

General Comments on Revelation 2-3

Some commentators interpret the seven churches to represent the seven years of tribulation spoken of in 11:2-3 and 12:14. Some see the churches as representative of the seven thousand years spoken of in ch. 6. Others see the churches as types of eschatological churches.

The context suggests a literal historical reading on these two chapters. Tangential comments in D&C 77:5 speak of the churches in a literally fashion. John's statements herein are quite specific and not figurative or symbolic. If John's intent was to present the churches as symbolic or eschatological it seems likely he would follow suit with the rest of the book and employ obvious symbolism, but he doesn't. It is therefore safest to conclude his primary intent is to speak literally here.

Can the seven ancient churches be taken as types of contemporary or eschatological churches? Certainly, but there is nothing suggesting that is John's primary intent. If the rest of the text of the book, after ch. 3, is taken as eschatological, then having John address his contemporaries in the beginning of the book is logical as the rest of the book is about the future.

The addresses to the seven churches of Asias are divided as follows:

2:1-7	Ephesus
2:8-11	Smyrna
2:12-17	Pergamum
2:18-2:29	Thyratia
3:1-6	Sardis
3:7-13	Philadelphia
3:14-22	Laodicea

Each address is presented as a quotation of the Lord and is composed of a unique authority statement (cf. 2:1, 2:8, 2:12, 2:18, 3:1, 3:7, 3:14) which is then followed by praise for the good and admonitions against falling away. The degree of compliment and warning is obviously dictated by how well or poorly the churches are doing. Each address then closes with an admonition of "He who has an ear to hear...".

One persistent theme throughout the addresses is how the churches are dealing with outside influence. Nicolaitans and Judaizers are identified as a pervasive problem. The Nicolaitans represent Gentile influence on the Church and the Judaizers represented the Pharisaic Jewish influence on the Church. The nascent Church is having difficulty establishing itself among the idolatrous attitudes of the Gentiles and the Pharisaic tendencies of the Jews.

Comments on Revelation 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;

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.

v1-7 The Lord addresses the church at Ephesus and indicates it is He Himself who is the One in the vision described in ch. 1 (v. 1). The Lord states he knows they are doing well, resisting evil and deception (v. 2), and have persevered with endurance and patience (v. 3). However, the Lord warns them against backsliding, as they are not as zealous as they once were (v. 4-5). But, to their benefit, they have not taken to permitting Gentile idolatries within the church (v. 6). The Lord closes by admonishing the church to listen and do what He has said so they may enter the kingdom of heaven (v. 7).

v1, 8, 12, 18 "angel", The IV/JST emends this to "servants", speaking of the mortal Bishop-like servants referenced in the IV/JST on 1:4-5 and 1:20.

v6 "the Nicolaitans", see v. 14-15. A term used to represent Gentile idolatries leaking into the church.

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.

v8-11 The Lord addresses the church at Smyrna, indicating he is the One who has the keys of the Resurrection (v. 8). He acknowledges their considerable adversity, and the hostility of the Judaizers (v. 9). He tells them not to fear their tribulations because it will prove them, and if they are faithful they will be exalted (v. 10). The Lord then admonishes them to listen and do what He has said because if they do they will be resurrected to eternal life and not spiritual death (v. 11).

The church at Smyrna is doing well enough that they need to direct warnings, and receive only commendations.

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].

v12-17 The Lord addresses the church at Pergamos, identifying Himself as One who speaks with the power of judgement (v. 12). He commends them for their diligence in spite of the considerable adversity they face (v. 13). However, He warns them against acculturating with Gentile practices which are contrary to the gospel (v. 14-15), and warns them to repent or face Judgement (v. 16). The Lord then admonishes them to hear and do what He has said, so they may receive the rewards of heaven (v. 17).

v13 The references to "Satan's seat" and "where Satan dwelleth" are probably references to Judaizers per v. 9, but might also refer to Gentile idolatries given the reference in v. 24.

v14-15 These verses make reference to Balaam, the Nicolaitans, and Gentile practices of idolatry and immorality. Balaam is the OT prophet who was perused by Balak to prophesy against Israel for worldly reward (cf. Num. 22-24), who therefore represents those in the Church who are seduced by things of the world. Both the Hebrew name "Balaam" and the Greek name "Nicolaitans" mean

"devourer of the people". Thus, the Lord is applying the Greek equivalent name of Balaam to this group of Church members who are being seduced by the world, as was Balaam.

The sin they are committing is the general accusation of eating things sacrificed to idols and of sexual immorality. These two acts are equated because various idolatrous rites of the Gentiles were lascivious orgiastic feasts. This activity is explicitly forbidden in Acts 15:20. While the specific activity is obviously prohibited and was an apparent problem (cf. 2 Pet. 2), the more general implicit prohibition is that of mixing Gentile idolatries with Christian faith.

Some commentators equate this reference to Nicolaitans to the Antinomian Gnostics of the same name, but the context does not suggest this is the case. The context indicates the individuals being addressed are engaging Gentile idolatries whereas the Gnostics were guilty of doctrinal heresies. Smith's Bible Dictionary suggests this group of Gnostics adopted the name of "Nicolaitans" out of spite for John because of his antignostic position.

Other commentators speculate that the name "Nicolaitans" is derivative of the name Nicolas, who was an early disciple (cf. Acts 6:5), and there are a group of his followers who have gone astray. There is nothing to suggest such a connection except for the similarity in names.

v17 "the hidden manna", manna is equated with the word of God in Deut. 8:3, also cp. Matt. 4:4. This is the word of God hidden from the world, a gift granted to the faithful, cp. Isa. 55:1.

"a white stone", the symbolism is probably drawn from the Acts 26:10 usage of the same Greek term "psephos", or pebble (the KJV on Acts 26:10 paraphrases the term to "voice", in the sense of one casting their voice as a vote). It is a stone which is used to indicate one casts their ballot, or lot, for a particular cause or position. Thus, the white stone indicates the individual has cast their lot with the Lord.

Also see D&C 130:10-11 where it states the white stone will become a Urim and Thummim to the one who possesses it, meaning that the one who has his allotment with the Lord has all things of His kingdom revealed to them. This explains why it is called "white", that being a symbol of sanctification and purity.

"a new name", the symbol of a new name is drawn from the original covenant making of Abram and Jacob, cf. Gen. 17:5, Gen. 32:28, also cp. Isa. 56:5. The new name symbolizes the new man, the man who has covenanted with God.

The Lord is the only one who knows a person's heart (1 Sam. 16:7, and so He is the only One Who knows who has entered into

covenant with Him. Hence the apparent secrecy, even though secrecy was never the goal from the outset. The apparent secrecy shows the individual and private nature of the covenant. This is not a corporate covenant, it is a One on one where the Lord knows precisely who He is dealing with, as was the case with Abraham and Jacob. Nobody else knows the name because nobody else is involved.

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.

v18-26 The Lord addresses the church at Thyratia, indicating He is the exalted personage referenced in the vision of the previous chapter (v. 18). He praises them for their notable good works (v. 19). He then turns to a serious warning against a woman among the church who is leading them astray (v. 20). The woman had been given opportunity to repent, but has not (v. 21), so she and her followers will be punished (v. 22-23). Those in the Thyratian church who have not followed her will not be punished (v. 24), and should continue in their good works.

It appears the Tyratian church had suffered division as a result of a woman who was leading some members of the church astray. Here, the Lord is intervening to separate out those who have been seduced by worldly influences and are unwilling to repent.

v18 Compare 1:14-15 for a similar description.

v20-23 How literally this is to be read is unclear. It seems unlikely there was a woman named "Jezebel" among the church, given the infamy attached to that name, cf. 1 Kings 18-21. Rather, the name is probably being used symbolically, as is the case with Balaam and the Nicolaitans in v. 14-15, to represent some kind of Gentile idolatry that had crept into the church. Whether the fornications were literal or spiritual we simply do not know, but the warnings against immorality are similar to those in v. 14 and read quite literally.

v22 "I will cast her into a bed", the IV/JST emends this to "I will cast her into hell". The implication, not entirely apparent in the KJV, is the woman will be cast down to her sick bed, with the same pestilence spoken of in v. 23, which will ultimately result in her death.

v26-27 These two verses paraphrase Ps. 2:9, a promise given to the Messiah. The use of this paraphrase suggests the Lord will share His power with His followers when they are exalted as He is.

The KJV and the IV/JST differ on these two verses, as follows:

KJV

And he that overcometh,
and keepeth my works
unto the end,
to him will I give power
over the nations:
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.

IV/JST

And to him who overcometh,
and keepeth my commandments
unto the end,
will I give power
over many kingdoms;
And he shall rule them
with the word of God;
and they shall be in his hands
as the vessels of clay
in the hands of a potter;

and he shall govern them by faith,
with equity and justice,
even as I received
of my Father.

The IV/JST changes the rather violent sounding KJV to a theme of equity and justice. Note the iron rod is equated with the word of God, cp. 1 Ne. 11:25.

v27 "vessels of a potter", symbolism derived from Isa. 29:16, Isa. 45:9, Isa. 64:8.

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