

Chapter 2

INTRODUCTION

- A. Twenty-one of the twenty-seven books of the NT are letters written to churches and individuals.
 - a. All express God's love
 - b. All express care for His people
- B. If Revelation was written during the latter part of Domitian's reign, these are the last letters he wrote.
- C. Chapters 2 & 3 – Seven letters to the churches of Asia.
 - a. Why are the letters included?
 - b. These letters accomplish several purposes:
 - i. They help make the book practical
 - ii. They provide a transition from the vision of Lord to the visions of chapters 4 through 22.
 - iii. They have a 3-way focus
 - 1. They look back at chapter 1.
 - a. Description of Christ in each letter – generally taken from the vision.
 - b. One exception – Laodicea (see 1:5 & 3:14)
 - 2. They look around at the conditions of John's day.
 - a. We get a feeling of the times through the unique challenge of each congregation.
 - 3. They look forward to chapters 4 through 22.
 - a. Each letter conclusion contains promises anticipating themes in the rest of the book.
 - b. Some of these connections are obvious, some are not very obvious.
 - i. Ephesus & the tree of life (2:7; 22:2)
 - ii. Sardis – not so obvious
 - iv. These letters are essential to the fulfillment of Christ's overall purpose in the book: He desired to encourage oppressed Christians and to prepare them for even greater persecution.
 - 1. He wanted to encourage them, but he insisted on being realistic!
 - 2. Would they be ready for the approaching storm?
 - 3. Before he could encourage them, he had to examine them – confirm their strengths and correct their weaknesses.
 - v. A pattern to the letters as well...
 - 1. Seven elements
 - a. Salutation or greeting
 - i. "To the angel..."
 - b. Description of Jesus
 - i. In most letters, taken from the first vision
 - c. A commendation of the congregation
 - i. Two have none
 - d. A condemnation of the congregation
 - i. Two have none

- e. A warning and a threat
 - i. Two have none – same churches that have no condemnation
 - f. An exhortation
 - i. “He who has an ear, let him hear...”
 - g. A promise
2. Harold Hazelip suggested that each church has an element to take as a lesson.
- a. He also suggested that all seven taken together give the characteristics of what God looks for in his church.
 - b. Seven elements/characteristics:
 - i. Ephesus = return to it’s first **love** (2:4)
 - ii. Smyrna = prepare for **suffering** (2:10)
 - iii. Pergamum = stand for **truth** (2:14,15)
 - iv. Thyatira = greater **holiness** (2:20)
 - v. Sardis = lacking in **genuineness** (3:1)
 - vi. Philadelphia = take advantage of **evangelistic** opportunities (3:8)
 - vii. Laodicea = condemned for lack of **dedication** (3:15)
 - vi. These letters contain lessons of practicality even for 21st century churches!

EPHESUS (2:1-7)

D. The church with “heart trouble”

- a. Addressed first because...
 - i. Ephesus was the most important of the seven cities
 - ii. John had made that city his home
 - iii. It was the “jewel of Asia”
 - 1. Home to Temple of Artemis/Diana – one of 7 Wonders
 - iv. Located today near Selcuk in Turkey – in ruins
 - v. Significant in spreading of the Gospel
 - 1. Acts 19 – 20
 - 2. 1 Timothy 1:3
- b. Note the following breakdown:
 - i. Verse 1
 - 1. Greeting
 - 2. Description of Christ
 - ii. Verse 2
 - 1. Commendation – “I know your deeds”
 - a. Both good and bad
 - b. Tells the Ephesians that Christ knows all!
 - c. Christ knew:
 - i. Their toil and perseverance
 - ii. Their soundness in doctrine and intolerance of evil and falsehoods
 - 1. Remember Acts 20:29 – Paul’s warning
 - 2. 1 John 4:1 – John’s encouraging them to “test the spirits to see whether they are from God”
 - iii. Verse 3

1. Further commendation
 - a. Endurance without weariness
 - b. Great strength is shown in this!
- iv. Verse 4
 1. Condemnation – “I have this against you”
 - a. “You have left your first love”
 - b. Ephesus may have looked healthy on the outside, but inside they suffered from heart disease.
 - c. What was the exact nature of what was happening?
 - i. No one knows for sure...
 - ii. Perhaps they were going through all the right motions without any passion behind it...
 - iii. Perhaps they had become increasingly judgmental in an attempt to keep out the falsehoods...
 - iv. Maybe their outward sign of endurance covered an inward struggle of weariness for the work...
- v. Verse 5
 1. Warning
 - a. Revive or be removed!
 - b. It is believed based on context that Jesus was warning them that either they repent or cease to be considered a true church of Christ’s.
 - c. It makes sense – a heart condition, if left untreated, will lead to death.
 2. Jesus’ prescription for improving their health...
 - a. Remember – from where you have fallen
 - b. Repent – of your sins
 - c. Return – to your first love and do the deeds you first did.
 - d. To be sure they understood the importance of repentance, Christ repeated it at the end of his warning.
 3. Ever suffered from the heart disease Ephesus suffered from?
 - a. How do we “recapture love” in our relationships? – we do those things we did when we first met or dated...
- vi. Verse 6
 1. The Nicolaitians
 - a. False teachers who lived ungodly lives and urged others to do the same.
 - b. An early Gnostic group that practiced immorality
 - c. Gnostics were condemned by Paul, John and other Christian writers
 - d. They were called Nicolaitians, after Nicolas who was chosen to serve tables in Jerusalem (Acts 6:5), to give their cause more credibility; it is not certain whether their teachings came from him or not.
 2. Notice the word “hate”
 - a. Christ and the church ought to hate evil deeds!
 - i. Proverbs 6:16-19
 - ii. Romans 12:9
- vii. Verse 7

1. Exhortation
2. Promise
 - a. "tree of life" – represents eternal life
 - b. In order to receive the reward, one must overcome their sin and strife.
 - i. To play the guitar, you have to overcome the learning curve of knowing HOW to play...

SMYRNA: 2:8-11

- E. The poor church that was rich
- a. The shortest of the seven letters – but perhaps the most packed!
 - b. Had a small but strong anti-Christian Jewish population.
 - c. It was the location of many temples and pagan/heathen ceremonies.
 - i. It was full-fledged Roman "nut jobs"
 - ii. One of the earliest Roman temples built there
 - iii. Unmatched dedication to the Roman Empire and Army
 - d. Today it is known as Izmir in Turkey
 - i. Remains a city of significance
 - e. Verse 8
 - i. The salutation
 - ii. The description of Jesus
 1. first and last, who was dead, and has come to life
 2. See vs 17,18
 3. Why did Smyrna need to hear this?
 - a. Smyrna was a suffering church
 - b. Jesus being the "first and last" = deity and omnipresence
 - c. "who was dead and has come to life" = authority over death and Hades; whatever men could do, he had the power to undo
 - f. Verse 9
 - i. Commendation – "I know your tribulation"
 - ii. Tribulation – as when a huge rock crushes something beneath it...
 - iii. Smyrna was under intense pressure
 - iv. Two biggest tribulations: poverty and persecution
 1. Poverty = destitute
 - a. Sacrifice in many different ways
 - b. Property confiscated or barred from buying or selling in the marketplace
 2. "Rich" = spiritual riches
 3. Persecution
 - a. Influential Jews who were able to manipulate Roman leaders
 - i. Many said they were Jews but still did not accept Christ as the Messiah and therefore rejected God's plan
 - ii. Even today, there are Jews who believe they are God's "special" or "chosen" people and are saved just because of that... (note Romans 2:28,29)
 - b. Synagogue of Satan – Ref. Jn 8:39-47

- c. Blasphemy – the act of speaking against another in an effort to injure him.
 - i. Perhaps against Jesus and therefore the church
- g. Verse 10
 - i. Jesus offers a “warning” of sorts:
 - 1. They would be imprisoned by the devil
 - 2. Your faith will be tested – value in suffering
 - 3. The trials would last 10 days
 - a. 10 = completeness, fullness, or power
 - b. It would be a complete trial with limitations
 - c. All evil is temporary with God’s children
 - d. Remember, we are to interpret numbers as symbolic unless given specific reason not to or otherwise
 - ii. “Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.”
 - 1. Not a promise of deliverance from trouble
 - 2. A promise of victory for the faithful
 - 3. crown = stephanos – crown of victory, of eternal life
 - iii. No condemnation
 - 1. Their persecution was a way of stripping the dead branches from the tree...in other words “the church of Christ persecuted is the church of Christ pure” (G. Campbell Morgan)
- h. Verse 11
 - i. Exhortation
 - ii. A message of comfort
 - iii. The second death – 20:14,15 and 21:8
 - 1. This is the eternal separation from God

PERGAMUM: 2:12-17

- F. The church in sin city
 - a. Today the modern town of Bergama covers the lower part of the ancient city (the plains not the mountain).
 - i. Acropolis – a high city; this was the original city on the mountain

<u>From Jesus</u>	<u>Verse</u>	<u>Description</u>
Salutation	12	“To the angel of the church in Pergamum write...”
Description of Jesus	12	“the One who has the sharp two-edged sword...”
Commendation	13	“You hold fast My name and did not deny My faith”
Condemnation	14,15	Teaching of Balaam, Nicolatians

Warning/Threat	16	Repent, or I am coming quickly and will make war
Exhortation	17	He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches
Promise	17	Hidden manna, white stone, a new name written on the stone

Additional notes:

b. Verse 12

- i. City is also known as Pergamus, Pergamon, and Pergamos.
- ii. Sword is the sword of judgment
 1. Rome's power is not greater than Christ's

c. Verse 13

i. An awesome challenge

1. "...where Satan's throne is...where Satan dwells."

a. A place where Satan had a throne, a stage.

i. Politically

1. Strong ties with Rome
2. 3 temples honoring emperors of Rome
3. Rome's stronghold for the east
4. Continual pressure to pledge allegiance to the emperor

ii. Religiously

1. Emperor temples
2. Structures to many pagan gods
3. Acropolis had the altar of Zeus/Jupiter
 - a. 120' L x 112' W x 20' H
 - b. Could be seen for miles
4. Temple for Egyptian gods
5. Medical practices
 - a. Cross between pagan mysticism and primitive medicine
 - b. "faith healing" & "self-suggestion" described the treatment
 - c. Some legitimate practices came out of it
 - d. Medical symbol = a serpent; why?
 - i. Pagan symbol of health because it could shed its skin and appear young again.
 - ii. Still used today

iii. Culturally

1. A melting pot of poets, philosophers, scientists, and scholars
2. A library that rivaled Alexandria in Egypt
3. Major achievements
 - a. Perfection of parchment
 - b. Development of bound books or a codex

4. Intellect was valued as well as beauty
 - a. 10,000 seat theater
 5. All of these were tied, however, to the emperor, a pagan deity or both.
 - iv. Morally
 1. Immorality – especially sexual – was rampant and integral in all aspects of life in Pergamum
 2. Pergamum was a city where disciples were in danger and had great challenges
 - ii. But the Christians remained faithful in spite of all this!
 1. Even in the face of death
 - a. Antipas
 - i. A martyr or witness for Christ
 - ii. We know nothing of him but his faith!
- d. Verse 14
- i. Balaam and Balak – see Numbers 22 – 25
 1. What was preached? Compromise.
 - a. One could be a Christian and still be “of the world”
 - b. The church had let them come in and tolerated them
 - c. Opposite of the Ephesian church and their intolerance
 - d. Its teachings were stumbling blocks
 - i. Eat things sacrificed to idols (2 Cor. 6:16; Gal. 5:20; 1 John 5:21)
 - ii. Commit acts of immorality or fornication
 1. from the Greek word porneuo
- e. Verse 15
- i. Teaching of the Nicolaitians
 1. Also being tolerated for some reason
 2. Why might that be?
- f. Verse 16
- i. Repent or there will be war!
 1. Swift and immediate action was called for!
 2. Jesus – if you do not resolve this, I will for sure and you will not be happy about it...
 3. Corrective discipline is called for – but preventative discipline would have gone a long way to keep this from happening!
 - ii. “I am coming...” – not the second coming
- g. Verse 17
- i. “hidden manna”
 1. Remember the Israelites in the wilderness (Ex. 16:13-36)
 2. A miraculous provision; literally means “what is it?”
 3. A jar was placed in the Ark of the Covenant
 4. God would provide sustenance for his faithful in Pergamum
 - ii. “white stone”
 1. Used to indicate approval
 2. Was it a diamond? Created under tremendous pressure?
 - iii. “new name”
 1. No one knows but they who receive it

THYATIRA: 2:18-29

- G. The church where Jezebel was a member
 - a. Considered at the time an insignificant rest stop on the road to Sardis
 - i. Perhaps the least known, important or remarkable of the seven churches
 - ii. Nothing left of it today but a few broken rocks in a little village
 - b. Christ considered it somewhat important – the longest and most instructive of all the letters.
 - c. Little is known about it:
 - i. Lydia (Acts 16:14)
 - ii. City was known for it's wool industry and purple dye
 - iii. Trade guilds
 - 1. Organized for leather workers, weavers of wool and linen, metalworkers, potters, dyers, dressmakers, bakers, etc.
 - 2. Much like a union today – very powerful
 - 3. But they brought paganism into people's lives
 - 4. Many Christians struggled with belonging

<u>From Jesus</u>	<u>Verse</u>	<u>Description</u>
Salutation	18	To the angel of the church in Thyatira
Description of Jesus	18	"the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet are like burnished bronze"
Commendation	19	"I know your deeds...of love and faith and service and perseverance...deeds of late greater than at first"
Condemnation	20-21	"you tolerate the woman Jezebel"
Warning/Threat	22-23	"I will give to each one of you according to your deeds"
Exhortation	29	"He who has an ear..."
Promise	24-28	"authority over the nations"; "I will give him the morning star"

Additional Notes:

d. Verse 18

i. Unknown exactly when Thyatira was established...

1. Lydia and her household may have shared their faith when they went home
2. May have started when Paul was in Ephesus (Acts 19:10)

ii. Jesus' description

1. The only time "Son of God" appears in Revelation
2. If there was any doubt the vision in chapter 1 described Jesus, this should remove any doubt
3. Through this, Jesus reminded the congregation of 3 powerful truths:
 - a. He is infallible
 - i. He is the Son of God
 - b. He is omniscient
 - i. "eyes like a flame of fire"
 - ii. Notice the phrase "I know" in verse 19 as well
 - c. He is just
 - i. "feet like burnished bronze"

e. Verse 19

i. Commendation

1. "I know your deeds..."
 - a. Love – Emotional
 - i. Agape love – unconditional devotion
 - ii. This was the only one of the seven commended for it's love
 - b. Faith – Spiritual
 - i. This was a trusting church
 - ii. They had learned to depend upon the Lord
 - c. Service – Physical
 - i. This was a helping church
 - ii. Their love was shown in practical ways
 - d. Perseverance – Mental
 - i. This was a steadfast church
 - ii. They did not give up though surround by a godless society
2. Jesus found more to commend of Thyatira than any other
3. Thyatira was a dynamic, active and alive church
4. It was also a growing, improving church
 - a. "your deeds of late are greater than at first..."
 - b. Our tendency is to lose enthusiasm and endurance as time goes on
 - c. But this church had grown and was doing more and more
 - i. One of the church's greatest act is the act of moving forward for Christ

f. Verse 20

i. Condemnation

1. Jezebel
 - a. Not just a name that symbolizes error being taught
 - b. Also most likely NOT the name of the individual being referred to
 - c. Most likely Christ used this name because of its implications

- i. A pagan princess who married Ahab, King of Israel
 - ii. She led him and the nation into idolatry
 - 1. Temple built to Baal and fed prophets of Asherah
 - iii. See: 1 Kings 16;18;19;21 & 2 Kings 9
 - d. In Thyatira, Jezebel was ambitious and persuasive
 - i. Called herself a prophetess
 - ii. Notice that Jesus did not say she had it only that she called herself a prophetess
 - iii. Jesus called her teachings “deep things of Satan”
 - 1. Notice that Jesus constantly throughout the letters stresses that the evil in the world is the work of Satan!
 - iv. She likely encouraged Christians to be part of trade guilds so that they could make more money and “give to her cause”.
 - v. Her doctrine caused Christians to:
 - 1. commit acts of immorality
 - 2. eat things sacrificed to idols
 - e. Jesus was not just angry with Jezebel, but he was angry with the church for allowing her to continue her teaching – they “tolerated” her
 - i. We are not sure why they tolerated her:
 - 1. Perhaps she was married to one of the church leaders (unlikely)
 - 2. Perhaps they prided themselves on having a non-judgmental spirit, like Corinth (1 Cor. 5:1,2)
 - ii. Whatever the reasons, Christ deemed it unacceptable
- g. Verse 21
 - i. “I gave her time to repent”
 - 1. Long-suffering nature of God
 - 2. We don’t know how, but time was obviously on her side as she likely KNEW the truth and chose to ignore it.
 - ii. But she refused to repent...
- h. Verse 22
 - i. Jezebel will suffer for her actions
 - ii. So will her followers and those who commit these acts with her
 - 1. “they repent of her deeds”
 - 2. Jesus held those who went along with Jezebel responsible for what she did as well as her
- i. Verse 23
 - i. “her children”
 - 1. reference to her spiritual offspring
 - a. Probably not just those who were influenced by her teaching but those who also spread it
 - ii. “with pestilence”
 - 1. In the original text literally “with death”
 - a. A Hebrew figure of speech meaning to “slay with certain and horrible death”

- b. Unknown what that may be whether physical or spiritual, but it would not be good at all.
 - iii. "all the churches will know..."
 - 1. This would serve as an object lesson to all those around Jezebel and the church there...
 - iv. "I will give to each one...according to your deeds"
 - 1. You reap what you sow
- j. Verses 24,25
 - i. Jesus pauses to address the faithful few
 - 1. Jesus obviously held some responsible for Jezebel and allowing her to go on...but not all
 - 2. Most likely candidates would be the leadership of the church as it is their responsibility to guard the flock (Acts 20:28)
 - 3. The second group, those who refused to condone Jezebel's actions, were likely those who had little or no authority and could do nothing about it
 - a. Jesus "placed no burden on them"
 - b. This was not their responsibility to clean it up – but it was their responsibility to "hold fast"
- k. Verse 26
 - i. Jesus promise was strong and hopeful for those who found themselves in this situation at Thyatira
 - 1. Those who keep "my deeds" verses Jezebel's deeds would be rewarded with authority over nations...
- l. Verse 27
 - i. Jesus promises that those who overcome would share in His rule and ultimately in the victory over evil.
 - ii. It would have been a "pie in the sky" dream for the faithful in this town.
- m. Verse 28
 - i. "Morning star"
 - 1. A bright star that appears on the horizon just before dawn breaks
 - 2. Usually, it is the planet Venus, but sometimes Mars
 - 3. Jesus identified himself in Rev. 22:16 as the bright and morning star
 - a. Most likely he was speaking here of a special relationship between he and the faithful
 - b. He wanted them to look forward to a new dawn, a new day beyond their current night of seeming hopelessness.
- n. Verse 29
 - i. Exhortation comes at the very end of the letter...that pattern will remain for the other letters.