Revelation chap. 2

The seven churches part 1

1 Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that hath the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks; 2 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: 3 And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted. 4 Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. 5 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. 6 But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. 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. 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; 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. 10 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. 11 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. 12 And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges; 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. 14 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. 15 So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. 16 Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth. 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. 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; 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. 20 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. 21 And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not. 22 Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds. 23 And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works. 24 But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak; I will put upon you none other burden. 25 But that which ye have already hold fast till I come. 26 And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: 27 And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father. 28 And I will give him the morning star. 29 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

The seven churches are here addressed by Jesus himself. The first greeting is directed to the church at Ephesus. Ephesus which means 'permitted' or 'desirable' was a maritime city of Asia minor. This church was started by Paul and there are many accounts that happened here in Acts and the epistles especially Ephesians. Jesus begins by chronicling the good things that were happening here with their works and labor and patience. He says he knows how they cannot bear them that are evil and have tried or tested those who were false apostles and found them to be liars. As with any good news there is usually bad and Jesus next upbraids them for leaving their first love. The word for love here is 'agape' which is the pure unselfish love of God that should never be confused with the selfish love of man. They have left this love which is the center of our faith and are commanded to repent or turn away from whatever idol is separating them from God. But this they have that they hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans which Jesus also hates. The Nicolaitans are traditionally thought to be a sect started by Nicolas who was one of the first seven deacons ordained by the apostles. We know from later on that they taught it was alright to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit fornication. Now we know that an idol is nothing so there may be some spiritual meaning here for our time for we are commanded not to commit fornication or spiritual idolatry with the harlot Babylon. Jesus ends with a blessing to the overcomers who will be allowed to eat from the tree of life in the midst of the paradise of God.

And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things says the first and the last, which was dead and is alive. The word Smyrna means 'myrrh' or 'bitter affliction'. Smyrna was near Ephesus and was also a port city. It was known for its schools of medicine and science. Jesus says I know your works and tribulation and poverty and also the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan. The synagogue of Satan is a topic that has been debated endlessly over the centuries. In the 1st century there were many believing and non-believing Jews who persecuted the church and the Gentiles when they had opportunity. Paul said that he is not a Jew which is one outwardly neither is circumcision outward in the flesh but he is a Jew which is one inwardly and circumcision is that of the heart. Rom 2:28,29 This teaching was very hard for the Jews of Paul's day and it is even harder for the dispensationalists of our day. The Jews had their struggles with the law just as the Gentiles had theirs with idolatry. Jesus next says to fear none of those things that you will suffer because the devil will cast you into prison and you will have tribulation for ten days. As we move forward we will begin to see that references to the devil and Satan will have application to our time when he physically sets up his kingdom on earth. He that is faithful unto death will receive a crown of life and will not be hurt by the second death.

The third epistle is for the church in Pergamos. Pergamos means 'earthly height' or 'elevation' and was a city located on the Caicus river. It was noted for its splendid buildings and vast library. These things says he with the sharp two edged sword. I know your works and where you dwell even where Satan's seat his. The word for seat here is throne and is the same that is used later to refer to the 'seat of the beast and his kingdom'. These cryptic references let us know that these churches will have spiritual counterparts in the last days when Satan physically arrives to control the world. Jesus commends them for not denying his name or faith even in the days of 'Antipas' my faithful martyr who was slain among you, where Satan dwells. Antipas means 'like the father' was historically thought to be the bishop of Pergamos. But I have a few things against you because of those who hold the doctrine of Balaam who taught Balac to deceive the children of Israel by eating things sacrificed to idols and to commit fornication. This doctrine is the same as the Nicolaitans which Jesus says he hates. He says to repent or he will come quickly and fight against them with the sword of his mouth or the word of God. To those which overcome I will give the hidden manna and a white stone with a new name which no one will know except he who receives it. In Roman times a white stone was awarded to the winners of athletic games with their names inscribed on it. This was like a ticket to a special awards ceremony that followed. The word 'overcome' is the same that was ascribed to Jacob who prevailed in his night of trouble with the angel of the Lord. His faith refused to yield even under the worst circumstances and he was awarded the new name of 'Israel'.

To the church in Thyatira write; These things says the Son of God who has eyes like a flame of fire and feet like unto fine brass. The greek name Thyatira means 'odor of affliction' or 'sacrifice'. This city was a thriving commercial center for dyeing and textiles during new Testament times. As with the other churches, Jesus commends them for their works of love and service and faith and patience. The fault he does find with them is a woman named Jezebel who calls herself a prophetess. They allow her to teach and seduce the servants to commit fornication and eat things sacrificed to idols. Whoever this woman is she is compared to Jezebel the wicked wife of Ahab who worshipped baal and slew the prophets of the Lord in the time of Elijah. She is given a space of time to repent of her fornication but she does not repent. Jesus threatens to cast her into a bed of either suffering or sickness and those that commit adultery with her into great tribulation unless they repent. And I will kill her children with death and all the churches will know that I am he who searches the reins and hearts. This last verse lends credence to the idea that this is symbolic language with Jezebel playing the part of Babylon the great whore who seduces the world to commit spiritual fornication and idolatry with her. The rest of Thyatira who have not known the depths of Satan are warned to hold fast till Jesus comes. More imminent language which would apply to those living and struggling thru the last days. He that overcomes and keeps my works until the end will be given power over the nations. And shall rule them with a rod of iron and I will give him the morning star. Jesus refers to himself as the morning star at the close of Revelation implying the blessing that will be given to those who are alive to witness his glorious appearing.