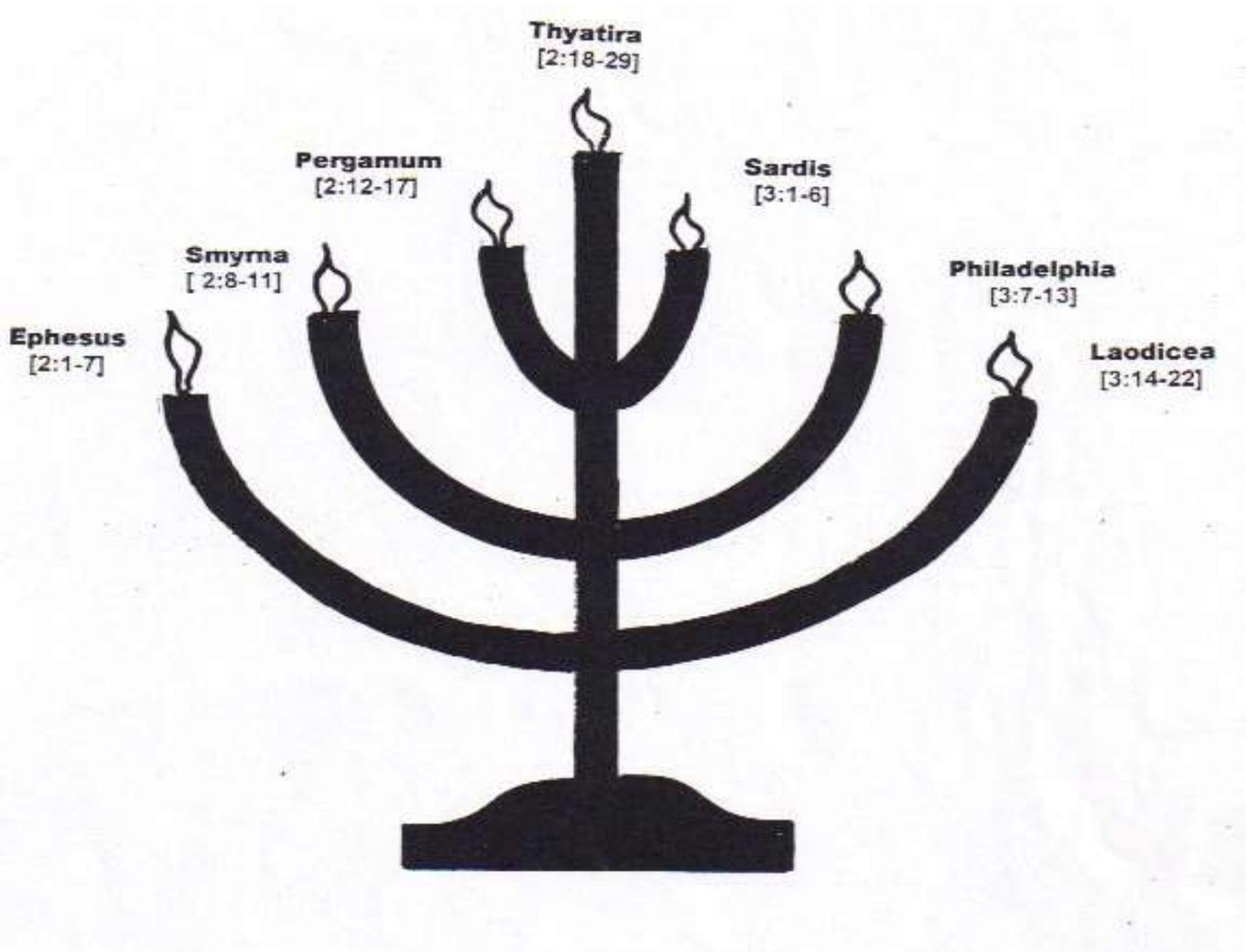


ESUS CHRIST EXAMINES FOUR CHURCHES

Summary and Historical Background

The second major division of Revelation is the Lord's examination of the seven churches in Asia Minor (Rev. 2-3). These churches existed when John lived in Ephesus. The divine author refers to this division as "the things which are" (Rev. 1:19). Both Scripture and history indicate that there were a good number of churches in Asia Minor at that time, but only seven were examined by the Lord. A map reveals that the geographical location of these churches, which began with Ephesus and ended with Laodicea. The map will show that they form an oblong when the reader follows the order in which they are named. Thus, it can be visualized geographically that Christ walked in the midst of these seven churches (2:1).



Since seven is a number for fullness, it is believed that these seven churches collectively represent all the blessings, problems, charges, threats and promises that churches experience to some extent during the Church Age. A careful study of these two chapters will provide pastors and churches a rich source of divine instruction to improve their witness to the world and service to God.

These seven churches were selected for two divine purposes. First, these churches were **historical** local churches, which had all the strengths and weaknesses common to churches throughout the Church Age. Second, these churches were **typical** of Christ's dealings with churches throughout the Church

Age. So His examination of these historical churches will be the same for all churches until the Rapture. In this study of the churches, each church will be given a title that corresponds to Christ's evaluation of it. Then Christ's relationship to each of the churches is identified and a title is given to Him that denotes His work in each church. Finally, the results of Christ's examination in five areas are itemized for each of the seven churches. Ephesus is the first church that Christ examined.

I. EPHESUS – 2:1-7

The Ephesian church was the primary recipient of Christ's message, but it was given to the angel of the church who would deliver it to them. The angel of the church was the pastor (cf notes for 1:16). Christ addressed the pastor because he was responsible for the spiritual life of the church (Acts 20:28). Even though the message was directed to the members of the church at Ephesus, all churches were to learn from it, especially those with circumstances similar to that of this church.

The church at Ephesus was founded by Aquila and Priscilla, who were joined by Apollos, a gifted preacher. On Paul's third missionary journey, he ministered in that church for three years with great success, so much so, that the idol makers were losing their clientele at an alarming rate. As a result they caused a riot in an attempt to revive the worship of Diana. When Paul left Ephesus, he put Timothy in charge of the church as its pastor. John ministered in Ephesus much later and tradition says he brought Mary with him where she died and was buried in that city.

Ephesus was the greatest city of Asia (Minor), even though it was not the capital of that province. That honor was given to Pergamum. Ephesus had the best harbor in Asia and had four main roads linking the city to Asia. Traders from many countries brought their wares and wealth to its marketplace. It was the gateway to Asia and the highway to Rome. It was a free city so it had no Roman troops stationed there to threaten the activity of the citizens. It drew large numbers of people every year to come to the games of Asia that were played in their stadium. It also was the center for the licentious worship of Diana (Artemis). The temple to this goddess was one of the Seven Wonders of the World with 120 columns 60 feet high. It drew a mixed population coming from six sources including religious prostitutes, criminals that found safety within its precincts and bankers that felt their money was protected by this goddess. Riches (1 Tim. 6:10) and religion (Acts 19:27-20:1) attacked the spiritual life of the Ephesian Christians. Nevertheless, Paul built a strong church in that city (Acts 19:1ff). Later he wrote a glorious letter to the Ephesian church when he was in prison for Christ's sake at Rome. About 30 years later Christ sent this message to the Ephesian church, composed of "second-generation" Christians (Rev. 2:1-7). It was still sound in doctrine, but it had left its initial love for the Lord (2:4).

B. Christ, the Inspector – 2:1; cf. 1:16, 20

2:1 – Christ introduced Himself to the Ephesian church in two ways: He holds the seven stars and He walks in the midst of the lamp stands. These two figures of speech come from chapter one where Christ and His relationship to the churches is mentioned (cf 1:12, 13, 16). Christ interpreted these two figures for John: the seven stars are the seven angels (messengers/pastors) of the churches and the seven lamp stands are the seven churches in Asia Minor (1:20). By saying that He holds the seven stars, He was reminding the Ephesian pastor and his church of His authority over the pastors. This is a comfort as well as a warning to the pastor. It is a comfort for a faithful pastor to know that the Lord loves him and holds him in difficult times (John 10:28; Acts 18:9, 10), but it is a warning to an unfaithful pastor that He will discipline him and could take his ministry from him (1 Cor. 9:24-27). By saying that He walks in the midst of the lamp stands (the churches), He was reminding them that He inspects the churches to see that they were living up to His expectations. The figure of a lamp stand is fitting for a church. In those days a lamp stand lifted up a lighted oil lamp so that it could send its light to the darkest parts of the room. So a church is to lift up the Gospel so that its light can reach the darkest places in the world. The Ephesian church was lifted up in a city where people from many parts of the world were passing through it. This church had a great opportunity to send the Gospel light to distant parts of the world by telling these travelers about Jesus Christ. However, they needed to love the Lord fervently to be able to witness

to these travelers effectively. Christ was inspecting the Ephesian lamp stand to see how well they were sending forth the light of the Gospel.

C. Praise – 2:2, 3, 6

1. For Service – 2:2

2:2 – Christ knew their works (activities); He sees everything (Heb. 4:13). He knew that they labored to the point of exhaustion. The translation of *hupomone* as “patience” is better understood today as “endurance.” They endured in their work and did not quit.

2. For Discernment – 2:2, 6

2:2– The Ephesian church members showed discernment in admitting members and discipline in judging false apostles. Their labors included the trials of evil men to keep the membership pure. They did not let anyone teach in their church without a careful examination. They were not only concerned about a pure membership but also about a pure doctrine. There is only one true test of a worthy teacher or preacher: his total acceptance of the Word of God. False teachers generally can be identified in one of three areas. First, they deny the deity of Christ (2 Jn. 9). Second, they deny that salvation is by faith alone, but add good works (Gal. 1:6-9; 2:16). Third, they deny the priesthood of common believers, which allows believers to be led of the Holy Spirit; they demand blind devotion to their “religion” (1 Pet. 2:9; 1 Jn. 2:27).

2:6 – This church also hated the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which Christ also hated. There are two main views concerning the identity of the Nicolaitans, but neither is certain. One view takes the two parts of the word, *nico* (“to conquer”) and *laos* (“people”) to arrive at the meaning, “to conquer the people.” This view believes the Nicolaitans gave the clergy the power to rule over the laity. The early church fathers held a second view of the Nicolaitans. They believed they followed the teaching of Nicolaus of Antioch, one of the original seven deacons (Acts 6:5). He later apostatized to practice a licentious antinomianism saying it was all right to eat food sacrificed to idols and commit fornication, probably with temple prostitutes. Antinomian teaching is against the law and takes a light view of sin because they believe that God’s grace will cover all sinful deeds. The view of these early church fathers harmonizes well with what Christ said about the Nicolaitans in 2:14-15, so it is the better choice of the two views.

3. For Perseverance – 2:3

2:3 – This church endured persecution for the name of the Lord. They labored on His behalf and did not faint in their trials. These believers had a great reserve of strength (Eph. 1:19ff). Their labors for the Lord were in sharp contrast to their labors against false apostles.

D. Sin – 2:4

2:4 – In spite of Christ’s praise for their earnest labors to maintain pure doctrine, He said that they had left their first love. Does this mean the church had left its love for the brethren or for Christ or for both? The mark of true believers is love for the brethren (Jn 13:35; 1 Jn 3:14; 4:7-12). This church had such love when it began (Acts 20:37; Eph 1:15), but as the years passed, it may be that members were added to the church that professed orthodox doctrine, but had not experienced the love of God in salvation. If so, they could not love and worship Christ like those who are saved (Rev 7:9-17), and they would not have true love for the brethren. This would be the cause for the whole church to leave the love it first had for Christ and the brethren in the beginning. It would deserve the serious rebuke that Christ gave to it. If this continued, it would be orthodox in doctrine, but dead in spirit. Its light would go out and it would no longer be a witness for Christ in the world (Mt 5:16). Many churches have experienced dead orthodoxy.

E. Charge – 2:5

2:5 – John gave a simple three-fold cure for spiritual backsliding: remember, repent and return.

1. Remember: The church was to remember where they were spiritually before they fell. They were to remember the joyful fellowship that they had with the Lord when they were first saved. They were to remember their willing obedience to the Lord in appreciation for His willing obedience to die on the cross for them. They were to remember their fervent love for Him because He was their dearest friend. They were to take a spiritual inventory of their lives by retracing their steps in departing from an ardent love for the Lord.

2. Repent: The church was to repent of its lack of a fervent love for the Lord. The Greek word for “repent” is *metanoeo*, which means “to change the mind.” An about face in their spiritual life would begin by a renewed mind (Rom 12:2). If the Ephesian church changed their mind toward the Lord, then their love for the Lord could be restored, the same love that they had when they were first saved.

3. Return: The church was to return to the first works that they had done when they were first saved. When true believers come to Christ for salvation, they are deeply in love with Him and want to tell everyone they meet about Him and His gift of salvation. This is proof of true repentance.

F. Threat – 2:5

2:5 – If the Ephesian church did not repent of its sin, the Lord would remove its lamp stand. The church would die spiritually, if not physically. It no longer would send forth its light in this sin-darkened world. This warning was a real threat with inevitable consequences. Its ability to bear light in the world would be extinguished and its opportunity to serve the Lord would be given to a church that would be faithful in its first love. History reveals that Ephesus had vigor for several centuries but today only the ruins of the church remain. What was said to the church at Ephesus applies to all churches.

G. Promise – 2:7

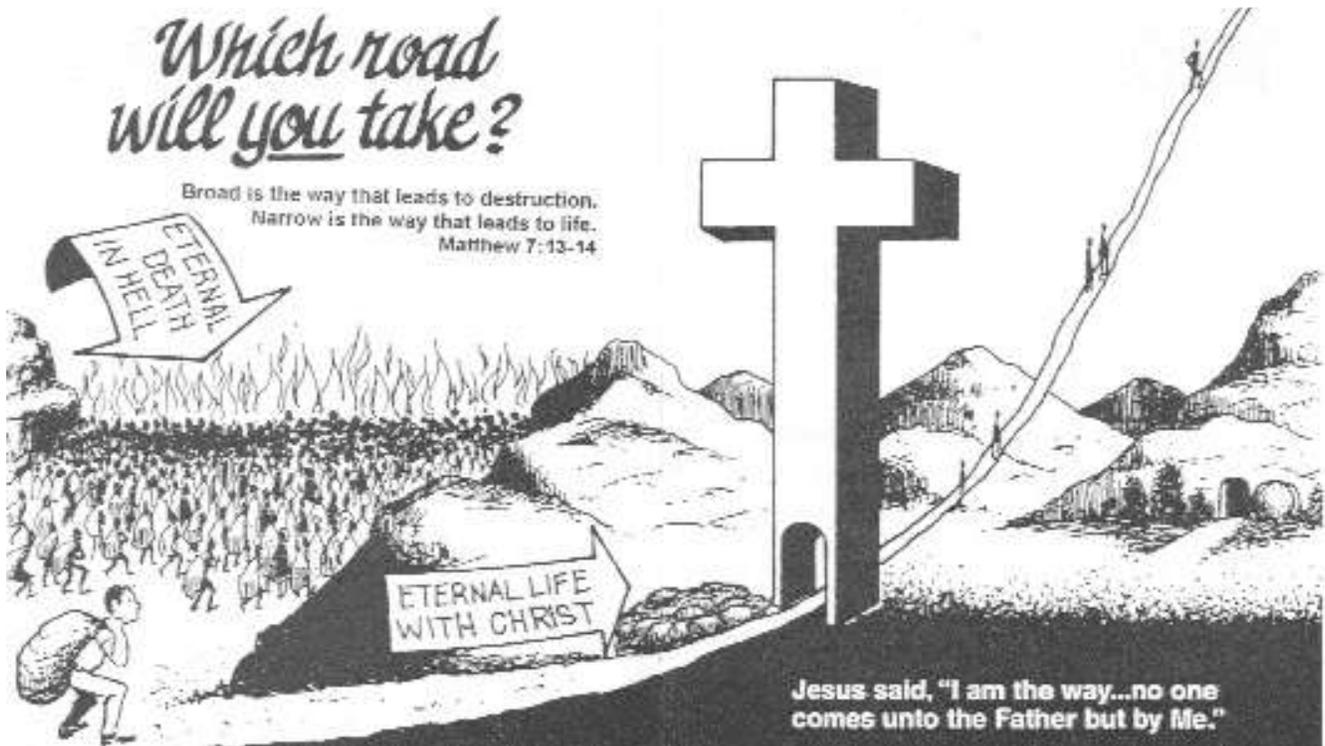
2:7 – Christ invited the church to listen to what He said to them and take it to heart. A person becomes an overcomer by placing his faith in Christ to be born into God’s family. He overcomes the world, the flesh and the devil by his faith in Christ. This is proof of a person’s salvation. John makes it clear that a believer’s faith in Jesus Christ enables him to overcome the world (1 Jn. 5:4-5). All overcomer passages in chapters 2-3 refer to the blessings all believers will experience in the Millennial and Eternal Kingdoms.

Christ promised overcomers that they would eat of the tree of life. The tree of life was first mentioned in the Garden of Eden (Gen 2:9) and it is mentioned again in the street of the New Jerusalem (Rev 22:2, 14). This is the city that comes down from heaven after the present heaven and earth have passed away and a new heaven and earth are created (Rev 21:1-3). The promise to eat of the tree of life symbolizes the eternal gift of life that every believer will enjoy in the Millennial Kingdom (Rev 20) and in the Eternal Kingdom (Rev 21-22).

CHURCH	CHRIST	PRAISE	SIN	CHARGE	THREAT	PROMISE
<p>EPHESUS 2:1-7</p> <p>Faltering Love</p>	<p>He holds the 7 stars (pastors); He walks in the midst of the 7 lamp stands (churches). He is the INSPECTOR 2:1; cf 1:16, 20</p>	<p>For her works, hard labor and endurance; hatred of evil deeds of the Nicolaitans; exposition of false prophets. 2:2,3,6</p>	<p>She abandoned her first love for Christ, yet she still worked diligently in the church. 2:4 (3)</p>	<p>She was to recall where she had sinned, repent and do the works that she had done when she was first saved. 2:5</p>	<p>Her lamp stand would be removed if she did not repent. 2:5</p>	<p>Believers would eat of the tree of life in Paradise (Gen 2:9; 3:22; Rev 22:2) 2:7</p>

HOW TO BECOME AN OVERCOMER

1 John 5:4-5 says that whoever believes that Jesus is the Son of God is born of God and overcomes the world by faith in Him. Jesus is the only one who can save a person from his sins and make him an overcomer. Overcomers are promised blessings from God in Revelation 2:7,11, 17, 26-28; 3:5, 12, 21. The following graphic and explanation will attempt to present the steps one must take to be born of God so he can become an overcomer.



There are four critical questions that God answers in the Bible to help a person to be born into His family.

1. **WHO AM I?** The Bible says everyone is a sinner and all have come short of the glory of God (Rom 3:12; 3:23). Everyone is a **lost sinner** and without God's intervention, everyone would go to hell.
2. **WHO IS JESUS?** The Bible says Jesus died for all our sins, but was raised to justify us (Rom 4:5). Jesus was crucified to pay the full penalty for our sins; He was raised from the dead to give us life. No one else could do this for us, so Jesus is the **only Savior** that can deliver us from hell.
3. **WHAT ARE MY CHOICES?** The Bible says the wages we earn from sinning is death, but the gift we can receive from God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord (Rom 6:23). You have two choices: (1) You can take the wages of your **sins** and go to hell; or, (2) you can receive God's gift of life by taking Jesus as your **Savior** and go to heaven. Faith in Jesus makes you an overcomer.
4. **HOW CAN I BE SAVED AND BE AN OVERCOMER?** The Bible says you must **repent**: hate your sins because they put Jesus on the cross. Give your sins to Jesus. Then **call on the Lord** to save you (Rom 10:13). He will save you, if you truly **believe** His promise. The proof that your faith is true is your desire to tell others that Jesus has cleansed you from all your sins and saved you from hell (Rom 10:9-10). Another proof of your faith is your gratefulness to Him. Thank Him for His gift of eternal life (Lk 17:12-19; 2 Cor 9:15). Faith in the Lord is how you become an overcomer.

II. SMYRNA – 2:8-11

A. The Church with Fierce Tribulation – 2:9-10

2:8 – The church of Smyrna was located in a city that was approximately 35 miles north of Ephesus. Smyrna was called the flower of Asia. It was founded by the Greeks in 1000 B.C., but it was destroyed by the Lydians in 600 B.C. and remained in ruins for more than 300 years, except for some small villages. Then with a plan in hand, Lysimachus, one of the four generals that divided up the kingdom of Alexander the Great, rebuilt the city in 290 B.C. to make it the loveliest city of Asia Minor. It is significant that Jesus identified Himself with the church in Smyrna as the one who was dead and is alive, an echo of the experience of Smyrna, but unlike Smyrna, He will be alive forever.

The city began at its magnificent harbor and wound its way through narrow foothills to the Pagos, a hill covered with noble buildings and temples, giving it the appearance of a crown to the city. The stunning “Street of Gold” curved around the Pagos, giving the street the appearance of a necklace. At one end of the street was the temple of Cybele and at the other end was the temple of Zeus with several temples between them that looked like jewels on the necklace.

It was a city of culture with a grand public library, with odium for musical performances, with a stadium for important games and with one of the largest theaters in Asia. It was a great trading city with a natural seaport, the safest in Asia, making it the second wealthiest city in Asia. The city still prospers today and is known as Izmir. It was a free city that earned that privilege by its loyalty to Rome long before it became a power in world affairs. It was a center for many temples and the first to build a temple to the goddess Roma. It also won the right over all other cities in Asia to build a temple to worship Caesar Tiberias (A.D. 26). It was also the home of wealthy Jews that gave a large gift to beautify the city. This, no doubt, gave them a place of power in city affairs. Their hostility to the Gospel, along with the Gentile idol worshippers, caused the believers much suffering and Jesus referred to these false Jews as the “synagogue of Satan” (2:9). About 60 years later they violently participated in the martyrdom of Polycarp, the bishop of Smyrna, on February 23, 155. Jesus introduced Himself to this church as the one who “was dead, and is alive” (1:8; cf 1:18). Jesus identified Himself with these suffering believers. He knew the fears and agony that they were experiencing.

Smyrna was a proud city where a strong rivalry existed among the leaders as to who could be the first and best among them in this municipality. It is noteworthy that Jesus introduced Himself to this church as the “first and the last” (2:8; cf 1:17). He was the first and the last and all others were under Him.

This church was probably started during Paul’s stay at Ephesus (Acts 19:10). Smyrna means “bitter.” Like spice bulbs, the fragrance of this church was not available until crushed. Bitter persecution brought forth the sweetness of Christ in these believers.

B. Christ, the Victor – 2:8; cf. 1:17, 18

2:8 – Christ died for the sins of every person, but was victorious over death when He arose from the grave. He told them that He is the first and the last, was dead and is alive. He was first in that He was with His Father in the beginning and is last because He conquered death and will live throughout eternity. He is eternal, but His suffering and death made Him fully aware of the tribulation that the church in Smyrna was experiencing. He was touched by the feelings of their weaknesses (Heb 4:15). These words would comfort the believers who were persecuted for Christ’s sake, even unto death. Christ’s resurrection was proof that there was victory over suffering and death (1 Cor. 15:12ff); it guarantees ultimate victory for all Christians.

C. Praise – 2:9

1. Their persecution – 2:9

2:9 – The word for tribulation (*thlipsin*) has the idea of being pressed on all sides as in the pressing of grapes or the grinding of wheat (2 Cor 4:8-11, 17). These believers were under intense pressure for their

faith in Christ, especially from Jews. This may be due to Jews that had converted to Christ and unsaved Jews were incensed and driven by jealousy to persecute this church (cf Acts 13:50; 14:2, 5, 19; 17:5; 26:2). If this persecution followed the normal pattern of Acts, the Jews stirred up the pagans to persecute the believers. As a result, many lost their property and were in abject poverty, a contrast to the Laodicean church (3:17). But Christ reminded them that they were rich--their wealth was in heaven where it would never lose its value and would satisfy their needs forever (Mt. 6: 19-20).

2. Their persecutors –2:9

2:9 – Blasphemy is done when someone attempts to injure a person’s reputation and in this case it included acts and slanderous remarks. This was done by Jews that accused Christians of crimes that they had not done. When false charges were brought before Gentile judges, sometimes the goods of Christians would be taken from them, or they might be cast into prison as Paul and Silas suffered in Philippi. Jesus said He knew what the Jews were doing. He said that they called themselves Jews, but actually they were of the “synagogue of Satan.” A synagogue was the place where the Jews met for instruction, but instead of being instructed by God, they were being instructed by Satan. They were physical descendants of Abraham, but they were spiritual children of Satan (Jn 8:39-44). That is why the Jews wanted Jesus to be crucified. They were doing the work of their father, Satan.

D. Charge – 2:10

2:10 – Christ told these believers not to be afraid of the persecution that they would suffer. He told them that the devil would cast some of them into prison that they might be tried. The devil uses trials in an attempt to get believers to recant their faith in Christ, but God uses trials to perfect their faith in Christ. Their faith is more precious than gold so God allows trials to test their faith. When the trial is finished, their faith will be found worthy of praise, honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ (1 Pet 1:7). The trial would last for “ten days.” There have been many symbolic interpretations for “ten days,” some that call for a long, harsh period of persecution and some for a short period of persecution, but it is best to take it as a literal ten days. There is no reason to take it symbolically. It may be a violent ten days and some might die, but it would be over in ten days. So Jesus encourages them to be faithful, even if they die. As stated earlier, Polycarp was martyred at Smyrna about 60 years later. Those who truly live by Christ’s strength will have the inward power to suffer for Christ and even to die for Him. These believers proved that they loved Him and were promised a crown of life (cf. James 1:12). This crown is a wreath of victory, not a crown of royalty. It signifies that the recipient is victorious and has eternal life.

E. Promise – 2:11

2:11 – Besides the crown of life, Christ promises all believers that they will not experience the second death, which assures them of eternal life. This promise provides peace and security for all overcomers (cf. 1 Jn 5:4-5). At death the believer will enter the courts of heaven (Jn 14:1-6), but the unbeliever is cast into Hell, followed by the eternal Lake of Fire, which is the second death (Rev. 20:14-15; 21:8).

CHURCH	CHRIST	PRAISE	SIN	CHARGE	THREAT	PROMISE
<p>SMRYNA 2:8-11</p> <p>Fierce Tribulation</p>	<p>He is first and last, was dead and is now alive.</p> <p>He is the VICTOR 2:8; cf 1:17-18</p>	<p>For her works and endurance of tribulation, poverty and fierce attacks by Jews stirred up by Satan 2:9</p>	<p>She is not charged with any sin</p>	<p>She was not to fear tribulation; she was to be faithful until death 2:10</p>	<p>No threat was needed</p>	<p>Believers will receive the crown of life and not be hurt by the second death 2:10-11</p>

III. PERGAMUM– 2:12-17

A. The Church with Foolish Tolerance – 2:14-15

Pergamum was a wealthy city located about 50 miles north of Smyrna and 15 miles from the Aegean Sea. It was not a port city like Ephesus or Smyrna, nor was it on any great trade routes. Instead it was a powerful political center, the capital of Asia for almost 400 years. It was a majestic city, built on a conical mount rising 1000 feet over the valley, a perfect site for a king. Since it was the capital of Asia, it was the administrative center in that area for Rome.

Pergamum was a cultural center, famous for its library of 200,000 rolls, second only to the library in Alexandria, Egypt. Its rolls were made of parchment (from animal skins), which was first developed in Pergamum when Ptolemy of Egypt refused to sell papyrus to the king of this city. Parchment turned out to be a better product than papyrus. It also was a religious center for the worship of many gods. A visible altar to Zeus, 40 feet high, was built high on the mount. The worship of the Caesars was dominant in this city where the presence of the Romans was so strong. Christians were in danger for refusing to worship Caesar once a year in most cities, but it was a daily danger in Pergamum. Pergamum had a history of syncretism in all areas of life. In politics it quickly adopted Roman rule in 130 B.C. to avoid destruction. In worship it absorbed both Greek and Roman gods. Syncretism was in the fabric of their character. This created a severe problem for the church when they allowed error to exist with truth.

B. Christ, the Warrior – 2:12; cf. 1:16

2:12 – Christ identified Himself to this church as the one that had the sharp sword with two edges (cf. 1:16). This represents the militant nature of Christ. His sword comes from His mouth, indicating the power of His words to make war against His enemies. At the end of the Tribulation, Christ will use His sharp sword against Antichrist and his armies to destroy them (19:15, 19-21; cf. Ps. 2:8-9), but here He will use His sword against unfaithful members in this church to discipline them (2:16). The Romans used their swords, not to swing them at the enemy and cause injury, but to thrust them into the bodies of their enemies and cause death. The Pergamum church needed to beware of Christ's use of His sword, which could be used for discipline or to cause death.

C. Praise – 2:13

2:13 – Christ said that this church was located where Satan had his throne. He commended it for not being ashamed of His name, but for remaining faithful to Him, even when Antipas, His faithful servant was martyred for his faith in Him. Satan's throne may have been a reference to the 40 foot altar to Zeus that had the appearance of a throne high above the valley. Or, it may have been a reference to many temples that were all clustered together in a beautiful grove called the Nicophorium. Whatever Christ meant, He repeated the fact that Satan dwelt in this city. It was his stronghold to attack this church.

D. Sin – 2:14-15

In Smyrna the synagogue of Satan persecuted the church from without, but in Pergamum the wiles of Satan poisoned the church from within. Satan was able to penetrate into this church because it was lax in church discipline. Members were tolerated when they adopted the practices of a false religion!

1. The doctrine of Balaam – 2:14

2:14 – Some members held the doctrine of Balaam. He told Balak how to make God curse Israel, when he could not curse Israel. The Old Testament story of Balaam and Balak is found in Numbers 22-25; 31:16. Balak, King of Moab, hired Balaam to curse the Israelites because he felt threatened by them.

However, God would not allow Balaam to curse His people. Instead, He made Balaam bless Israel. When Balaam could not curse Israel, He taught Balak how he could get God to curse Israel. He needed to cause Israel to fall into a grievous sin; this would cause God to curse Israel. He told Balak to have his women entice the Israelite men to commit fornication with them and then have them bow down to their gods and eat the sacrifices offered to their gods (Num 25:1-2). Combining the practices of a pagan religion with the doctrine of God became known as the doctrine of Balaam. When Balak followed the counsel of Balaam, it worked. Many Israelites yielded themselves to sin with the pagan women and it caused God to curse them so that 24,000 Israelites were killed (Num 25:9). It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Heb 10:31). This is the kind of sin that some members of the church in Pergamum were practicing in the temples of the gods in their city.

2. The doctrine of the Nicolaitans – 2:15; cf 2:6

2:15 – The doctrine of the Nicolaitans is related to the doctrine of Balaam. The Nicolaitans in the church at Pergamum ate the sacrifices offered to idols and committed fornication with the temple prostitutes. Since God hated the doctrine of Balaam, He also hated the doctrine of the Nicolaitans (cf 2:6). God hates the doctrine of believers joining unbelievers in sinful practices (cf 2 Cor 6:14-16). Believers must separate themselves from all unbelievers in their sinful behavior. When believers rationalize that it is permissible for them to eat meat offered to idols at private or public festivals and to fornicate with temple prostitutes to show their unsaved neighbors the liberty that they have in Christ, they are wrong and will be disciplined by Christ. If they reason that eating meat offered to idols and committing fornication is a part of their culture, they have forgotten that God is holy and hates all deeds of sin. He will punish those that commit sin whether it is cultural or not.

E. Charge – 2:16

2:16 – Christ called for these church members to repent that were involved in this sin. This meant they first had to change their minds so they could change their ways (see the note on 2:5). Repentance was the only cure for the corrupting process that was destroying their church. The pastor had not been faithful in turning the church away from the Nicolaitans. He needed to follow Paul's example to declare to them the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27).

F. Threat – 2:16

2:16 – Christ added a threat to those who refused to repent. He would come quickly and fight against them with the sword of His mouth. That meant He would fight against them like He fought against the men of Israel that yielded to the doctrine of Balaam and 24,000 died (Num 31:8; Josh 13:22). To avoid His judgment, the pastor needed to teach the doctrine of separation and engage the church in practicing it. The church needed to practice discipline by dismissing immoral members (1 Cor 5) and then practice forgiveness by restoring those that gave evidence of true repentance (2 Cor 2:4-11; 7:8-12). The central lesson learned from this church is the need for pastors to teach their members to separate from sinners that insist believers conform to their sinful practices to be their friends. The choice is separation from sin or suffering from the sword.

G. Promises – 2:17

2:17 – Christ promises the overcomer that he will eat of the hidden manna. Manna was the food that supernaturally sustained Israel in the wilderness (Ex. 16:32-34). Some manna was put in a pot to be kept in the Ark of the Covenant where it was hidden from the view of the people. Christ is the Bread of Life for a believer throughout his present journey on earth (Jn. 6:31-33; 48-51), but is hidden from his view while He is in Heaven. Christ will be revealed to church believers at the Rapture and to all believers after the Tribulation when they sit down in fellowship with Him to eat the marriage supper of the Lamb. In keeping

with the previous promises, this has primary reference to the nourishment a believer will receive from Christ during the Millennial and Eternal Kingdoms.

The overcomer also is promised a white stone with a new name written on it. There are several suggested meanings for this reward. One: if a judge handed out a white stone in a court of law, it meant acquittal. So it means the believer will not be condemned (cf. Rom. 8:1). Two: a white stone was divided between two friends when they were about to part from each other and each would carry their half with the name of their friend on it. Years later, even to future generations, there would be immediate cause for friendship, if the two halves could be identified. Three: a white stone was given to a victorious athlete with his name on it. This stone would admit him to a special feast. This meaning fits well with the other blessings of the overcomer. The overcomer by faith in Christ is given a new name that will admit him into the Millennial Kingdom to enjoy the marriage supper of the Lamb. This ties together the promises of the hidden manna and the white stone.

CHURCH	CHRIST	PRAISE	SIN	CHARGE	THREAT	PROMISE
PERGAMUM 2:12-17 Foolish Tolerance	He has the sharp sword with two edges. He is the WARRIOR 2:12; cf 1:16	For being true to Christ under intense pressure where Satan ruled 2:13	For allowing church members to live an immoral life 2:14-15	She was to repent of this sinful practice 2:16	Christ would fight against her with the sword from His mouth 2:16	Believers will eat the hidden manna (Christ); receive a white stone with their name on it 2:17

IV. THYATIRA – 2:18-29

A. The Church with a False Teacher – 2:20

Thyatira was about 40 miles southeast of Pergamum. It was the gateway to Pergamum and served as a military outpost to delay an enemy attack from the east and give Pergamum time to prepare for battle. Thyatira was in a valley and had no natural protection for defense. As a result it was destroyed several times and rebuilt by opposing armies. After the Romans secured this area in 133 B.C., the city enjoyed peace. The roads that brought enemy troops to fight against it, now became trade routes to make it a commercial city with great prosperity.

The problem that threatened this church came from the trade guilds (like unions), not the false religions. The city worshipped gods, but they were not a direct threat to the church. The trade guilds controlled the wealth of the city. If a person wanted to do business in the city, he needed to belong to a guild to make contacts for his business. The problem for Christians belonging to a guild was with the feasts that were connected with these guilds. The food at these feasts was offered to idols before it was eaten and it was considered a gift from their god. Drunkenness abounded at these feasts and fornication followed the feast. No serious Christian could attend these feasts and keep himself pure. But the temptation for a less committed Christian to compromise and attend these feasts for making his business prosperous was strong and a woman in the church taught these believers that it was all right for them to do it (2:20).

Thyatira was especially known for its dye of a Turkish-red color. Lydia, a seller of purple from Thyatira, was saved in Philippi under the ministry of Paul and helped him build a church in Philippi (Acts 16:11-15).

B. Christ, the Judge – 2:18, 23; cf. 1:14-15

2:18 – Christ identified Himself as the “Son of God,” the only time in Revelation that He used this title. Christ’s relationship to God as Father connects with His promise to the overcomers (2:26-27). He will

give them authority over the nations, even as His Father gave this authority to Him (Ps 2:7-9).

Christ's eyes were like a flame of fire (cf. 1:14). He is a Judge that can see into the innermost soul of a person (2:23; cf Heb. 4:12-13). There is nothing that is hid from His eyes. His judgments are perfect.

Christ's feet are like fine brass or burnished bronze (cf. 1:15). Brass is used by God to symbolize judgment in the Old Testament (i.e., the brass altar, the brass laver, the brass serpent). Christ's feet will tread down his enemies in judgment when He comes again (Isa. 63:1-6). He will judge those who oppose Him in the churches and give to everyone according to their works (2:23).

C. Praise – 2:19

2:19 – Christ knew their works. He knew about their love that was missing in the church at Ephesus (2:4). He knew about their service, which grew out of their love. He knew about their faith that was shown in their service. He knew about their endurance in trials that grew out of their faith in God.

The last works of this church were more than the first. It either produced a greater quantity of works or it produced a higher quality of works or possibly both a greater quantity and higher quality of works than at the beginning of their existence. The works of this church was continuing to grow. Its love and service along with its faith and endurance continued to increase. Christ highly praised this church for its works.

D. Sin – 2:20-21

2:20 – Christ saw with His penetrating eyes the problem of this church. It was the church's toleration of a woman like Jezebel to teach pagan religious practices to some of its members. Her prototype was Jezebel, King Ahab's wife, who introduced Baal worship into Israel (I Kgs. 16:31; 17:4; 19:2; 21:10). Her sins were characterized as "whoredoms" and "witchcrafts" (2 Kgs. 9:22). The woman in the church at Thyatira claimed to be a spokeswoman for God (a prophetess) and taught the believers that it was permissible to commit fornication and eat food offered to idols. This was a practice commonly done in the worship of false gods in their temples, a practice that was forbidden for the churches (Acts 15:28-29). The woman seems to be a member of the church, but this is not clear. Even so, she was allowed to influence some of its members with her teaching.

2:21 – Christ was merciful and gave her an opportunity to repent of her immorality (2 Pet. 3:9; Rom. 2:4), but she stubbornly refused to do so (1 Sam 15:23).

E. Threat – 2:22-23

2:22 – Since this woman refused to repent, Christ would cast her into a bed of sickness and pain in exchange for her bed of sin and pleasure, meaning He would stomp on her sin with His feet of brass. He also would judge her followers for their immorality, but He in mercy gave them time to repent.

2:23 – Christ went on to say He would kill her children (followers) with a grievous death by a pestilence (Ezk 33:27). Her children would be those who followed her teaching; they would suffer the same judgment as their mother. The believers would learn that Christ is sovereign over the churches. He searches the minds and hearts of the people in the churches with His eyes of fire; He knows all that people think, say and do (Heb 4:13). Also, He judges them with His feet of brass according to their deeds; He judges the sins of the people (18:6; 20:12-13; 22:12). People are responsible for what they do, whether they are believers (1 Cor 3:12-15; Heb 12:5-11) or unbelievers (Rev 20:11-15). Christ is the righteous Judge.

F. Charge – 2:24-25

2:24-25 – It seems from the praise that Christ gave this church that most of the believers were faithful to Him, but a minority followed this Jezebel-like woman and experienced the deep things of Satan. These church members were experiencing the seductive powers of Satan. They participated in the pagan feasts, eating food offered to idols and indulging themselves in fornication with the temple prostitutes. False teachers, like this woman, taught "believers" that they had liberty to experience what the pagans were doing in order to understand them (cf Gal 5:13; Jude 4). They could participate in the feasts to the

full extent because they were stronger and more enlightened than their weaker and poorly informed brethren. The body was separate from the spirit, so the acts of their body did not affect the condition of their spirit. They were taught that they could not sin; Christ had saved their spirit from all sin (cf 1 Jn 1:8, 10). Therefore, they felt justified in joining the pagans in their immoral feasts. They apparently looked down on the other members of the church with disdain for not joining them in the feasts. However, they were the ones that had been deceived. Instead of soaring upward to the heights of freedom with an enlightened mind, they plunged downward to the depths of bondage with a darkened mind. Instead of receiving the truth in Christ to separate from sin, they had accepted the lies of Satan to indulge in sin.

The faithful believers were promised that they would not be given any other burden than to resist the false teaching of the prophetess and the haughty taunts of her followers. They were to hold fast to their position against their ungodliness until He came to judge the prophetess and her followers. That would be a burden heavy enough for them to carry. His coming again also calls for believers to hold fast until His return at the Rapture after which He will judge unbelievers during and after the Tribulation.

G. Promises – 2:26-29

2:26 – When Christ finishes His message to the church at Thyatira, He gives a double promise to the overcomers, that is, two promises to all those who trust in Christ for salvation. Before He states the first promise, He either makes a statement or a qualification by saying it is for those who keep His works unto the end. If it is a statement, He is saying all overcomers will keep His works unto the end and will receive His promise. If it is a qualification, He is saying only those overcomers that keep His works unto the end will receive this promise. There are Scriptures to support both positions.

The first promise that Christ gave to overcomers (believers) is the authority to rule over the nations. Was this promise given with a qualification or not? When Christ spoke to the believers at Laodicea, He made no qualifications for the overcomers; they will rule and reign with Christ in His Millennial Kingdom (Rev 3:21). Also, the very concept of an overcomer is to keep the works of Christ. True believers in Thyatira would keep the works of Christ and reject the teachings of the prophetess. This would be true of overcomers in other churches as well. However, when Christ spoke to those who expected Him to set up His Kingdom when He arrived in Jerusalem, He gave them a parable that established the principle of qualification for His rewards. He told them about the nobleman (Himself), who was going away to receive his kingdom (Millennial Kingdom) and return. Before he left, he gave each of his servants (believers) the same amount of money and told them to invest it. When the nobleman returned with his kingdom, the servants were called to give an account of their investments. The nobleman rewarded his servants with cities to rule according to the earnings they made with his money. However, one servant did not invest his master's money and he lost his reward (Lk 19:11-26). Paul also wrote about a qualification for Christ's rewards. He said that Christ will judge the believers after the Rapture to reward them according to their works (2 Cor 5:10). He also said that those that have done well will be rewarded, but those that have not done well will lose their reward; however, they will not lose their salvation (1 Cor 3:11-15). So it must be concluded that all believers will reign with Christ in His Kingdom, but not all will have the same authority to rule over the nations.

2:27 – When Jesus Christ returns to earth, He will rule the nations of the world with an iron rod and smash them into shivers like the breaking of a clay pot. This authority was given to Him from His Father when He raised Him from the dead (Psalm 2:8-9; Acts 13:33). This language sounds like the judgment Christ will bring against the nations that are destroying Jerusalem (Zech 14:1-4). Christ will come with His armies from Heaven to judge these nations (Rev 19:11-14). Who will be the soldiers in His armies? Some believe it will be angels, but it does not say that in the Scriptures. However, it does say that Christ will give the overcomers in the churches the same authority over the nations that His Father gave to Him, if they have kept His works to the end (Rev 2:26-27). If this is so, these overcomers will be the soldiers that will judge the nations with Christ at the end of the Tribulation. Then they will continue to have

authority over the nations during the millennial reign of Christ so that righteousness is maintained throughout the world. Overt sin will not be tolerated and will be swiftly and justly punished (Zec 14:16-19). While the apostles will rule over the twelve tribes of Israel (Mt 19:28), the rest of the faithful church believers will rule over the cities in Gentile nations. All believers will be given some place of service to rule with Christ in His Kingdom.

CHURCH	CHRIST	PRAISE	SIN	CHARGE	THREAT	PROMISE
THYATIRA 2:18-29 False Teacher	He is the Son of God; has eyes like ta flame of fire; has feet like brass. He is the JUDGE 2:18,23; cf 14f	For her love, service, faith, and endurance; for increasing in these works 2:19	She tolerated a woman to teach believers that they could do what the heath-en do in their temples. 2:20-21	Sinning members were to repent; the others were to remain true until Christ's return 2:22,24,25	The woman and her followers would be cast into great tribulation; her followers would be killed. 2:22-23	Believers will rule the nations & receive morning star (Christ at His return before the day of the Lord) 2:26-28