrna. While Ephesus was a political center and Smyrna a commercial center, Pergamos was the great "religious" center. Asklepios, the god of medicine, was a chief god here. He was represented holding the staff of Hermes, the god of commerce. The Greeks depicted him with the two headed snake (see Numbers 21, John 3, 2 Kings 18) which is called the Caduceus (official emblem of the city, as well as our symbol for medicine). We all know what the serpent represents in scripture.



Pergamos became the center of emperor (Caesar) worship. The first temple of this cult was built at Pergamos in 27 BC. **Babylon** was the original center of all occultic practices. When the Persians conquered Babylon, a new center for these practices (and the priesthood) was moved to **Pergamos**. The high priest of this system was called Pontifex Maximus. Later, after Rome conquered the world, this religious center along with all of its practices and priests, was moved to **Rome**. Paganism was about to be absorbed into the Roman Church.

In 312 AD, Emperor Constantine was at war with a rival. His father had previously prayed to the God of the Christians and had some success, so Constantine decided to do the same. He ended up defeating his enemy and declared his conversion to Christianity. He then assumed headship of the church, repealed the persecution edicts of Diocletian and advanced Christians to high offices in the state. The official state-sanctioned persecution of Christians ended, but a far worse death than by lions was now introduced. The new Roman church would bring spiritual death.



Ruins of the Roman theater in Pergamos. How would you like to climb up to those seats??

Essentially, paganism was "Christianized." Pagan temples became Christian churches. Heathen festivals were converted to "Christian" holidays and festivals, and pagan priests slipped into office as Christian priests. The only change from the pagan ways was really in terminology. The Roman church became a pagan mix of Christian and heathen practices and priesthood. Only ruins of this once thriving city are left today.

- **Pergamos** - "Per" means mixed or objectionable (perverted) and "gamos" means a marriage or "coming together" (such as intercourse). The church at this time had become married to paganism, perverted and mixed. Thus the need for a sharp two-edged sword.
- **Description of Jesus used for this letter:** *"... He who has the sharp two-edged sword:..."* In this center of paganism ("where Satan's throne is...") this is an apt description of the speaker. The reference in Hebrews 4:12 is of note: *"For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."* Beginning in the third century after Jesus, the Roman Church had perverted the truth by paganizing Christianity. They may wear a "Christian" label, but Jesus' two-edged sword with divide the truth from the false.
- **The Commendation:** *"I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith..."* Jesus knows:
 1. their works (*the deeds they were doing for Him*)
 2. where they live, where Satan's throne is (*they live in the heart of the enemy's stronghold*)
 3. that they held fast to His name, and did not deny His faith (*later, after Constantine, they stood for the truth in spite of Rome's perversion of Christianity. They didn't give up the truth to join the new official "Church."*)

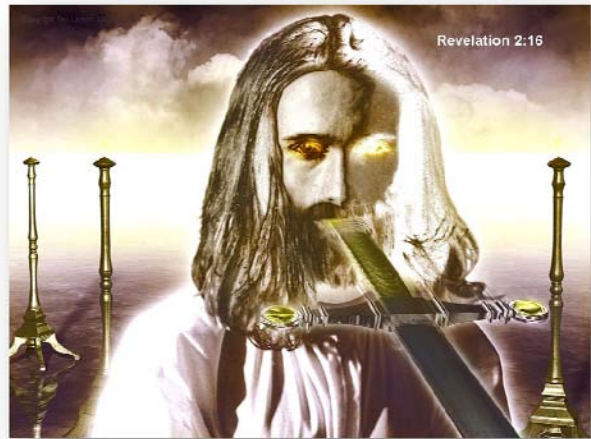
"...even in the days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells." Antipas was the bishop of Pergamos during the reign of Emperor Domitian in 83. His name means "against all" which might indicate that he was standing alone for the faith against the forces of evil. His name came to represent "those against the pope" during the Reformation period. According to orthodox tradition Antipas was consecrated bishop of Pergamos by the Apostle John. Antipas' end is recorded by Simeon Metaphrastes as having been burned to death on the same altar on which the people were to offer their incense to Caesar.

- **The Criticism (Concern):**
 - 1) *"But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality."* In the Old Testament (Numbers) Balaam was an oracle ("prophet") for hire, and his only concern was profit. Although he did not curse the Israelites (at God's instruction) and instead blessed them, Balaam was instrumental in getting the Israelites to intermarry with the Moabites and Midianites (against God's laws) and turning their hearts away from God. He did this for money from Balak, the king of Moab.

The "doctrine of Balaam" is about spiritual prostitution, marriage with the world, and with other "gods." This included sexual immorality. The "doctrine of Balaam" is the exchange of eternal riches for earthly gain and lusts. Balaam was eventually killed along with the enemy.

- 2) *"Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate."* This is the second time that Jesus has remarked that He hated something - the practice of the Nicolaitans. As mentioned earlier, the word implied the practice of the clergy lording it over the laity, in the church. **Pergamos represents the church of Rome** dating from the time they instituted the Nicolaitan system of separation of the priests and laity. Antipas represents the opposition to the excesses of Rome and the tradition of men which led to the Protestant Reformation.

- **The Exhortation** (encouragement): *"Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth."* The word for *repent* literally means to "turn around" and go back [to God]. It means make a 180 away from what you are doing and go straight back to God. Notice that Jesus says He will fight against "them," not "you." Perhaps this means the Nicolaitans, and the falsehoods of the Roman church, including marriage to the world. It could be that the local body of believers was tempted to take on these practices of the new Roman church, which Jesus says He hated. That's pretty strong language for Jesus!



- **The Promise:** *"To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it."* "Hidden manna" is the Bread from Heaven. In Exodus and throughout the wilderness wanderings, God provided bread from heaven for the people to eat. Jesus called Himself the Bread that came down from Heaven (John 6). He is spiritual bread, nourishment for our spirits and souls. "White stones" have several meanings in ancient cultures. White and dark colored stones were often used to vote or cast judgment. The black stone was a "no" or guilty vote. The white stone was "yes" or innocent. The overcomer here is given a "yes" note and judged non-guilty. White stones were also used as entrance to festivals and special events. It was a type of free admission. The overcomer is given free admission to heaven. And, the stone is used throughout the Word as representative of the Rock of our Salvation, Jesus. God is in the habit of giving new names throughout the scriptures. (Abram to Abraham, Sarai to Sarah, Jacob to Israel, Saul to Paul, etc.) This is symbolic for the new creature created in Him. It represents a change from what we were, to what we will be in Him. Jesus will give us new names, uniquely crafted just for us. No one else will share that name!
- The Church at Pergamos is thought to **prophetically represent the beginnings of the organized Roman Church, (Constantine to 1st Pope, 313-590 AD)** in an historical timeline of the Christian Church.

4th Letter: THE LETTER TO THYATIRA (Revelation 2:18-29)

¹⁸ “And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write, ‘These things says the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass: ¹⁹ “I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and as for your works, the last are more than the first. ²⁰ Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce^[e] My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. ²¹ And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent. ²² Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. ²³ I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works. ²⁴ “Now to you I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine, who have not known the depths of Satan, as they say, I will put on you no other burden. ²⁵ But hold fast what you have till I come. ²⁶ And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations— ²⁷ ‘He shall rule them with a rod of iron; They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter’s vessels’— as I also have received 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.””

Introductory material about Thyatira

Thyatira was not a particularly important, beautiful, or wealthy city. It and the rest of the cities on the letter's circuit are inland now. When compared to the previous "letter" cities, it is way down the scale on all levels. It began as Pelopia, then called Semiramis (a goddess of Babylon), followed by Euhippia. After Alexander the Great, it ended up in the hands of Seleucus I (after Lysimachus, both generals of Alexander). It became a city dedicated to protecting Pergamos, and would be sacrificed, if necessary, to protect the much grander and more valuable city of Pergamos. It was named Thyatira (similar to a Greek word for "daughter") after Seleucus (aka Nicator) had been informed that a daughter was born to him. This city had good roads and a good location to rivers, necessary for trade routes.

Thyatira was not known for its religious significance. Though it had the normal temples to Apollos, Artemis, and other gods of the day, they were overshadowed by the day-to-day business of Thyatira. This also was not a city known as a special center for emperor worship. There really was no great risk of persecution to the Christian community here, unlike other cities in Asia Minor. However, there was one major stumbling block.

This city was a bustling center for manufacturing and marketing, and was well known for its dozens of trade and craft guilds. There was a guild (union) for every trade. The trades most common here were woolen workers, dyers, linen workers, potters, leather workers, bronze workers and slavers. Paul's first convert in Europe was Lydia, a Thyatiran who sold purple cloth in Philippi (Acts 16:14). She was a long way from home. The purple cloth of Thyatira was well known, and very expensive.

These trade guilds were the major problem to Christians in Thyatira. To be successful here you had to belong to the guild and participate in their meetings, which often became orgies. Each guild was dedicated to its own pagan patron god. It was common for these guilds to have great lavish ceremonial meals together. The meat for the meal came from an animal that was sacrificed to the guild's god. As these meals progressed, they frequently became full-fledged wild parties full of sexual fornication. It is easy to understand why Paul talked so often about not eating meat sacrificed to idols, and linked that practice to sexual immorality. He was speaking of the leading pastime of the world of his day.

The Jewish community, as well as the Christians, had to belong to these guilds in order to do business in Thyatira. They were expected to participate in these "parties." What to do? Some, such as the Nicolaitans (and early Roman church), suggested that it was fine to participate in these orgies and idol worship since the physical body was evil anyway, and it was the spirit that would live forever, so why not just have fun? (the roots of Gnosticism). Jezebel may have been one of their "own." To the faithful Christian, however, such an idea was pure blasphemy, but their very livelihoods were at stake. The real problem in Thyatira was not from the outside, but from INSIDE the church: COMPROMISE.



Ruins of Thyatira today.

Today the city of Akhisar (about 30,000) now occupies the site where Thyatira once stood. It is south of Istanbul and due east of Athens.

- **Thyatira** - There are many thoughts about the original meaning of this name. It is similar to the Greek word (*thygater*) for "daughter." This is appropriate here as this letter refers to the evil of Jezebel, in scripture the daughter of the Priest of Astarte (Babylonian goddess), the King of Sidon (see 1 Kings). The term "daughter of Zion" is also used throughout scripture to indicate God's people. Women are constantly associated with sexual immorality and often portrayed as the seductresses of scripture. A "woman" plays a large role in this letter. Others say the name comes from a Greek root word meaning to "sacrifice." This would also be relevant for this city's letter.
- **Description of Jesus used for this letter:** *"... the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass..."* The Son of God is Almighty God Himself, eyes like a flame of fire may indicate anger, indignation, all-seeing, and combined with blazing feet "like fine brass" (in a furnace, white hot, brass is a symbol for judgment) indicate One who sees all, is the judge of all sin, and is full of righteous anger. What He saw happening in Thyatira to HIS daughter, the Church, was a cause for righteous indignation!
- **The Commendation:** *"I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and as for your works, the last are more than the first..."* Jesus knows:
 1. their works (*the deeds they were doing for Him*)
 2. their love (*their faith was not just a label, they had a relationship with Jesus*)
 3. their service (*they were serving God, not man*)
 4. their faith (*they continued to hold fast to the teachings of Jesus, and believed steadfastly*)
 5. their patience (*enduring in the midst of paganism, and pressure to conform to the world*)
 6. their increasing works (*Jesus knew they were doing more and more works for Him, their lives were being shaped more and more into His image - the "good works" of our lives indicate living lives that reflect Him*)

- **The Criticism** (Concern):

"Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols." As indicated above, in ancient Israel during the times of the Kings, pagan Jezebel married King Ahab, of the northern Kingdom of Israel. This union brought in the worst time in the Old Testament history of the kings of the split kingdoms of Israel ("Israel" in the north, "Judah" in the south). Jezebel was incredibly wicked, tried to kill all the prophets of God, and allowed no one to stand in the way of getting what she wanted. Above all other women in scripture, Jezebel was the most evil, cunning, daring and unscrupulous. She led Ahab to evil also. But she died horribly and was eaten by dogs. In this letter to the church at Thyatira, hundreds of years later, we don't know if the woman referenced here merely has the same name as the original Jezebel, or the name is used here deliberately to equate this person to the original seductress, OR merely calling the general seduction of believers away from God as the work of "Jezebel." It is clear, however, that the behavior of this current Jezebel is as bad in God's eyes as the original. She is leading the church astray.

"And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent. Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works.." This passage refers to actual physical and literal fornication, but is also used spiritually throughout scripture to indicate intimacy with false gods instead of the One True God. Jesus has apparently made it clear to them His expectations and given them time to repent, which they (or she and her followers) have not done. Those who do not repent and turn away from these acts will be given "great tribulation" as well as sickness. The sickness may be physical (STDs, etc.) or spiritual, or both. By implication, it may mean that those who repent will NOT go into the Tribulation. When Jesus spoke to His disciples about the end times, he referenced a "great tribulation" which we understand to mean the last half of the literal 7 year period of time. The ones who do not repent will be judged by their works, not by grace. And we know that ALL fall short of the glory of God, and ALL deserve death. Without grace, we are condemned. The comment about "her children...", and all the churches shall know..." may also indicate "children" of the Jezebel who tempted God's people away, and the children of the original group of believers. In other words, "children" of the original church. This may involve all the various denominations, sects and branches of Christianity that have come to be, instead of the one united Body of Christ. This will have more meaning when we get to Revelation 17 and 18 and the judgment of Babylon.

- **The Exhortation** (encouragement): *"Now to you I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine, who have not known the depths of Satan, as they say, I will put on you no other burden. But hold fast what you have till I come."* This implies there were believers in Thyatira, and today (and throughout history) who did not fall prey to these practices and the perversion of the church at large. This church related seduction and subsequent "prostitution" of God's people is called knowing "the depths of Satan." That's pretty serious stuff. For these true believers still practicing the purity of God's Word, not man's attempt at religion, Jesus will not burden them with any other action, other than to hold fast to what they now have - a faith untouched by the enemy's perversion of the church.

- **The Promise:**

(1) *"And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations— 'He shall rule them with a rod of iron; They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessels' - as I also have received from My Father."* We have spoken of the Nicolaitans as those "church" people who believed and practiced the power of clergy over the laity.

Eventually the Roman church did in fact seek and gain power over the secular nations. The promise here is that the true believers will be rewarded with true power from God, HIS power over the nations. We are told that we will reign with Christ during the Millennial Kingdom. We will share power with Him. That is an awesome thought! He quotes scripture from Psalm 2, that amazing conversation between the Godhead regarding Jesus' Millennial rule. We often think of the Millennium as a nice peaceful time of conforming behavior. But it will be enforced, not natural. Man is still man and those not completely redeemed in this age, will be under the "rod of iron" (referenced also in Psalm 110:2 and Hebrews 1:8) and "dashed to pieces" if they don't comply. Jesus indicates He has received this power from His Father.



(2) *"...and I will give him the morning star."* The morning star is the one seen before sunrise. Jesus is called the Morning Star in chapter 22 verse 16. (See also 2 Peter 1:19 and Numbers 24:17) The morning star is the promise of dawn, or our redemption.

- **NOTE About the message to the overcomer:** Beginning with the church at Thyatira, and continuing for the remaining three churches, the closing statement of *"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches"* is now AFTER the message to the overcomer. In the first three letters it was before this promise. This may indicate that in the first three letters, and the first three churches (throughout history as well), the church addressed still was capable of repenting and making things right again. However, from Thyatira onward (the Dark Ages to today) it seems that the "Church" would not repent, but the promises are applicable to a remnant of true believers who would hear and repent - individuals, not the church at large. In the last four letters to these churches, the messages to the overcomer are also associated with the second coming of Jesus.
- The Church at Thyatira is thought to **prophetically represent the period of time we call the "Dark Ages."** It is the time of the medieval papacy from about 600 to 1500 AD in an historical timeline of the Christian Church.

Historical note: In 378 AD, Damasus, the bishop of Rome (pope) took on the title and office of Pontifex Maximus (high priest) of the Babylonian religion. This had previously been reserved for the Roman Emperor. Now the Roman church was officially combined with paganism, and has never really been separated. The rites, rituals and ceremonies, the titles, vestments and other "mysteries" of the Roman church including celibacy of the priests, nuns, image worship, veneration of saints, adoration of the host, papal infallibility, transubstantiation and more, all come from these pagan religious rites which originated in Babylon, moved to Pergamos and eventually settled in Rome.

"The church was no longer a separate sanctified people and the Roman influence became a stumbling block. The effect of the rule of Constantine meant that the state supported the church and the emperor became its benefactor. When the Empire crumbled and the throne was vacant, the worldly authority was taken over by the papacy who turned the throne into "satan's seat." The bishop of Rome was now Pontifex Maximus with all the pretention and false authority over the church that the old imperial office held.

Successive generations of the Roman church show this admixture of pagan influence and the gospel of Christ existing side by side. In this atmosphere however is the spirit of God that consists of a gospel that will not return void. The church has always had its true worshippers and those that held fast to the name of Jesus because the true church of Jesus Christ consists of those that have partaken of salvation. The church is the bearer of the truth of this salvation but salvation itself comes from Jesus and does not proceed from the church no matter what the church tells us. Salvation is stronger than man's attempt to divert the source and there will always be those that have not denied the true faith." (Jay Atkinson)

NOTE: *Comments regarding the Roman church are not meant to offend. These are not opinions or speculation. They are facts based on known and available histories. They are a build up to understanding why John was shocked with something he saw in Revelation 17. The history of the organized Church (every format) is very dismal, a wretched history of "prostitution" as scripture calls our polluting of the Word of God and ways of God in order to conform to the world. At the time of John's vision, the church was merely attempting to survive. As the letters progress, and as the church progresses in history, it gets farther and farther away from God. What God shows John in chapter 17 stuns him. We will talk about this when we get to these chapters. To truly understand the letters to the churches, and God's thoughts regarding organized religion and the church, we must be aware of what history has to say about the church. It isn't very pretty at times.*

REVELATION CHAPTER 2				
CHURCH	Ephesus 2:1-7	Smyrna 2:8-11	Pergamum 2:12-17	Thyatira 2:18-29
Symbolic Church Age	Apostolic Church 30-100 AD	Persecuted Church (age of Martyrs) 100-312 AD	State Church (Constantine to 1 st Pope) 313-590 AD	Established Church (1 st Pope to Reformation) 590-1517 AD
Speaker	"He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands."	"The First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life."	"He who has the sharp two-edged sword."	"the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass."
Praise	Works, labor, patience, non-toleration of evil, tested false teachers, perseverance, hated Nicolaitans	Works, perseverance (He knew their suffering, poverty, Jewish persecution (Synagogue of Satan!))	Works, steadfastness, held to faith (He knew where they lived, Satan's throne)	More works, love, service, faith
Problems	Left first love	NONE!	False teachers in their midst (Balaamites and Nicolaitans)	Toleration of False teachers who lead others into sin (Jezebel)
Counsel or Warning	Remember from where you have fallen; repent; do first works (heart!) OR ELSE I will come quickly and remove your lampstand...	Don't be afraid, be faithful to death (would be imprisoned soon)	Repent OR ELSE He will fight them (those spreading false teachings, not whole church) with Sword of His mouth	Lord's problem with the "Jezebels" and her followers, not entire church. He would not "burden them" further, but hold fast what they have until He comes. Gave time for "Jezebel" to repent, but didn't want to, so will cast her on a bed of suffering, and her followers and kill her "children." They would ALL be judged on their "works" (condition of heart!)
Reward to Overcomer	Eat of the tree of life in Paradise (of God, with Him), (eternal life in Paradise, comparable to Garden of Eden)	Crown of life, not hurt by second death (saved from eternal separation from God)	Hidden manna to eat, white stone with unique name known only to holder and Jesus (eternal sustenance, acquittal, free pass to heaven, unique love from God)	Power over the nations, and the morning star (will reign with Him in Millennium)
Problem in a nutshell	No passion for Jesus, agape love missing	NONE	False doctrines, not testing teachers, not remaining separate from the world	Compromise, toleration of false teachers, not remaining separate from world

AND NOW THE BIG QUESTION....What does Jesus say to YOU in these letters? These are not just addressed to ancient church bodies. They are addressed to every believer through every generation and time. What is Yeshua saying to you?

