

Notes on the Greek New Testament
Day 344 – December 10th – Revelation 2:1-17

Works frequently referenced in these notes on the book of Revelation

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| Morris, Leon | <i>The Revelation of St John</i> (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries), Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1969 |
| Mounce, Robert H | <i>The Book of Revelation</i> (New International Commentary on the New Testament), Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1977 |
| Peterson, Eugene H | <i>Reversed Thunder</i> , San Francisco, HarperCollins, 1991 |
| Witherington, Ben | <i>Revelation</i> (New Cambridge Bible Commentary), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2003 |

Chapters 2 & 3

Each of the letters to the seven churches has the same structure:

- i) A description of Christ, mostly from Ch.1. The aspects of Christ's character reflect the particular situation of the church.
- ii) Praise for the church's good record (except in the case of Laodicea).
- iii) Complaint about deficiencies (except in the case of Smyrna and Philadelphia).
- iv) Command to repent or go back to the beginning (except Smyrna and Philadelphia).
- v) A warning (except Smyrna and Philadelphia).
- vi) Encouragement.
- vii) Promise to the conqueror.

Churches 1 and 7 are in grave danger.

Churches 2 and 6 are in excellent shape, churches 3,4 and 5 are middling – neither good nor bad.

Caird says, "The churches are being investigated to see whether they are strong enough to survive a thorough-going persecution. The virtues promised – patience, endurance, constancy and loyalty – are those most necessary to withstand persecution."

Each of the letters displays a detailed knowledge of the history, topography and economics of the city to which it is written.

Verse 1

Τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Ἐφέσῳ ἐκκλησίας γράψον·
 Τάδε λέγει ὁ κρατῶν τοὺς ἑπτὰ ἀστέρας ἐν τῇ
 δεξιᾷ αὐτοῦ, ὁ περιπατῶν ἐν μέσῳ τῶν ἑπτὰ
 λυχνιῶν τῶν χρυσοῦν·

Ephesus, with a population of approximately a quarter of a million, was the most important city of proconsular Asia. It was an important sea port and commercial and export centre. The mother goddess had long been worshipped there – the Greeks identified her with Artemis and the Romans with Diana. Her temple was four times the size of the Parthenon. However, there were also two temples to Augustus in Ephesus and Domitian had named Ephesus the guardian of the imperial cult. "Only a few years before Revelation was likely to have been written, Ephesus had a new cult site for the emperors and celebrated the Olympic games in honour of Domitian." Witherington. Paul had spent 3 years of ministry in Ephesus (Acts 20:31). By the latter part of the first century Christianity had been there for more than four decades and it seems to have become the literary centre of Asiatic Christianity. "John is mostly addressing those who have been Christians for some time but whose initial enthusiasm has waned." Witherington.

γράφον Verb, aor act imperat, 2 s γραφῶ
 ὄδε, ἦδε, τοδε this; he, she, it
 κρατεῶ hold, hold fast

Denotes a firm and constant grip.

περιπατεῶ walk, walk about

μεσος, η, ον see 1:13

λυχνια, ας f see 1:13

χρυσους, η, ουν see 1:13

Cf. Lev. 26:12, "I will walk among you, and will be your God, and you shall be my people." Christ applies to himself what is written of God. He is the mediator and guarantor of the covenant between God and his people.

At the same time there is here a note of warning. "It is the invisible Christ who already [pre-parousia] walks among the churches and inspects them and calls them to into account in the present. His work always involves redemptive-judgment, or in this case beatitude follows correction of behaviour."

Witherington.

Verse 2

Οἶδα τὰ ἔργα σου, καὶ τὸν κόπον καὶ τὴν ὑπομονὴν σου, καὶ ὅτι οὐ δύνῃ βαστάσαι κακοὺς, καὶ ἐπείρασας τοὺς λέγοντας ἑαυτοὺς ἀποστόλους, καὶ οὐκ εἰσὶν, καὶ εὗρες αὐτοὺς ψευδεῖς·

κοπος, ου m work, labour, trouble
 ὑπομονη, ης f patience, endurance

'Toil and patience' give the active and passive sides of the life summed up in τα ἔργα σου.

δύνη Verb, fut midd dep indic, 2 s δυναμαι
 can, be able to

βασταζω carry, bear, endure, tolerate
 κακος, η, ον evil, bad, wrong, harm

Paul had warned the Ephesian elders that such 'evil men' or 'wolves' would arise in the church after his departure (Acts 20:29).

πειραζω test, put to the test
 ἑαυτος, εαυτη, εαυτον him/herself, itself
 εὑρισκω find, discover
 ψευδης, ες false, lying

"The necessity of testing doctrine and advice was widely recognised in the early church (1 Thess 5:21; 1 Cor 14:29; 1 Jn 4:1). Jesus provided the very simple and pragmatic, 'You will know them by their fruits' (Mt 7:20)... The Ephesians heeded this advice, tested those who called themselves apostles, and found them not simply self-deceived, but deceivers. They were liars because when tested they could not measure up to their pretentions." Mounce.

Verse 3

καὶ ὑπομονὴν ἔχεις, καὶ ἐβάστασας διὰ τὸ ὄνομά μου, καὶ οὐ κεκοπίακες.

ὄνομα, τος n name
 κεκοπίακες Verb, perf act indic, 2 s κοπιαω
 work hard, labour, become tired

Verse 4

ἀλλὰ ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ ὅτι τὴν ἀγάπην σου τὴν πρώτην ἀφήκες.

πρωτος, η, ον first, earlier
 ἀφήκες Verb, aor act indic, 2 s ἀφιημι
 leave, forsake, let go

"Jesus had made it clear that 'by this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another' (Jn 13:35).

Brotherly love was the distinctive badge of Christian discipleship, but at Ephesus hatred of heresy and extensive involvement in the works appropriate to faith had allowed the first fresh glow of love to God and one another to fade." Mounce. Witherington comments, "Perhaps, in their zeal for orthodoxy or orthopraxy, they have lost their ability to distinguish between hating the sin and loving the sinner."

Cf. Jer 2:2, "I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride, how you followed me in the wilderness."

Verse 5

μνημόνευε ὃν πόθεν πέτωκας, καὶ μετανόησον καὶ τὰ πρῶτα ἔργα ποιήσον· εἰ δὲ μή, ἔρχομαί σοι, καὶ κινήσω τὴν λυχνίαν σου ἐκ τοῦ τόπου αὐτῆς, ἐὰν μὴ μετανοήσης.

μνημονευω remember, keep in mind

A call to continuous remembrance.

ποθεν interrog adv. from where
 πέτωκας Verb, perf act indic, 2 s πιτω fall
 μετανοεω repent

The aorist points to a sharp break with the present state.

ἐρχομαί σοι present tense, 'I'm on my way'.

κινεω move, remove
 τοπος, ου m place

"Without love the congregation ceases to be a church. Its lampstand is removed." Mounce.

Verse 6

ἀλλὰ τοῦτο ἔχεις ὅτι μισεῖς τὰ ἔργα τῶν Νικολαϊτῶν, ἃ καὶ γὼ μισῶ.

μισεω hate, despise

The only certain information which we have concerning the Nicolaitans is that found in this book. It has been suggested that the Nicolaitans and Balaamites (2:14-15) are one and the same and that three churches were therefore affected by this sect.

"D.M.Beck takes the Nicolaitans to be a 'heretical sect, who retained pagan practices like idolatry and immorality contrary to the thought and the conduct required in Christian churches'... Broadly speaking, they had worked out a compromise with the pagan society in which they lived... Their claim to practice idolatry and immorality under the banner of spiritual liberty was soundly rejected by the Ephesian congregation." Mounce.

Witherington wonders whether their name was significant (i.e. a self-adopted name) – Nicolaitans = 'victory people.'

κάγω a compound word = και ἐγω

Verse 7

ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις, τῷ νικῶντι δώσω αὐτῷ φαγεῖν ἐκ τοῦ ξύλου τῆς ζωῆς, ὃ ἐστὶν ἐν τῷ παραδείσῳ τοῦ θεοῦ.

οὖς, ὠτος n ear, hearing

Cf. Mk 4:4 etc. for the common saying of Jesus. "The exhortation to hear what the Spirit says introduces a promise in the first three letters and follows a promise in the last four." Mounce.

νικῶ conquer, overcome

Maybe a pun on the name Nicolaitans. One who remains faithful to Christ through all opposition and persecution (cf. 2:26; 3:21; 12:11; 15:2).

δώσω Verb, fut act indic, 1 s διδομι
φαγεῖν Verb, aor act infin ἐσθίω eat
ξύλον, ον n wood, tree
ζωῆ, ης f life

Cf. Gen 2:9; 3:22-24; Rev 22:2.

παράδεισος, ον m paradise

"Paradise was originally a Persian word for pleasure garden. In later Judaism it was used to portray the abode of the righteous dead. The Paradise of God in Revelation symbolises the eschatological state in which God and man are restored to that perfect fellowship which existed before the entrance of sin into the world." Mounce.

Verse 8

Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Σμύρνῃ ἐκκλησίας γράψον· Τάδε λέγει ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὁ ἔσχατος, ὃς ἐγένετο νεκρὸς καὶ ἔζησεν·

Smyrna was a seaport rivalling Ephesus. The old city had been destroyed and a new one was built by the successor of Alexandria the Great. The city made claim to be the first city of Asia, disputing this title with Ephesus and Pergamum.

Nothing is known of the origin of this church. Mounce suggests that it was founded during the time Paul lived in Ephesus on his third missionary journey (cf. Acts 19:26).

γράψον see v.1

ὁδε, ἡδε, τοδε see v.1

πρῶτος, η, ον see 1:17

Cf. note on 1:17.

ἐγένετο Verb, aor midd dep indic, 3 s γινομαι
νεκρὸς, α, ον dead

ζῶ live, be alive

Cf. 1:18. Ramsay has pointed out that the description of Christ as the first and the last, who was dead and came to life is well suited to a city which had also been dead and came to life, and which now claimed to be 'first'.

Verse 9

Οἶδά σου τὴν θλίψιν καὶ τὴν πτωχείαν, ἀλλὰ πλούσιος εἶ, καὶ τὴν βλασφημίαν ἐκ τῶν λεγόντων Ἰουδαίους εἶναι ἑαυτούς, καὶ οὐκ εἰσὶν, ἀλλὰ συναγωγή τοῦ Σατανᾶ.

θλιψις, εως f trouble, suffering

"The burden which crushes" Morris. A reference to affliction the church was suffering at the hands of Jewish and heathen persecutors.

πτωχεια, ας f poverty

"The linking of tribulation and poverty suggests a close connection between the two. In an antagonistic environment it would be difficult for the Christian to make a living, and thus many were economically destitute. They may also have been victims of mob violence and looting (cf. Heb. 10:34). Their poverty, however, was a material poverty: spiritually they were rich (note the contrast with the Laodicean church which claimed to be rich but was poor; 3:17)." Mounce.

Witherington suggests that their poverty may have been linked to the guild system – Christians may have been unwilling to participate in the guilds because of their inclusion of pagan or imperial ceremonies.

πλούσιος, α, ον rich

βλασφημία, ας f slander, blasphemy

"Jewish hostility to Christians seems to have stemmed both from their conviction that to worship a Galilean peasant who had died a criminal's death would be blasphemy and the apparent success of the Christians in evangelising God-fearers and even some from within Judaism." Mounce.

Witherington suggests that Jews, angered by Christian's witnessing in the synagogues, may have sought to make trouble for Christians by reporting them to the authorities as practicing an illegal religion, a *superstitio*. Christians had previously enjoyed a measure of protection from imperial power by being viewed as simply another Jewish sect. He comments, "Jews of course had a right to practice their own religion (something Rome allowed most ethnic groups they conquered to do), but in the Jews' case abstaining from other gods was a component of their faith. If Christians could be shown to be Gentiles or no longer Jews, they could not claim the benefits of an exemption from emperor worship, a precarious position in which to be."

εἶναι Verb, pres infin εἶμι

Cf. Rom 2:28-29; 9:6 for Jews who are not real Jews – it takes more than physical descent.

ἑαυτος, ἑαυτη, ἑαυτον him/herself, itself
 συναγωγη, ης f synagogue
 Σατανας, α the Adversary, Satan

Cf. Jn. 8:31-47. Jesus said of Jewish opponents in his day that they were not children of Abraham but of Satan.

The strong language here is self-defensive rhetoric making deliberate use of hyperbole. It is not the rhetoric of hate or anti-Semitism. John means that by opposing and persecuting (or instigating the persecution of) the Christians, these Jews were doing the devil's work.

Verse 10

μηδέν φοβοῦ ἃ μέλλεις πάσχειν. ἰδοὺ μέλλει βάλλειν ὁ διάβολος ἐξ ὑμῶν εἰς φυλακὴν ἵνα πειρασθῆτε, καὶ ἐξετε θλίψιν ἡμερῶν δέκα. γίνου πιστὸς ἄχρι θανάτου, καὶ δώσω σοι τὸν στέφανον τῆς ζωῆς.

μηδεις, μηδεμα, μηδεν no one, nothing
 φοβεομαι fear, be afraid (of)

Cf. Mt 10:28.

μελλω (before an infin) be going, be about
 πασχω suffer, experience
 βαλλω throw, place
 διαβολος, ου m the devil

They should be strengthened in recognising this attack as the work of the devil. John spends much time in this book showing how Satan's hand can be detected in the affairs of this world but that the last word is always with God – it is *his* plans which will triumph.

φυλακη, ης f prison, imprisonment

Probably to await execution.

πειρασθῆτε Verb, aor pass subj, 2 pl πειραζω
 test, put to the test, tempt

δεκα ten

A round number indicating a short period of time.

πιστος, η, ον faithful, believing
 ἄχρι prep with gen until, as far as
 θανατος, ου m death
 δωσω Verb, fut act indic, 1 s διδωμι
 στεφανος, ου m wreath, crown

A wreath, not a royal crown which would be διαδημα. Smyrna was famous for its games. The picture here is of the victory wreath. Witherington adds that Smyrna had the wreath as a symbol for its city, a symbol often found on inscriptions.

ζωη, ης f life

Life is the victor's prize (cf. James 1:12; 2 Tim 4:8; 1 Thess 2:19; 1 Peter 5:4; Heb 2:9).

Verse 11

ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις. ὁ νικῶν οὐ μὴ ἀδικηθῆ ἔκ τοῦ θανάτου τοῦ δευτέρου.

οὖς, ὅτος n see v.7.

νικαω conquer, overcome

ἀδικηθῆ Verb, aor pass subj, 3 s ἀδικεω
 harm

δευτερος, α, ον second

"The second death is a rabbinic term for the death of the wicked in the next world ... In Revelation 20:14 it is identified as the lake of fire, and in 21:8 as the final lot of 'the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted,' etc. Over the faithful, who share in the first resurrection, it has no power (20:6)." Mounce.

Verse 12

Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Περγάμῳ ἐκκλησίας γράψον· Τάδε λέγει ὁ ἔχων τὴν ῥομφαίαν τὴν δίστομον τὴν ὀξεῖαν·

Pergamum was the seat of government of the Roman province of Asia. The first temple of the imperial cult was built there in 29 B.C. in honour of Rome and Augustus. This is why John speaks of Pergamum as the 'place where Satan has his throne'. It was also the centre of the worship of Asklepios, the serpent-god who was famed for healing and who was referred to as 'saviour'. Witherington adds, "Pergamum was also famous for its 200,000 volume library. Here above all the church was likely to clash with the dictates of Hellenistic culture and the imperial cult."

ῥομφαια, ας f see 1:16

δίστομος, ον see 1:16

ὀξυς, εια, υ see 1:16

"In the context of life in a provincial capital where the proconsul was granted the 'right of the sword' (*ius gladii*), the power to execute at will, the sovereign Christ with the two-edged sword would remind the threatened congregation that ultimate power over life and death belongs to God." Mounce.

Verse 13

Οἶδα ποῦ κατοικεῖς, ὅπου ὁ θρόνος τοῦ Σατανᾶ, καὶ κρατεῖς τὸ ὄνομά μου, καὶ οὐκ ἠρνήσω τὴν πίστιν μου καὶ ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις Ἀντιπᾶς, ὁ μάρτυς μου, ὁ πιστός μου, ὃς ἀπεκτάνθη παρ' ὑμῖν, ὅπου ὁ Σατανᾶς κατοικεῖ.

ποῦ interrogative adverb where (?)
κατοικεω live, settle, inhabit
ὅπου adv. where
θρονος, ου m throne

Some think that the allusion is to the serpent god Asklepios. Most however, see it as a reference to the fact that Pergamum was the official cult centre of emperor worship in Asia. Caird says "John believed that Rome was the latest and greatest agent of Satan, not only because of her totalitarian demand for that absolute allegiance which is due to God alone, but also because he saw in her the epitome of all paganism and worldliness."

κρατεω hold, hold fast
ἠρνήσω Verb, aor midd dep indic, 2 s
ἀρνεομαι deny, disown, renounce
πιστις, εως f faith

By yielding to the pressure of burning incense to the emperor and declaring 'Caesar is Lord'.

μαρτυς, μαρτυρος dat pl μαρτυσιν m
witness, martyr

Suggests that he alone had thus far lost his life for the faith. It is not clear whether this was by judicial execution or mob violence.

πιστος, η, ον see v.10

Withington comments, "It is striking that Antipas is given the same title as Jesus, 'the faithful witness'."

ἀπεκτάνθη Verb, aor pass indic, 3 s
ἀποκτενω kill, put to death

"A contrast is intended with the first clause [of the verse] – both the believers and their ultimate adversary live in the same locality." Mounce.

Verse 14

ἀλλὰ ἔχω κατὰ σοῦ ὀλίγα, ὅτι ἔχεις ἐκεῖ κρατοῦντας τὴν διδαχὴν Βαλαάμ, ὃς ἐδίδασκεν τῷ Βαλὰκ βαλεῖν σκάνδαλον ἐνώπιον τῶν υἱῶν Ἰσραὴλ, φαγεῖν εἰδωλόθυτα καὶ πορνεῦσαι·

ὀλιγος, η, ον little, small; pl. few

There may be more than a few things we do not like about a church, but what matters is the verdict of Christ.

ἐκεῖ there, in that place

κρατεω see v.13

διδαχη, ης f teaching, what is taught

"John's opprobrious name for the teaching of the Nicolaitans." Caird.

διδασκω teach

βαλεῖν Verb, aor act infin βαλλω throw
σκανδαλον, ου n that which causes sin/
offence, obstacle

ἐνώπιον prep + gen before, in front of

"This reference is not to a body of doctrine but to Balaam's activity of advising the Midianite women how to beguile the Israelites into acting treacherously against the Lord. Numbers 25:1ff. reports that the Israelites 'began to play the harlot with the daughters of Moab,' who in turn were successful in getting them to worship their gods and take part in their sacred meals. Although there is no mention of Balaam at this point, we learn in Numbers 31:16 of his role in Israel's apostasy... Thus Balaam became a prototype of all corrupt teachers who betrayed believers into fatal compromise with worldly ideologies." Mounce.

φαγεῖν Verb, aor act infin ἐσθιω eat
εἰδωλοθυτον, ου n meat offered to idols

Probably at pagan festivals.

πορνεω commit sexual immorality

May either be literal (pagan festivities often included sexual licence), or figurative (i.e. religious infidelity).

Withington comments, "Whether John has in mind sex with sacred prostitutes (which would mean that πορνεία is used in its technical and root sense) or, more likely, the sexual dalliance that went on at dinner parties held in the temple precincts is uncertain. In either case John is warning against going to pagan temples and participating in events there."

Verse 15

οὕτως ἔχεις καὶ σὺ κρατοῦντας τὴν διδαχὴν Νικολαϊτῶν ὁμοίως.

οὕτως thus, in this way

Suggests that the previous verse referred to the Nicolaitans.

ὁμοίως likewise, in the same way

Witherington writes, "G.R.Beasley-Murray makes the appealing suggestion that the Nicolaitans may have been high-status Christians who believed a certain amount of compromise with the dominant culture was all right. They could have argued, 'Even Romans don't really believe the Emperor is a god, so why not just go along, and have a good living as a member of a guild?' They might have been dualists like some of the Corinthians (see 1 Cor. 8-10), arguing that what one did with the body did not affect one's spiritual condition and status. The complaint against Balaam is a complaint against syncretism, the luring of Christians into participation in pagan cults."

Verse 16

μετανόησον οὖν· εἰ δὲ μή, ἔρχομαί σοι ταχύ, καὶ πολεμήσω μετ' αὐτῶν ἐν τῇ ῥομφαίᾳ τοῦ στόματός μου.

μετανοεω repent

"Only a portion of the church has fallen prey to the pernicious doctrine of the Balaamites, but all are guilty of not taking action against their presence. The fault is the opposite of Ephesus where the heretics were rooted out but love was missing (2:2, 4)." Mounce.

ταχυ adv quickly, without delay, soon
πολεμεω wage war, fight

The sword of Christ's mouth is more to be feared than the sword of Rome.

Verse 17

ὁ ἔχων οὓς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις. τῷ νικῶντι δώσω αὐτῷ τοῦ μάννα τοῦ κεκρυμμένου, καὶ δώσω αὐτῷ ψῆφον λευκὴν, καὶ ἐπὶ τὴν ψῆφον ὄνομα καινὸν γεγραμμένον ὃ οὐδεὶς οἶδεν εἰ μὴ ὁ λαμβάνων.

νικαω see v.11

δώσω Verb, fut act indic, 1 s δίδωμι

κεκρυμμένου Verb, perf pass ptc, m & n gen
s κρυπτω hide

Reflects a Jewish legend that the pot of manna from the Ark was taken by Jeremiah at the time of the destruction of Solomon's Temple and hidden underground. There it would remain until the time of the Messiah when the manna, the ark and the temple would all be restored. "To those who conquer is offered not idol food but hidden manna (i.e., bread that is not currently visible and that comes from heaven). Here is the promise of a much more lasting and satisfying fellowship than one could get at a pagan feast, drawing on Jewish messianic traditions about the repetition of the manna miracle in the messianic kingdom." Witherington.

δώσω Verb, fut act indic, 1 s δίδωμι

ψηφος, ου f pebble, stone; vote
λευκος, η, ον white, shining

There are several explanations of the white stone:

- i) Stones were used as tickets of admission to the theatre or to a banquet. Caird and Mounce say that this is the conqueror's ticket of admission into the heavenly banquet.
- ii) Some suggest that a white stone was used in a court of law to signify acquittal.
- iii) Some think that it refers to a Rabbinic belief that in the last days the manna would be accompanied by precious stones falling from heaven.

Morris says, "We simply do not know what the white stone signified, though clearly it did convey some assurance of blessing."

καινος, η, ον new

γεγραμμένον Verb, perf pass ptc, m acc & n
nom/acc s γραφω

Mounce thinks it could be the name of the victor himself. Witherington adds, "The new name implies a new identity and being someone special in the kingdom. Christians did not have to compromise on earth by socialising with pagans in temples when they had a much better engraved invitation to a much better banquet."

οὐδεις, οὐδεμα, οὐδεν no one, nothing