

Revelation 2–3

I. Ephesus (Revelation 2:1–7)

A Church That Can Discern Error But Must Recover Love

A. History and culture: a strategic port city shaped by wealth, spectacle, and competing loyalties

1. Ephesus was a major urban center in Roman Asia, known for _____, _____, and powerful civic _____, including devotion to Artemis and strong imperial presence.
2. In a city trained to perform loyalty publicly, the church’s endurance and discernment would be constantly tested by social _____ and public _____.

B. Christ’s self-presentation: presence among churches and authority over their messengers

1. Jesus holds the seven stars and walks among the lampstands, signaling both _____ presence and _____ authority over the churches (a pastoral inspection, not distant observation).

C. Commendations: disciplined labor, doctrinal testing, and moral clarity

1. Ephesus is praised for _____, _____, _____, and testing false claims to apostolic authority.
2. Their rejection of corrupt teaching and practices shows a church that can discern when “_____” is being weaponized or diluted.

D. Confrontation: orthodoxy without affection becomes a form of spiritual loss

1. The charge is not that they stopped believing true things, but that they stopped _____ in a way that reflects the gospel’s first priority.
2. In Revelation’s moral universe, _____ correctness can become a sophisticated form of _____.

E. Promise and symbolism: “the tree of life” as restored Eden and temple-life with God

1. The “tree of life” evokes God’s original intention for humanity in Eden and the Bible’s larger hope of _____ life in God’s presence.
2. For believers living amid the “garden-temples” of Greco-Roman religion, the promise re-centers desire: not Artemis’s sanctuary, not imperial favor, but God’s own paradise as the true life-world.

II. Smyrna (Revelation 2:8–11)

A Persecuted Church Rich in God's Economy

A. History and culture: civic pride, imperial loyalty, and the cost of dissent

1. Smyrna was an important, prosperous city with strong _____ identity and deep commitments to _____'s political-religious order, including imperial cult dynamics that could make Christians stand out as socially suspect.

B. Christ's self-presentation: "the First and the Last" who passed through death **V. 8-11

1. Jesus frames the church's suffering inside his own victory over death: the persecuted do not belong to the empire's story, but to the Lord of history.

C. Commendations: faithful endurance in tribulation and poverty

1. Smyrna receives _____ rebuke. Their suffering is named, and their poverty is reinterpreted as "_____ " before God.

D. Confrontation: the reality of slander and contested identity

1. The conflict includes _____ defamation and _____ hostility, where belonging is disputed and the church is pressured to _____ to survive.

E. Promise and symbolism: the "crown of life" and immunity from the "second death"

1. The crown (stephanos) is _____ imagery, not luxury, pointing to honor granted by _____ rather than status granted by the _____.
2. The "second death" language reframes the threat: Rome can harm _____, but cannot determine final _____.

III. Pergamum (Revelation 2:12–17)

A Church Living Where Power Is Worshiped

A. History and culture: a city of temples, propaganda, and imperial presence

1. Pergamum was a prominent center of _____ life and _____ religion in Asia Minor, including strong imperial-cult expression and monumental religious architecture.
2. "Where Satan's throne is" functions as an apocalyptic exposure of spiritual realities behind visible systems of _____, _____, and _____, not merely a travel note.

B. Christ's self-presentation: the sharp two-edged sword

1. The sword-from-the-mouth image signals _____ by decree and the authority of Christ’s word over every rival “word” of the city (edicts, slogans, accusations).
- C. Commendations: _____ under pressure and remembered martyr faithfulness**
1. They held fast to Christ’s name and did not _____ the faith even when public costs were high, including the loss of life.
- D. Confrontations: accommodation to _____ participation and _____ immorality**
1. The “Balaam” framing casts _____ as covenant _____: joining what God forbids in order to gain what the city offers.
 2. The issue is not merely _____ morality, but _____ participation in a rival worship-economy.
- E. Promise and symbolism: hidden _____, the white _____, and a new _____**
1. Hidden manna: Revelation promises divine _____ and covenant _____ that the city cannot supply. Jewish apocalyptic tradition also envisioned manna returning in the consummation of God’s future, which intensifies the promise as end-time provision, not mere metaphor.
 2. White stone (psephos leukē): the symbol carries recognizable cultural resonances, and Revelation likely leverages more than one at once.
 - a) Acquittal and verdict: Greco-Roman legal practice used black and white stones or pebbles as a _____ signal, with white associated with _____. Ovid preserves the logic of black for condemnation and white for acquittal.
 - b) Admission token and belonging: a “_____” could function as a token for access, hospitality, or participation, including admission-like uses in the ancient world.
 3. New name: in Scripture and ancient culture, names mark _____ and _____. The “known only to the recipient” motif signals intimate, secured identity _____ by Christ rather than _____ by the city or the crowd.

IV. Thyatira (Revelation 2:18–29)

A Church Pressured by Economic Religion and a False Prophetess

- A. History and culture: working-class _____, guild _____, and compromised _____**
1. Thyatira was known for commerce and crafts, and Christian faithfulness could _____ with local economic structures tied to pagan devotion and social obligation.
 2. In settings like this, “idolatry” is rarely _____. It is often the price of keeping _____, _____, and _____.
- B. Christ’s self-presentation: eyes like _____ and feet like burnished _____**
1. The imagery signals penetrating _____ and unyielding _____. No hidden compromise remains hidden to the Lord who “sees.”
- C. Commendations: _____, _____, _____, _____, and _____**
1. Unlike churches that decline, Thyatira’s “last works” exceed the first. The tragedy is that _____ in some virtues coexists with _____ of spiritual sabotage.
- D. Confrontation: “Jezebel” as a corrupting teacher who _____ compromise**
1. The issue is not simply one person’s sin but _____ tolerance of teaching that baptizes participation in idolatrous life as _____ discipleship.
 2. Revelation treats this as a _____ mercy: it feels like freedom, but it trains the church to love what destroys it.
- E. Promise and symbolism: authority with Christ and the “morning star”**
1. The promise echoes Psalm 2’s royal language, portraying the conqueror’s participation in Christ’s reign rather than grasping power through empire-like methods.
 2. The “morning star” ultimately belongs to Christ himself, and the promise signals shared _____ and shared _____ grounded in his triumph, not theirs.

V. Sardis (Revelation 3:1–6)

Reputation Without Reality and the Call to Wake Up

- A. History and culture: wealth, security, and the danger of complacency**
1. Sardis was famed historically for _____, including associations with gold and luxury.

2. The city also carried a humiliating memory: it was captured when defenders assumed their position was unassailable. Herodotus recounts how a vulnerability was exploited because _____ failed.
- B. Christ's self-presentation: the one who has the seven spirits and seven stars**
1. The church needs life, not _____. Christ presents himself as the one who can supply spiritual _____ and evaluate spiritual _____.
- C. Commendations: a faithful _____**
1. Even in a deadened church, Christ identifies "a few names" who have not defiled their garments, showing that renewal begins with _____ people, not _____ reputation-management.
- D. Confrontation: unfinished _____ and the slow death of _____**
1. Sardis is not accused of dramatic _____ but of _____ unreality: activity without _____, works without _____, identity without _____.
- E. Promise and symbolism: white garments, secure name, public confession**
1. White garments signify _____, _____, and _____ in Revelation's symbolic world, contrasting with defiled clothing as moral compromise.
 2. The "book of life" language functions as covenant security for conquerors, and the promise of public confession reverses _____'s obsession with public reputation: _____'s verdict is the final reputation.

VI. Philadelphia (Revelation 3:7–13)

Small Strength, Open Door, Permanent Belonging

- A. History and culture: _____, _____, and civic _____**
1. Philadelphia sat in a region marked by seismic disruption; Roman sources record catastrophic earthquakes affecting cities of Asia, shaping daily life with fear of _____ and forced _____.
- B. Christ's self-presentation: the _____ One, the _____ One, and the _____ of David**
1. The "key of David" draws on Isaiah 22:22's authority-to-open-and-shut motif, placing ultimate access and vindication in Christ's hands, not local power brokers.
- C. Commendations: _____ word, _____ name, _____ endurance**
1. "Little power" is not a _____. It is realism. Their victory is _____, not _____.

D. Confrontation: contested identity and social exclusion

1. The conflict includes identity _____: who belongs, who is “legitimate,” who is loved by God. Christ promises _____ that reorders the social narrative.

E. Promise and symbolism: open _____, _____, and the triple _____

1. Open door: secured opportunity and access established by the _____ - _____, therefore not finally closable by opponents.
2. Pillar in the temple: in an earthquake world, the image signals _____, _____, and _____ of belonging.
3. Threefold name inscription: covenant _____ and identity _____, marking believers as permanently tied to God, God’s future city, and Christ’s own name.

VII. Laodicea (Revelation 3:14–22)

Prosperity’s Blindness and Christ’s Offer of True Wealth

A. History and culture: _____, self-_____, and civic _____

1. Laodicea’s wealth and confidence were historically reinforced by its ability to recover from disaster without imperial aid. Tacitus records that after an earthquake the city “recovered by its own resources, without assistance.”
2. That civic posture makes the letter’s diagnosis culturally _____: “I need nothing” is not only a personal attitude; it is a city-shaped spiritual instinct.

B. Christ’s self-presentation: the _____, _____ and true _____

1. Where the church’s self-assessment is _____, Christ presents himself as the truth-teller whose testimony is _____.

C. Commendations: none given, because self-deception must first be _____

1. Laodicea’s danger is not _____ but _____. The church cannot heal until it _____ with Christ about its condition.

D. Confrontations: _____ and the misuse of _____ as spiritual proof

1. Interpreters often over-claim city-specific certainty for the hot/cold imagery. Recent scholarship has pushed back on turning the metaphor into a simplistic, settled aqueduct code, arguing for more careful handling of _____ and _____.

2. The text's sure point is _____ and _____: their posture is repulsive to Christ because it represents _____ allegiance and _____ desire.

E. Promise and symbolism: refined _____, white _____, eye salve, table fellowship, _____ reign

1. "Buy from me" redefines wealth: what Christ gives _____ be purchased by Laodicea's economy.
2. Gold refined: _____, durable faithfulness rather than _____ affluence.
3. White garments: _____ honor and _____ purity, _____ shame.
4. Eye salve: healed _____, the ability to see the truth about self and God.
5. Door and meal: the knocking image functions as a summons to _____ for a compromised church, with the meal promising _____ communion rather than _____ spirituality.
6. Throne-sharing: the climactic promise offers participation in Christ's victorious reign, the exact opposite of the church's current counterfeit _____ through comfort.