

2,24,22 Rev. 2 vs. 18 to 29, Thyatira

At this point, we are about half the way through the seven letters, so I want to take a few minutes and give you the layout of these churches in history, beyond the first century applications to the local assemblies in Asia Minor. This will help give us an overview perspective of the prophetic nature of each of these letters.

As Rev. 1:3 tells us, the entire book of Revelation is prophetic, including chapters 2 & 3.

Ephesus ran from approximately (30 to 100 AD) and began the departure from God's original thought for His people by leaving what our Lord called "First Love".

Smyrna (100 to 312 AD) Smyrna is a name which comes from "Myrrh" – a fragrance, when crushed, gives off an appealing aroma, representing the beauty and humility of the suffering of God's child. This church receives no rebuke and continues the apostolic line.

Pergamos (or Pergamum) (313 to 600 AD) moved away from spiritual union with Christ and married the world. When First Love is forsaken, that love is eventually replaced by another. As we saw last time, Pergamos means "marriage" or "union" and, in this case, the marriage is with the world system via Constantine - it was the beginning of Catholicism; an unholy church/state union.

Thyatira (600 to 1500 AD) Thyatira means "continual sacrifice" - as in the Catholic Mass where Christ is continually sacrificed when Catholics partake of the sacraments. Thyatira represents the continued development and spreading of Romanism and the papacy.

In Sardis (1520 to the late 1700's) we see the birth of the Reformation - a breaking from Rome and new light given. But because of limited truth, Sardis can only maintain the Name of spiritual life, not its substance.

Philadelphia (1800 to mid-1900's) - The recovery which began in Sardis finds a remnant expression in Philadelphia and a return to First Love.

Laodicea (mid 1900's to the present) - Laodicea is a prideful departure from Philadelphia, a 'taking-for-granted' of God's blessings without the wisdom to hold on to Christ as Head. Laodicean pseudo-spirituality is the primary characteristic of the Church at the end, and is seen in Paul's prophecy in 2 Thess. 2:3.

"Let no man deceive you, for that day shall not come, except there come the falling away (apostasy), first . . ."

As history has unfolded, the accuracy of Revelation 2 & 3 in both outward conditions and inward *spiritual* conditions is amazing.

Now, let's move into Rev. 2. In each of the letters we are studying, we have seen two phrases repeated that are intrinsically linked to one another. I'll explain what I mean by 'linked' in a minute.

One phrase is "he that overcomes" (or "he that conquers" depending on your translation). The other is "he that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches". What I mean by 'linked together' is that the primary spiritual characteristic of the overcomer is the willingness to hear what the Lord is saying in the present tense, not just in the past or in the academics of scripture, but now in our present walk with the Lord.

The word John uses for children in 1st John is 'tekonon'. But the word Paul uses for 'sons' is 'huios' in Rom. 8:14, "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God". Here's a brief explanation of the difference;

"John uses the word teknon — child — expressive of a being deriving its life and nature from another, as children do from their parents, while in Hebrews and Romans we have huios — son — expressive of the distinctive position and dignity which a son has in a household. The former word teknon carries with it more thought of internal intimacy, moral characteristics, community of life and nature, whilst the latter word huios directs the mind to a *position* given or recognized and the dignities resulting from it. A 'child' delights in the intimacy and affection of the family, but a 'son' will be displayed in manifested glory. (Heb. 2:10.) If we turn to Romans 8:19, 21, we find this very distinction carefully brought out, as we read of the 'liberty of the *children* of God', on the one hand, and on the other the 'manifestation of the *sons* of God.'"

So, again, we see another example of the importance of moving from 'child' to 'adult' in the Christian life. The children are safe, forgiven and secure in the family, but the sons will reign with Christ over the nations.

And as we'll see in a few minutes in vs. 26-27, even though most Christians have been taught that all believers will rule and reign with Christ for 1000 years, Rev. 2:26-27 show us that authority over the nations is *only* for overcomers.

In Matt. 25:21 we read this promise from Jesus;

“His lord said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.’”

Salvation is not earned by a life of “faithfulness over a few things”; but sharing the throne of Christ is. So, what is the Lord doing in your life and mine to make this possible for us? These comments are by Watchman Nee;

“In spiritual matters we should recognize the fact that *time is for eternity*; that the service we render in time is preparation for the service in eternity. God places us in the ‘here and now’ for the purpose of training us for our eternal vocation. Revelation 22 informs us that we will serve God even in eternity; therefore, all we go through here is to prepare us for our eternal service.”

We can become so focused on our lives here that we forget that this brief 70 or 80 years in this life is nothing compared to eternity, and that the Lord is allowing nothing into our lives now except what will prepare us for the life to come. His eyes are on the goal of all this, just as ours should be.

(1 Cor. 9:24 AMP) “Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? Run [your race] in such a way that you may seize the prize and make it yours!”

Whenever I come across passages in these letters that challenge us to “. . . press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:14), I also feel the need make sure we understand that reaching this goal not only requires how we respond to the training Nee talked about, but also that we never forget the support the Lord gives us to win this race – He wants this for us even more that we want it.

Here's what I mean; this is from Sparks;

“I think perhaps we are more tempted to look at ourselves than anything else! We have continually to remove our eyes from ourselves and everything to do with ourselves. There is nothing more discouraging than this self of ours, and nothing more misleading. Our own judgments are wrong, and so are our thoughts and ideas. They are not God's thoughts. We must take our eyes off ourselves, but not look out into space and be vacant. Hebrews tells us to ‘Look unto Jesus,’ and you know how that sentence is finished – ‘the author and finisher of our faith.’ He started this thing. Are you not glad that you can say: ‘It was the Lord who found me? It was the Lord who put His hand on me.’? What He said is very true: ‘You did not choose Me, but I chose you’ (John 15:16). He was the author of our faith, and it says that He is the finisher – He will finish it.”

Those who win are not those who never fall down, but those who see themselves as people who will *always* fall down unless their eyes are on the Lord. I remember reading once that the only time downhill skiers fall down is when they begin to worry about falling down.

So, let's look at Thyatira.

(Rev. 2:18-29) “And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write, ‘These things says the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass: ‘I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and as for your works, the last are more than the first. Nevertheless, I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent. I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works. 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— ‘He shall rule them with a rod of

iron. They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessels' — as I also have received from My Father; and I will give him the morning star. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

Because of the outward show of religiosity, the Lord begins with "eyes as a flame" piercing to the heart of the matter is the title our Lord uses, and as we saw in Rev. 1:15, feet of brass or bronze speak of judgment and strength. As one author puts it, "What His eyes discover, His feet shall tread upon."

But then He begins with a commendation;

"I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and as for your works, the last are more than the first."

When we see the severity of Thyatira's allowance of evil, it's a little surprising to see such an encouraging commendation at the beginning. This shows us something about the Lord's love for His people regardless of their faults.

But it also shows that believers with 'love, service, faith and patience under pressure' can fall from that height into deception. It reminds me of what Paul wrote in 1 Cor. 10:1-12;

"Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ."

This passage shows that all those who left Egypt with Moses were saved, secure, and on their way to heaven. However, here's the rest of the passage;

"But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness. Now these things became *our* examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted. And do not become idolaters as were some of them. As it is written, 'The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.' Nor let us commit sexual immorality, as some of them did, and in one day twenty-three thousand fell; nor let us test Christ, and were destroyed by serpents; nor complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer. Now

all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for *our* admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. Therefore, let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall."

We aren't going to tangent off on the difference in the two covenants or the purpose of the Law, but when it comes to accountability, there are definite similarities.

And we'll see one of those in the letter we're looking at tonight;

(Rev. 2:20-23) "You allow that woman Jezebel to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. I will kill her children with death" (exactly like what happened in Corinth).

Thyatira was permitting an evil of a more serious character than any that had yet appeared. This evil is symbolized by Jezebel (her story is in 1 Kings 16).

Jezebel's goal was to unite the religion of Israel with the pagan religion of Phoenicia; to form a mixture of heathen idolatry and Judaism.

As you remember, Pergamos followed the years of persecution under Rome, when Constantine came to power and made Christianity a state religion. That's when corruption began.

So, what was "Christianity" during those years? What did John see represented in Jezebel that the Church following Pergamos would evolve into?

Many historians call this time the "Dark Ages". It was definitely a spiritual blackout.

I have reviewed the writings of a variety of Bible scholars on Thyatira (Ironsides, Scott, Newell, Nee, Coates, Hysslop, Pember). There is universal agreement among them that this church, and this segment of church history, points directly to the Roman Catholic religion.

Here's an example of one of their writings,

"(Thyatira) ... comes from two words, one meaning 'sacrifice' the other, 'that which goes on continually'. An interpretation, therefore, is 'continual sacrifice'. And this is very significant, because Thyatira undoubtedly sets

forth the period which was the result of the union of church and state. It was in the 7th. century that the Bishop of Rome was first recognized as Christ's vice-regent, and visible head of the church. This was, properly speaking, the beginning of the papacy. There was no Roman Catholic church, in the full sense, until the Pope was the acknowledged head of Christendom.

"The Roman Catholic priests declare that, in the mass, they offer a 'continual sacrifice' for the sins of the living and dead. Other errors of the church of Rome spring from that. However, this is central, the root, the blasphemous denial of the finished work of the Lord Jesus on Calvary's cross.

"I have often pressed this question home to Catholic priests: 'What is your function as a sacrificing priest?' They say, 'It is my privilege to offer up the Lord Jesus from time to time as a continual sacrifice for the sins of the living and dead.' I generally put it like this: 'Well, Christ has to be slain that He may be offered up, doesn't he?' 'Yes'. 'You claim then that every time you pronounce the blessing, you are sacrificing Christ for the sins of the living and dead?' 'Yes'. 'Well then, you crucify Christ afresh every time you offer that sacrifice!' Then they begin to hedge.

"But there is no escape from this horrible conclusion. The Roman priest says that when he offers the sacrifice of the mass, he is presenting Christ again for the sins of the world. And the only way that Christ can be a sacrifice is to be put to death, therefore, the priest kills Him afresh every time he offers."

This is called the Catholic doctrine of "transubstantiation".

The parallels in history and in the typological language of Rev. 2 are far too similar for coincidence; Catholicism drew God's people into idolatry, spiritual fornication (what vs. 22 calls 'adultery') and into darkness for centuries.

However, as we see in 2:19; within this context of spiritual idolatry there is an element of purity and even growth.

Remember, there have been many Catholic monks and nuns who laid down their lives for the needy and sick in genuine commitment to Christ Himself, not just to "The Church".

Even with all the persecution he received, St. Francis still remained at least outwardly under the Rome's umbrella, even though his heart belonged to the Lord. Others within this spiritual remnant during the dark ages include, Madame Guyon, Tauler and Fenelon.

There were many throughout the dark ages who developed spiritually in spite of the Jezebel spirit; and wherever there is faith the Lord responds in love.

As shown in vs. 24; these godly souls may have been rare, but they did exist.

(Gal. 1:9) "As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed."

So, even though Paul's Galatian's 1 anathema or 'curse' is over the Catholic religion; for Catholics who see through the 'salvation by works' gospel of Catholicism, God's curse is removed.

In vs. 21-23 we have this warning; "I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling."

He's given her approximately 1500 years to repent. And in addition to time, Rome had the direct challenges of Luther, Wycliff, Knox and Calvin. But in spite of this "...she is unwilling". So, two things are appointed to her;

1. A bed of affliction
2. Death

The second part of vs. 23 raises an interesting question; when will God universally judge the Roman system in a way that *all* the churches acknowledge God's justice? It hasn't happened yet; but it will eventually. One author calls this;

"An emphatic judgment of such character that 'all the churches shall know that I am He which searches the minds and the hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works.'"

There is a phrase in vs. 24 that comes out better in the original, that we should briefly touch on.

"Now to you I say, and to the remnant in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine, who have not known *the depths of Satan*."

This is Walwood's comment on this verse:

“. . . the deep things of Satan. Here reference is made to the satanic system often seen in great detail in false religions which claim to be Christian, but which compete with the true Christian faith. Just as there are the deep things of God (1 Cor. 2:10) which are taught by the Spirit, so there are the deep things of Satan which result from his work of deception.”

Satan is the great imitator. If God has ‘deep things’, so will Satan.

The next sentence says, “. . . as many as do not have this doctrine . . . I will put on you no other burden. But hold fast what you have till I come.”

There’s something interesting in this that came to mind when I was reading it – I noticed that it’s very similar to what the Lord told the next two churches (Sardis and Philadelphia).

In Sardis / Rev. 3:2; “. . . strengthen the things which remain.”

And in Philadelphia / Rev. 3:8 “you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name.” And Rev. 3:11; “. . . hold fast to that which you have.”

When you put those exhortations next to Rev. 2:25 (“. . . hold fast what you have”), it looks like, at the end of the age, the victory of the church will not be it’s mega-size or it’s earth-shaking political or cultural power, but it’s ability to stand in the face of the onslaught of the enemy who, knowing his time short, is moving against her in greater wrath and pressure than ever.

I remember reading something about this by Sparks; it’s an excellent description of the characteristics of the overcomers, which is the part of the letter to Thyatira we’ll be looking at next. Here’s what he wrote;

“The Lord must have something which cannot be carried away, which cannot be removed or shaken or rooted up. That is His remnant. That, He must have for His own glory, and, that being so, He will take every measure with His remnant to have them like that. In order for that to be so, we have to get into a place of unshakeableness where our spiritual roots have got such a grip that nothing can overthrow. And I believe that explains a very great deal of what the Lord is doing with His own spiritual people in these days.

“It is true that the children of God are going through a time of intense trial and testing spiritually; everywhere it is so. Why? Because the Lord must have something against which hell is impotent, and by which He demonstrates to the universe that strength of His might which causes to stand and withstand.

“If one were asked what the last issue for the Church in this age is, I would say that it stands, and that is saying a tremendous thing. You may accuse me of limiting things, and say, ‘are you not expecting much more than that? Progress, advance, sweeping movements?’ The Church will have all its work cut out in the end to stand, but its standing will be its victory. Just to be able, through testing and trial, when everything is blowing round you like a blizzard; when everything is dark, mysterious, and even God seems far away and unreal, and faith is tested and you are being assailed on the right hand and on the left, and there is every reason outwardly for giving up, falling down, surrendering, lowering your standard - just to stand and not be moved in your faith is the greatest possible victory.... We are passing through deep experiences, the enemy is doing it and the Lord is not preventing him, but we will come to a fuller knowledge of the power of our God. And the Lord is seeking to have a people who cannot be shaken, against whom hell with all its demonstration of arrogance and pride, is impotent. That is what the Lord needs.”

Rooted and Grounded by T. Austin-Sparks - *The Lord's Object with the Overcomer*
<https://www.austin-sparks.net/english/002932.html>

I realize that other Bible teachers believe the church, at the end, will be a major powerhouse of evangelism, glory, signs and wonders. And they may be right, I'm not sure yet. But when I look at what the Lord asked of each of these last few churches, I see (as Sparks wrote), “. . . everything is dark, mysterious, and even God seems far away and unreal, and faith is tested and you are being assailed on the right hand and on the left, and there is every reason outwardly for giving up . . . *standing (immovable) will be the victory.*”

This is partly because, as the writer to the Hebrews said in Heb. 12:26, the final shaking that's coming (which I believe has already started) is designed to remove everything that represents a man-made Christianity and leave *only* that which

Christ has built. That which is still standing after God has shaken the heavens will be in a place of victory. Here's Heb. 12:26;

“. . . whose voice then shook the earth; but now He has promised, saying, 'Yet once more I will shake not only the earth, but also heaven.' Now this, 'Yet once more,' indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made, so that the things which cannot be shaken may remain.”

So, now let's look at the final promises our Lord gives to the overcoming remnant in Thyatira; power (authority) over the nations and the Morning Star.

(Rev. 2:26-29) “And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations . . . and I will give him the morning star.”

Ruling over the nations, which Jesus said was an honor given to Him by His Father, is very similar to the promise given to Laodicea in Rev. 3:21;

“To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.”

The throne of the nations (and as we'll see later in another study, the throne of creation) belongs to the Son, and to those within the Church who are overcomers.

There are some very important reasons that it must be this way; that only the overcomes have this honor bestowed on them.

God's original purpose for man was, and is, dominion - to reign with God's Son over all creation in perfect expression of God's will, demonstrating God's thought and desire in everything.

Israel's history was, in a sense, an 'experiment' to prepare a people who could rule the nations on earth under God's direction.

But authority requires integrity and knowing the mind of Christ. Royalty in character is not *bestowed* - it's *developed* through training and discipline.

Even the Son was "made perfect through suffering." Royal integrity must be tested and perfected before the right to rule is granted. As one author put it,

"It is not just a matter of Pedigree; of being born in a royal family -

spiritual character is required as well. This is the way all of creation works and the training of God's *sons* for positions of authority is no exception. There is a mystic air of royalty and nobility that was known in God's greatest servants. The ultimate of this is seen in Christ Who, even on the cross, shown forth in glorious nobility of character. It was His inner character and integrity that determined Royalty, not simply an outward status."

Not all Christians are overcomers, and not all will reign, simply because not all Christians, during this time of spiritual development on earth, develop the character of kings.

In case you're thinking, "I'm so far from having the character of kings that if I lived another thousand years, I'd still not even come close"; don't forget what we saw when we studied Ephesus. We can't be conformed to the image of Christ by spending our time looking at ourselves.

(2 Cor. 3:15-18) "But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart. Nevertheless, when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord."

We are transformed into the image of the Lord by keeping our eyes focused on *His glory*, not *our defects*.

Being overly introspective is a trap we don't want to fall into.

Also, as we've seen in all the letters we've studied, the enemy will consistently try to pull us away from God's purpose for us into a myriad of alternatives - whether Catholicism, Nicolaitan immorality, Dominion theology, or just basic watered-down American Christianity.

The characteristic of the overcomer is to keep a single-minded devotion to the Lord Himself; to have ears to hear what the Spirit is saying; to be open to moving as God moves and avoid locking into *any* system that is stagnant and lifeless.

Finally, the Morning Star. I'm going to use three authors to help us understand this; first, Watchman Nee;

"The morning star is the daybreak star in the orient. At the darkest hour, just at the time the day is breaking, it appears for a little while, and then the sun arises. Many people see the sun, but few have seen the morning star. One day the Lord will be seen by the whole world. But before everyone sees the light, you may have already seen it first while in darkness. This is what it means to receive the morning star. Just before the day breaks, it is the darkest time. But it is at that very moment the morning star appears. The Lord promises the overcomer that he will receive the morning star at the darkest time... When you see the sun, it is always during the daylight hours, but he who sees the morning star is one who makes a special point of rising *to see* while others are asleep. This is the promise to the overcomer."

Now, Horatius Bonar;

"It was 'very early in the morning' while 'it was yet dark' that Jesus rose from the dead. Not the sun, but only the morning star shone upon His opening tomb. The shadows had not fled; the citizens of Jerusalem had not awakened. It was still night—the hour of sleep and darkness, when He arose. Nor did His rising break the slumbers of the city. So shall it be 'very early in the morning while it is yet dark,' and when nothing but the morning star is shining, that (the overcomers) shall awaken, while the children of the night are still sleeping."

And finally, Alan Halton;

"This world of ours has endured a very long and very dark night. That night will end as the Sun of righteousness arises to rule over the Day—the Day of the Lord. This does not mean we have to wait till morning to see the Light of Day. To those who, while it is yet night, are 'stretching forth unto those things which are before,' He is first the Morning Star, appearing before the Sun has breached earth's horizon. To them He manifests Himself in a way that the world in darkness does not see. Even before the rising of the Sun of Righteousness, the Morning Star shines forth the Light of the coming Day while it is yet night, and proclaims that the Day is at hand. (In their hearts)

Christ is seen victoriously over the darkness of the night... while it is still night. That is the promise to the overcomer—the victorious one.”

The Morning Star rising in our hearts is extremely personal (like the white stone offered in Pergamum) which is why it's a promise given only to overcomers.

There's no evidence that the Morning Star is meant as a testimony to the world of the power of the church. As a matter of fact, as Watchman Nee, Alan Halton and Horatius Bonar said, the Morning Star appears at this Age's darkest hour and *only* the overcomers see it – neither the carnal Christian, nor the world see anything but darkness; they are totally asleep.

The overcomers are shown, by the inward revelation of Christ in their hearts, that His coming is near. They are given a supernatural insight into the proximity of His return – just before they are taken out of this world in the rapture.

As I said at the beginning of our study of Revelation, we have to move past simply studying Revelation as an academic pursuit because the information is so fascinating. We have to fight the urge to keep all these things locked away in our intellect and not allow them to penetrate our whole being so they shape the way we live our lives – especially in anticipation of His soon return and all that implies for us.

Academic Christians may point to the outward signs that indicate the nearness of His coming, but the overcomer will have the inward witness of the Spirit revealing that nearness in a personal and convincing way – through “whisperings of preparation”; the revelation of the Morning Star rising in the hearts of those walking with the Lord as Enoch was; living on the edge of eternity, to be caught up to meet the Lord in the air and taken to place He has prepared for us.