

Revelation 2:1-29: Letters to the Churches

A. Letters in General

1. Carried by personal messengers or travelers
2. Prophetic letters—2 Chronicles 21:12-15, Jer. 29)
3. Letters followed a similar pattern:
 - a. To the angel of the church in a given city
 - b. Jesus depicted in glory
 - c. I know—offering praise
 - d. But I have this against you
 - e. The one who hears must pay attention
 - f. Eschatological promise

B. Rev. 2:1-7—The Church of Ephesus

1. Ephesus—leading city “guardian of the imperial cult”, ruler demanding worship; Domitian and Augustus built temples
2. Acts 19: 8-9; known for worship of Artemis—practice of magic
3. false teachers is hardly surprising; need discernment
4. Ephesus is lacking in love—love for God and others; unity of love.
5. Nicolaitans—identity—Nicolas (Acts 6:5)—gnosticism (idol worship)
6. Reward—eating from the tree of life—Genesis (source of eternal life)

C. Rev. 2:8-11—The Church of Smyrna—1 of 2 unequivocally commended

1. One of the most important cities in Asia Minor
2. Jews were exempt from worshipping the emperor—Jews were monotheistic, ancient ethnic religion. Christians thus were protected to some extent from persecution.
3. Synagogue leaders distinguished themselves sharply from Christians.
4. Persecution—10 days—Roman detention; to end in judgment. God will rule and judge.
5. Crown—symbol of victory in battle; award or honor; rewards for righteousness
6. Overcoming means withstanding persecution.

D. Rev. 2:12-17—The Church of Pergamum

1. 120,000 to 200,000 inhabitants; Sword Roman image for capital punishment—Jesus is the one who holds the power over life and death.
2. Judgment of false teachers 2:15-16
3. Satan’s throne: serpent—image of city’s major deity; Zeus the savior—serpents
4. Balaam(code name)—acts out of greed for money (Num 22:19) false prophet.
5. food to idols and sexual immorality; syncretism—participation in cults
6. Trade guilds; overcoming—standing against teachings of compromise
7. Hidden Manna—Jewish tradition –ark or new exodus movement
8. White stone—ancient courtrooms—acquittal (white); conviction (black)

E. Rev. 2:18-29—The Church of Thyatira

1. Son of God—challenge to the city—Apollo—son of Zeus—fire—sun god; bronze—metal industry;
2. Economic pressures to belong to trade guilds;
3. Imperial cult; Jezebel (code name)—850 false prophets (1 Kings 18:19)
4. Seeking to take the lives of God’s true prophets and lead the church astray.
5. God will strike Jezebel and her children.
6. Those who overcome the false teachings will reign over the nations; sharing authority—reign with Christ (5:10): the 1000 years (20:6), and eternally (22:5)