

A Commentary on Revelation 2

(Based on Sermon Notes – NKJV)

The Second Section of Revelation: “The Things Which Are”

Revelation chapter 2 begins the second major division of the book according to the divine outline given in:

Revelation 1:19 (NKJV)

“Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this.”

- *The things which you have seen* — the vision of the glorified Christ (Revelation 1)
- *The things which are* — the Church Age (Revelation 2–3)
- *The things which will take place after this* — future events (Revelation 4–22)

We are still living in this second section. These letters therefore speak:

1. To seven literal first-century churches
2. To the church in every age
3. To individual believers
4. Prophetically of the panorama of church history

Each letter follows a divine pattern — a sevenfold structure — revealing Christ’s perfect knowledge, His evaluation, His call to repentance, and His promise to overcomers.

The Letter to Ephesus — The Loveless Church

Revelation 2:1–7

The City and the Church

Ephesus was:

- The provincial capital of Asia
- A major port city
- The center of Artemis worship
- A stronghold of occult practice

Yet the gospel produced revival there. The church had been:

- Founded by Paul

- Strengthened by Priscilla and Aquila
- Taught by Apollos
- Pastored by Timothy
- Later associated with John

This was a mature church — nearly forty years old — now in its third generation.

Christ's Self-Revelation

Revelation 2:1 (NKJV)

“These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands”

Christ is:

- The One who holds the messengers (authority and protection)
- The High Priest who walks among the churches
- The One who trims the lamps and supplies the oil — the Holy Spirit

He is present, observant, and active.

Commendation

Revelation 2:2–3 (NKJV)

“I know your works, your labor, your patience... you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not...”

They were:

- Doctrinally sound
- Morally discerning
- Patient and persevering
- Faithful in labor

They obeyed Paul's warning in Acts 20.

They were willing to judge sin inside the church according to:

1 Corinthians 5:12–13 (NKJV)

“Do you not judge those who are inside? ... Put away from yourselves the evil person.”

The Rebuke — The Heart of the Letter

Revelation 2:4 (NKJV)

“Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love.”

Not lost — **left**.

They had:

- Orthodoxy without intimacy
- Service without devotion
- Ministry without love

This is the tragedy of activity replacing relationship.

The Remedy

Revelation 2:5 (NKJV)

“Remember... repent... and do the first works...”

Return to:

- The place of devotion
- The motive of love
- The priority of sitting at His feet

Ministry must flow from intimacy.

The Promise

Revelation 2:7 (NKJV)

“To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life...”

The tree lost in Genesis is restored in Christ.

Love for Christ leads to eternal life in His presence.

The Letter to Smyrna — The Persecuted Church

Revelation 2:8–11

Smyrna was:

- A beautiful and wealthy city
- A center of emperor worship
- A place where Christians were excluded from trade guilds
- A city where refusal to say “Caesar is Lord” meant poverty or death

Christ’s Self-Revelation

Revelation 2:8 (NKJV)

“These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life”

To a suffering church facing death:

- He is the eternal One
- He is the risen One

They may die — but death is defeated.

Their Condition

Revelation 2:9 (NKJV)

“I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich)”

They were materially poor but spiritually rich.

The Synagogue of Satan

This refers not to ethnicity but to **hostile religious opposition** — hearts aligned against Christ, just as Jesus said in:

John 8:44 (NKJV)

“You are of your father the devil...”

The issue is always the heart.

The Command

Revelation 2:10 (NKJV)

“Do not fear... Be faithful until death...”

Suffering is:

- Limited

- A test
- Temporary

Faithfulness is eternal.

The Promise

Revelation 2:11 (NKJV)

“He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.”

Martyrs may face the first death — never the second.

Polycarp becomes the living illustration of this promise.

The Letter to Pergamos — The Compromising Church

Revelation 2:12–17

Pergamos was:

- The political capital
- A center of emperor worship
- A center of pagan temples
- Home to the altar of Zeus
- The seat of the Asklepios serpent cult

A place Jesus calls:

“Where Satan’s throne is.”

Christ’s Self-Revelation

Revelation 2:12 (NKJV)

“These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword”

The Word of God is the answer to compromise.

Commendation

They: Held fast to His name

- Did not deny the faith
- Produced martyrs like Antipas

Faithfulness existed in a dark place.

The Rebuke — The Doctrine of Balaam

Compromise through:

- Idolatry
- Sexual immorality
- Worldly accommodation

Numbers 22–25 becomes the pattern:

Satan could not curse Israel — so he corrupted them.

The same strategy works in the church today.

The Call

Revelation 2:16 (NKJV)

“Repent...”

Christ will either:

- Comfort with His Word
or
- Fight with His Word

The Promise

Revelation 2:17 (NKJV)

To the overcomer:

- Hidden manna — Christ Himself
- A white stone — acceptance and victory
- A new name — personal intimacy

The Letter to Thyatira — The Corrupt Church

Revelation 2:18–29

The smallest city — the longest letter.

A trade-guild city where:

- Economic survival required participation in idolatrous feasts
- Sexual immorality was normalized

Christ's Self-Revelation

Revelation 2:18 (NKJV)

“The Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass”

He:

- Sees everything
- Judges perfectly

Commendation

Revelation 2:19 (NKJV)

“I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience...”

They were increasing in ministry.

Externally — a model church.

The Rebuke — Jezebel

Revelation 2:20 (NKJV)

“You allow that woman Jezebel...”

The sin was **toleration**.

A false teacher inside the church:

- Promoting compromise
- Seducing believers
- Justifying sin

This echoes the historical Jezebel:

- Idolatry - Moral corruption
- Manipulation of leadership

The Judgment and Mercy

Christ gave:

Time to repent.

Judgment falls only after rejected grace.

The Faithful Remnant

Revelation 2:24–25 (NKJV)

“Hold fast what you have till I come.”

Here appears the first explicit “until I come” — a prophetic horizon.

The Promise

Revelation 2:26–28 (NKJV)

To the overcomer:

- Authority to reign with Christ
- The morning star — Christ Himself

Heaven is not merely a place — it is a Person.

The Message of Revelation 2 for Today

Each church asks us:

Ephesus — Do I love Him more than my ministry?

Smyrna — Am I faithful in suffering?

Pergamos — Am I compromising with the world?

Thyatira — Am I tolerating what Christ condemns?

The Call of the Chapter

Every letter ends the same way:

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

This is:

- A corporate call
- A personal call
- A present call

The Overcomer

The overcomer is not the perfect Christian —
it is the true believer who:

- Repents
- Endures
- Holds fast to Christ

Final Pastoral Exhortation

Revelation 2 is a heart check.

Return to your first love.

Be faithful in suffering.

Refuse compromise.

Do not tolerate sin.

Hold fast until He comes.

REVELATION CHAPTER 2 — MASTER OUTLINE

1. The Second Section of Revelation — “The Things Which Are”

- a. Chapter 2 is the next section of the book
 - i. The uniqueness of Revelation
 - ii. The blessing — Revelation 1:3
 - iii. The divine outline — Revelation 1:19

Revelation 1:19

Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this.

- b. The outline
 - i. The things which you have seen — The Glorified Christ
 - ii. The things which are — The Seven Churches / Church Age
 - iii. The things after this — Revelation 4–22
- c. We are still in the Church Age

2. The Four-Fold Application of the Seven Letters

- a. Seven literal churches of John’s day
- b. The Church of all time
- c. Personal application
- d. Prophetic panorama of Church history

Church History Timeline

30–100 A.D. — Apostolic Church (Ephesus)
100–313 A.D. — Persecuted Church (Smyrna)
313–590 A.D. — State Church (Pergamos)
590–1517 A.D. — Papal Church (Thyatira)
1517–1730 A.D. — Reformed Church (Sardis)
1730–1900 A.D. — Missionary Church (Philadelphia)
1900–Present — Apostate Church (Laodicea)

- e. God always has a remnant
- f. The last four churches still present today
- g. The order is divinely perfect — Roman postal route

3. The Heptadic Structure of Each Letter

- 1. Address to the church
- 2. Description of Jesus

3. Condition of the church
4. Verdict
5. Command
6. Exhortation to all believers
7. Promise to the overcomer

THE LETTER TO EPHESUS — The Loveless Church

Revelation 2:1–7

1. Background

- a. Provincial capital — major port city
- b. Center of Artemis worship and occult activity
- c. Founded by Paul — strengthened by Priscilla & Aquila, Apollos, Timothy, John
- d. Nearly 40 years old — third generation believers

2. Christ's Description

“He who holds the seven stars... walks in the midst of the lampstands”

- a. Authority — right hand
- b. Protection and presence
- c. High Priest tending the lamps — Leviticus 24:1–4
- d. Oil — the Holy Spirit

3. Commendation

“I know your works...”

- a. Labor, patience, perseverance
- b. Stood against evil
- c. Tested false apostles — Acts 20:28–31
- d. Biblical judgment — Matthew 7 / 1 Corinthians 5:12–13
- e. Sound doctrine — did not grow weary

4. The Rebuke

“Nevertheless... you have left your first love”

- a. Not lost — left
- b. Outwardly strong — inwardly cold
- c. Ministry without intimacy
- d. Activity without affection

- e. Love defined — self-denial for God and others
- f. Opposite of love — pride

5. The Remedy

“Remember — Repent — Do the first works”

- a. The “why” not just the “what”
- b. Mary before Martha — Luke 10:38–42
- c. Sit before serving
- d. Return to the honeymoon

6. Nicolaitans

- a. Immorality and idolatry — Irenaeus / Hippolytus
- b. Jesus hates the deeds, not the people

7. The Promise

“To him who overcomes...”

- a. Tree of life — Genesis 3:24 / Revelation 22:14
- b. Love shown through obedience — John 14:21

THE LETTER TO SMYRNA — The Persecuted Church

Revelation 2:8–11

1. Background

- a. The “Crown of Asia” — Mount Pagus
- b. Center of emperor worship
- c. Libellus — burn incense to Caesar
- d. Trade guild pressure — poverty for Christians

2. Jewish Opposition

- a. Post-70 A.D. survival mode
- b. Special Roman protection
- c. Birkat ha-Minim — expulsion of believers
- d. Slander and prosecution

3. Christ’s Description

“The First and the Last... who was dead and came to life”

- a. Overcame death
- b. Smyrna — Myrrh — embalming spice

4. Their Condition

“Tribulation and poverty — but you are rich”

Contrast: Laodicea — Revelation 3:17

5. Synagogue of Satan

- a. Heart issue — Romans 2:25–29
- b. Not ethnic — spiritual condition
- c. John 8:41–44

6. The Command

“Stop being afraid”

- a. Source of persecution — the devil
- b. A test
- c. Tribulation ten days
 - i. Literal
 - ii. Ten waves of Roman persecution (prophetic)

7. The Promise

“Crown of life — not hurt by the second death”

- a. Born once — die twice
- b. Born twice — die once
- c. Polycarp — living example of Revelation 2:10

THE LETTER TO PERGAMOS — The Compromising Church

Revelation 2:12–17

1. Background

- a. Political capital — Attalid Dynasty / Rome
- b. Massive library
- c. Zeus altar — Asklepios serpent cult
- d. Imperial cult

2. Asklepios

- a. Serpent — “Savior”
- b. Healing temple — incubation rites
- c. Rod of Asklepios
- d. Possible perversion of Numbers 21:8–9
- e. Fulfilled in Christ — John 3:14–16

3. Christ's Description

“The sharp two-edged sword”

- a. The Word — Hebrews 4:12–13
- b. The remedy for compromise

4. Commendation

- a. Held fast His name
- b. Antipas — faithful martyr
- c. Where Satan's throne is
 - i. Center of false religion
 - ii. Spiritual warfare — Ephesians 6:11–12

5. The Rebuke

Doctrine of Balaam

- a. Compromise through seduction — Numbers 22–25
- b. Idolatry and immorality
- c. 24,000 died — Numbers 25
- d. Modern application — pornography epidemic

Doctrine of Nicolaitans

- a. Justifying sin
- b. Buffet Christianity

6. The Call

“Repent — or I will fight with the sword of My mouth”

1 Peter 4:17

7. The Promise

- a. Hidden manna — Christ our provision
- b. White stone — victory and access to the banquet
- c. New name — intimate relationship

THE LETTER TO THYATIRA — The Corrupt Church

Revelation 2:18–29

1. Background

- a. Smallest city — longest letter
- b. Trade guild pressure

- c. Lydia — Acts 16:14–15
- d. Blue-collar town

2. Christ's Description

“The Son of God... eyes like fire... feet like brass”

- a. Omniscience
- b. Perfect judgment

3. Commendation

- a. Works, love, service, faith, patience
- b. Increasing works

4. The Rebuke — Toleration

“You allow that woman Jezebel”

- a. Self-appointed prophetess
- b. Seducing believers
- c. Trade guild compromise

5. Jezebel Typology — 1 Kings 21:25–26

- a. Idolatry
- b. Corruption
- c. Manipulation

6. Judgment and Mercy

- a. Time to repent
- b. Sickbed — great tribulation for followers
- c. Spiritual children judged

7. The Faithful Remnant

“You who have not known the depths of Satan”

- a. Gnostic “secret knowledge”
- b. Genesis 3 deception

8. The Command

“Hold fast till I come”

- a. Rapture implication
- b. Papal Church era (prophetic)

- c. Continual sacrifice — transubstantiation system
- d. Dark Ages corruption — Wycliffe, Hus, Tyndale

9. The Promise

- a. Authority to rule — Psalm 2
- b. The Morning Star — Revelation 22:16
- c. Relationship with Jesus

FINAL APPLICATION

The Heart Check

- a. Ephesus — Have you left your first love?
- b. Smyrna — Will you be faithful in suffering?
- c. Pergamos — Are you compromising with the world?
- d. Thyatira — Are you tolerating what God condemns?

The Call

“He who has an ear, let him hear...”

The Goal

Hold fast until He comes.