

I. Structure and approach

A. The Seven Letters (2:1 - 3:22)

1. Letter to Ephesus (2:1-7)
2. Letter to Smyrna (2:8-11)
3. Letter to Pergamum (2:12-17)
4. Letter to Thyatira (2:18 -29)
5. Letter to Sardis (3:1-6)
6. Letter to Philadelphia (3:7-13)
7. Letter to Laodicea (3:14-22)

II. The Seven Letters (2:1 - 3:22)

III. Letter to Ephesus (2:1-7)

A. Historical Background

1. Ephesus was the _____ most populated and important city in the world (second only to Rome) with over 400,000 inhabitants by this letter was written to them.
2. The Temple of _____, one of the 7 ancient wonders of the world, sat on the main hill overlooking the city.
3. The Apostle _____ lived in Ephesus in the middle of the first century for a time and is credited with beginning the church there.
4. John, who wrote Revelation, also later lived there some as an old man near the turn of the century and many scholars believe he penned His gospel there.
5. After the fall of the Roman Empire, the city began falling apart and is today only fields and dug-up ruins near Selcuk, Turkey.

B. VERSE by VERSE

1. Intro

- a. The first part of verse one is an intro that repeats at the beginning of each of the 7 letters. It gives the name of the church that each letter is for.
- b. It is addressed not to the church but to the angel of the church. Here angel = _____.

2. Description of Jesus

- a. The stars represent the seven angels or _____ to the seven churches
- b. The lampstands represent the seven churches themselves

3. Words of Affirmation

- a. He commends them for their good _____
- b. He also praises them for not being fooled by people who claimed to have a calling from God but didn't and who taught false things as if they were truths from God.
- c. On top of this they have faced persecution without growing _____.
- d. In the same way Jesus knows us and keeps a record of all we do and endure for Him today!

4. Words of Correction and Exhortation:

- a. Jesus is telling them that, in the midst of all their working to do good, to make sure they believed the right things, and to stand against persecution, they had allowed their _____ and affection for the person of Jesus to grow cold.
- b. As the years went by, as the church approached the 50 year mark, its early passionate love for Jesus that had ignited a revival affecting a large portion of the Roman empire had been replaced by duty, responsibility, and steadiness that lacked affection and love.
- c. So Jesus gives the Ephesians a path back to intimacy.
 - i. He tells them to firstly _____ the times of their lives where they did experience intimacy and passionate love for Jesus.

- ii. He tells them to _____ or literally stop doing and valuing that which hinders love from flowing in their hearts for Jesus.
 - d. Is there anything I'm doing that hinders my ability to love Jesus in ever increasing passion?
- 5. Inserted Praise
 - a. In verse 6, Jesus inserts a final praise for the Ephesians, something not done for the rest of the churches. He says they agree with Him in hating the deeds of the Nicolaitans. They encouraged people to participate in whatever sexual activity they desired and to do anything else their flesh wanted so that the struggle against those desires would not distract people from serving God.
 - b. In much of the church today there is a dumbing down of teachings against sexual immorality and other acts of the flesh that the Bible is clear in calling sin.
- 6. Promised Reward
 - a. "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."
 - i. The word church here is _____, meaning He is speaking to all of the churches
 - ii. Next this phrase tells us is that anyone who is willing to listen actually has the _____ to hear what God is saying
 - b. "To him who overcomes..."
 - i. Overcomers must passionately pursue true relationship with Jesus, fight the lusts of our flesh, and endure any persecution that comes our way.
 - ii. So who can do this? Well, only Christians who are empowered by the Holy Spirit, for this is nothing that humanity can do in it's own strength.
 - iii. This is an extremely touchy subject because several of the rewards Jesus offers, especially this first one, have to do with our eternal salvation. Is Jesus saying that you have to do everything right and live a perfect life to earn eternal life as a reward? Absolutely not! The Bible is clear that our salvation cannot be earned by us. It is grace that saves us through faith! What Jesus is saying is that we must look to Him and lean on Him through everything we face in life. This is true faith. We will struggle with temptation and fall in some way, big or small. What is important is that we don't give up the struggle. Because ultimately the struggle against sin is not a fight to be perfect and earn our salvation. Its a struggle to keep our faith in God. When we can do this no matter what we face, we become overcomers.
 - c. Reward = eat from the tree of life found in the Paradise of God. A happy and glorious immortality will be ours forever in the fullness of the presence of God.

IV. Letter to Smyrna (2:8-11)

V. Historical Background

1. Willingly came under Roman control in 133 BC. To strengthen their tie to Rome the leaders of Smyrna invented a cult for the _____ of Rome and the Roman emperor.
2. Because of their loyalty to Rome and prestige as the founders of Roman worship there was a tremendous resistance in Smyrna to the gospel.
3. The city eventually was conquered by Muslims in the 1300's and later became part of ther Ottoman Empire who renamed it Izmir. Today Izmir is one of the principle port cities of modern day Turkey.

B. Verse By Verse

1. Intro. – The same introduction is used as for Ephesus. The letter is to the leaders of the church in Smyrna.
2. Description of Jesus:

- a. The First and the Last – Here Jesus is emphasizing the fact that He had the first word in creating everything and that He will have the last word in judging all of creation. There is no authority that has a say over Him, whether it be local pagan leaders or Rome itself.
 - b. Who was dead and has come to life – Here Jesus is reminding the Christians of Smyrna that He knows _____ intimately. He understands what it means to be persecuted unto death and identifies with them in their struggle.
3. Words of Affirmation
 - a. The words Jesus offers Smyrna are incredibly moving. He looks His wounded and battered bride in the eyes and communicates everything with the two short words, “_____.”
 - b. He knows all that they have suffered for His name.
 - c. “a synagogue of Satan.”
 - i. It’s important that we understand Jesus is not saying He hates all _____.
 - ii. This is the first time we see _____ in Jesus in the book of Revelation. He is enraged at the mistreatment of His Bride by those who’ve been given every privilege and chance to be His people but have refused at every turn.
 - iii. Jesus’s anger is never aroused towards His Bride, but towards those who persecute or tempt her. When Jesus returns and carries out the judgements of God, He does so to remove every one and every thing that hinders love and oppresses those whom He died for.
 4. Words of Correction and Exhortation
 - a. Smyrna is one of only 2 of the churches that Jesus does not offer correction for. He does however exhort them to not be afraid. He tells them that as bad as things are, they are going to get worse for a time.
 - b. Jesus knows this is coming for many of them, so he tells His beloved church to be faithful unto death. Their earthly lives may be cut short, but they shall live forever and kings and victors with Jesus.
 5. Promised Reward
 - a. But eternal life is not the only promise Jesus gives them. He then extends to them and to every believer the chance to not be harmed by the _____ death.

VI. Letter to Pergamum (2:12-17)

A. Historical Background

1. Pergamum was a major prosperous and religious city in the Roman province of Asia with an _____ similar to Athens.
2. The Acropolis was a center of worship for Zeus, Athena, and Dionysus. Also, in 29 BC, to compete with Smyrna, they built the first entire temple dedicated to worshipping not just past Roman emperors but to worshipping living ones.

B. Verse By Verse

1. Description of Jesus:
 - a. the one with the sharp two-edged sword
 - i. He is announcing Himself as the One who has the power and ability to rebuke and cut off if necessary that which is infected in His _____.
 - ii. Secondly, Jesus is saying that He is the one with the power to vindicate His people who are oppressed and bring ultimate judgement on the wicked men persecuting His church.
2. Words of Affirmation
 - a. Jesus is proud of their stance against persecution. He mentions Antipas, one of John’s personal disciples who led the church in Pergamum for a short time.

- b. Jesus praises them that they would stay this way even though they live where satan's throne is. Many commentators think "satan's throne" is referring to the temple of the _____.
- 3. Words of Correction and Exhortation
 - a. He rebukes those who hold the doctrines of Balaam - participating in the feasts and rituals of the other religions
 - b. He rebukes those who hold the doctrines of the Nicolaitans - taught sexual immorality and other acts of the flesh are not sin
 - c. Jesus tells them to _____ or He will come with His word to accuse them openly.
 - d. Today there is rampant compromise in the church as an attempt to blend with our culture and avoid persecution by those who think Biblical Christianity is intolerant or outdated. We must heed these words ourselves, for Jesus is jealous for a perfect and spotless Bride. Those who breed infection in her will be confronted and given a chance to repent. If they do not, they will be removed, so that the rest of His Bride will not be hindered in love.
- 4. Promised Reward
 - a. hidden manna - He will feed and sustain us with His word and presence if we will set our hearts to _____.
 - b. white or gleaming stone - we will receive precious jewels denoting our victory of faith that will last as a testimony forever.
 - c. new names that will be written on those stones which no one will know – replaces sins labels for us with an identity of true intimacy

VII. Letter to Thyatira (2:18-29)

A. Historical Background

- 1. Part of the Roman empire and was well known for it's many trade _____. Trade guilds were like unions in that workers in a certain field could only buy and sell if they were a part of the local guild. These guilds were heavily religious and had monthly meetings in temples that involved eating food sacrificed to idols and promiscuous, orgy filled rituals. One of the most well known guilds was the purple guild that was world renown for their dyes.
- 2. There were two main temples in Thyatira. One was dedicated to worshipping the sun god Tyrimnos, and the other was for the goddess Sambethe which had a resident prophetess who would reveal deep and hidden things to those who worshipped her.
- 3. Today Thyatira is the modern city Akhissar in Turkey. The name literally means "white castle" and the ruins of that middle ages castle can still be seen today.

B. Verse By Verse

- 1. Description of Jesus:
 - a. Jesus asserts His _____ as the Son of God.
 - b. He highlights his eyes that are burning with fire.
 - i. Jesus' jealousy for His people
 - ii. The burning anger and wrath in Jesus' heart for those who embrace wickedness and reject His offer of repentance and restoration.
 - c. Feet like burnished or glowing hot bronze - He is ready to tread the earth with wrath to burn out all that is evil and hinders love.
- 2. Words of Affirmation
 - a. Jesus has a lot of good things to say about this church.
 - i. He praises their deeds and their love. They have not replaced intimacy with Jesus with working for Him. Instead, they have worked with Him in loving partnership.

- ii. He also praises their faith and perseverance. They have stood against persecution and endured the rejection of people.
 - iii. He also praises their service. They care for one another and all who are in need, serving as Jesus did.
 - b. Amazingly, too, this is the only church that Jesus says has actually grown in their good _____.
- 3. Words of Correction and Exhortation
 - a. The church has tolerated Jezebel.
 - b. To understand this we need to take a step back and address a few things:
 - i. Jesus is not talking about the “spirit of Jezebel.”
 - ii. Whether her name is or isn’t Jezebel, one thing is clear: her character is similar to the Jezebel of the Old Testament.
 - iii. It is not wrong for women to be prophets or minister by the gifts of the Holy Spirit. This Jezebel’s sin is not that she was a prophetess. It’s that she was a false prophet.
 - c. She led His people astray so that they committed sexual immorality and ate meat sacrificed to idols.
 - d. Why would she teach this? In light of the guilds of Thyatira Her argument was basically – business is business. It’s ok to participate in these things if it’s for the sake of supporting what God has _____ you to. Have you heard any similar arguments in our culture?
 - e. So Jezebel felt so strongly about her argument that not only did she live it, she began saying it was a word from God that overrode what the Apostles had said. This is a big problem. However, what was worse was that the church tolerated it.
 - f. So Jesus comes with His rebuke and His plan. Jesus has given her time to repent but she does not want to repent. Jesus gives her a new bed - a bed of sickness.
 - g. He also says He will take those who commit adultery with her or follow her teachings and give them over to great persecution.
 - h. He especially deals with Jezebel’s children, or those who have not just followed her teaching, but have become teachers of it themselves. Jesus is going to also afflict and kill them with this same disease.
 - i. Why does Jesus react so seemingly brutally to Jezebel and her followers? He tells us in verse 23. He wants the Church to understand that He really knows what’s in their minds and hearts. It’s not ok to pay lip service to Jesus on Sunday and live like the world the rest of the week. Jesus is looking for a _____, not a prostitute. It is mercy that moves Jesus to cut off that which is poisoning His Beloved and swaying her and drawing her away from truly loving and partnering with Him.
 - j. For those in Thyatira who have not participated in these sinful practices Jesus tells them to just hold fast until He comes. They are doing great!
- 4. Promised Reward
 - a. His first promise is a quote from Psalms 2. Jesus is saying, “If you partner with me on the earth now, I will let you partner with me in ruling and judging the earth then!” How incredible this will be!
 - b. Then Jesus goes even farther and says He will give to us the morning star. The morning star = _____!