

The Twitter Commentary on Revelation
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Revelation Chapter 2

Rev 2 (Introduction)–

The seven churches of Rev 2 and 3 seem to be arranged in a chiastic structure.

The chiastic structure of the seven churches reminds the reader of the seven-branched candlestick in the sanctuary.

The cities of the seven churches were probably located on a circular postal route.

The seven churches follow a seven-fold format, with exceptions in the cases of Smyrna, Philadelphia and Laodicea.

Jesus has deep knowledge of the churches, they can keep no secrets from Him.

Since Jesus already knows, there is no reason to hide anything from Him!

Each picture of Jesus in the Churches is different, no church gets the full picture of Jesus.

Each church's picture of Jesus is uniquely fitted to that church's situation and need.

The varied ways in which Jesus is presented to the Churches indicates there is more than one right way to think.

The various characteristics of Jesus correspond to the different needs of the seven churches.

There is a general pattern of decline and degeneration as one moves from Ephesus to Laodicea.

In response to increasing decline, there are increasingly severe warnings from Christ.

Promises in progressive fashion compensate for the increasing degeneration among the seven churches.

Laodicea receives the promise to end all promises, to sit with Jesus on His throne!

There have been four major approaches to the interpretation of the seven churches of Revelation.

The four approaches to the churches are called preterist, futurist, idealist and historicist.

The preterist approach takes the text's focus on seven churches seriously.

But preterism is too limiting an approach by itself for an apocalyptic text like Revelation.

Rev contains timeless truths, but that is not its only purpose.

The seven churches have none of the distinctive characteristics of historical apocalyptic.

Rev 1:19 and 4:1 make it clear that the seven churches concern the "things which are," not John's future.

The fact that there are "seven" churches may suggest a symbolic purpose.

The seven churches do happen to fit well the characteristics of the different eras of church history.

The parallel between Rev 3:17-18 and 16:15 indicate that Laodicea has a role in the last

days of earth's history.

The primary purpose of the seven churches is a message to the original churches of Roman Asia.

By extension, the seven churches also seem to apply to periods of history from John's day to the End.

Rev 2:1–

Ephesus quickly became one of the five major centers of early Christianity.

Jesus here holds tightly to the leaders of the churches, He is in full control of the situations they face.

The lampstand was the only light in the sanctuary, the churches are the only light about God that many people will ever see.

Rev 2:2-4, 6 (Introduction)–

There are many positive things that Jesus knows about the church at Ephesus.

Rev 2:2-3–

Verses two and three are a single sentence emphasizing the positive aspects of the Ephesian church.

Rev 2:2–

“Labor” in Greek is toilsome, physical labor, a metaphor for the challenging spiritual work of the church.

“Patience” in Greek describes the passive side of Christian living.

In its most literal sense, the Greek word for “patience” means “remaining under,” patient perseverance under great pressure.

While it is relationally healthy to treat all people as sincere, this verse implies that there are genuinely evil people in the world.

The Ephesians did not tolerate evil and they tested claims to apostleship.

Rev 2:3–

The Ephesian church was a discerning church, responding differently according to the circumstances.

Rev 2:4–

The primary flaw of the Ephesian church was leaving the love they had at first.

While they have “left” their first love, the works of verses two and three are evidence the relationship was still there.

The Greek language has four words for love, which mean, respectively, affection, sexual attraction, friendship and selfless love.

The Greek word for love *storgê* can be translated “affection,” including the natural affection of a parent for a child.

Eros is passionate or sexual love, which can lead to both positive and negative behaviors.

Philia is love between friends that is as strong and lasting as that between siblings.

Agape is self-sacrificing love, the kind that God exhibited in the death of Christ on the cross. It is the mark of Christian discipleship (John 13:35).

Rev 2:5–

The remedy for the church's fallen condition is described with three imperatives; "remember," "repent," and "do."

The aorist imperative for repenting implies that they need to start doing something they have not been doing.

Repentance itself is the most important thing, but the works that flow from love are the evidence that repentance has taken place.

Those who fail to repent can lose their role as God's light to the world.

If the threat is directed at the whole church, it is eschatological, what happens at the final judgment.

Those who choose not to remember or to repent have removed themselves from the genuine community of the followers of Jesus.

Rev 2:6–

We know very little from history or Scripture about the Nicolaitans.

Nicolaitans is a compound word, from "people" (*laos*) and "conquest" (the root is *nik*): "The one who conquers the people."

The "Nicolaitans" were probably driven by the felt need for a faith that would allow them to "get along" with their neighbors.

Rev 2:6 (Excursus on Christians in Roman Asia)–

Christian life in Asia Minor at the end of the First Century was quite precarious.

Jews in the Empire had special exemptions from emperor worship and Roman civil religion.

To the degree Christians were "outed" from Judaism, they were exposed to civil and societal persecution.

The Christian abandonment of Jerusalem (Matt 24:15-22) in AD 66 turned Jews against the Christians in their midst.

A prayer cursing Christ and Christians was probably added to synagogue worship around 80-90 AD.

Gentile neighbors felt Christians hated the human race because they didn't partake of civic activities.

Christians around John's time were accused of being "atheists" and "cannibals."

The destruction of Jerusalem and Nero's persecutions would have increased Christian insecurity.

In many parts of the Empire, refusal to worship the emperor was unpatriotic and even

treasonous.

The death of Antipas would have made Christians in Pergamum feel especially vulnerable.

Roman governors at the time did not systematically persecute Christians, but acted when forced to.

John's own exile would have added to the insecurity of being a Christian in 1st Century Asia Minor.

Believers in Asia Minor seem to have disagreed on how to respond to the threat of persecution.

The churches of Rev were split as to how far to accommodate to the realities of Roman society.

The seven letters encourage the persecuted but also confront the compromising.

The opponents of John are described by three different names in Rev 2; Nicolaitans, Balaam and Jezebel.

No matter what your religion was, you were required to participate in the public events of Roman society.

Non-participation in Roman civil religion led to political, economic and social consequences.

While an idol is nothing (1 Cor 8:4-9), the state used public feasts as a way of gauging loyalty to the state.

Cultic prostitution was seen as a way to ensure community prosperity.

Christians who avoided idol feasts and cultic prostitution were thought to be hostile to community welfare.

In ancient Rome, status was a higher value than wealth or security.

Many Christians longed for the status and honor that came from involvement in Roman society.

Some Christians found a theological justification for compromise in texts like Rom 13:1-7 and 1 Tim 2:2-3.

For Paul eating food offered to idols was a personal choice (1 Cor 8-10), for John it was not.

From Corinth to Revelation circumstances had changed. What was once OK was no longer so.

John offers believers an alternate reality in which they are kings and priests.

While Rome threatened their lives, status and earthly possessions, God is bigger than Rome.

Rev 2:7–

“Anyone who has an ear” implies that the messages to the churches are relevant to all believers everywhere.

The closing messages concerning the Spirit echo the words of Jesus during His earthly ministry (Matt 11:15; Mark 4:9; Luke 8:8).

The ears and the hearing are not primarily physical, it is a metaphor for attentiveness to

spiritual truth.

“Overcomes” is a military word used metaphorically here for victories in matters of moral character.

Fulfillment of this overcomer promise is found in Rev 22:1-3, 14; eternal life at the tree of life.

Reference to “paradise” reminds the reader of the tree of life in the midst of the original garden.

Those who overcome in Christ will have restored access to the tree of life in a restored Eden, the New Jerusalem.

Rev 2:1-7 (spiritual lessons)–

The “backsliding” of Ephesus re-enacted the experience of Israel, especially in Jeremiah (2:2, 13, 21; also Hos 2:14-15).

The early church faced some of the same spiritual struggles we face today.

Pride makes repentance difficult, it means admitting we are wrong and our best efforts have fallen short.

Genuine repentance is a miracle of God when it occurs.

The Ephesians were to tune their spiritual attention to what the Spirit was trying to say to them.

If you are not where you used to be spiritually, “look to the place where you last saw the light.”

Sometimes the motive behind an action is more important than the final result.

It is only through the gospel that we can truly love; we love because He first loved us.

Doctrinal soundness and love are qualities difficult to maintain in balance.

When attempting to address wrong, it's best to err on the side of mercy.

1 Cor 13 tells us you can be doctrinally sound with all kinds of works, but without love, you have nothing.

Rev 2:1-7 (Church History Reading)–

The message to the Church of Ephesus fits well with the apostolic era of the church (AD 31 to AD 100).

Rev 2:8-11 (Introduction)–

Since Smyrna was the nearest of the seven cities to Ephesus, it is the second to be mentioned in Revelation.

Christians in Smyrna faced opposition from both Jews and pagans.

In ancient times, as today, people behaved in a lot of different ways in the face of persecution.

In some ways, the church at Smyrna was the opposite of Laodicea.

Rev 2:8– A suffering, persecuted church needs to know that Jesus is powerful enough to make everything right at the end.

Jesus introduces Himself with the two attributes most calculated to comfort the church in the midst of its sufferings.

Rev 2:9–

The word “afflictions” means “pressure,” different circumstances that lead to psychological distress.

The deep poverty of the church at Smyrna is reminiscent of Jesus’ experience.

Earthly poverty is one condition God can use to expose true riches to our consciousness.

The “Jews” of this text are probably ethnic Jews concerned Christians among them will hurt their standing in the Empire.

The term “Jews” here **may** be a metaphor for Christian opponents of John and his followers.

Slander means to use words to ruin someone else’s reputation. This happened to the church members at Smyrna.

Rev 2:9 (Excursis on “the Jews” in the Ancient World)–

In the Gospel of John the term “Jews” is used by the narrator, the Samaritan woman and Pilate.

Jesus avoids the term “Jews” except when speaking to the Samaritan woman.

The word “Jews” is an extension of “those who live in the Roman province of Judea.”

Around 85 AD Jews took measures to exclude Christians from the synagogue.

Rev 2:10–

Persecution strengthens the faith of some but discourages others and can lead them to leave the faith.

“Ten days” can express a relatively short period of time, but may be prophetic of the future persecution begun by Diocletian (303-313 AD).

This is not a royal crown but the victory garland of the Olympic games, a fitting reward for overcomers.

Rev 2:10-11–

Smyrna is encouraged to stop worrying and give Jesus control of the future.

The church’s faithfulness is encouraged to increase to the point where it can stand in the face of mortal threat.

When you listen to the Spirit, He calms your heart and takes away your fear.

The ultimate reward is avoiding second death, which results in eternal life.

Rev 2:8-11 (Spiritual Lessons)–

The future is full of things to be afraid of, but “perfect love (Christ’s) drives out fear” (see 1 John 4:18).

Those who trust in God’s approval don’t need approval from anybody else.

If God is in full control of my life, I don't have to be afraid of death or anything else.

Rev 2:8-11 (Church History Reading)–

The message to Smyrna fits well with the persecution of the church from around 100-313 AD.

The great persecution of the church began with the separation from Judaism and ended with the Edict of Milan.

Rev 2:12-17 (Introduction)–

Pergamum was the capital city of Roman Asia. It was also a major intellectual and religious center.

Pergamum had a major center of healing called the *Asclepios*. Its best known physician was Galen.

The message to Pergamum has similarities to that given to Sardis and contrasts with that to Ephesus.

The Nicolaitans and the followers of “Balaam” were probably the same group.

The sins of Pergamum, idol food and fornication, anticipate the challenges the church faced in the second and third centuries.

Rev 2:12–

The difference between Pergamos and Pergamum has to do with uncertainty regarding the correct dictionary form in Greek.

The sword in Jesus’ mouth is the Word of God, with which He exposes the thoughts and attitudes of the heart (Heb 4:12).

The sword in Jesus’ mouth counters the power of the state, which has no jurisdiction over the second death.

Through the Word of God (sword of the Spirit) Jesus provides the discernment that we need to avoid spiritual decline.

Rev 2:13–

In general terms, the throne of Satan would imply a reference to Satan’s counter claim to the throne of God (Rev 12:7-9).

“The” throne of Satan in Pergamum must have been a specific place. But which?

Rev 2:13 (Excursis on Satan’s Throne)–

One candidate for “Satan’s throne” is the Pergamon Altar of Zeus Soter.

A second candidate for Satan’s throne is the Asklepion, a temple/hospital dedicated to the serpent god.

If Pergamum was the seat of the Roman governor at the time, that could be what John meant by “Satan’s throne.”

A fourth candidate for Satan’s throne in Pergamum is the imperial cult thought to have been centered there.

Satan’s throne may represent persecution being more severe in Pergamum than in the

other churches.

The identity of Satan's throne is unclear, I lean toward the Zeus Altar because of its shape and location.

Rev 2:13–

Ancient Pergamum was filled with enchanting attractions like temples and the spectacular theater.

The Pergamenes were not ashamed of the name of Jesus, even if it got them into trouble or irritated their neighbors.

The name Antipas ("against everyone") could have been symbolic of how their neighbors perceived the members of the church.

More likely Antipas (perhaps short form of Antipater) was the name of a church member, who had recently died for his faith.

The church had settled into Pergamum in spite of the dangers and temptations there.

Rev 2:14-15–

The problem with the church at Pergamum was tolerance of destructive teachings and practices by a minority in the church.

The names "Balaam" (in Hebrew) and "Nicolaitan" (in Greek) mean the same thing, "one who destroys or conquers the people."

This passage alludes to the OT Balaam story. Balak was king of Moab. He feared an Israel under God's blessing.

Balaam is the prophet of Mesopotamia who survived a talking donkey but resisted the will of God.

When Balaam tried to curse Israel, God prevented and he blessed Israel instead. This was followed by enticement to idolatry.

After failing to curse Israel, Balaam promoted debauchery in the hope of getting God to curse Israel, so Balaam could get his money (Num 31:16).

This passage brings together the entire OT Balaam story and adds the detail that Balaam taught Balak what to do.

A more subtle reference to Balaam is found in the narrative of Rev 14:4 through 15:4.

The issue here is that the faithful members in the church tolerated views that would eventually undermine the whole church.

Rev 2:16–

The church is challenged to start doing what it doesn't think it needs to do: repent for tolerating error.

The "them" that Jesus will fight against is probably everyone in the church that does not repent of their tolerance of evil.

Rev 2:17–

Repentance is encouraged by keeping one's eye on the reward, in this case spiritual

manna.

A pot of manna was “hidden” inside the Ark of the Covenant (Heb 9:4, an expansion of Exod 16:33-35).

There was a tradition in first century Judaism that when the Messiah would come, the manna would begin to fall again.

A white stone represented acquittal in the ancient court system.

In Hebrew thought a new name represented a change of character or identity.

No one knowing the name seems related to the hidden manna, and was a mark of protection.

Rev 2:12-17 (Spiritual Lessons)–

Compromise in the West is rarely intentional, it arises out of a gradual drift into secularism.

Spiritual life tends to degenerate unless vigorous attention is given to Scripture and prayer.

Conciliation makes peace among the faithful, compromise has unhealthy spiritual results.

To repent includes a firm decision renew practices of prayer, study and action.

Witness is a two-way street, both the person witnessing and the person being witnessed to are touched by the Spirit.

The anti-compromise message of Pergamum needs to be balanced with the pro-love message of Ephesus.

Rev 2:12-17 (Church History Reading)–

This messages fits in well with the third period of Christian history, a period of popularity and spiritual decline.

Rev 2:18-29 (Introduction)–

Thyatira was famous for its trade guilds for hand-workers. Lydia (Acts 16:12-14) probably had a dyeing business there.

Thyatira was small and relatively unimportant, but has survived on the same site to this day.

As the midpoint of a chiasm, the message to Thyatira is almost twice as long as the others.

The church at Thyatira did not face as many spiritual dangers as Pergamum did.

Christians did face social pressure to minimize their faith in the context of the trade guilds of Thyatira.

Rev 2:18–

Eyes like a flame of fire suggest omniscient discernment of the issues in the church at Thyatira (see Rev 1:14).

Feet like burnished bronze recalls the bronze censer of the Hebrew tabernacle, symbol

of intercession and mercy.

Rev 2:19–

Jesus praises the church for four types of works: love, faith, service and patient endurance.

The inner qualities of love and faith are demonstrated in the outward qualities of service and patience.

Love and faith are gifts from God, but they can be exercised in practical ways in the real world.

Patient endurance is also characteristic of God's true people at the end of time (Rev 14:12).

Thyatira's improvement is in contrast with Ephesus, which started out strong, but then left its first love.

Rev 2:20–

With this verse the message moves from positive to negative.

The Thyatiran church doesn't just "tolerate" Jezebel, there is a sense of active permission.

Jezebel helped introduce the worship of Baal to Israel (1 Kgs 16:31-33; 21:25). She also practiced prostitution and witchcraft (2 Kgs 9:22).

Jezebel may symbolize a specific female leader in the church or personify a group of people within the church.

Followers of "Jezebel" may have pointed to the Bible to justify the compromises they were promoting (1 Cor 9:19-23).

Rev 2:21–

Jezebel was given a period of time in which to repent, but she did not.

The situation in Thyatira is similar to that of Ephesus and Pergamum, but much more serious. The majority seem to follow Jezebel.

Jezebel's sins were not only flagrant, but she was persistent in them over a period of time.

Rev 2:22–

Ironically, the tool of judgment is the same as the tool of sin, a bed.

Jezebel is already past her time of repentance, but her followers are still offered that possibility.

Rev 2:23–

To "kill with death" is a Hebrew expression that emphasizes the certainty of the outcome.

God is love, but tough love sometimes requires emergency measures to stave off evil.

Perhaps this text should be taken figuratively, the children are Jezebel's followers, not

her children by birth.

The death of innocents in one of God's "emergency measures" does not determine their ultimate destiny.

The horrible fate of Jezebel and her children reminds us of the even more serious future judgment.

The word for "minds" here is actually "kidneys." They represented the most hidden emotions of a person, the innermost secrets.

Rev 2:24–

There are three groups in Thyatira: Jezebel, those influenced by her, and those who are faithful but have permitted her to lead.

"Remnant" here means a spiritually faithful few in the midst of a larger unfaithful body of people.

The remnant in Thyatira are those who do not accept the teachings of Jezebel, nor do they know "the deep things of Satan."

It is possible that Jezebel was consciously teaching "the deep things of Satan," "as they say."

By knowing the deep things of Satan, Jezebel may have been promoting an exorcism-style ministry.

Toying with Satan is not wise, the response of Jesus is the best way to handle him when he appears (Matt 4:5-7; Luke 4:9-12).

The "deep things of Satan" may be a mocking title for Jezebel's attempts to teach the deep things of God.

Jezebel taught accommodations for the sake of mission that the church in council had forbidden (Acts 15:28-29).

The basic meaning of "burden" has to do with carrying a heavy weight, used here metaphorically for suffering in general.

The phrase about no further burdens is pointing backward in the text, rejecting the sum total of Jezebel's teachings.

Rev 2:25–

While Thyatira's faithfulness is minimal at best, Jesus accepts it as their best effort and tells them to halt any further decline.

Rev 2:26-27–

The use of "and" (*kai*) at the beginning of v. 26 means the overcomer promise is viewed in light of the second coming (v. 25).

To overcome and to "keep Jesus' works" is one and the same thing, they are both present participles.

The promise to the overcomers is the very thing that has already been achieved by Christ, authority over the nations (Rev 12:10).

This verse contains a very strong allusion to Psalm 2.

The Hebrew of Psalm 2:9 speaks of “breaking” the nations, the Greek of “shepherding” them (a royal metaphor).

The rule over the nations that Jesus earned (Rev 5), will be received also by those who overcome (Rev 3:21; 7;15-17).

Rev 2:28–

The “morning star” in the Bible is a metaphor applied both to Jesus (here and Rev 22:16) and Lucifer/Satan (Isa 14:12).

Rev 2:29–

The order between the overcomer promise and the invitation to listen to the Spirit is reversed from Thyatira to Laodicea.

Why the shift in order? Perhaps because in the first three the majority is faithful, in the rest the majority is not.

Rev 2:18-29 (Spiritual Lessons)–

Big problems often occur in small churches.

Very gifted church leaders like Jezebel can be wrong.

The best way to examine one’s own faithfulness is to observe the outcomes of your teaching in your followers.

Rev 2:18-29 (Church History Reading)–

Thyatira correlates well to the middle of Christian history, ending with the Reformation.

Rev 2 (Conclusion)–

Although separated into two chapters, the seven churches are a single vision.