



Revelation - Chapter Two

II. Revelation 1:9-3:22 - Things that are: Christ's presence with and knowledge of his churches (continues)

Summary of Chapter Two

It is now time for John to begin to write what he sees in a book and send it to the seven churches. These churches are Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. In this chapter only the first four churches are addressed.

The first message or edict is to the church in Ephesus which is commended by Christ for its labour, patience, intolerance of evil, and their detection of false teachers, but is condemned for forsaking their first love, i.e. Christ.

The second edict is to the church in Smyrna which is commended by Christ for its faithfulness in trial.

The third edict is to the church in Pergamum which is commended by Christ for holding fast to him, but is condemned because they also held to the doctrine of Balaam and the Nicolaitans.

The fourth edict is to the church in Thyatira which is commended by Christ for its works, faith and love, but are condemned for tolerating the woman Jezebel who teaches fornication and sacrifice to idols.

II.b Revelation 2:1-3:22 - Christ's edict-letters to his seven churches

Revelation's first sevenfold series, followed by seals, trumpets, and bowls, consists of seven messages or royal edicts, each of which follows a pattern:

1. The royal author describes himself in terms from Chapter One.
2. 'I know' introduces his diagnosis of the church's condition, both positive, except for Sardis and Laodicea, and negative, except for Smyrna and Philadelphia.
3. Comfort and commands flow from the diagnosis.
4. All of the churches are commanded to hear and heed all of the letters: 'what the Spirit is saying to the churches'.
5. A blessing is promised to 'everyone who conquers', foreshadowing the final visions in Chapters 21-22.

The seven churches of Revelation are interpreted in a variety of ways. Some believe they were just messages given to these specific cities in the 1st Century that can be applied to modern churches too. Others see them as seven different types of church and that modern churches should identify themselves with one of them and heed the specific commendations and warnings. Still others believe they describe the different periods of the church age, painting a progressive picture of the professing church from the First Coming of Christ until the Second Coming.

II.b.i Revelation 2:1-7 - The message to Ephesus

The church in Ephesus was commended for doctrinal vigilance and endurance but was rebuked for its loss of love for Christ. The city's landmark was the temple of Artemis, and one of its symbols was the date palm tree, a contrast to the 'tree of life' (v.7).

For more information refer to the section [The Ancient City of Ephesus in the Introduction to Ephesians on the website.](#)

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

Revelation 2:1

To the angel of the church. Each royal edict is directed not to leaders or elders, nor to groups within the church but to its angel. Through John, Jesus does identify certain groups but he does so through words such as they, some, anyone, everyone and whoever. Therefore the whole congregation gets to hear the message directed to the angel and has the individual choice and responsibility to receive and act on the message.

Ephesus was the principle city in the Roman Province of Asia and thus heads the list of the churches to which the whole letter of Revelation was sent. After a brief visit to the city at the end of his second missionary journey, Paul returned to Ephesus, where he found a group of believer's who knew only John's baptism (Acts 19:1-7), so he made it his home for three years (Acts 19:10), and built up both the church in the city and helped evangelise the whole province. In fact, many believe that his letter addressed: <<**To the saints who are in Ephesus and are faithful in Christ Jesus**>> (Ephesians 1:1a) was actually a circular letter intended for all the church groups in the province. Timothy was instructed to oversee the local church (1 Timothy 1:3), and it was from Ephesus that the word was brought to Colossæ (Colossians 1:7).

The words of reflects the expression 'thus says', which in the OT could introduce either a word from God, e.g. <<**Thus says the Lord: For three transgressions of Gaza, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment; because they carried into exile entire communities, to hand them over to Edom**>> (Amos 1:6), or a royal edict, e.g. <<**Thus says King Cyrus of Persia: The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all his people, may the Lord his God be with him! Let him go up**>> (2 Chronicles 36:23).

These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands. To each church Jesus uses a different

description of himself. On occasions the description links in with part of the message that is then given, for example: he who has the sharp, two-edged sword in his mouth (v.12) threatens to use it (v.16); in another, he who died and came to life again (v.8) promises the crown of life as a reward for being faithful to the point of death (v.10). However, in most cases they are interchangeable. For the most part, any of the seven self-designations of Jesus could have been used to introduce any of the seven messages. They are not based primarily on the message that each introduces, or the local situation to which that message is directed, but on John's preceding vision on Patmos and the material leading up to it. In this verse it relates to the explanation of the 'seven stars' and the 'seven lampstands' in 1:20.

² 'I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance. I know that you cannot tolerate evildoers; you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them to be false. ³ I also know that you are enduring patiently and bearing up for the sake of my name, and that you have not grown weary.

Revelation 2:2-3

I know reveals the omniscient nature of the Risen Lord. Everything that he speaks of in the edicts comes from his personal knowledge of the state of the church, its values, attitudes and achievements.

I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance. The dominant values in the message to Ephesus are the same as those recognised and praised by Paul and others in their congregations. It is reminiscent of Paul's praise for Thessalonica: <<*We always give thanks to God for all of you and mention you in our prayers, constantly remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labour of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ*>> (1 Thessalonians 1:2-3), and that given to the recipients of Hebrews: <<*For God is not unjust; he will not overlook your work and the love that you showed for his sake in serving the saints, as you still do*>> (Hebrews 6:10). However, this does not allude to salvation by works but works being the natural outworking of faith: <<*But someone will say, 'You have faith and I have works.' Show me your faith without works, and I by my works will show you my faith*>> (James 2:18).

I know that you cannot tolerate evildoers. The message acknowledges that the congregation has this ability and have put it into practise: you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them to be false. This is based on sound biblical teaching: <<*Do not despise the words of prophets, but test everything; hold fast to what is good; abstain from every form of evil*>> (1 Thessalonians 5:20-22). Many years earlier, Paul had warned the Ephesian elders to guard against such people: <<*I know that after I have gone, savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Some even from your own group will come distorting the truth in order to entice the disciples to follow them*>> (Acts 20:29-30), and had also written of false apostles specifically in a warning to Corinth: <<*For such boasters are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ*>> (2 Corinthians 11:13).

I also know that you are enduring patiently and bearing up for the sake of my name, and that you have not grown weary. This further commendation notes the

purpose behind their faith and works: for the sake of my name, and their commitment to seeing the work through. The following passage will also link back to indicate that their work and faith are based in love.

The commendations they received from the Lord were echoed a decade or so later by their bishop Onesimus, as recorded in a letter from Ignatius of Antioch: “You all live according to truth, and no heresy dwells among you; in fact you will not even listen to anyone who does not speak about Jesus Christ in truth” (Ignatius, To the Ephesians 6.2). He added: “I have learned that some from elsewhere who have evil teaching stayed with you, but you did not allow them to sow it among you, and stopped your ears, so that you might not receive what they sow” (To the Ephesians 9.1).

⁴ But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. ⁵ Remember then from what 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.

Revelation 2:4-5

I have this against you. Sandwiched between the positive commendations, Jesus lets it be clearly known that he is not satisfied that they are truly living out the Gospel in the way it had first been given to them: <<*For if the message declared through angels was valid, and every transgression or disobedience received a just penalty, how can we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? It was declared at first through the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard him*>> (Hebrews 2:2-3).

You have abandoned the love you had at first. One interpretation is that Ephesus had lost its early love for Christ. Another interpretation is that Ephesian believers had lost love for one another and needed to revive the compassionate works you did at first. Many interpreters think both are in view, since love for Christ and love for one another are related: <<*Jesus answered, ‘The first is, “Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.” The second is this, “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.” There is no other commandment greater than these’*>> (Mark 12:29-31), and: <<*Those who say, ‘I love God’, and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen*>> (1 John 4:20). What happened in Ephesus, and in many churches since, is in line with what Jesus said would come to pass: <<*And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because of the increase of lawlessness, the love of many will grow cold*>> (Matthew 24:11-12).

Remember then from what you have fallen. Most believers, when they encounter Jesus for the first time and commit their lives to him, are caught up in the euphoria of what personal salvation means and just how great God is. However, many of them, as the years pass, become accepting of all the things that God is doing in their lives and even stop noticing them. For some, the passage of time removes the levels of expectancy of encountering God and Jesus wants to remind such people that they should reflect on where they once were in their relationship

with him and do what is necessary to return to him in that same way, perhaps heeding the teaching of Paul: *<<I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect>>* (Romans 12:1-2).

I will come to you. This does not necessarily indicate the time when Jesus will return but that judgement in this life will come upon them for their failure to change their ways.

Remove your lampstand means that both in the near future and when Christ returns, they would lose their status as a church and Christ would treat them like apostate Israel.

Unless you repent. The call to repent means that the judgement indicated will not come to pass if they determine to return to their first love of Christ and live their lives accordingly because, for those who live their lives to Christ will have their sins forgiven: *<<Therefore I tell you, people will be forgiven for every sin and blasphemy, but blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven>>* (Matthew 12:31).

⁶ Yet this is to your credit: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

Revelation 2:6

The Nicolaitans were obviously a heretical Christian sect, but not identifiable with certainty from NT or extra-biblical evidence. Like the prophet Balaam, they seduced God's people to participate in idolatry and sexual immorality (vv.14-15), perhaps disguising antinomian license as freedom in Christ; refer to 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 and the associated comments.

Although the church is called to love God, to love its neighbours and to love one another, it is to the credit of the Ephesians that they hate the works of the Nicolaitans. Some may find it incomprehensible that a God who is love can actually hate. However, when Jesus says which I also hate he is referring to the works and not the Nicolaitans, whom he loves as his creation and would wish to repent and come to faith, as Paul indicates: *<<This is right and is acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth>>* (1 Timothy 2:3-4).

⁷ Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches. To everyone who conquers, I will give permission to eat from the tree of life that is in the paradise of God.

Revelation 2:7

Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches. This command is given to each of the seven churches and therefore applies to all churches today. It is similar to the commands of Jesus recorded in the Gospels, e.g. *<<Let anyone with ears listen!>>* (Matthew 11:15 and Mark 4:23), *<<And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake>>* (Mark 13:37).

To everyone who conquers. Victory is the objective in a Christian's spiritual warfare. The example to be emulated is the Lion of Judah who conquered as a slain Lamb, redeeming people for God from every nation (5:5 and 5:9). Believers who hold to their testimony conquer the dragon (12:11) and the beast (15:2).

The tree of life. Access to this tree in Eden, and the eternal life it promised to the pure, was banned after humanity's fall: <<***Then the Lord God said, 'See, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever' – therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken. He drove out the man; and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim, and a sword flaming and turning to guard the way to the tree of life***>> (Genesis 3:22-24). It reappears in the New Jerusalem, its roots watered by living water from God's throne, its fruit a constant source of nourishment, and its leaves bringing healing to the city's inhabitants, whose names appear in the Lamb's book of life (22:1-2).

The paradise of God. The Garden of Eden is seen as the original place of paradise, soiled by the fall of mankind. It is also the dwelling place of God, for that is where Jesus' spirit went at the moment of his death and where he promised he would be with the repentant criminal: <<***He replied, 'Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise'***>> (Luke 23:43). This book will later reveal that it will be part of the New Heaven and the New Earth.

II.b.ii Revelation 2:8-11 - The message to Smyrna

Churches in Smyrna and Philadelphia (3:7-13) receive no rebuke from Jesus, who encourages them as they endure persecution. Roman Smyrna, modern Izmir, was a harbour city renowned for its temple to the Mother Goddess and for its provincial imperial cult temples to Tiberius (1st Century AD) and Hadrian (2nd Century AD).

Strabo in his Geography reported early 1st Century Smyrna to be a beautiful city possessing paved streets, a library, a gymnasium, and a shrine to Homer, who may have been born there. A few inscriptions point to a Jewish presence in the city. Jewish opposition to Christians in Smyrna was alleged in the martyrdom accounts of Polycarp and of Pionius in the 2nd and 3rd Centuries, respectively.

⁸ 'And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: These are the words of the first and the last, who was dead and came to life:

Revelation 2:8

Smyrna, today known as Izmir, was a port city with a good harbour about thirty-five miles northwest of Ephesus. Smyrna laid claim on its coins to being 'the first city of Asia in size and beauty', and it was indeed a city of great natural beauty. It had a long history of loyalty to Rome, having dedicated a temple to the goddess Roma as early as 195BC. There is no record of how Christianity came to Smyrna. Like the other Asian cities, Smyrna was probably reached as a result of Paul's ministry in Ephesus, although there is no indication that Paul personally visited.

The first and the last, who was dead and came to life echoes 1:17-18 <<***I am the first and the last ... I was dead, and see, I am alive for ever and ever***>>. To a church already suffering 'slander' (v.9) and soon to face persecution 'unto death' (v.10), Jesus identifies himself as Israel's eternal Redeemer who prepared the way through death to resurrection life.

⁹ 'I know your affliction and your poverty, even though you are rich. I know the slander on the part of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

Revelation 2:9

Your poverty, even though you are rich. Although the city itself was very wealthy, the Smyrnan believers were financially poor, yet they were spiritually rich: <<*Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters. Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him?*>> (James 2:5). This can be contrasted with the Laodiceans who thought themselves to be affluent but in Jesus' eyes were bankrupt (3:17).

The church's opponents may say that they are Jews, but they have no legitimate claim to that name, refer to John 8:39-44 and Romans 2:12-29. On the contrary, they belong to the synagogue of Satan. Most commentators identify this group as actual Jews in Smyrna who refused to accept Jesus as the Messiah and in refuting this they were committing slander. The assumption is that Christians, even Gentile Christians, by the end of the 1st Century were regarding themselves as the true Jews, and the actual ethnic Jews as not Jews at all. The NT defines God's people in relation to Jesus, not their genealogy.

¹⁰ Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Beware, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison so that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have affliction. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. ¹¹ Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches. Whoever conquers will not be harmed by the second death.

Revelation 2:10-11

Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Those who place their hope in Jesus in this life have nothing to fear from anyone: <<*I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that can do nothing more. But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him!*>> (Luke 12:4-5).

The devil is about to throw some of you into prison so that you may be tested. This is not meant literally for the word for devil means 'the accuser' and here was those who opposed the Christian community and belonged to the synagogue of Satan (v.9). The testing is a natural part of the Christian experience with some undergoing a more painful experience than others in terms of the suffering. The call here is not for repentance but for faithful perseverance in the face of such hostile opposition. Believers should not fear periods of testing: <<*For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin*>> (Hebrews 4:15).

Ten days, be faithful until death. The tribulation for Smyrnan Christians will be brief. Daniel had faith that a period of testing would lead to tribulation: <<*Please test your servants for ten days. Let us be given vegetables to eat and water to drink. You can then compare our appearance with the appearance of the young men who eat the royal rations, and deal with your servants according*

to what you observe.’ So he agreed to this proposal and tested them for ten days. At the end of ten days it was observed that they appeared better and fatter than all the young men who had been eating the royal rations. So the guard continued to withdraw their royal rations and the wine they were to drink, and gave them vegetables>> (Daniel 1:12-16), yet it may end not in discharge from prison but in martyrdom, an even better release (7:14-17).

The crown of life, i.e. eternal life, is the laurel wreath of victory that God promises to those who love him: <<*Athletes exercise self-control in all things; they do it to receive a perishable garland, but we an imperishable one*>> (1 Corinthians 9:25), <<*As for me, I am already being poured out as a libation, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. From now on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have longed for his appearing*>> (2 Timothy 4:6-8), and: <<*Blessed is anyone who endures temptation. Such a one has stood the test and will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him*>> (James 1:12).

Ignatius of Antioch wrote letters, which still exist, to both Polycarp, the pastor or bishop of Smyrna, and his congregation. Polycarp was martyred in Smyrna by the Romans, supported by the local Jewish leaders, in the year AD156. Nowhere were the words be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life, more aptly fulfilled than in the life and death of Polycarp.

Whoever conquers by faithfulness in the face of death is immune from the second death: <<*Then I saw thrones, and those seated on them were given authority to judge. I also saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their testimony to Jesus and for the word of God. They had not worshipped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. Over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years*>> (Revelation 20:4-6).

II.b.iii Revelation 2:12-17 - The message to Pergamum

The church at Ephesus resisted false teaching, and Smyrna endured persecution. Believers at Pergamum faced both assaults, withstanding persecution well but wrongly condoning dangerous deception.

Pergamum was built on terraces leading up the only accessible slope of its acropolis. It was an important centre for pagan and imperial religion, but there are also indications of the Jewish faith, e.g. Cicero, For Flaccus 28, and Josephus, Jewish Antiquities 14.247-255.

¹² ‘And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: These are the words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword: ¹³ ‘I know where you are living, where Satan’s throne is. Yet you are holding fast to my name, and you did not deny your faith in me even in the days of Antipas my witness, my faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan lives.’

Revelation 2:12-13

Christ's reference to the sharp two-edged sword proceeding from his mouth echoes 1:16 and forewarns that the church's failure to discipline false teachers will prompt him to intervene directly (v.16).

Pergamum was an ancient Greek city in Aeolis, currently located 16 miles or 26km from the Aegean Sea on a promontory on the north side of the river Caicus. Today, the main sites of ancient Pergamum are to the north and west of the modern city of Bergama in Turkey.

Pergamum hosted temples dedicated to 'the divine Augustus and the goddess Roma'; to Asklepios, the god of healing, who is symbolised by serpents; the emperor Trajan, and a large altar dedicated to Zeus. The worship of the emperor as a god was also strongly emphasised, even required, in the province of Asia, and it was a major problem for Christians at the time. All of this qualifies Pergamum to be called the site of Satan's throne.

My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan lives. Amid oppressive paganism, a believer named Antipas had sealed his testimony with his life, and Jesus shares with Antipas his own title, faithful witness (1:5).



The Temple of Trajan

Yet you are holding fast to my name, and you did not deny your faith in me. Even amid tribulation and persecution, disciples of Jesus are called to remain faithful to his call on their lives: <<*Then Jesus told his disciples, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me'*>> (Matthew 16:24). Others may deny Jesus as their Lord: <<*For certain intruders have stolen in among you, people who long ago were designated for this condemnation as ungodly, who pervert the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ*>> (Jude 4), but believers are to remain faithful to his name, and as witnesses to his death and resurrection.

The fact that a single martyr is identified may be indicative that martyrdom was not yet commonplace in the province of Asia. He is referred to as the faithful witness, a title also given to Jesus, because he had clearly followed the Gospel teaching he had received, even to the point of death. If there is one value that emerges from the message to Pergamum, it is this faithfulness, or firm commitment to what is right, coupled with a stubborn refusal to compromise in order to achieve respectability and status in Roman society or, indeed, any other society.

¹⁴ But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling-block before the people of Israel, so that they would eat food sacrificed to idols and practise fornication. ¹⁵ So you also have some who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. ¹⁶ Repent then. If not, I will come to you soon and make war against them with the sword of my mouth.

Revelation 2:14-16

You have some there who hold to the teaching of Balaam is a reference to those in the church who are not following correct doctrinal teaching and are living idolatrous and immoral lives, which was placing an obstacle in the church for others who do wish to follow correct teaching, for to put a stumbling-block before the people of Israel is a reference to the church here.

As the Israelites migrated through the wilderness, the prophet Balaam, prevented from cursing them, advised Moab's king Balak to seduce them into both sexual and spiritual adultery: <<*While Israel was staying at Shittim, the people began to have sexual relations with the women of Moab. These invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods*>> (Numbers 25:1-2), and: <<*These women here, on Balaam's advice, made the Israelites act treacherously against the Lord in the affair of Peor, so that the plague came among the congregation of the Lord*>> (Numbers 31:16). The apostle writes of Balaam: <<*They have left the straight road and have gone astray, following the road of Balaam son of Bosor, who loved the wages of doing wrong, but was rebuked for his own transgression; a speechless donkey spoke with a human voice and restrained the prophet's madness*>> (2 Peter 2:15-16), and another NT author warns: <<*Woe to them! For they go the way of Cain, and abandon themselves to Balaam's error for the sake of gain, and perish in Korah's rebellion*>> (Jude 11). Likewise the Nicolaitans, although opposed in Ephesus (v.6), were spreading sexual and spiritual infidelity at Pergamum for they would eat food sacrificed to idols and practise fornication. In around AD49, following passionate argument from both Peter and Paul that Gentiles should not be Judaised, the Jerusalem Council agreed an edict to the Gentile churches: <<*Therefore I have reached the decision that we should not trouble those Gentiles who are turning to God, but we should write to them to abstain only from things polluted by idols and from fornication and from whatever has been strangled and from blood*>> (Acts 15:19-20).

The Balaamites and the Nicolaitans at Pergamum are almost certainly not two groups but one, Nicolaitans being a coined nickname based on what some believed to be the Greek equivalent of Balaam. The latter, in Hebrew, could be read as 'master of the people', while Nicolaitans in Greek could be read as 'conquerors of the people'.

Repent then. If not, I will come to you soon. Jesus' threat to come soon refers not to his Second Coming, but to his intervention through providence, as had occurred at Corinth: <<*For this reason many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. But if we judged ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world*>> (1 Corinthians 11:30-32).

Make war against them with the sword of my mouth. There are some who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans, those who are living immoral or idolatrous lifestyles and it is against them and not the church generally that the teaching of Christ must and will prevail. It will be the Word of God that is used to win the battle for hearts and minds. This statement links back to the description Jesus gives of himself in v.12.

¹⁷ Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches. To everyone who conquers I will give some of the hidden

manna, and I will give a white stone, and on the white stone is written a new name that no one knows except the one who receives it.

Revelation 2:17

As God fed Israel in the wilderness, Christ supplies hidden manna to everyone who conquers, who endures persecution and stays pure from defilement (12:6 and 12:14-17). In fact Jesus, as the bread of life, revealed himself to be manna from heaven: *<<I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live for ever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh'>>* (John 6:48-51). This verse is a further indication to the fact that salvation is by grace and not by the works of individuals or churches.

Historically, a white stone was given to victors at games for entrance to banquets, and in Revelation that will be the messianic banquet; such a stone was also used by jurors at trials to vote for acquittal. The manna and a white stone suggest differing types of eternal blessings and rewards, as appropriate in each situation.

The new name, given to the one who holds fast to Jesus' name (v.13), may refer to the Holy Spirit's work of conforming believers to the holiness of Christ: *<<For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family>>* (Romans 8:29). It fulfils yet another of the promises of God: *<<I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off>>* (Isaiah 56:5b), and: *<<The nations shall see your vindication, and all the kings your glory; and you shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord will give>>* (Isaiah 62:2).

II.b.iv Revelation 2:18-29 - The message to Thyatira

For some people today tolerance is the only real virtue and intolerance the only vice. The message to Thyatira goes against the grain of modernity by setting limits to tolerance. The main criticism of the angel of Thyatira is that he has tolerated something and someone that should not be tolerated.

Thyatira was a smaller city located further inland in the fertile Lycus River valley. Little is known of its history beyond the fact that it once belonged to the kingdom of Pergamum, and few archæological remains have been found. Yet the edict to Thyatira is the longest of the seven messages.

Thyatira was a politically and culturally marginalised city, finding its identity economically, with guilds dealing in metals and fabric, as confirmed by Luke: *<<A certain woman named Lydia, a worshipper of God, was listening to us; she was from the city of Thyatira and a dealer in purple cloth. The Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul>>* (Acts 16:14).

Guilds celebrated their patron deities in periodic festivities, so Christians may have been tempted toward the message of a prophetess who advocated participation in illicit sex and food sacrificed to idols, both staples of the social scene.

Archæological soundings at modern Ak-Hissar have yielded evidence of a few ancient architectural elements from Thyatira. Coins found there point to the

ongoing NT-era worship of Apollo, who had been assimilated with the Lydian sun-god Tyrimnos.

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

Revelation 2:18

The Son of God can leave the reader in no doubt to the true identity of Jesus as the Messiah of God. He does not claim to be a son of God but *the* Son. He was, of course, recognised in this capacity during his earthly mission: <<*Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God’*>> (Matthew 16:16).

Christ’s eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze, links back to 1:14-15, evoking images familiar to Thyatiran metalworkers, as well as echoing OT visions of God’s glory: <<*Upwards from what appeared like the loins I saw something like gleaming amber, something that looked like fire enclosed all round; and downwards from what looked like the loins I saw something that looked like fire, and there was a splendour all round*>> (Ezekiel 1:27). With fiery eyes, Jesus ‘searches minds and hearts’ (v.23), and his feet, as well as his words, will crush his enemies.

¹⁹ ‘I know your works – your love, faith, service, and patient endurance. I know that your last works are greater than the first.

²⁰ But I have this against you: you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophet and is teaching and beguiling my servants to practise fornication and to eat food sacrificed to idols.

Revelation 2:19-20

Thyatira’s strengths and weaknesses are the inverse of those at Ephesus. This church is strong in love, faith, service, and patient endurance, evidenced in works; but it lacks discernment and tolerates heresy. However, they are clearly commended as an improving church for Jesus also says I know that your last works are greater than the first.

The self-proclaimed prophet who endorses idolatry and immorality by teaching and beguiling my servants to practise fornication and to eat food sacrificed to idols, resembles Jezebel of Tyre, who married Israel’s King Ahab and violently imposed Baal-worship on the northern kingdom: <<*And as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, he took as his wife Jezebel daughter of King Ethbaal of the Sidonians, and went and served Baal, and worshipped him*>> (1 Kings 16:31). Many scholars think Jezebel represented an actual female prophetess who was leading people astray in the church of Thyatira. In any case, she symbolises the prostitute Babylon, who seduces through pleasure and luxury as well as ruthless violence, refer to Revelation Chapter 17.

In v.13 Antipas was held up as an example of faithful witness to Christ. Jezebel is the only other named individual in the seven edicts and her example is a complete contrast. However, it does give an insight, along with the account of the business woman Lydia whom Paul met in Philippi, that women were given more respect and freedom in Thyatira than in some other places. The power

and influence of this Jezebel, a self-styled prophet at Thyatira, must be viewed in light of three facts:

1. Women prophesied freely in early Christianity, for example, Acts 2:17, Acts 21:9 and 1 Corinthians 11:5.
2. Women often played major roles as priestesses in contemporary Roman and Eastern cults in Asia Minor.
3. The Christian Montanist movement in the same region a century later assigned conspicuous leadership roles to two prophetesses: Priscilla and Maximilla (Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History 5.14-19).

²¹ I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her fornication. ²² Beware, I am throwing her on a bed, and those who commit adultery with her I am throwing into great distress, unless they repent of her doings; ²³ and I will strike her children dead. And all the churches will know that I am the one who searches minds and hearts, and I will give to each of you as your works deserve.

Revelation 2:21-23

In his forbearance, the Lord has given this prophetess time to repent of her fornication: <<*Or do you despise the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience? Do you not realise that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?*>> (Romans 2:4), and: <<*The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance*>> (2 Peter 3:9); or the church time to bring her to discipline. Neither has occurred, and she proliferates lovers and children – spiritual offspring who exhibit her influence and will share in her great distress, unless they repent.

I am throwing her on a bed, and those who commit adultery with her I am throwing into great distress. Some understand this to mean a sick bed and this would tie in with the tribulation that her followers would also endure. Others translate the Greek simply as a couch and, given the reference to eating food sacrificed to idols, understand it to be a dining couch on which she will continue to gorge herself and face punishment for it unless they repent of her doings, again showing that grace always offers a way out for everyone no matter how much they may have sinned. Paul holds to this view: <<*For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus*>> (Romans 3:22b-24).

I will strike her children dead. This is to be understood of her followers. The so-called prophetess led the way in immorality, under the pretence of some deeper knowledge. She had her associates and their disciples; the evil and the evil consequences would grow; the disciples outran their teachers, and more than tribulation awaits them for death is their penalty.

All the churches will know that I am the one who searches minds and hearts. The result of judgement on Jezebel and her disciples will be made known to all the churches, which has become the case through this book. Jesus knows everything about the inner person: <<*But Jesus on his part would not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people and needed no one to testify about anyone;*

for he himself knew what was in everyone>> (John 2:24-25), and continues to know all things through the presence of his Spirit: *<<But, as it is written, ‘What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him’ – these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God>>* (1 Corinthians 2:9-10).

I will give to each of you as your works deserve. Salvation is by grace and not works. However, final judgement will reveal the works of the individual and eternal rewards will be given according to what is merited by each individual.

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 to what you have until I come.

Revelation 2:24-25

Jesus’ eyes distinguish sincere believers from those who abandon God’s Word to search elsewhere for the deep things of Satan, deceptive promises of secret spiritual knowledge through false religions. Those who abide by the requirements of the Jerusalem Council edict and especially with the Gospel teaching have nothing to fear and no other burden: *<<For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to impose on you no further burden than these essentials>>* (Acts 15:28), as long as they hold fast. This call goes out beyond the local church in Thyatira because Jesus adds the caveat until I come.

²⁶ To everyone who conquers and continues to do my works to the end, I will give authority over the nations;

²⁷ to rule them with an iron rod,
as when clay pots are shattered –

²⁸ even as I also received authority from my Father. To the one who conquers I will also give the morning star. ²⁹ Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.

Revelation 2:26-28

To everyone who conquers and continues to do my works to the end is a reference to those who have come to faith, overcome periods of testing and have remained in the faith until the end of their lives or Jesus’ return.

The Son of God (v.18) will share, with everyone who conquers, his own authority to rule the nations, as recorded by King David: *<<I will tell of the decree of the Lord: He said to me, ‘You are my son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron, and dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel’>>* (Psalm 2:7-9); and by the prophets: *<<its breaking is like that of a potter’s vessel that is smashed so ruthlessly that among its fragments not a sherd is found for taking fire from the hearth, or dipping water out of the cistern>>* (Isaiah 30:14), *<<and shall say to them: Thus says the Lord of hosts: So will I break this people and this city, as one breaks a*

potter's vessel, so that it can never be mended. In Topheth they shall bury until there is no more room to bury>> (Jeremiah 19:11).

I also received authority from my Father. Jesus once again indicates that ultimate authority belongs to God the Father but that he has delegated responsibility of all things pertaining to the created order to the Son: <<*And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me'*>> (Matthew 28:18).

The morning star is Christ himself (22:16), Israel's ruler and rescuer, who was foreseen by Balaam, the unwilling seer: <<*I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near – a star shall come out of Jacob, and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel; it shall crush the borderlands of Moab, and the territory of all the Shethites*>> (Numbers 24:17). Premillennialists see here a reference to reigning with Christ in the millennium; refer to the comment on Revelation 20:4-5.

In the first three letters the statement: Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches was followed by a final command from Jesus. In this and the following three edicts the statement is the conclusion of the message to that particular church.