

## CHAPTER 2

The book of Revelation is a series of letters within a single letter.

There are three ways to interpret these letters:

1. The literal meaning, what they say directly to that individual church.
2. The universal meaning, what they say to the church as a whole.
3. The prophetic meaning, what they say about a particular church age.

These seven churches are located in Asia Minor (modern day Turkey). And the geographic pattern is arranged like a clock.



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These churches countdown the ages of the church until Christ's return.

And this wasn't realized until the last of these church ages, because it wasn't realized until that final church age that the events of these ages closely aligned with historical events.

### Revelation 2:1-7

**[1] “To 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. [2] “I 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. [3] I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name’s sake, and you have not grown weary. [4] But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. [5] Remember 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. [6] Yet this you have: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. [7] He 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.’ (ESV)**

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Each letter is highly structured.

The letter begins with the church's name, usually has some sort of commendation and then a criticism, a warning and a promise.

There are also three ways to look at these letters:

- Literal
- Universal
- Prophetic

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### Ephesus

Ephesus was a port city on the Mediterranean Sea

It was an influential city in the days of this letter's writing.

It also had one of the most influential churches of the early days of Christianity.

Jesus reminds the church that He holds the seven stars in His hands and walks among the seven lampstands.

It would seem that Jesus is reminding the church that He is in charge of the church and that He is over it still.

There are a number of commendations. They toil in perseverance and do not tolerate evil. In fact, they don't tolerate false apostles.

They also hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans.

So they tested apostles to make sure they fit the bill and they did not tolerate those who tried to lord a level of clergy over the people of the church.

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But for all of the commendation, there is some criticism, Jesus says that they have forgotten their first love.

It seems that they refused to give Jesus rule over their lives.

Jesus said the way to fix this was to repent and do their first works over.

The church was active, but not in the right ways. They were busy doing things, but not the things Jesus wanted them to do.

This is the life of a self-satisfied Christian. Living off-mission. You are a member of the body of Christ, but are you being led by the Holy Spirit?

This is something the universal church can learn from as well. It does us well to remember that we are not our own and that we were bought with a price. We should be led by the Holy Spirit and follow His leading in all things that we do.

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The Apostolic church began at Pentecost, so this letter tells us how the early church began. Initially it was led by the Apostles so they held to sound teaching and rejected false doctrine.

But as the Apostles died out and Romans began to intermingle with Jewish believers, pagan culture infiltrated the church. Eventually believers were more immature and carnal. And it became a self-satisfied organization.

In order to shake this up, Christ sent persecution and what was left were individuals truly committed to Christ.

<b>CHURCH AGE</b>	7	<b>LAODICEA</b>	<b>Apostate Church</b> 1900-? AD
	6	<b>PHILADELPHIA</b>	<b>Missionary Church</b> 1648-1900 AD
	5	<b>SARDIS</b>	<b>Reformation Church</b> 1517-1648 AD
	4	<b>THYATIRA</b>	<b>Roman Catholic Church</b> 600-1517 AD
	3	<b>PERGAMUM</b>	<b>Roman Empire Church</b> 313-600 AD
	2	<b>SMYRNA</b>	<b>Persecuted Church</b> 100-313 AD
	1	<b>EPHESUS</b>	<b>Apostolic Church</b> 30-100 AD

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## Revelation 2:8-11

[8] “And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: ‘The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life. [9] “I 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. [10] Do 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. [11] He 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.’ (ESV)

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### Smyrna

Smyrna is a Greek transliteration of the word smurna which means myrrh.

Myrrh was an embalming spice used for dead bodies.

Smyrna was a Roman city filled with pagan temples. It was closely associated with emperor worship.

Roman law did not forbid religions other than emperor worship with some exceptions, most notably Judaism. Early Christianity was associated with Judaism by the Romans so it was initially left alone, but as they separated, Christians faced persecution.

Smyrna was probably on the forefront of this. Jesus' words reflect this.

He wanted Smyrna to see that for the persecuted church, death is not the end. Not only did they face persecution, but they also faced poverty because of it.

Jesus says do not fear the persecution they face. He said to face it with faith.



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### Smyrna

Jesus says that they will face prison for a short time and then face death.

Roman prisons were efficient and a decision was usually made within ten days as to judgment. This number ten is consistent with that number but also this number in the Bible means testimony.

So Jesus is saying this is an opportunity for testimony.

He says for them to not fear the second death. Their short-term suffering will result in eternal blessings.

The prophetic meaning of this church refers to the time of persecution suffered by the church in the Roman Empire from 96 AD - 313 AD.

Ten emperors starting with Domitian persecuted the church heavily. So the ten days of persecution applied not just to Smyrna but also the universal church.

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### Revelation 2:12-17

[12] “And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: ‘The words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword. [13] “‘I 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. [14] But 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. [15] So also you have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. [16] Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war 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 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.’ (ESV)

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### Pergamum

Pergamum is a mix of two words pergos and gamos and alludes to the union or marriage of a powerful institution.

It was a powerful seat of authority which held the ability to apply capital punishment.

Also had a number of pagan temples and a school of medicine.

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Jesus says he holds the two-edged sword indicating He holds judgment and correction.

He commends the church says that they dwell where Satan's throne is, yet you hold fast to His name name.

Pergamum was home to the pagan worship of the god Esculapius represented by a snake and had a large amount of persecution. Antipas who stood against this persecution and was martyred for his stance.

But the church also had something against it, and that was they held to the doctrine of Balaam. Balaam, he was a prophet of God in the book of Numbers who was corrupt and greedy.

When offered money by Israel's enemy Balak, he tried to curse them. God prevents this from happening, but the intent of Balaam's heart is what Jesus is talking about here.

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Pergamum tried to put stumbling blocks before believers, most notably related to sexual immorality and eating food sacrificed to idols.

So the church was teaching false doctrine because it was greedy.

It also had some who held to the doctrine of the Nicolaitans who we talked about earlier at Ephesus.

Jesus has correction for these false teachings, He says to repent, or else He will come with a two-edged sword. Jesus says I'm coming with judgment unless you correct your ways.

The idea of the doctrine of Balaam also applies to the church as a whole.

We need to guard against false doctrines invading our churches.

We need to ensure that we hold to sound teaching.

And that we don't become so greedy for power, numbers of prestige that in the process we compromise the teaching of the Gospel.

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Jesus says that he who overcomes will receive hidden manna and a white stone.

The hidden manna is meant to be a contrast to the meat offered to false idols.

The stone goes back to the healing center where individuals would be healed of their afflictions. It was said that once they performed a ritual and they were healed they would receive a white stone with their name on it to serve as a testimony to a false god. The contrast Jesus gives is that believers will receive a white stone with respect to their everlasting spiritual healing.

From a prophetic standpoint, this church represents around 313 AD. because that is when Constantine declared Christianity to be a state religion.

The church was married and joined to a powerful institution, Rome and persecution ended. So numbers were up, but also were all sorts of various ideas that came in from pagan practices, many of which crowded out Biblical doctrine.

Roman authorities became a stumbling block before believers. Eventually the sword did come around 600 AD when the Roman Empire was fractured and fell.

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### Revelation 2:18–29

[18] “And 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.[19] “I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first. [20] But 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. [21] I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality. [22] Behold, 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, [23] and 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. [24] But 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. [25] Only hold fast what you have until I come. [26] The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, [27] and 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. [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.’ (ESV)

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### Thyatira

Thyatira was another pagan center of worship whose name means something along the lines of perpetual sacrifice.

It was the least significant of all the cities written to.

Jesus emphasizes the eyes of fire and feet of brass meaning He was looking at the church in judgment looking for purity.



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Jesus says that they had love, service faith and patient endurance. And also that their works have increased. They are doing more things, service is up, they are helping others receive these good works.

They are working pious and diligently. But they became more service-based and not mission-based.

Jesus says this of the church, that they tolerate the woman Jezebel. Jezebel was the wife of Ahab a king of northern Israel in the Old Testament. It was a name synonymous with evil and corruption. The readers would have understood that this individual wasn't really named Jezebel, but rather this was an association of a person with the spirit of Jezebel.

Jesus is saying that a women or several women were claiming to be prophetesses and corrupting the church on the grounds of meat sacrificed to idols and sexual immorality. This individual had an evil heart who sought to do evil. The result of her unrepentant heart, she along with many of her children (her followers) will die.

For those who are true believers, Jesus tells them to hold fast. He assures them that one day they will rule with Jesus in the kingdom

Pergamum we had believers promoting false teaching and in Thyatira we have unbelievers in charge of teaching.

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For the church as a whole this again reminds us to guard our doctrine.

To guard what we believe and most importantly to understand what we believe!

The prophetic age of the church runs from 600 AD - 1517 AD.

It was an age dominated by the Roman Catholic church, rising out of the rubble of the Roman Empire and became somewhat of a unifying power.

The church went from being joined with the government to being a government. The church ruled but not spiritually.

The church took over a number of social services, so works were increased but at the sacrifice of the mission of the church. Conversion was a matter of necessity rather than faith.

As a result of the heresies, judgment came. Sickness fell during this period through the Black Plague. Some of the hardest hit was the church due to the leaders carrying this disease around with them.

As a result the church weakened in both their hold over society as well as government. One of the biggest things the Black Plague led to was the Reformation.