

The Revelation to John, part 2

Revelation 2:1 - 3:22 ^{RSV} "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 evil men but have tested those who call themselves apostles but 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 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.

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 him who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.'

1. All messages are mediated through an angel (lit. 'messenger'), could refer to church leader, messenger, or mystical being.

Reminder that Christ is ever present among his Churches to guide them in the ways of love.

2. 'apostles' means literally 'missionaries', apparently not referring to the twelve, or even to episcopal order, but to false missionaries, i.e., the Nicolaitans of v.6. See Paul's prediction of false leaders infecting Ephesus in Acts 20

3. Reference to some kind of period of difficulty in the church centered around the removal of a heretical leader.

4. The removal of the heresy came at high cost: people were no longer fully committed and enthusiastic about proclaiming the Gospel. Love for other believers was replaced by suspicion of unsound teaching.

5. the presence of Christ departs from those well-intentioned people, who, zealous to find the right path abandon universal love.

6. The Nicolaitans are widely considered to be a heretical sect within Christianity that died out. There is no trace of them except in this book.

7. probably how scriptural readings and prophecies were closed at Christian worship. Reference to promises later in the book, and to Genesis. There is strong Johannine theology around the tree of life in Genesis being seen by Christians as the Cross of Christ, the fruit of which gives eternal life: by choosing sin, Adam and Eve set us irrevocably on a course which necessitated the sacrifice of Christ, and ultimately deepened God's gifts to creation. Briefly, perseverance will also mean that the Church can continue to celebrate Christ's presence in the Eucharist.

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| <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>¹¹ He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who conquers shall not be hurt by the second death.'</p> | <p>8. Reminder that Christ lives as an encouragement to those who are persecuted. Also a mirror of the city itself, which had been destroyed and rebuilt.</p> <p>9. No condemnation, only commendation in this shortest letter. Refers to Jews who commit idolatry by worshipping in the temple of the Emperor or Roma. The Christian's refusal to participate apparently brought rumors and slander against them from certain (probably conscience-guilty) Jews.</p> <p>10. Maybe a reference to one of the annual festivals in Smyrna, during which dissidents were imprisoned unjustly in order to give the city a good image to visitors. The 'ten days' is either the length of one of the festivals, or symbolic of a long time, but with an end in sight. The encouragement was to be faithful even unto death. According to tradition, Smyrna produced a famous martyr in Polycarp, who was consecrated bishop by John himself. Polycarp was burned alive at the public games in AD 156, in order to keep insurgents quiet. He had undoubtedly read this letter in his youth and pondered its meaning well. The crown mentioned is not <i>diadema</i> or 'royal crown' but <i>stephanos</i>, meaning crown or garland of victory—a direct reference to the Olympic games.</p> <p>11. This is another reference to a point later in the book, based on the Christian belief that after the first death, all would be raised again for judgment, and all those who were unworthy would be returned to death.</p> |
| <p>¹² "And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: `The words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword.</p> <p>¹³ "I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is; you hold fast my name and you did not deny my faith even in the days of Antipas my witness, my faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.</p> | <p>12. A reference to judgment, but also a to the two-serpented staff of Asclepius, the caduceus: Christ's judgment is more than a match for the tools of other gods and will cut through the serpent's false work with ease.</p> <p>13. Likely a reference to the Altar of Zeus. htThere had apparently already been persecution to martyrdom here.</p> |

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| <p>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, that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice immorality.</p> <p>¹⁵ So you also have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans.</p> <p>¹⁶ Repent then. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth.</p> <p>¹⁷ He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him 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 which no one knows except him who receives it.'</p> | <p>14. See Numbers 22, for the story of Balaam and Balak. The story is about eating food sacrificed to idols. At the Altar of Zeus, animals were sacrificed, and a token part was burnt, but the rest was sold at the market. Apparently part of what the Nicolaitans taught was conformity to this practice. Nicolaitans were therefore probably part of a larger heretical sect called the 'Gnostics', who taught that salvation was not of this world, and so the body and its concerns were trivial, but it was in a hidden, spiritual dimension that one could only approach by getting secret knowledge that unhinged the mind from its mortal cage and set it free to be saved.</p> <p>16. The truth which Jesus speaks will bring war against such falsehood and defeat it.</p> <p>17. Manna is the food given to hungry Israel: see John 6. the hungry Christians will be fed by God's own hand, and the only understanding they need is the personal encounter with Jesus in his Eucharistic Feast. There is a Rabbinic legend that precious stones fell from heaven with the manna. Precious stones were worn as amulets to identify one with a special group. The Gnostics sometimes used them to signify that they had been given the special knowledge required for salvation. This is a pure white stone, which signifies our new identity with Christ in our baptism, and is all the 'secret knowledge' anyone needs</p> |
| <p>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.</p> <p>¹⁹ "I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first.</p> <p>²⁰ But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and</p> | <p>18. a reminder of the images of stability and mperturbability, also possibly of value, and majesty.</p> <p>19. There is progress in this congregation, as opposed to Ephesus, which has fallen back.</p> <p>20. See I Kings 16 for the story of Jezebel, who lured Israel into the worship of Astarte and Ba'al. Here there is something of the</p> |

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| <p>beguiling my servants to practice immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols.</p> <p>²¹ I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her immorality.</p> <p>²² Behold, I will throw her on a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation, unless they repent of her doings;</p> <p>²³ and I will strike her children dead. And all the churches shall know that I am he who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you as your works deserve.</p> <p>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 upon you any other burden;</p> <p>²⁵ only hold fast what you have, until I come.</p> <p>²⁶ He who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, I will give him power over the nations,</p> <p>²⁷ and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received power from my Father;</p> <p>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.'</p> | <p>same problem as in Pergamum. Christians who will not eat food sacrificed to idols are going hungry and suffering persecution. The danger here is one of compromise. This prophetic does not wish destruction to the church, but merely to bring it into a new practice. This new practice is not in accord with the will of the Spirit, and received Tradition, and is destructive to the faith. Christians in every age must ask how much they are willing to adopt the practice of the age, and how much it is in conflict with the teachings of Jesus Christ.</p> <p>22-23: See Jeremiah 11:20</p> <p>24. deep things probably means that which is beyond superficial appearance: meaning Christ sees past appearances to what is in the heart.</p> <p>26-27. direct quote of psalm 2: 8-9</p> <p>28. the morning star is the herald of the dawn, the first glimmer on the horizon that tells us the sun is about to rise. It could also represent power over Satan: Lucifer means 'light-bringer' and was the name of the morning star. It is also a reference to later in the book (22:26) where Jesus himself is described as the 'true morning star', also possibly a reference to Satan as an impostor. Sunrise is also frequently used as a symbol of the Resurrection, so it may be given to this church to serve as heralds of the resurrection.</p> |
| <p>^{RSV} Revelation 3:1 "And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: `The words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. "I know your works; you have the name of being alive, and you are dead.</p> <p>² Awake, and strengthen what remains and is on the point of death, for I have not found your works perfect in the sight of my God.</p> <p>³ Remember then what you received and heard; keep that,</p> | <p>1. Reminder that God is the source of all light and all life. Apparently needed here because they are 'dead'. This sounds like a reference to merely nominal Christianity.</p> <p>2-3. The situation here is critical, but not hopeless. The church is in the process of losing its identity, and its membership to those who would rather partake in the luxury of the town, and the saturation with food and flesh that took place there. There is a quote from Matthew's Gospel, that no one knows when Jesus will</p> |

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| <p>and repent. If you will not awake, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come upon you.</p> <p>⁴ Yet you have still a few names in Sardis, people who have not soiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy.</p> <p>⁵ He who conquers shall be clad thus in white garments, and I will not blot his name out of the book of life; I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels.</p> <p>⁶ He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'</p> | <p>come to claim his due, so it is necessary to be constantly vigilant. The call here is: Listen! Obey! Repent! Return!</p> <p>4. The situation is not hopeless because there are still a few saints among them who are themselves open doors to the grace necessary to renew this church.</p> <p>5. White, pure garments are also mentioned later in the book. They are symbolic of purity and festival through many OT and NT references. This is where the Christian practice of wearing an alb at the altar comes from: it is a symbol of purity of life achieved through baptism.</p> <p>In all these cities, there would have been a register, kept by officials of the city, and everyone's name was written in it upon birth, and then blotted out upon death or expulsion from the city. The book of life is an allusion to just such a register in the City of God.</p> <p>The final message is one to be faithful and to proclaim the gospel openly. References are Matthew 10:32 and Luke 12:8</p> |
| <p>⁷ "And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: `The words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one shall shut, who shuts and no one opens.</p> <p>⁸ "I know your works. Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut; I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.</p> <p>⁹ Behold, I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie -- behold, I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and learn that I have loved you.</p> <p>¹⁰ Because you have kept my word of patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial which is coming on the</p> | <p>7. Philadelphia gets a reminder that Christ is in control of all situations, especially the death of his servants.</p> <p>8. This is a small church, harassed by pagans and the local synagogue, whose God is probably blamed for the earthquake which destroyed the city. They get no reprimand. Christ is among them as one who gives them the good news, and no amount of harassing will remove his presence and their ability to attain to everlasting life through him. The 'door' is also an opportunity to proclaim the gospel to those around them.</p> <p>9. Since John was a Jew, it is impossible to interpret this correctly as an anti-semitic statement. It is stating that Christians were the true Israel, the heirs of God's promise, and those who rejected the teachings of Jesus were rejecting their heritage. They will see, in the end, who the Messiah is, and know the truth.</p> |

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| <p>whole world, to try those who dwell upon the earth. ¹¹ I am coming soon; hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown. ¹² He who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God; never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name. ¹³ He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'</p> | <p>10. 'I will keep you from the hour of trial' is better translated as 'I will keep you throughout the trial', since it is clear that they are enduring trial and suffering already. 12. Pillars were not only the supports of temple roofs, but also lasting memorials with names of heroes, their city of origin on them, and the king or emperor's name. In the city of Philadelphia, the memorial pillars were the only part of the temples left after the earthquake. They are also permanently affixed to the place of worship, which as we learn later in the book, is in the presence of God himself.</p> |
| <p>¹⁴ "And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: `The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation. ¹⁵ "I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were cold or hot! ¹⁶ So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of my mouth. ¹⁷ For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing; not knowing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. ¹⁸ Therefore I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, that you may be rich, and white garments to clothe you and to keep the shame of your nakedness from being seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, that you may see. ¹⁹ Those whom I love, I reprove and chasten; so be zealous and repent. ²⁰ Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me. ²¹ He who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father</p> | <p>14. In a city whose spirituality had deteriorated because of material wealth and luxury, this is a reminder to stay true to the message of the gospel. 15. This is arguably the sternest reprimand of the five. This appears to say that church believed that there could be compromise between worship of God through Christ and worship of Caesar, and so they did both, making their attitude toward things that they should hate warm, and cooling their love for Jesus and their fellow Christians. 16. The image of tepidity is one which mirrors the reality of the day: tepid food was probably that which was left out to rot, or water that had grown stagnant. Meat had to be cooked, and fish and water had to be cool to insure freshness and edibility. The result of eating tepid food was nausea and illness. 17. This is a sharp contrast to the status of those living in the town and its three main accomplishments: Banking, medicine (remember their famous eye salve!), and wool trade. 18. This is a reminder that the truth of the gospel is the real gain, and everything else is rubbish. 19. After barking at them, Jesus reminds them that it is done out of love, and so that he can be with them fully.</p> |

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on his throne.

²² He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

20-21. Here are two more images from later in the book: That of the heavenly banquet and that of The Lamb on His Throne.

Note that throughout the message is that of conquering, and not at all of escape.