

# The Book of Revelation

## Chapter 2

### Bible Study Notes

*“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.”*

**Revelation 2:7**

This study in chapter 2 begins our look at the 7 Churches of Revelation which will be completed in our study on chapter 3.

Now in studying we must remember that the Book of Revelation is a book filled with symbols and figurative language so therefore we must understand when things are to be taken literally and when things are to be taken symbolically.

Firstly, as mentioned in our previous study on chapter 1, the number seven (7) throughout the Bible always represents totality or completeness. We see this in many different examples such as the seven trumpets, the seven last plagues, the seven feasts, the seven-fold Spirit of God, the seven-branch candle stick, the seventh son (descendant) of Adam, Enoch, was the first to be translated to Heaven without seeing death, and so on.

With this in mind, we will see that the seven Churches are no different. Yes, all the Churches were literal Churches during the time of the Apostle John, each with a message that was given to them. However, by understanding the importance of the symbolic language throughout the Book of Revelation, we will come to see from our study, that there is a much greater meaning in these letters to the seven churches.

We must remember that Jesus is the bridegroom, and He has only one Bride and that is His Church, throughout the ages, both in the Old Testament and the New Testament. **2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 11:2, Ephesians 5:25-27**. His Church is represented by all His faithful followers who have all accepted the Lamb that was slain from the foundations of the world; that sacrificial Lamb represents Jesus, **John 1:29**.

When we understand this then we will notice that the seven churches in the symbolic sense actually represent seven different periods in time of the Christian Church, commencing with the era of the Church of Ephesus or the Apostolic time period (*time of the Apostles*) and finishing with the Church of the Laodiceans or the end time Church (*the church in the last days before the Jesus' 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming*).

Remember there is a much deeper meaning than just the literal letters to these Churches which existed in the time of John, says Jesus, *“He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches.”*

With that being covered, let us now begin to take a look at the first 4 of these seven churches.

v. 1-7

### **The Message to the Church in Ephesus:**

Here we see Jesus is standing in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks, representative of the seven churches or the seven periods of church history. We see firstly that Jesus is always present with His people, His faithful followers, those Bible believing Christians who worship Him in spirit and in truth; He is “*in the midst*” of the Churches, His presence is always with them, He never slumbers nor sleeps on His people, **Psalm 121:1-2**. As the Church in Ephesus was the first one mentioned, so is it symbolic of the *first period* of the New Testament Church history, namely from the year **31AD-100AD**. This is known as the Apostolic age or the Age of the Apostles, as they were the ones who walked alongside Jesus daily and learnt from Him for 3 ½ years, and subsequently went on to spread the gospel across the entire Roman Empire at that time for the next 69 years following the ascension of Jesus.

This was the Church in its beginning stages, it was pure, full of light, and remained faithful to the teachings of Jesus and His Word; it pierced and convicted the hearts of the early believers and did not allow pagan doctrines to infiltrate the Church beliefs. It was during this time that the entire New Testament was written, and the Gospel message went out to the entire Roman Empire, *the known world at that time*.

We see in *verse 6* that the early believers during this time, hated the deeds of the Nicolaitans. The term Nicolaitans is a term used to refer to those false teachers who had started to enter into the early Church during the time of the Apostles onwards. They brought in many false teachings and even led the early Christian believers into idolatry and fornication. The term Nicolaitans in the original Greek means “*destruction of the people*” and it was these individuals, the false teachers, who looked to gain victory over the mindset of the lay people or congregation, (hence ‘*laitan*’). They believed that there was to be a separation between the laity and the leaders. They denounced the fact that we are all *brethren* as the Scripture teach, and it is from these early apostates where we got all the different non-biblical designations we see in modern Christianity today. Terms such as reverend, holy father, pope, etc. All of these terms were created by those who Christ refers to as the Nicolaitans.

Note the Apostle John tells us that the whole world is made drunk on the wine of the fornication of the end time Beast. We will cover this in more detail in a later study, however, we must understand that the powers of darkness, under the control of satan, have deceived the masses, even those in the Church, into believing doctrines that are not Biblical, and it is only by comparing everything with the Word of God, will we be able to know what truth is and what is error.

***“Come, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters, with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication.” Revelation 17:1-2***

Unfortunately, what we notice about the Church in Ephesus is that they had lost their first love and had become complacent; their first zeal for God had diminished. This could probably have been from the wide-spread persecution that was common in those days as Christians were persecuted and martyred for their faith in Jesus throughout the Roman Empire, the worst of this coming between the year 62-65 AD. History shows us that all of the Apostles except the Apostle John were killed for their faith as he died a few years after writing the Book of Revelation from old age. However, this complacency could also have come from the fact that we as people tend to get complacent when we become comfortable over time. As a result, we see that Jesus rebukes them in *verse 5* and warns them to repent lest He “*will remove thy candlestick out of his place*”.

v.8-11

### **The Message to the Church in Smyrna:**

Here we read the letter addressed to the Church in Smyrna. We should note that the original Greek word, of which the New Testament was written, for Smyrna, means 'sweet smelling or fragrant smelling'.

This was a Church which metaphorically had a pleasant and fragrant aroma of which Jesus was well pleased with; it was a very desirable Church. During this time, they endured widespread persecution, poverty, and tribulation but they remained faithful to God, of this Jesus was well pleased.

Says Jesus in **verse 9**, ***"I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich) ..."***

It was in a time of Church history, when there was widespread persecution and martyrdom, of a wider scale than that of the Apostolic era.

This period lasted from the year **100AD-313AD**, of which the **peak** of this persecution lasted from **303-313AD**, starting with the reign of Emperors Diocletian and Maximian and ending with Emperors Galerius & Constantine of the Roman Empire (*commonly called The Tetrarchy.*)

***"Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days."*** **verse 10**

Here we see that the Church was to endure major persecution and tribulation for 10 days. This, as I have covered does not represent a literal 10 days but rather 10 prophetic days, which equates to 10 literal years.

Let us prove this by comparing the Scriptures.

In the Bible, when we encounter prophecies which are to last for a certain length time, i.e., *time prophecies*, we will see that 1 prophetic day represents 1 literal year.

***"And your sons shall be shepherds in the wilderness forty years, and bear the brunt of your infidelity, until your carcasses are consumed in the wilderness. According to the number of the days in which you spied out the land, forty days, for each day you shall bear your guilt one year, namely forty years, and you shall know My rejection."*** **Numbers 14:33-34**

***"For I have laid on you the years of their iniquity, according to the number of the days, three hundred and ninety days; so, you shall bear the iniquity of the house of Israel. And when you have completed them, lie again on your right side; then you shall bear the iniquity of the house of Judah forty days. I have laid on you a day for each year."*** **Ezekiel 4:5-6**

Notice that the above verses are both time prophecies and bear in mind that there are other time prophecies in the Bible, but we will study these in later chapters. However, what I want you to understand is that Numbers and Ezekiel lay the foundation for understanding all the other time prophecies in the Bible, for example, the 1,260 days, the 42 months, the time, times & half a time, the above mentioned 10 days of persecution, the 2300 days and so forth.

God is the same yesterday, today and forevermore and He changes not, says the Prophet Malachi, so 1 prophetic day equals 1 literal year in the Old Testament, the same is also true in the New Testament; man might change because of our human nature but God changes not.

**“My covenant I will not break, nor alter the word that has gone out of My lips.” Psalm 89:34**

**“For I am the LORD, I do not change...” Malachi 3:4**

Now that we have proved the aspect of a time prophecy in Scripture, now we can understand that what Jesus said to the Church in Smyrna regarding the persecution they would have encountered for **‘10 days’**, really represented **10 literal years** and this coincides exactly with the reigns of Emperors Diocletian, Maximian, Galerius & Constantine, which to this day have been the worst era of Christian persecution in the history of the Roman Empire. This persecution under these Emperors lasted from 303AD-313AD, however, the general period of Church history represented by the Church in Smyrna lasted from **100AD-313AD**. But in His grace, Jesus has promised a crown of life to all those who would have endured the persecution even unto death in this time, **verse 10**, and to us He says the same thing; remain faithful unto Him even unto death, **James 1:12**.

v.12-17

### **The Message to the Church in Pergamos:**

Here we have the message to the church in Pergamos; Pergamos means *lifted up, high tower or elevated* in the original Greek. It was during this era of Church history which lasted from **313AD-538AD**, that compromise started to infiltrate the Church and its doctrines, and man’s way was in a sense *‘lifted up or elevated’* above the way of the Almighty. This period started during the reign of Emperor Constantine, about the time of the end of the Tetrarchy in Roman history.

It was at this time that Constantine, *who like all the other Roman Emperors before him were pagans*, began to favour Christianity and in the year 312AD he *‘converted’* to Christianity and issued a decree in the year **313AD**, that the persecution and martyrdom of the Christians throughout the Roman Empire should cease. This then led to Christians within the Roman Empire proclaiming their faith more openly and even saw them rising to prominent offices with the government over time.

Unfortunately, this also began the time of compromise within the Church as many pagans and idol worshippers (*as this was the custom throughout the Empire*) crept into the Church (**represented by Balaam/Balac/Nicolaitans**), *because Christianity was now favoured*, and with it, they brought all of their pagan practices, such as, venerating & praying to the dead, worshipping idols & statues, sacrificing food to idols, and eating it, false teachings, etc. It was also during the reign of Constantine that the many pagan statues throughout the Roman Empire were renamed with the names of the various Apostles and important Biblical figures.

In addition, and this is of major importance, Constantine was the one who on **March 7<sup>th</sup> 321 AD**, issued a decree throughout the Roman Empire, instituting that Sunday, the 1<sup>st</sup> day of the week, be the day of rest for throughout the Empire, when the Bible clearly states that God’s sanctified and Holy Day of rest for His people is the Sabbath Day. It is interesting to note that the majority of the Christian Church now keeps Sunday as the day of worship, but I can guarantee you, that they do not know how this practice came to be, and that it is not Biblical; when we go back to the early history of the Church, we can see that prior to this, the true Sabbath was kept by the early Church. In was during the reign of Emperor Constantine where we see the marriage of the Church & the State & based on Bible prophecy, we will see this trend transpire just before the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming of Jesus.

It was the devil, using the world leaders, as we will see in later studies that caused the infiltration of false teachings and doctrines, **verse 14**, into the Church and it was at this time, we notice the widespread compromise and corruption.

This continued right up until the time of the fall of the Pagan Roman Empire and the rise of the Papal Roman Empire, under the Pope of Rome, *the new Caesar*.

As a result of all of these things, we see Jesus giving a stern rebuke to the Church of this time period, Pergamos, urging them to repent of their ways lest He come and destroy them.

***“Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth.”*** **verse 1**  
v.18-29

### **The Message to the Church in Thyatira:**

Now we have come to the fourth age of the Christian Church which lasted from the year **538AD-1517AD**. This period commenced the reign of Papal dominion, (*Pope as the ruler*), in the now collapsed Western Roman Empire, which fell in *475AD*. The Popes were the new *Caesars* of the Papal Roman Empire. It was under the decree given by the Eastern Roman Emperor, Justinian, that the Pope of Rome was now the legal ruler of the now collapsed Western Roman Empire. It was in the year *475AD* that the Western Roman Empire fell, and it was then split into *ten horns or nations*, what we know today as western Europe.

***“After this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, exceedingly strong. It had huge iron teeth; it was devouring, breaking in pieces, and trampling the residue with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns. I was considering the horns, and there was another horn, a little one, coming up among them, before whom three of the first horns were plucked out by the roots. And there, in this horn, were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking pompous words.”***  
**Daniel 7:7-8**

Thus, the prophecy is fulfilled spoken of by the Apostle John, that the Beast out of the sea, also known as the *little horn*, in the Book of Daniel, or the anti-Christ power, received its power & great authority from the Dragon.

***“The dragon gave him his power, his throne, and great authority... And he was given a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies, and he was given authority... Then he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His name”*** **Revelation 13:2,5,6**

We will cover the above in more detail in the later chapter studies, especially the study on Revelation 13, however, for now let us continue our look at the Church in Thyatira.

As we remember, during the period of the Church in Pergamos, compromise started to creep into the Church of that age and as a result the Church started to become corrupt from the inside. This trend continued right up until the time of the Church in Thyatira. As it was, the head of the western European Kingdoms was now the *Beast Power or Jezebel*, as **verse 20** calls her and she used her power to influence the kings of Europe to execute her will against the true and faithful Christians.

Notice in **Daniel 7:7** and **Revelation 13:1**, the beasts possess 10 crowns, which shows us that there are kings and kingdoms associated with this Beast power.

It was during this period from **538AD-1517AD**, that the Pope of Rome received power and authority to put to death all *‘heretics’*, that is, all those who refused to accept the doctrines of the now Roman Church. However, as we noticed before, the church had now become corrupted from within and it was at this time that many fell into the worship of idols and false worship, not worshipping God according to His Word, but worshipping God according to the dictates of the Pope.

Says Jesus, ***“In vain do they worship Me, teaching for doctrine the commandments of men.”*** **Matthew 15:9**

It was during this time that the possession of a Bible was made outlawed and all who owned a Bible were to be put to death by the stake, that is, being burnt alive. The devil, working through the Roman church created a period of spiritual darkness over the western European nations at that time, known today as the *‘Dark Ages.’* Many

suffered widespread persecution and martyrdom for believing the truth of the Bible and remaining faithful to God, not adhering to the traditions that were brought into widespread Christianity by the Roman Church. Beliefs such as *purgatory, Sunday sacredness as opposed to Sabbath sacredness, the immortality of the soul, Mary being a mediator alongside Jesus, the veneration of the dead, the Pope being the representative of Jesus on earth, celebrations such as Easter, Lent, Christmas, & idolatry*, among many other traditions which are not Biblical, all came into the Church during the periods of the Churches of Thyatira.

The Book of Revelation refers to these false doctrines as the **'wine of her fornication'**, **Revelation 17:2**, stating that *'the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk'* by it. All nations, all peoples have drunk of this wine and have believed these falsehoods.

It is also interesting to note that during the great colonisations of the Western European nations to the many 'uninhabited' countries of the world, that all of these doctrines were thus spread to the many nations and engraved into society, and this is why many Churches today keep many of these traditions. However, if were to study the Word of God in humility, we will see that these are not biblical but are only man-made traditions.

***"Now to you I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine, who have not known the depths of Satan, as they say, I will put on you no other burden. But hold fast what you have till I come. And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations." verse 24-25***

Here, Jesus shows His compassion for those true and faithful Christians who were living in this time period, those who were living up to all the light that they had during this period of spiritual darkness. He encouraged them to stand firm and endure until the end, and that he shall put upon them no other hardship or burden, all that is needed of them is endurance to stand the test of faith and he who overcomes and remains faithful until the end shall be richly rewarded.

### **Conclusion:**

This ends our study on Revelation chapter 2, dealing with the first 4 Churches and the first four historical time periods of the Christian church. As we have noticed, the messages given by Jesus to these Churches had a much larger spiritual application than just literal messages to literal Churches. It commences with the Apostolic age and ends with the Church of the Last Days of which we are now living in.

Let us continue to study the Word of God as He has preserved His Word throughout all of the generations and persecutions and tribulations that the early Christians had to encounter. If we are faithful and true in our request for wisdom and discernment to understand God's Word, then He who is the great standard of wisdom shall bestow it upon us.

Until next time, *Maranatha! (Oh Lord Come)*

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

**Revelation 2:29**