

# The Letters to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, and Thyatira

by John F. Walvoord

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*The sermon explores the messages to the seven churches in Revelation, emphasizing their relevance and the need for churches to maintain their love for God.*

**Scripture:** Revelation 2:4-20

**Topics:** "Church Discipline", "Faithfulness"

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## Description

John F. Walvoord preaches about the messages to the seven churches in Revelation, highlighting the divine revelation and exhortation for the present age. The messages contain warnings against compromise, idolatry, and immorality, emphasizing the need for faithfulness and repentance. The churches are commended for their works, faith, and love, but rebuked for tolerating false teachings and sinful practices. Christ's sharp rebukes serve as a warning to all believers to remain faithful and pure in the midst of a corrupt world.

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## Transcript

### Introduction

In the second chapter of the book of Revelation the second major division of the book begins. As previously mentioned, chapter 1 seems to fulfill the command of 1:19, "Write the things which thou hast seen." Beginning in chapter 4, the material deals with "the things which shall be hereafter" (1:19). In chapters 2 and 3 the messages to the seven churches are referred to as "the things which are" (cf. 1:19). These messages, therefore, contain divine revelation and exhortation pertaining to the present age; and, having special pertinence in the present situation in the church, they constitute one of the most incisive and penetrating exhortations in the entire New Testament in relation to church doctrine and Christian living.

It is remarkable that so little attention has been paid to the importance of these two chapters. Archbishop Trench is cited by Seiss as lamenting that the Church of England omits reference to any of the material in these two chapters in portions selected for use in public services. Trench writes,

It is...to be regretted that while every chapter of every other book of the New Testament is set forth to be read in the Church, and, wherever there is daily service, is read in the Church, three times in the year, and

some, or portions of some, oftener, while even of the Apocalypse itself two chapters and portions of others have been admitted into the service, under no circumstances whatever can the second and third chapters ever be heard in the congregation.<sup>65</sup>

In the revival of interest in eschatology in the twentieth century there has been a partial remedy of the previous neglect of the book of Revelation including special attention to the messages to the seven churches. Recent studies such as *The Postman of Patmos* by C. A. Hadjiantoniou have helped to dramatize the living character of these letters in the modern church, and the attention to their contribution has been duly given by competent New Testament scholars. It remains true, however, that many casual worshipers in Christian churches today who are quite familiar with the Sermon on the Mount are not aware of the existence of these seven messages of Christ. Their incisive character and pointed denunciation of departure from biblical morality and theology have tended to keep them out of the mainstream of contemporary theological thought. Many of the evils and shortcomings which exist in the church today are a direct outgrowth of neglect of the solemn instruction given to these seven churches.

There has been some debate concerning the theological significance of these seven churches. It is obvious, as there were many churches located in the area where these churches were found, that God divinely selected seven and seven only, and did not send messages to other churches that conceivably might have been more important. Swete states that there were from five hundred to one thousand townships in the province of Asia in the first century, some of them far larger than the cities of Thyatira and Philadelphia, and undoubtedly a number of them had Christian churches.<sup>66</sup> He suggests that the answer to the problem of selection is found in the geographical location of the seven churches in the form of a gentle arch and located on a circular road connecting the most populous part of the province. The messages directed to these seven churches should therefore be considered as sent to the rest of the province and other churches as well.

The geographical order of presentation is followed, beginning at Ephesus, moving north to Smyrna, then farther north to Pergamos, then east to Thyatira, south to Sardis, east to Philadelphia, and southeast to Laodicea. However, other churches in the area were ignored, such as the church at Colossae and the churches at Magnesia (Manisa) and Tralles. It is understandable that the number of churches should be limited to seven as this is the number of completeness or universality in the Scripture, but there undoubtedly were other principles which determined the selection.

First of all, each church needed a particular message, and the spiritual state of each church corresponded precisely to the exhortation which was given. The selection of the churches was also governed by the fact that each church was in some way normative and illustrated conditions common in local churches at that time as well as throughout later history. The messages to the seven churches therefore embody admonition suitable for churches in many types of spiritual need. Along with the messages to the churches were exhortations which are personal in character constituting instruction and warning to the individual Christian. Each of the messages as given to the churches therefore ends in a personal exhortation beginning with the phrase "He that hath an ear, let him hear."

Many expositors believe that in addition to the obvious implication of these messages the seven churches represent the chronological development of church history viewed spiritually. They note that Ephesus seems to be characteristic of the Apostolic Period in general and that the progression of evil climaxing in Laodicea seems to indicate the final state of apostasy of the church. This point of view is postulated upon a providential arrangement of these churches not only in a geographical order but by divine purpose,

presenting also a progress of Christian experience corresponding to church history. As in all scriptural illustrations, however, it is obvious that every detail of the messages addressed to these particular churches is not necessarily fulfilled in succeeding periods of church history. What is claimed is that there does seem to be a remarkable progression in the messages. It would seem almost incredible that such a progression should be a pure accident, and the order of the messages to the churches seems to be divinely selected to give prophetically the main movement of church history.

Milligan is quite opposed to the idea that the seven churches represent chronological periods:

If we examine the tables of such a period drawn up by different inquirers, we shall find them so utterly divergent as to prove fatal to the principle upon which they are constructed. No one has been able to prepare a chronological scheme making even an approach to general acceptance. The history of the Church can not be portioned off into seven successive periods marked by characteristics to which those noted in the seven epistles correspond. Besides this, the whole idea rests upon that historical interpretation of the Apocalypse which is simply destructive both of the meaning and influence of the book.<sup>67</sup>

The prophetic interpretation of the messages to the seven churches, to be sure, should not be pressed beyond bounds, as it is a deduction from the content, not from the explicit statement of the passage. It is fully in keeping with the futurist point of view rather than the historic, as Milligan claims. It is not necessary to hold, as some have, that without the second and third chapters of the book of Revelation the church would be left without instruction regarding its progress in the present age. Other passages such as I Timothy 4 and 2 Peter 2-3 give information on this subject.

Much additional light, however, is given by a study of the messages to the seven churches, and the general trend indicated confirms other Scripture that, instead of progressive improvement and a trend toward righteousness and peace in the church age, it may be expected that the age will end in failure as symbolized in the church of Laodicea. This is taught expressly in passages describing the growing apostasy in the professing church culminating in the apostate Christendom of the time of the great tribulation. Simultaneous with this development in the church as a whole there will be fulfillment of the divine plan of God in calling out a true church designed to be a holy bride for the Son of God and a promised translation from the earth before the final tragic scenes of the tribulation are enacted.

Each message addressed to the seven churches of Asia has its own distinctive characteristics, but there are also many similarities. Each message begins with the expression "I know thy works." Each offers a promise, "to him that overcometh." Although there is variation in the order, each has the same concluding sentence, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches." Each of the messages begins with an introduction in which the Lord Jesus is described, but in each message the description differs in keeping with the message addressed to the church. Most of the letters to the churches contain words of warning as well as promise to those who hear and respond. In general, these messages are letters of reproof, rebuke, and reassurance.

The Letter to Ephesus: The Church Without Love (2:1-7)

2:1 Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks;

Christ the Sovereign Judge. The first letter is addressed to the angel or messenger of the church of Ephesus. The Greek word *aggelos*, which has been transliterated in the English word *angel*, is frequently used in the Bible of angels, and this seems to be its principal use as noted by Arndt and Gingrich.<sup>68</sup> However, it is often used also of men in Greek literature as a whole, and in several instances this word referred to human messengers in the Bible (Matt. 11:10; Mark 1:2; Luke 7:24, 27; 9:52). It is properly understood here as referring to human messengers to these seven churches. These messengers were probably the pastors of these churches or prophets through whom the message was to be delivered to the congregation.

The messenger of the church at Ephesus, which at that time was a large metropolitan city, was undoubtedly an important person and a leader in Christian testimony at that time. When the book of Revelation was written, Ephesus, the most prominent city in the Roman province of Asia, had already had a long history of Christian witness. Paul had ministered there for three years as recorded in Acts 19. The effectiveness of his ministry is stated in Acts 19:10: "All they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks." The preaching of the gospel had affected the worship of Diana, in whose honor the temple of Diana had been built in Ephesus, a structure considered one of the seven wonders of the world. The reduction in the sale of idols of Diana and the Christian teaching that these idols were not worthy of worship resulted in the riot recorded in Acts 19:23-41.

Demetrius, a leader among the silversmiths in Ephesus, called a meeting of his fellow craftsmen and addressed them in these words: "Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth. Moreover ye see and hear, that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods, which are made with hands: So that not only this our craft is in danger to be set at nought; but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised, and her magnificence should be destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worshippeth" (Acts 19:25-27). The resulting riot forced Paul's departure from Ephesus, but the incident is a remarkable testimony to the power and effectiveness of early Christian witness in this important city.

After Paul's ministry at Ephesus came to a close, evidence indicates that Timothy for many years led the work as superintendent of the churches in the area. There is reason to believe that the Apostle John himself, now exiled on Patmos, had succeeded Timothy as the pastor at large in Ephesus. It was to this church and to Christians living in Ephesus at the close of the first century, some thirty years after Paul, that the first of the seven messages is addressed.

Christ is introduced in the message to Ephesus as the One who "holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks." This portrayal of Christ corresponding to that given early in the first chapter of Revelation is a symbolic presentation of the fact that Christ holds the messengers of these churches in His right hand, a place of sovereign protection as well as divine authority over them. The word for "hold" (Gr., *kraton*) means "to hold authoritatively." The messengers, therefore, are held in divine protection and under divine control. Earlier, John had written of the security of the believer in the hands of an Almighty God in John 10:28-29: "And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand." The same truth is presented symbolically in this vision of Christ.

2:2-3 I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: And hast

borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted.

Commendation of doctrine and diligence. The second important fact in this vision, Christ walking in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks or lampstands (Gr., *lychnio*,n), symbolizes His presence and observation of the testimony of the churches of Asia. His message to the church is based on His knowledge of their notable and commendable works. He mentions their labor or toil, their patience or steadfastness, their abhorrence of those who were evil, and their ready detection of false teachers who claimed to be apostles but who were not. These remarkable characteristics are sorely needed in the church today where too often there is failure to serve the Lord patiently, and the tendency is to compromise both with moral and theological evil. The Ephesian church is therefore commended for abhorring that which is morally bad as well as that which is theologically in error.

In contrast to the fact that they could not bear those who were evil, he commends them for continuing to bear their proper burdens, repeating again the fact that they have patience, literally, that they "keep on having patience," which is an advance on the statement in verse 2. Likewise it is noted that their labor is motivated as work "for my name's sake" and that they have not fainted or grown weary. These remarkable characteristics establish the fact that the church had served the Lord well, and few modern churches could qualify for such commendation.

2:4-5 Nevertheless I have something against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.

Indictment for lack of devotion. In spite of these most desirable traits Christ declared that the church at Ephesus had failed in one important matter, namely, "thou hast left thy first love." In the Greek the order of the words is especially emphatic in that the object of the verb is before the verb--"thy first love thou hast left." The word for love (Gr., *agape*,n) is the deepest and most meaningful word for love found in the Greek language. Though they had not departed completely from love for God, their love no longer had the fervency, depth, or meaning it once had had in the church.

The spiritual problem of the church at Ephesus can best be seen in the perspective of the threefold nature of man's spiritual poverty. Some spiritual needs stem from lack of faith in God so that the individual either falls short of salvation itself, or, if saved, he lacks an abiding dependence on God and the promises of His Word. This constitutes a defect in the area of the intellect or in theology. The second problem of spiritual experience is in the exercise of human will. Many who have trusted in God have never yielded themselves completely to God, and as a result have not been filled with the Spirit. There is no indication that the church had seriously fallen short in either of these two spiritual areas. Their defect was a matter of heart rather than of head or will. The ardor which they once had had grown cold.

In the letter to the Ephesians, written some thirty years before in the early days of the history of this church, Paul commended them for their love for all saints. He wrote at that time, "Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers" (Eph. 1:15-16). The church seems to have fulfilled the same commendable qualities found in the apostolic church in Jerusalem. The period following Pentecost, described in Acts 2, was characterized by love and devotion for Christ Himself, a love for the Word of God, a love manifested in fellowship with the saints and in their prayer to God, and a love expressed in commendation to Timothy of "all them also that love his appearing" (2 Tim. 4:8).

The church at Ephesus was now in its second generation of Christians, those who had come into the church in the thirty years since Paul had ministered in their midst. Though they continued to labor faithfully as those who had preceded them, the love of God which characterized the first generation was missing. This cooling of heart which had overtaken them in relationship to God was a dangerous forerunner of spiritual apathy which later was to erase all Christian testimony in this important center of Christian influence. Thus it has ever been in the history of the church: first a cooling of spiritual love, then the love of God replaced by a love for the things of the world, with resulting compromise and spiritual corruption. This is followed by departure from the faith and loss of effective spiritual testimony.

In other portions of Scripture the danger of fading love for God is described. In Paul's first letter to Timothy he wrote, "For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows" (1 Tim. 6:10). In similar vein the Apostle John wrote in one epistle, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1 John 2:15). The danger of substituting love for idols for love for God is stated in the closing verse of the same epistle: "Little children, keep yourselves from idols" (1 John 5:21). Even loved ones can stand between the child of God and his love for his heavenly Father. Christ Himself said, "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me" (Matt. 10:37). Even the God-given institution of marriage can stand in the way of a true love for God. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "The unmarried woman careth for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit: but she that is married careth for the things of the world, how she may please her husband" (1 Cor. 7:34). Whatever the object of love, anything which hinders a true love for God may cause a Christian to lose his first love even as was true of Ephesus so long ago.

To correct the spiritual declension into which they had fallen, the Lord directs three urgent exhortations. First He commands, "Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen." To correct any departure from God the first step is to go back to the place of departure. Ephesian Christians were therefore exhorted to remember the ardor which once gripped their hearts, the causes for it, the wonder of their newfound salvation, and the joy and satisfaction that were theirs in Christ. So often spiritual defection, whether of mind or heart, comes from forgetting that which once was known. The second aspect of his exhortation is embodied in the word repent (Gr., metanoeson, meaning "to change the mind"). They were to have a different attitude toward Christ and should resume that fervent love which once they had. In keeping with these first two exhortations the final one is embodied in the words "do the first works." A true love for God is always manifested in the works which it produces. Though the Ephesian church had been faithful in many appointed tasks, these did not in themselves reflect a true love for God. They were not merely bondslaves of Jesus Christ bound by legal obligation, but they were those whose hearts had been given to the Saviour.

The Ephesian Christians were also sharply warned that if they did not heed the exhortation, they could expect sudden judgment and removal of the candlestick. As Alford comments, this is "not Christ's final coming, but His coming in special judgment is here indicated."<sup>69</sup> The meaning seems to be that He would remove the church as a testimony for Christ. This, of course, was tragically fulfilled ultimately. The church retained its vigor for several centuries and was not only the seat of Eastern bishops but also the meeting place of the third General Council which took place in a.d. 431 and was held in the Church of Saint Mary, whose ruins are still extant today. Ephesus declined as a city, however, after the fifth century, and the Turks deported its remaining inhabitants in the fourteenth century. The city, now uninhabited, is one of the

important ruins in that area, located seven miles from the sea due to accumulation of silt which has stopped up the harbor of this once important seaport.

2:6 But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate.

Commendation of hating the enemies of truth. Coupled with the exhortation to repent is the final word of approbation in verse 6 in which the Ephesian church is commended for hating the deeds of the Nicolaitans. Much scholarly speculation has arisen concerning the precise nature of this group's error.<sup>70</sup> The Nicolaitans apparently were a sect, and some have interpreted their name as meaning "conquering of the people" from nikao,, meaning "to conquer" and laos, meaning "the people." This view considers the Nicolaitans as the forerunners of the clerical hierarchy superimposed upon the laity and robbing them of spiritual freedom. Others have considered them as a licentious sect advocating complete freedom in Christian conduct including participation in heathen feasts and free love. Alford states, "The prevailing opinion among the fathers was, that they were a sect founded by Nicolaus the proselyte of Antioch, one of the seven deacons."<sup>71</sup> Alford believes that this is substantially correct, and that it is supported by the statement "which I also hate" (v. 6) concerning which Alford states, "This strong expression in the mouth of our Lord unquestionably points at deeds of abomination and impurity: cf. Isa. 61:8; Jer. 44:4; Amos 5:21; Zech. 8:17."<sup>72</sup> That which was hated by the Ephesians was embraced by the church at Pergamos according to Revelation 2:15. Whatever the precise nature of this sect, it is noteworthy that a true love for God involves a fervent hate of that which counterfeits and distorts the purity of biblical truth. David raised the same question when he wrote, "Do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate thee? and am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee? I hate them with perfect hatred: I count them mine enemies" (Ps. 139:21-22). Though the Christian, like God, should love the world in the sense of desiring to extend to it the benefits of salvation, like David he should hate those who are the enemies of God.

2:7 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.

The invitation and promise. The letter to the Ephesians, like the other six letters, closes with an invitation and a promise: "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches." Though the message is directed to the church as such through its pastor, the individual is urged to respond to the exhortation and warning. So it is ever that God speaks to the ones who will hear.

Similarly to the closing messages to other churches, the message to the church at Ephesus contains a promise given to those who overcome: "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God." The promise here mentioned for overcomers is not a message to a special group of Christians distinguished by their spirituality and power in contrast to genuine Christians who lack these qualities; it is rather a general description of that which is normal, to be expected among those who are true followers of the Lord. The Apostle John in his first epistle asks, "Who is he that overcometh the world?" (1 John 5:5). He answers the question, "He that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God." In other words, those in the Ephesian church who were genuine Christians and by this token had overcome the unbelief and sin of the world are promised the right to the tree of life which is in the midst of the paradise of God.

This tree, first mentioned in the Garden of Eden in Genesis 3:22, is later found in the midst of the street of the new Jerusalem, where it bears its fruit for the abundant health and life of the nation (Rev. 22:2). It is especially appropriate that those who hate the evil deeds of the world and the idolatrous wicked worship

are given that spiritual recompense of abiding in the abundant life which is in Christ in the eternity to come. The gracious nature of the promise is designed to restore and rekindle that love of Christ known in the early fervent days of the church and to be realized without diminishing in the eternity to come.

#### The Letter to Smyrna: The Church in Suffering (2:8-11)

The church of Smyrna was singled out by our Lord for the second of the seven letters. If one traveled from Ephesus to Smyrna, he would cover a distance of about thirty-five miles to the north, entering Smyrna by what was called the "Ephesian Gate." Smyrna was a wealthy city, second only to Ephesus in the entire area and, like Ephesus, a seaport. Unlike Ephesus, which today is uninhabited, Smyrna is still a large city and contains a Christian church. Unger states,

Anciently it was one of the finest cities of Asia, and was called "The lovely--the crown of Ionia--the ornament of Asia." It is now the chief city of Anatolia, with a mixed population of 200,000 people, one-third of whom are Christians.<sup>73</sup>

In this large and flourishing commercial center was the little church to which this message was sent. Smyrna is mentioned only here in Scripture, but from other literature it is evident that this city was noted for its wickedness and opposition to the Christian gospel in the first century.

2:8 And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive;

Christ the Eternal One. To this church our Lord is introduced as the One who is "the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive." In describing Himself as "the first and the last" Christ is relating Himself to time and eternity. He is the eternal God who has always existed in the past and who will always exist in the future. In keeping with this attribute He is also portrayed as the One who was dead, literally, the One "who became dead," referring to His death on the cross. He is also the One who is alive, literally, "who lives," referring to His resurrection as the eternal and resurrected One. He is not only the eternal One in relation to time but the resurrected One in relation to life. In His person He therefore is presented as the eternal One, a description which is prominent in the first chapter in the Revelation as given to John on the Isle of Patmos. The church at Smyrna is told that the One who was eternal became incarnate and died, a reminder that even the eternal Son of God willingly became subject to the rejection and persecution of man. Like Christ, the church at Smyrna should anticipate ultimate victory. Even as the grave could not hold Christ, and He is now described as the One who "lives," symbolizing His triumph over death, rejection, and mistrial, so they too could anticipate their ultimate victory.

These features of the person and work of Christ are especially adapted to constitute words of encouragement to the church at Smyrna which was undergoing great trial and affliction. The word Smyrna itself means "myrrh," a sweet perfume used in embalming dead bodies, and included in the holy anointing oil used in the Tabernacle worship in the Old Testament (Exodus 30:23). It was also a common perfume and is mentioned as used by the bridegroom in the Song of Solomon 3:6 where the question is asked, "Who is this that cometh out of the wilderness like pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all powders of the merchants?" Likewise in Psalm 45:8, the heavenly Bridegroom is described as using myrrh as perfume: "All thy garments smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia, out of the ivory palaces, whereby they have made thee glad." The fragrance of Christ as the bridegroom is thus represented typically by the myrrh.

2:9 I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan.

Commendation of faithfulness in trial. In the best manuscripts the expression "thy works" is omitted, making the statement much more direct: "I know thy tribulation, and poverty." In referring to their tribulation He assures them that He knows of their oppression by their enemies and its resulting affliction. The word used for "poverty" (Gr., *ptochian*) is the word for abject poverty. They were not just poor (Gr., *penia*). It may be that they were drawn from a poor class of people, but it is more probable that their extreme poverty is explained by the fact that they had been robbed of their goods in the process of their persecution and affliction. He quickly reminds them, however, "But thou art rich." In the same spirit James refers to "the poor of this world rich in faith" (James 2:5) using the same Greek words for poverty and riches. Paul used the verb forms of the same words in his statement "as poor, yet making many rich" (2 Cor. 6:10).

It would seem that their persecutors were not only pagans, who naturally would be offended by the peculiarities of the Christian faith, but also hostile Jews and Satan himself. Recognition of the opposition of Jews is made in verse 9 where Christ said, "I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan." As Alford observes,

These slanderers were in all probability actually Jews by birth, but not (see Rom. 2:28; Matt. 3:9; John 8:33; 2 Cor. 11:22; Phil. 3:4 ff.) in spiritual reality; the same who everywhere, in St. Paul's time and afterwards, were the most active enemies of the Christians.<sup>74</sup>

Alford confirms this interpretation by the account of the martyrdom of Polycarp in which the Jews were active.<sup>75</sup> Thus it has always been in the church; false religion has been most zealous in opposing that which is true. The Smyrna Christians found few friends in the hostile world around them.

2:10-11 Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.

The exhortation and promise. Their present persecution, however, was only the forerunner of that which was to come. Christ predicted that the devil would cast some of them into prison, doing all in his power to stamp out this testimony in the midst of his domain. Christ indicated that they would be cast into prison and would be tried and would have tribulation ten days. He exhorted them, nevertheless, "Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer... be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."

Scholars have pondered the allusion to the ten days. If the church at Smyrna is taken as representative of the church in persecution in the second or third century, ten days may be representative of this period. W. A. Spurgeon, assuming that the seven churches correspond to church history as a whole, states,

Is it not obvious that the "ten days" of persecution during which Satan would cast some of this Church into prison, refers to one of the seven church epochs to which the seven churches correspond? Then the "ten days" of persecution must refer to the ten persecutions of secular history during which great numbers of Christians were imprisoned and slain. Over these martyrs the second death will have no power.<sup>76</sup>

Some have found ten specific periods of persecution in these centuries. Walter Scott, who does not hold this view, quotes White in itemizing ten pagan persecutions as follows:

The first under Nero, a.d. 54; the second under Domitian, a.d. 81; the third under Trajan a.d. 98; the fourth under Adrian [Hadrian], a.d. 117; the fifth under Septimius Severus, a.d. 193; the sixth under Maximin, a.d. 235; the seventh under Decius, a.d. 249; the eighth under Valerian, a.d. 254; the ninth under Aurelian, a.d. 270; the tenth under Diocletian, a.d. 284.77

The date mentioned is the beginning of the reign of each emperor, not necessarily the beginning of the persecution. Some have applied the "ten days" to the ten years of persecution under Diocletian.

Most commentators such as Swete and Walter Scott take the reference to ten days as a symbolic representation of a specific period of time. Walter Scott writes for instance,

The expression "ten days" signifies a limited period, a brief time inconsistent with the length and period of pagan persecutions covering 250 years. The following reference to "ten days" will confirm the meaning of the term as implying a brief and limited time: Genesis 24:55; Nehemiah 5:18; Daniel 1:12; Acts 25:6; Jeremiah 42:7, etc.78

Likewise Alford states, "The expression is probably used to signify a short and limited time."<sup>79</sup> Alford cites scriptural support in the following references: Genesis 24:55; Numbers 11:19; Daniel 1:12; see also Numbers 14:22; 1 Samuel 1:8; Job 19:3; Acts 25:6.<sup>80</sup> It is clear in any case that the church at Smyrna could expect further persecution including imprisonment for some of their number.

The problem of human suffering raised in the message to the church at Smyrna has occupied the minds of men through the centuries. For those of the Christian faith it is not difficult to understand why the ungodly should suffer. The question remaining, however, is why the godly should suffer as in the case of the Smyrna church. The answer to this question is largely bound up in the doctrine of the sovereignty of God. The will of God, however, is holy, just, and good. An explanation is given in Scripture for varied aspects of Christian suffering. In some cases, suffering in the life of a child of God may be disciplinary as indicated in God's dealings with the church at Corinth (1 Cor. 11:30-32; cf. Heb. 12:3-13). In other cases it may be preventative as illustrated in Paul's thorn in the flesh (2 Cor. 12:7). Paul was kept from exulting above measure in the divine revelation given to him through the humiliation of his thorn in the flesh.

Suffering is also represented in Scripture as teaching the child of God what could otherwise remain unlearned. Even Christ is said to have "learned... obedience by the things which he suffered" (Heb. 5:8), and for Christians in general the experience of suffering is educative. Paul writes in Romans 5:3-5, "And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us."

Still a further reason for suffering is found in the fact that Christians through suffering can often bear a better testimony for Christ. This was true of Paul of whom it was said in Acts 9:16, "For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake." The experience of the church at Smyrna, therefore, though undesired by them, was undoubtedly designed by an infinitely wise and loving God for their good as well as for the better testimony of the gospel.

To this suffering church Christ addresses two exhortations which are His watchword to all in similar circumstances. First, in 2:10 He writes them, "Fear none of those things," which literally translated is "Stop being afraid." They had nothing really to fear in this persecution because it could not rob them of their priceless eternal blessings in Christ. In any case they were in the hands of God. Whatever was permitted was by His wise design. Second, Christ exhorts them, "Be thou faithful unto death," which translated literally is "Become faithful even unto death." Up to this time apparently none of their number had died. They were exhorted to be faithful to the Lord when the test came even if it resulted in their death. Though their own lives might be sacrificed, their real riches were as far removed from this world as the heavens are above the earth. Being faithful unto death, they would be all the more sure that they would receive the crown of life. This is not to be understood as a crown or a reward attending eternal life, but rather that their crown would be life eternal itself. These words of encouragement and exhortation no doubt strengthened John himself as he was enduring the rigors of exile on a bleak island in his aged condition.

The persecutions and trials of the church at Smyrna were to be continued, as witnessed not only by the prophecy recorded here but by secular history. According to Ignatius, not long after the book of Revelation was written, Polycarp, the famous early church father, assumed the office of bishop in the church in Smyrna. It may be that he was already pastor of this church.<sup>81</sup> Here he was a minister for many years, finally climaxing his testimony by dying a martyr's death. When asked by his heathen judges to recant his Christian faith, he replied, "Four score and six years have I served the Lord, and He never wronged me: How then can I blaspheme my King and Savior?"<sup>82</sup> The faithfulness of Polycarp to the end seems to have characterized this church in Smyrna in its entire testimony and resulted in this church's continuous faithful witness for God after many others of the early churches had long lost their testimony.

The crown of life is apparently the crown of eternal life. The glories of life eternal stand in contrast to the trials of martyrdom and erase the dark shadows of persecution and death. The crown of life may be contrasted to the other crowns promised the child of God: the crown of righteousness for a godly life (2 Tim. 4:8), the crown of glory for faithful shepherds (1 Peter 5:4), the crown of gold, the evidence of our redemption (Rev. 4:4), the crown of rejoicing (1 Thess. 2:19), believers in heaven won by Paul, and the incorruptible crown (1 Cor. 9:25) for self-control in the race of life. The crown follows the cross. Some would limit the crown of life to martyrs, however, as a crown of abundant blessing--a crown of "royal environment," a "symbol of victory," and a "crown of joy."<sup>83</sup>

In concluding the message to the church at Smyrna, the promise is given, "He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death." The world in its rejection of the Christian message can inflict martyrdom and terminate life in this world, but those who are faithful in their opportunity to receive Christ in this life are promised that they will not be overcome with the second death, the sad lot of those who depart this life without faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. The rich reward of those who are faithful unto death was also the expectation of the Apostle Paul who wrote as he was facing imminent martyrdom, "For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing" (2 Tim. 4:6-8).

Just as the church at Ephesus in large measure is representative of the spiritual state of the church of Jesus Christ in the world at the close of the first century, the fruit of apostolic ministry and faithful labor, so the trials of the church in Smyrna symbolize the persecution and trials the early church endured until the time of Constantine in the beginning of the fourth century. Though beset by many foes and without the

power of wealth which characterized the later church, these years witnessed to the purity and fidelity of those who represented Christ.

It is noteworthy that the word of Christ to the church of Smyrna contains no word of rebuke. The very trials that afflicted them assured, them of deliverance from any lack of fervency for the Lord and kept them from any impurity or compromise with evil. Such is the recompense for those who endure trial for Christ in this age. The purifying fires of affliction caused the lamp of testimony to burn all the more brilliantly. The length of their trial, described here as being ten days, whether interpreted literally or not, is short in comparison with the eternal blessings which would be theirs when their days of trial were over. They could be comforted by the fact that the sufferings of this present time do not continue forever, and the blessings that are ours in Christ through His salvation and precious promises will go on through eternity. The second death with its reference to the judgment at the great white throne (Rev. 20:11-15) was not to be their lot, but they were assured eternal blessings in the presence of the Lord.

The Letter to Pergamos: The Church in Compromise (2:12-17)

2:12 And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write; These saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges;

Christ the judge of compromise. To the church at Pergamos, or Pergamum, one of the most prominent cities of Asia, the third message of Christ was directed. Located in the western part of Asia Minor north of Smyrna and about twenty miles from the Mediterranean Sea, it was a wealthy city with many temples devoted to idol worship and full of statues, altars, and sacred groves. It was an important religious center where the pagan cults of Athena, Asclepius, Dionysus, and Zeus were prominent. This city was the official residence of the Attalic princes. A university was also located there. Among its famous treasures was a large library of two hundred thousand volumes, later sent to Egypt as a gift from Anthony to Cleopatra. One of the products for which this city was famous was paper or parchment, which seems to have originated here, the paper itself being called pergamena. One of the prominent buildings was the magnificent temple of Esculapius (also spelled Asklepios), a pagan god whose idol was in the form of a serpent. Alford observes that some, such as Grotius and Wetstein, interpret the expression "Satan's seat" (v. 13) as referring to this temple.<sup>84</sup> As Alford points out, however, the expression is "Satan's throne" not "the serpent's throne."<sup>85</sup> Alford prefers to leave the expression an undefined allusion to satanic power. Others identify it with the great altar of Zeus that once stood in the city and now may be seen in East Berlin. Although the glory of the ancient city has long since vanished, a small village named Bergama is located below the ruins of the old city. A nominal Christian testimony has continued in the town to modern times.

In this atmosphere completely adverse to Christian testimony was situated the little church to which Christ addressed this letter. As in the messages to the other churches, Christ is introduced in special character: here as the One who "hath the sharp sword with two edges," a description given to Him earlier, in 1:16. Here there is added emphasis by the repeated use of the article before the word sword and before each adjective. Christ is described as having the sword, the two-edged one, the sharp one. The sword mentioned is a long spearlike sword, apparently referring to the double-edged character of the Word of God. Reference is made to this spearlike sword seven times in the Bible (Luke 2:35; Rev. 1:16; 2:12,16; 6:8; 19:15, 21). The last two references in Revelation 19, where it speaks of the sword proceeding from the mouth of Christ in keeping with the introductory description in 1:16, seem to make plain that the sword here refers to the Word of God. Its representation as a double-edged sword indicates on the one hand the

sword as the Word of God which separates the ones who are the vessels of grace from condemnation with the world, and which by its promises and message of salvation cuts loose the chains of sin and condemnation which bind the helpless sinner. On the other hand, the same Word of God is the means of condemnation and rejection for those who refuse the message of grace. The Word of God is at once the instrument of salvation and the instrument of death. This twofold character is especially pertinent to the church at Pergamos, which needed to be reminded of the distinct position of those who are true Christians as opposed to those who reject the gospel.

2:13 I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth.

Commendation for holding fast. In verse 13 Christ extends a word of commendation to the church in Pergamos. He first notes the fact that they were dwelling "where Satan's seat is." In the best manuscripts the expression "thy works" is omitted, which gives added emphasis to the fact that "Satan's seat" is the place of their dwelling. The mention of Satan's seat or throne, referred to again at the end of the verse in the expression "where Satan dwelleth," is a reference to satanic power in the evil religious character of the city of Pergamos manifested in persecution of Christians and perhaps epitomized in the worship of Esculapius, the serpent god.

Christ notes that in spite of their evil environment the Pergamos Christians have held fast to His name and have not denied the faith. The reference to "my name" seems to embody a personal loyalty and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ with all that this represented; in addition to this they have not denied the body of Christian truth which accompanies faith in Christ, to which He refers in the expression "my faith." Divine judgment takes into consideration the forces of evil arrayed against the Christian. To those who are found faithful in such circumstances commendation is all the more generous. The faithfulness of the church at Pergamos is a challenge to Christians today to stand true when engulfed by the evil of this present world, the apostasy within the ranks of religion, and the temptation to compromise their stand for the truth.

As a symbol of the faithfulness of these saints in Pergamos, one of the early martyrs is here named as "Antipas," who is declared to be "my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth." There has been speculation as to the character of this person, but there is no certain word concerning the nature of his martyrdom. His name means "against all" which perhaps symbolizes the fact that he may have stood alone against the forces of evil and was faithful even unto death. The church at Pergamos as a whole was commended for standing unwaveringly for Christ even though one of their members had paid the supreme price.

2:14-15 But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which thing I hate.

Rebuke for compromise. In spite of these many tokens of faithfulness in a time of temptation and trial, the Lord indicated that all was not well with the church at Pergamos. Two blots on their record labeled them as the compromising church. According to verses 14 and 15 they held the doctrine of Balaam and the doctrine of the Nicolaitans.

The reference to Balaam is an allusion to the experience of Balaam recorded in Numbers 22-25 when he was hired by the kings of the Midianites and the Moabites to curse the children of Israel. The sad record of the prophet, who went along with this plan as far as he was able but without being successful in cursing Israel, is given a large place in the book of Numbers. According to Numbers 31, Moses was angry with the children of Israel for not exterminating the women of the Midianites. Here we learn for the first time that the prophet Balaam had advised King Balak to corrupt Israel by tempting them to sin through intermarriage with their women and the resulting inducement to worship idols.

Numbers 31:15-16 records that Moses said to the children of Israel, "Have ye saved all the women alive? Behold, these caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to commit trespass against the Lord in the matter of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of the Lord." The doctrine of Balaam therefore was the teaching that the people of God should intermarry with the heathen and compromise in the matter of idolatrous worship. This is in contrast to "the way of Balaam," that is, selling his prophetic gift for money (2 Peter 2:15), and "the error of Balaam," his assumption that God would curse Israel (Jude 11).

Undoubtedly intermarriage with the heathen and spiritual compromise were real issues in Pergamos where civic life and religious life were so entwined. It would be most difficult for Christians in this city to have any kind of social contact with the outside world without becoming involved with the worship of idols or in the matter of intermarriage with non-Christians. Practically all meat was offered to idols before it was consumed, and it was difficult for Christians to accept a social engagement or even to buy meat in the market place without in some sense compromising in respect to the meat offered to idols.

Intermarriage with the heathen was also a real problem. Social relations with the heathen world would lead in some instances to partaking of the heathen feasts which in turn led to heathen immorality which was a part of the idolatrous worship. Apparently there were some in the Pergamos church who held that Christians had liberty in this matter. Christ's absolute condemnation of the doctrine of Balaam as it related to the church at Pergamos is a clear testimony to the fact that Christians must at all costs remain pure and separate from defilement with the world and its religion and moral standards. In a similar way they were rebuked for holding the doctrine of the Nicolaitans. That for which the Ephesian church was commended as hating now becomes embraced by some in the church of Pergamos. Nicolaitanism seems to represent moral departure (see discussion at 2:6).

The expression "which things I hate" is not found in the best manuscripts in verse 15, but it does occur in the original reference to this doctrine (2:6). What God hates the Christian ought to hate as well. The modern tendency to blur distinctions of moral and theological character and to manifest unconcern in those areas had its counterpart in the early church of Pergamos. The word of Christ to this church on this point constitutes a stern warning to modern Christians to examine their morality and faith and to demand freedom to follow the Word of God with the guidance of the Holy Spirit where this conflicts with the standards of men.

The parallel in the history of the church to the temptation and failure foreshadowed at Pergamos is all too evident to students of church history. With the so-called conversion of Constantine the Emperor, the time of persecution which the church had previously endured was replaced by a period in which the church was favored by the government. The edicts of persecution which had characterized the previous administration were repealed and Christians were allowed to worship according to the dictates of their conscience. Near the end of the fourth century, Theodosius actually proscribed paganism.

Under these circumstances it soon became popular to be a Christian, and the conscience of the church was quickly blurred. It became increasingly difficult to maintain a clear distinction between the church and the world and to preserve the purity of biblical doctrine. Though some benefit was secured by the successful defense of biblical truth by the Council of Nicea in a.d. 325 as opposed to the defection from the faith by Arius and his followers, the history of the three centuries which followed is a record of increasing corruption of the church, departure from biblical doctrine, and an attempt to combine Christian theology with pagan philosophy.

As a result the church soon lost its hope of the early return of Christ, and biblical simplicity was replaced by a complicated church organization which substituted human creeds and worship of Mary, the mother of our Lord, for true biblical doctrine. The church committed the same sin of which Israel was guilty in the Old Testament, namely, the worship of idols and union with the heathen world. The solemn warning of Christ given to the church at Ephesus was forgotten.

2:16 Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

Warning to repent. In this abrupt command, Christ issued a sharp word to the church at Pergamos and their modern counterparts: "Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth." Even though many in the church at Pergamos had been faithful and one of their number had died as a martyr to the faith, it was nevertheless true that the evil character of those things which were invading the church was so serious in the mind of Christ that it involved fighting against them with the sword of His mouth. There is no alternative to continued impurity and compromise with the truth except that of divine judgment. The apostasy which is seen in its early stage in the church at Pergamos has its culmination in the future apostate church in Revelation 17 which is ultimately brought into divine judgment by Christ the Head of the church.

2:17 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.

Invitation and promise. As in His messages to the other churches, Christ gives a promise and an invitation to individuals. "He that hath an ear" is invited to listen. To him is given the threefold promise of verse 17, contained in this revelation. First of all, the believer is assured that he will have the benefit of eating of the hidden manna. Just as Israel received manna from heaven as its food in the wilderness replacing the onions and garlic of Egypt, so for the true believer in the Lord Jesus there is the hidden Manna, that bread from heaven which the world does not know or see which is the present spiritual food of the saints as well as a part of their future heritage. This seems to refer to the benefits of fellowship with Christ and the spiritual strength that is afforded by that experience.

In addition to the hidden manna, those who overcome by faith are promised a white stone, possibly a brilliant diamond. In courts of law being given a white stone is thought to represent acquittal in contrast to a black stone which would indicate condemnation. Hadjiantoniou suggests several other representations such as happiness, or a symbol of friendship, or a passport to important social events.<sup>86</sup> Alford in an extended discussion, after listing many divergent views, supports the position of Bengel along with Hengstenberg and Duesterdieck "that the figure is derived from the practice of using small stones inscribed with writing, for various purposes, and that, further than this, the imagery belongs to the occasion itself only."<sup>87</sup> Alford believes that the real value of the stone is the inscription on it rather than the stone's

intrinsic worth. The stone's value rests in the new name of the recipient which is his title to eternal glory.<sup>88</sup>

The giving of the white stone to the believer here, then, is the indication that he has been accepted or favored by Christ, a wonderful assurance especially for those who have been rejected by the wicked world and are the objects of its persecution. In addition to receiving the stone, a new name written on the stone is promised them, the name described as one "which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it."

In the Old Testament the high priest had the names of the twelve tribes of Israel inscribed upon the stones carried upon his breast, symbolic of the fact that whenever he appeared before God he was a mediator representing the entire twelve tribes of Israel. Here is a name that belongs to the individual. Some consider it to be that of Jehovah, the unspoken name of God in the Old Testament. Others have regarded it as a personal name indicating their own enrollment in heaven. Whatever its character, the name symbolizes the personal heritage of the glories that are beyond this world and the assurance of eternal salvation. Christians in this modern day as well as Christians in the church at Pergamos are reminded by this Scripture that it is God's purpose to separate them from all evil and compromise and to have them as His peculiar inheritance throughout eternity. However difficult their lot in this life, they are assured infinite blessing in the life to come.

The Letter to Thyatira: The Church Tolerating Apostasy (2:18-29)

2:18 And unto the angel of the church in Thyatira write; These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass.

Christ the Holy One. The fourth message of Christ was addressed to the angel of the church in Thyatira, a small thriving town located about forty miles southeast of Pergamos, The city had been established as a Macedonian colony by Alexander the Great after the destruction of the Persian empire. Located in a rich agricultural area, Thyatira was famous for the manufacture of purple dye, and numerous references are found in secular literature of the period to the trade guilds which manufactured cloth.<sup>89</sup> It is remarkable that Christ should single out a very small church in a relatively obscure city for such an important letter. However, the message reaches far beyond the immediate circumstances in the church at Thyatira. One other mention of Thyatira is found in Acts 16:14-15 where the conversion of Lydia is recorded in these words: "And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul."

As there is no record in Scripture of any evangelistic effort in the city of Thyatira, it may be that the gospel was first brought to Thyatira through the instrumentality of Lydia. Her role of a seller of purple indicates that she was a representative of the thriving trade in purple cloth originating in Thyatira. Though Lydia was probably already deceased, Christ directed the longest of the seven letters to this small Christian assembly which may have been the fruit of her witness. All was not well in Thyatira, and to this little church is addressed one of the most severe of the seven epistles.

Christ is introduced in verse 18 as "the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass." In 1:14-15 a similar description is given where Christ is pictured as the righteous Judge who, knowing all things, can ferret out every evil. His sovereign judgment deals with all who fail to measure up to His perfect righteousness. The chief point of distinction in this description of Christ is that He is named the Son of God in contrast to the designation in chapter 1 where He is called the Son of Man. His title here is in keeping with the character of the judgment pronounced upon the church. Their diversion

from the true worship of Jesus Christ the Son of God was so serious that it called for a reiteration of His deity. The description of His eyes as a flame of fire speaks of burning indignation and purifying judgment. In a similar way His feet are declared to be like fine brass (Gr., chalkolibano,,). This word, found only here in the Bible, has puzzled scholars. It seems to represent an alloy of precious metal such as gold, silver, brass, or copper. Its exact character is not known, but there is general agreement with the conclusion of Swete that it is "the name of a mixed metal of great brilliance."<sup>90</sup> The point in mentioning it here is in reference not to its quality as metal, but to its brilliant appearance enhancing the revelation of Christ as a glorious judge.

2:19 I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last to be more than the first.

Commendation of works, faith, and love. In verse 19 Christ commends the church at Thyatira in a remarkable way, considering the severe condemnation, which may be translated freely as follows: "I know your works and the love and the faith and the service and your patience and your last works being more than the first." In the commendations of the church at Smyrna and at Pergamos the expression "thy works" is not in the best manuscripts, which emphasizes the fact that the principal point of commendation in Smyrna was their faithful suffering and in Pergamos the place in which they were giving their testimony. In Thyatira, however, works are mentioned, because their works were prominent, and of these the omniscient Christ was fully aware.

It is remarkable that the church was commended first for its charity, or love, especially when none of the three preceding churches was commended for this quality. In addition, mention is made of their service, their faith, and their patience, and of the fact that their last works were greater than the former works, in contrast, for instance, to the case of the Ephesian church. In spite of these most commendable features, the church at Thyatira was guilty of terrible sin; and with this fact Christ deals beginning in verse 20.

2:20-23 Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols. And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not. Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds. And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and

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