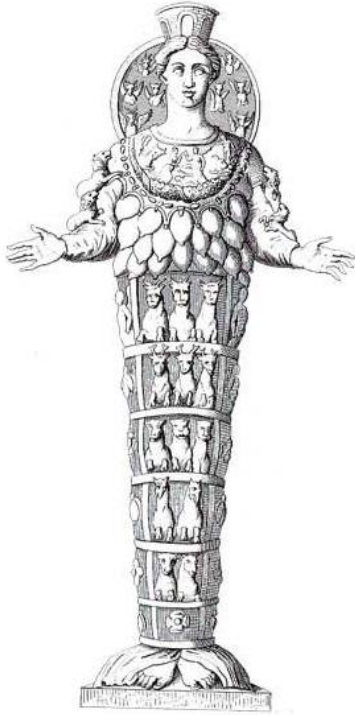


CHAPTER 2

(Rev 2:1) Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks;

We know quite a bit about Ephesus. The temple of Diana was there. Diana was the Roman goddess of nature and the hunt. She was venerated by the Ephesians and was a major source of income for Ephesus. Her worship attracted tourists from all over the empire. She was also known as the Greek goddess Artemis. Artemis and Diana are the same goddess of nature and the hunt known by different names in Greek and Roman mythology.



Diana of Ephesus

Additionally, Diana (Artemis) of the Ephesians was a fertility goddess on par with Isis, Astarte, Demeter, Inanna and was thus comparable to Sumerimis, Ishtar, Ashtoreth, Venus, etc. The statue of the goddess in the Temple of Diana was a many-breasted combination of Artemis and Ashtoreth. Diana of the Ephesians was the nursing mother goddess of gods, men, and animals. You can imagine the fertility rites that went on at Ephesus. The image to the left is Diana of the Ephesians, is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported license, [CC BY-SA 3.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/).

The meaning or definition of the word 'Ephesus' is uncertain. In the Greek its lexical form is εφοσος, *ephosos*. Some maintain that it is from the Greek word, εφορος, *ephoros*, curator, overseer, or regent. Since the city predates Greek culture, this is questionable. Some scholars believe the word came from the Hittite word fragment, *appa*, back, behind, or after. There is a Sanskrit word related to this; it is *apara*, meaning later. Thayer and Smith's Bible Dictionary say it means "permitted." Hitchcock defines it "desirable." Prash maintains it means "not lasting." Therefore, no one is absolutely certain of its actual meaning.

Ephesus was the capital of the Roman province of Asia, and consisted of the western two thirds of modern Turkey, which is now a Muslim state. It is located 1.5 miles west of modern Selçuk, Izmir, Turkey. It was located on an inland harbor connected by a channel to the Cayster River that flowed into the Aegean Sea. The channel is now a silted up wetland. The harbor is still there but has receded about 700 feet from the ancient city docks. The theater where the uproar over Paul's teachings took place (Acts 19:29-41) is still in use today and seats around twenty-five thousand. Many roads crossed at Ephesus thus making it a large cosmopolitan city with wealth and vice. It had a population of up to 340,000, depending on which historian you quote. Average quotes are about 250,000. It was a large cosmopolitan city either way.

Diana was the main Greek goddess of the city with a temple that many consider to be one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. It lies in ruins having been destroyed by an earthquake in 401 AD. Today the entire city is in ruins. It was abandoned in the Fifteenth Century apparently because its harbor no longer had access to the sea and because it had been conquered by the Ottoman Turks who built the nearby city of Ayasuluğ, which is modern Selçuk.

Christianity would have been frowned upon in Ephesus because Christians worshipped only one God—the One True God, Yehovah. Ephesus was intensely polytheistic and the thought that only one God was supreme was alien to the Ephesians. The church at Ephesus would have had an uphill battle to proselytize the people of Ephesus. Yet they managed to do so with God's help. To read about the beginning of the church at Ephesus, read Acts 18-20. Additionally, read about Paul's ministry and the riots at Ephesus caused by The Way (Christianity) in Acts chapter 19.

Christianity prospered there; the fact that it was one of the seven churches that received a letter directly from Jesus Christ shows it was a major church when John penned the Revelation. There were several Christian church councils held in Ephesus in the Fifth Century, showing that the church there was still viable at that time.

The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand and who walks among the seven gold lampstands is Jesus Christ in His glory. He is the One dictating the letters to the churches.

(Rev 2:2) 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:

At Ephesus, there were many who were opposed to the church (Acts 19:23-35). Yet, the Church had good works, and they were cheerfully patient. Paul had warned them that there would be false apostles (Acts 20:29-30). They had heeded the warning and diligently tried the false teachers. In spite of the opposition of the pagans, the church prospered because of their faith, their works, labor, and patience.

There were men that deemed themselves to be apostles; since they were self-proclaimed, they were false apostles. What determines apostleship? Paul wrote about true and false apostles in the eleventh chapter of Second Corinthians.

An apostle is simply one who is sent. Thus anyone truly sent by God to spread the Gospel could be referred to as an apostle. However, if we look at those men that are called apostles in the New Testament, we will get a fuller picture of what true apostleship is.

Jesus is considered to be The Apostle and our High Priest (Heb 3:1). Therefore Jesus, The Apostle, appointed the original twelve Apostles. They were selected, and appointed, or ordained by Jesus Himself, The Apostle and High Priest of our profession. Thus the original Twelve were appointed by Jesus Himself.

When Judas died, the eleven remaining Apostles chose two nominees for his replacement according to the Scriptures. Peter quoted Psalm 69:35, "Let their habitation be desolate; and let none dwell in their tents." referring to Judas, and Psalm 109:8B, "let another take his office," referring to a replacement for Judas. They then cast lots, which was one way Yahweh communicated with Israel through the priesthood. The lots fell to Mathias, who became the next Apostle.

Paul was appointed the Apostle to the Gentiles by the Risen Christ (Acts 9:15; Rom 11:13; 1 Cor 1:1; 2 Cor 1:1; Gal 1:1; Eph 1:2; Col 1:1; 1 Tim 1:1; 2 Tim 1:1; Tit 1:1). Barnabas was set apart as an apostle by the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:2-2; 14:14). All the apostles were godly men set apart by the Spirit of God to be sent out to proclaim the Gospel.

Teaching truth with only a very small amount of untruth is false teaching. False apostles teach the truth for the most part but add a small amount of untruth. It sounds good, but it is as Paul wrote, that a little leaven leavens the whole lump (1 Cor 5:6-7). In other words a small bit of false teaching makes the teacher's whole doctrine suspect.

(Rev 2:3) And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted.

They had borne with the false apostles, or had persevered with them and labored for the Name of Christ and had not become weary. They were good stewards of the Gospel.

(Rev 2:4) Nevertheless I have *somewhat* against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.

This is a difficult passage. There is not a direct equivalent passage anywhere in the Scriptures from which to draw conclusions. One possibility is the fact that many times the Israelites turned away from God and his blessings. They did so precisely because they began to trust the prosperity those blessings brought instead of

trusting God, Who provided that prosperity. They began to think that they were responsible for the blessings and not God. However, there is a better understanding of the passage available. One that we may all be able to empathize with.

On face value, what was their first love? We find that in Acts 19:17 that the fear of the Lord increased "and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified." We also read of the faith and love of those at Ephesus in Eph 1:15, "Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints." This indicates that their first love was for Jesus and other Christians.

Perhaps if we rearrange the words somewhat we can get a better view of the meaning here. Some translations present just such a better view. The English Standard Version and Holman Christian Standard Bible both render it, "But I have this against you: you have abandoned the love you had at first." Other translations render the verse similarly. That does not change the meaning of the verse; it clarifies it.

Their love was stronger and more ardent when church at Ephesus first began than it was when John wrote the Revelation. Their love for Jesus and other Christians, or at least the effect it had on their outward actions, had cooled somewhat. They were not as active in doing the good works that their love first caused them to be. They were becoming lukewarm.

(Rev 2:5) 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.

Jesus allows them the opportunity to repent from their sins. We all have the same opportunity to repent when we follow in their footsteps. Sometimes we need such an eye opener or a swift kick to set us back on the right track. It is apparent from history that the church did heed Jesus' warning because they were a successful and well-known church for centuries.

The candlestick is described in chapter one as the church itself: "The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches" (Rev 1:20b). Thus if they did not repent the church would die and cease to exist. That is exactly what happens to modern churches when they become stagnant. Let us remember that the church is the people and not the facility. Eventually all the people are gone, only the building is left, and the church ceases to exist. It is obvious, though, that the Ephesian Christians did repent because the church thrived for several centuries afterward.

(Rev 2:6) But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

We know little more about the Nicolaitans than what is said about them here in Revelation. One meaning of the word means "Followers of Nicolas." The etymology of the word indicates "victor of the people, victory over the people, or to utterly vanquish the people."

Historical accounts (Tertullian, Victorinus, Eusebius, etc.) tell us that the Nicolaitans were people who taught heresies. Evidently the Church did not allow them license. (See also the notes on Rev 2:15). From The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia we read:

"According to Irenaeus (Adv. Haer., i. 26, 3; iii. 10, 7), followed by Hippolytus (Philos., vii. 36), they were founded by Nicolaus, the proselyte of Antioch, who was one of the seven chosen to serve at the tables (Act_6:5). Irenaeus, as also Clement of Alexandria (Strom., ii. 20), Tertullian and others, unite in condemning their practices in terms similar to those of John; and reference is also made to their Gnostic tendencies.

"The problem underlying the Nicolaitan controversy, though so little direct mention is made of it in Scripture, was in reality most important, and concerned the whole relation of Christianity to paganism and its usages."

Tradition tells us that the Nicolaitins disobeyed the instruction given to the Gentile churches, by the Jerusalem Council, that they should not eat food sacrificed to idols. They did so in order to fit in to society and join in their public festivals so they would not engender suspicion from the pagan community. Clement of Alexandria wrote, "They abandoned themselves to pleasure like goats, leading a life of self-indulgence." Please note that tradition is not necessarily factual.

(Rev 2:7) 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.

If you have a spiritual ear, you will discern what the Spirit says to the churches. In other words, if the Holy Spirit is in you, you will be able to correctly understand what He, the Holy Spirit is telling you. He speaks to you through your spirit, and through the Word; sometimes He speaks to you in His still, small voice, or through other people, or through events, or through circumstances, etc. If you have believed on Jesus for your salvation, you have the Holy Spirit in you.

The phrase, 'to him that overcometh,' could just as correctly be rendered 'to him that is victorious' or 'to him that conquers'. The Greek will allow all three. This gives us a better idea of the meaning of the phrase. What must we overcome? The Bible tells us to overcome several things: evil with good (Rom 12:21), the corruption of the world (2 Pet 2:19-20), the wicked one (1 John 2:13-14), and spirits that do not confess Jesus Christ (1 John 4:4). Jesus has overcome the world, and only through Him may we overcome anything. So that if we are faithful to Jesus, then we will be able to overcome. We will receive eternal life and will be able to eat from the Tree of Life. See Rev 22:2 for a picture of the Tree of Life in heaven, which is paradise (Luk 23:43; 2 Cor 12:4).

Other passages in the Scripture explain what overcoming means. In 1 John 5:4 we are told that if we are born of God, that is, if we are born again or from above, or saved (John 3:3), then we have overcome. Our faith is the victory that overcomes the world. 1 John 1:5 plainly states, "Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?"

The church at Ephesus had lost their first love, that is, the love they should have for Jesus Christ and other Christians. They had graduated into traditions and things not related to Jesus. Many churches today are in this same mode. They have given up the true Word of God for their traditions and many false teachings have crept into many of our churches. They have their programs, their socials, their training sessions, and their traditions, but have gotten away from teaching and living the Word of God. Many just teach salvation to their flocks who have been saved for many years. They only give spiritual milk and not spiritual meat. Some have so many programs and activities that Christ is left out or relegated to the end of the list of activities. If your church is like this, repent and return to your first love, the true Word of God.

(Rev 2:8) And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive;

Out of the seven churches, Jesus finds some fault with five. There are two that receive no criticism from Jesus. They are Smyrna and Philadelphia.

Smyrna (modern Izmir) means myrrh, a sweet fragrance and one of the gifts of the Magi. It was used as a perfume and for anointing dead bodies. Smyrna was the center of Roman Emperor worship, and the Church at Smyrna was probably founded after the missionary journeys of Paul. Polycarp, a disciple of the Apostle John, and a martyr, was Bishop of Smyrna and was martyred there c. 155 AD. Polycarp is well known in Christian history and his writings still survive. He was perhaps the angel (messenger) of the church of Smyrna.

Modern Izmir, is located in Eastern Turkey on the Gulf of Izmir, which provides Turkey with a deep water port. Today it is the third largest city in Turkey. In Roman times, it maintained the Temple of Cybele as well as temples to other Greek and Roman gods. It was a cultural and economic center that rivaled ancient Ephesus a few miles to its south. It was known for its science and hit medicine.

(Rev 2:9) 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.

Paul wrote about "them which say they are Jews, and are not" in Romans 2:28-29, "For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God." In other words, in the New Covenant, after Jesus death, and resurrection, and the opening of the Holy of Holies to the world (Mat 27:50-51), circumcision is inward and not external. The circumcision of the heart replaces our old heart of stone with a new heart of flesh (Eze 36:26; 2 Cor 3:3). To be someone who is a Jew inwardly one must have a change of heart and trust Jesus Christ as Savior.

Thus true Jews are those saved by the blood of Christ and this includes Gentiles as well that have been saved by the blood of Christ and have been grafted in to the root stock of Israel (Rom 11:16-17). Alternatively, circumcision of the flesh, or removal of the penile foreskin, avails nothing spiritually. In the Old Covenant, the removal of the foreskin of Jewish males was proof of their Jewishness. In the New it proves nothing. It is the spiritual circumcision of the heart that makes one a true Jew; this applies to saved Gentiles as well. True Israel is made up only of saved Jews and Gentiles.

Unsaved Jews are not the true Israel in God's view. But as Paul wrote in Romans 11:23, Jews who still do not believe that Jesus is the True Messiah, can still be re-grafted in to the root stock of Israel if they do not remain in unbelief. When an unsaved Jew believes in Christ as Savior, he or she then becomes a part of true Israel and is once again a true Jew. It does happen. I knew a Jewish man who trusted Christ as Savior and became a Southern Baptist pastor. He served as my interim pastor in a church I attended when I was between pastorates.

Even though poor in the world's goods, and suffered persecution, they were rich in heavenly treasures because of their good works. Here is the first mention of the Synagogue of Satan. The members of the Synagogue of Satan, based on the words of Jesus in the verse, were Judaizers, those who demanded the Christians adhere to the Pharisaic ordinances. They wanted Christians to also practice the Mosaic Law and all its rituals in order to be saved. This was in addition to their faith in Christ. This church was troubled by those claiming to be Christians by requiring that believers also had to be circumcised, etc. They were not true Christians. Just like every church, Satan had his children among the congregation. They were committing blasphemy.

(Rev 2:10) 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.

Jesus is telling them that they will suffer. They will suffer at the hands of the Devil. Similar suffering is discussed in Rev 13:7, Mat 24:9, Mark 13:9, and Luke 21:12. It is simple; the universal church will endure tribulation; no Christian is exempt. This includes persecution in any time as well as in the First Century Jewish persecution of the church, and the Roman persecution of the church until the Fourth Century when Rome became Christianized.

Throughout history, up to this very present moment, the church has suffered tribulation. Christian men and women have been jailed, fined, tortured, enslaved, murdered, burned at the stake, raped, had their children taken from them, ostracized, banished, etc. for their faith in Christ. What this verse tells us is that Jesus will be with us during suffering and will mitigate the terror, the pain, misery, etc. during the tribulation and we will be able to endure it because of His presence in our sufferings. As long as we are faithful even unto death, His presence will comfort, and strengthen us. We are not to fear.

There are those who say that the ten days represent the ten persecutions under the Roman Caesars. Others say that this signifies a short period of time or an indefinite period of time. Some say it will be a period of ten years. Jesus is telling those who endure this tribulation, however long it lasts, to be faithful unto Him even if they are killed and they will receive their crown. Could you be among them? It is certainly possible.

The number ten signifies the completeness of Divine order. It means that nothing is lacking and all is in perfect order and that the entire period is complete. In other words, this tribulation is ordained of God. The Great Tribulation will also complete all of the sufferings of the saints for all time. The number ten also represents a time of proving. (See Gen 24:55; 1 Sam 25:38; Jer 42:7; Dan 1:12-14). The following paragraphs will discuss several possibilities for the ten days.

When Nebuchadnezzar told his chief of staff, Ashpenaz, to pick some of the best Hebrew men and train them to serve in the palace, viz. in the government, Ashpenaz chose several, including Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah and put them into training in Babylonian culture and law. The king ordered rich Babylonian food for these men. However, the food was not Kosher and the Hebrews could not eat it. Rather than causing conflict with Ashpenaz, Daniel asked Melzar, the attendant over the men, to allow them to eat a diet of legumes and water. He wisely asked the attendant to prove this diet for ten days and if the Hebrews' health worsened, then they would eat the king's diet. After ten days of proving, the men looked healthier and more nurtured than before. Thus, after this proving, the Hebrew men were allowed to remain on their Kosher diet. This ten day proving time resulted in positive consequences. Proving can also result in negative consequences.

After the birth of the Church at Jerusalem and beginning with the martyrdom of Stephen, the church suffered ten persecutions. The Greek word rendered day here is *ἡμερῶν*, *hēmerōn*, which is the genitive plural of *ἡμέρα*, *hēmera*, day. There are several possible senses of the word e.g. a 24 hour day, the day time, a day appointed for a special purpose, or an extended period of time. There are other senses as well. An extended period of time is in view here for various reasons; the principle one being that historically the persecutions of the church lasted over 200 years. According to Foxe, those persecutions were under the rulers of Rome as follows:

1. Nero, c. 67
2. Domitian, c. 81
3. Trajan, c. 108
4. Marcus Antonius, c. 162
5. Septimius Severus, c. 192
6. Maximus, c. 235
7. Decius, c. 249
8. Valerianus, c. 257
9. Aurelianus, c. 274
10. Diocletian, c. 303

Other historians have slightly differing lists, but the differences are minor. Foxe's list is well known. The last of these ten persecutions under Diocletian, lasted ten years.

According to Eusebius¹ in the afternoon of October 312, before the Battle of the Milvian Bridge near Rome, Constantine had a vision of the cross instructing him to fight in the name of Christ, with his soldiers' shields bearing the symbol of Christ. The symbol was the Chi-Rho. He subsequently won the battle giving credit to the Christian God.



Chi-Rho

After that, Constantine, in the year 313, officially legalized the toleration of Christianity and other religions with the Edict of Milan. However, though tolerated in the law, Christianity did not become the official

¹ Life of Constantine the Great (Βίος Μεγάλου Κωνσταντίνου; *Vita Constantini*) by Eusebius of Caesarea, 4th century

"religion" of the empire until 380, under Emperor Theodosius. These two tens, the ten persecutions and the ten years of the last persecution, proved Christianity to be a dominant influence in the empire. This allowed for a time of peace for Christians in the Western Roman Empire.

(Rev 2:11) 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.

See the comments on Revelation 2:7. "He that hath an ear" refers to Christians who, through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit have ears opened by the Spirit and "hear with understanding, affection, and faith; who try what they hear, and approve, embrace, and retain that which is good,"² and discard that which is not good and that which is evil. How do we overcome? By believing on the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

I restate here that a person that believes on the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior, specifically one who is saved, has overcome the world (1 John 1:4-5).

(Rev 2:12) And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges;

Pergamum, or modern Bergama, was the seat of Asclepius (Roman Aesculapius) worship. Asclepius was the Greek and Roman god of medicine. The symbol of Asclepius is the caduceus, which is a herald's staff with wings on it intertwined with two serpents. It is our present day symbol of the medical profession. It was previously a symbol of commerce.



Caduceus

There was a library of approximately 200,000 volumes (in the form of vellum, papyrus, scrolls, cuneiform, etc.) at Pergamum. It was a great city by earthly standards. Its name means citadel or pinnacle.

Who hath the sharp, two-edged sword? Jesus the Christ (Rev 1:16). He is the Word of God. The Scripture tells us "For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Heb 4:2).

(Rev 2:13) 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.

Why does he call it Satan's seat (technically his throne)? Many reasons, such as the pagan worship centers there. First and foremost, any center of sin, any sinful city, nation, area, country, etc., is Satan's seat. In Pergamum, there were temples to Asclepius, Jupiter, and Apollo. Paul wrote that when Gentiles sacrifice to idols they are actually sacrificing to demons, thus the temples of idols in Pergamum were Satan's seat.

Of course, the caduceus with its serpents adds to the illusion. Many Christians were persecuted and killed there in Pergamum, like Antipas.." There are places today where Satan has such a seat. Christians may feel the oppression of demonic forces because of their (the Christians') presence in those places. This author has actually experienced that kind of oppression in a place like that. Those places truly exist.

² John Gill D.D., *An Exposition of the New Testament* (3 vols., 1746–8)

Martyr technically means witness. The Greek word is μαρτυρῶς, *martus*, a witness. This witness, Antipas, was killed for his faith. Antipas' name means "like the father. We only have tradition to give us any more information about Antipas. It is believed that he was ordained by the Apostle John as the Bishop of the church at Pergamum during Domitian's reign. Tradition also has it that, under Nero's reign, Antipas was burned or roasted in a brazen altar shaped like a bull because he cast out demons that the locals worshipped.

(Rev 2:14) 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.

Balaam was a priest of paid by Balak, the king of Moab to curse Israel. Balaam did not curse Israel, he blessed them. Because he blessed Israel, Balak and Moab made peace with Israel and the Israelites who "began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab and they called the people unto the sacrifices of their gods: and the people did eat, and bowed down to their gods" (Num 25:1-2). In other words, they committed idolatry. Read the story in Numbers 22-24. Balak thus became a stumbling block to Israel. There were those among the church at Pergamum that caused others to eat the foods sacrificed to idols just as the Israelites did. The church tolerated it

In the general culture in First Century Pergamum, foods sacrificed to idols were later sold to the public for their consumption. The council at Jerusalem, with Paul's blessing, sent letters to the Gentile Christians instructing them that they did not need to be circumcised to be saved believers, but that they should not consume food sacrificed to idols, or blood, or strangled animals and that they should abstain from fornication. Read the entire story in Acts chapter 15.

Paul went on to more fully explain this in 1 Cor 8:4-14. He stated the mature Christians know that those idols are not really gods and that there is only One True God, the Father, the Creator of all things. Thus they knew it would not be sinful to eat those foods.

Yet some less mature believers still believed that perhaps idols were real. These believers would have guilty consciences if they consumed food sacrificed to idols, and seeing mature Christians eating such foods, would cause the weaker believers to stumble and might cause them to go back to worshipping idols. Causing a less mature believer to stumble in that way is sinful. That is exactly what Balaam caused the Israelites to do. That is why Jesus had that against the believers at Pergamum.

(Rev 2:15) So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.

See also the comments on Revelation 2.7

This verse is connected to the doctrine on Balaam by the words "so hast thou also." Balaam brokered peace between Israel and pagan idolatrous Moab for personal gain. This peace caused the Israelites, God's chosen people, to commit idolatry with Moab by worshipping false gods and their doctrine (Num 25:1-3, 31:16). The Nicolaitans did the same thing to the church that Balaam did to Israel in the wilderness. They led many of God's people astray to false worship and doctrine just as Balaam did.

(Rev 2:16) Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

At Ephesus, the church did not tolerate these false teachers. Here some members of the church held to the doctrine of Balaam and the Nicolaitans and were tolerated by the whole church. If the entire church did not repent of this tolerance, then they could expect the wrath of Jesus to come against those that held the doctrine of Balaam and the Nicolaitans. The method of His correction is not given. For the church to repent, they must either correct the false doctrine or expel the purveyors of the false doctrine from the congregation.

(Rev 2:17) 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*

"To him that overcometh." A person that believes on the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior, specifically one who is saved, has overcome the world (1 John 1:4-5).

See the comments on Revelation 2:7. Those who understand need to hear this. This is not as complicated as it seems. Hidden manna is spiritual food such as the Body of Christ, the Bread of Life, and the Word of God. This spiritual food is hidden from those who do not have an ear to hear. Why? Rom 11:8: "(According as it is written, God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear;) unto this day." Paul was talking about natural Israel and all unsaved people. God has deliberately given some a spirit of slumber so that they cannot understand His Word. He has taken his counsel from them and given them the counsel of men. This is for their protection from false teachers leading them astray. If they don't hear the truth, they cannot reject it. This not only applies to Israel, but any who might be led astray. But, according to Isa 29:18, "And in that day shall the deaf hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity, and out of darkness." There is coming a time when their eyes will be opened.

There are two possible interpretations of 'in that day.' One is the time of the Gospel, which began with the resurrection of Christ. The other is the time of the end when all things are made new "in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory" (Mat 19:28). In the context of Isaiah chapter 29, it is the time when Christ will sit upon His throne. Conversely, the meaning of the verse we are studying, Rev 2:17, is that this is the time of the church age. The manna or spiritual food is hidden from those whose eyes are closed, but open those who trust in Christ. We simply used Isa 29:18 to illustrate spiritual deafness that is with us to this very day.

The word for stone here is: **5586**, ψῆφος, *psephos*, psay'-fos; meaning a pebble (as worn smooth by handling), i.e. (by implication of use as a counter or ballot) a verdict (of acquittal) or ticket (of admission); a vote. This, by the way, is the name given to Simon Peter by Jesus, which is Cephas, a synonym of *psephos*, above (John 1:42). Both mean a stone.

White is the color of purity. The white stone symbolizes acquittal of sin, thus leaving the sinner pure; his or her sin is cast as far as the east is from the west (Psalm 103:12). The new name on the stone makes it very personal. It is your guarantee that the stone of acquittal is yours and yours alone. It is our verdict of acquittal and ticket of admission to heaven. What must you do to receive such a stone? You must be saved, which empowers you to overcome, conquer and be victorious, that is, remain faithful to Jesus even unto death. If you are saved by the blood of Christ, you will overcome all obstacles placed before by the world, the flesh, or the Devil, for nothing can separate you "from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 8:38-39).

In some organizations a person can be accused of an infraction. The members of the organization will come together and place either a white ball or a black ball in a container. Each ball is a vote. When the container is opened, if it has a black ball in it, the member is guilty of the infraction. If it has all white balls, he is acquitted. The white stone is just such an instrument. Apparently some ancient courts used the black and white stones to render a verdict.

(Rev 2:18) 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;

Thyatira (modern Akhisar) was the home of Apollo worship. It was a city where purple dye was produced. Today the city still exports red dye. Lydia, the purveyor of purple cloth was from there (Acts 16:14).

In the gate of the city was the shrine of Apollo, directed by a sibyl, that is, a pagan prophetess named Sambethe. The shrine enclosure was called the Chaldean court. The sibyl helped to intermix the different religions practiced in Thyatira. In addition to Apollo, the emperor as well as some other minor gods and goddesses were

worshipped, for the people in the Roman Empire worshipped a pantheon of gods and goddesses. She would help people to mix and match their religions into one that satisfied the worshipper. A designer religion if you will. That is basically what Jezebel did. She brought her Baal worship with her to Samaria and the Israelites worshipped Baal with her. They also mixed Baalism with the worship of the LORD.

Ye shall observe to do therefore as the LORD your God hath commanded you: ye shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left." Deuteronomy 5:32

"What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it." Deuteronomy 12:32

"Thus saith the LORD, Learn not the way of the heathen... For the customs of the people are vain." Jeremiah 10:2-3

"Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you" 2 Corinthians 6:17

"And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book." Revelation 22:19

(Rev 2:19) 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.

Charity is the KJV translation of the Greek root word, *αγαπη*, *agape*, which means love of God in believers in Christ. Their works are itemized here: love, service, and faith. Obviously, service and ministry are synonymous; therefore the believers rendered service to God and ministered to the needs of the people. They must have faith else charity and service would not have been good works in God's eyes; for our works without Christ are as filthy rags (Isa 64:6). Jesus mentions their works twice—here and in verse 26. This proof that Jesus was talking to saved people—to Christians.

(Rev 2:20) 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.

Apollo was one of the gods worshipped at Thyatira. The Sybil, or prophetess, of Apollo, Sambethe, apparently had someone in the church that was doing the mixing of the spiritual and idolatrous within the church. Possibly a devotee of Apollo, perhaps the Sybil herself, or perhaps another who claimed to be a prophetess, joined herself to the church in some way. Maybe she was married to a church member even as Jezebel was married to King Ahab. Some have even suggested she was married to the messenger or bishop of the church there. She could have been a follower of one of the many gods and goddesses worshipped at Thyatira. It is difficult to exactly pin down who this woman was. We do know that she influenced Christians in the church to sin. Just like Jezebel, this woman caused some of the believers to commit idolatry, mixing paganism with Christianity. Thus Christ calls her Jezebel. This is not something new. There have been pagan traditions in church worship almost from the beginning and they have continued up to today. Are there pagan practices in churches today? Definitely. For one example, see my comments on the previous verse.

Seducing Christ's servants to commit fornication is not necessarily sexual sins, though they could have been. The closer meaning here is that the prophetess seduced some of them to practice idolatry. Throughout the Old Testament, adultery and fornication often mean idolatry. Eating things sacrificed to idols is another way of saying they were idolatrous. They were incorporating some of the pagan rites into their Christian worship. (See the comments on Rev 2:7 and 2:15).

(Rev 2:21-22) 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.

I will remind you that God uses adultery, harlotry, and fornication to symbolize idolatry. Jezebel was not necessarily a real prostitute and she did not necessarily practice actual fornication. She may have done so, but that is not what this verse is truly about. When one of His people turns to idolatry, God feels like a husband whose wife has gone out to commit adultery, or to be a prostitute, or to commit prostitution. It hurts him badly for one of His own to worship someone other than Him. It hurts him as badly as it would hurt that husband mentioned above. It is quite a graphic metaphor that works well.

Apparently the woman was made aware of her sinning and still did not repent of it. This also indicates that this woman was an integral part of the church.

(Rev 2:23) 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.

Those that followed her influence and resorted to idolatry or to mixing idolatry with Christianity are in view here. These are not her physical children but her spiritual children. It is probable that these were her other devotees who also incited Christians to idolatry. It would not apply to the Christians, even those that succumbed to her sinful influence. These were the same heretics that Paul denounced in his Epistle to the Galatians. Here are a few definitive verses from Galatians Chapter 1:

Gal 1:6-9 I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: (7) Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. (8) But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. (9) As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.

Those heretics or false teachers were perverting the Gospel of Christ by demanding that the Galatians be circumcised and obey all the ceremonial Jewish laws in addition to the Gospel for salvation, just as those Judaizers in Gal 2:14. The KJV phrase "live as do the Jews" in Gal 2:14, is the rendering of one Greek word, Ἰουδαΐζειν, Ioudaizein, those who Judaize or Judaizers (verb infinitive present active form of Strong's G2450).

In a similar way the devotees of Sambethe and Apollo were encouraging believers to include the perverted things that were done in the temples of the Roman pantheon in their Christian worship. Those perversions included sacrificing to the gods, bowing to them, drunken orgies and feasts, some of the sexual perversions, etc. that went along with idol worship. God swore to kill the prophetesses and their devotees for their perversions. Death is the penalty for idolatry. Of course, upon repentance one is forgiven. Thus would all the churches that heard of these happenings take heed that those things would not happen in their assemblies.

God knows the hearts and reins or kidneys of the people. This means that God knows the deepest and most hidden thoughts in the human mind. The heart and the reins were considered the seat of the emotions because that is where the physical sensations occurred that were triggered by the emotions. The actual physical seat of the emotions is not the heart, which is no more than a pump; or the kidneys that are no more than a filtering organ. The actual seat of the motions is in the brain.

Since God looks on the heart (or the brain actually), He knows all our deeds both good and bad. For bad deeds there are consequences; for good deeds rewards. Only those that are saved by the blood of Christ can do good works. The works of all others are as filthy rags in God's sight (Isa 64:4).

(Rev 2:24-25) 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.

What doctrine? The doctrine of including paganism in the worship of the One True God. This is the same doctrine that Nicolaitans of Ephesus and Pergamum had, and the same doctrine that Balaam used to lead Israel astray. The doctrine of the followers of the Jezebel at this church came straight from the most unholy depths of the mind of Satan. Stay away from idolatry and hold on to what you have, that is, Jesus Christ.

(Rev 2:26) And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations:

Remain faithful to Christ. Ruling with Christ is a common subject in the Bible when referring to God's people. See Psa 49:14; Dan 7:18,22,27; Mat 19:28; Luke 22:29,30; & 1Cor 6:3,4

(Rev 2:27) 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

Psalm 2:9 states, "Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." The Father gives this power to the Son who, in turn gives it to us. Christ's enemies will be destroyed just as a rod of iron can shatter pottery. The rod of iron could be a reference to the Gospel, which changes Christ's enemies into his brethren. The shattered pottery could allude to the old stony heart being shattered by the Gospel allowing people to receive a new heart through faith in Jesus. See: Mat 11:27, Luke 22:29, & John 17:24.

(Rev 2:28) And I will give him the morning star.

The morning star: the early light or truth. Christ is the true morning star (Rev 22:16), Lucifer³ (light bearer; Hebrew: morning star) is the false one (Isa 14:12). If we overcome, Jesus will give us the light and the truth.

(Rev 2:29) He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

See the comments on Revelation 2:7. Again, this is for those whose spiritual eyes and ears are open. Only the Holy Spirit can open our eyes to the truth (John 14:26).

³ See Appendix 4