

# REVELATION

*Seeing, Knowing and Serving Jesus Christ  
Today at the Edge of History*

Chapter 2:1-7

## Text: Revelation 2:1-7 - To the Churches: Ephesus

*To the Church in Ephesus*

**2** "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write:

These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands: <sup>2</sup> I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. <sup>3</sup> You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.

<sup>4</sup> Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. <sup>5</sup> Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place. <sup>6</sup> But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

<sup>7</sup> He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.



*“The great Son of Man is with us even now; moving among us, calling his bride-to-be into the dance of affection and intimacy. He stands before each of us right now. What is he saying to you? How do you respond?”*  
 - Darrell Johnson, *Discipleship on the Edge*, p.62

**Read & Reflect - 1:9-20**

**First Reading/First Impression:** Read all seven letters to the “churches in the province of Asia” (2:1-3:22). Next to each name below, write one word that comes to our mind to describe that church.

1. Ephesus _____	7. Laodicea _____
2. Smyrna _____	6. Philadelphia _____
3. Pergamum _____	5. Sardis _____
4. Thyatira _____	

**Second Reading/Focus on Ephesus:** Read the Letter to the Church in Ephesus again. If you were the new pastor of this church, what would the title of your first sermon be?

**Search**

Verses 1-7 - Fill in the chart below from the contents of the Ephesian Letter.

Church	How Jesus Presents Himself	What Jesus Knows	What Jesus Has Against Them	What Jesus Calls Them To Do	Warnings	Blessings
<i>Ephesus</i>						

Verses 2-3, 6 - What does Jesus, through John, say are the Ephesian church’s commendable assets?

Verse 4 - What is the essence of the church’s liabilities?

**Apply - 2:1-7**

1. What drew you to become a Christian, to put your trust in Christ, in the first place?

2. How do you today continue to enjoy and reflect these realities?

3. What evidence do you see in yourself and in your church that some “forsaking of our first love” has taken place?

4. What do you think Jesus might be telling us, through Revelation, to do about this?

*“I remember the devotion of your youth, how as a bride you loved me and followed me through the desert, through a land not sown... What fault did your fathers find in me, that they strayed so far from me?”*

- Jeremiah 2:2 & 5

**Notes on Revelation 2:1-7**

**Ephesus...** The closest of the seven cities to the island where John is exiled, it is also the most important politically and the best known. Paul wrote of his adventures here (see Acts 19-20) and included a parting speech to the Ephesian elders “... *I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them*” (Acts 20:29-30). “What Paul had envisioned in the 60’s has now occurred” (Metzger, Breaking the Code, p.31).

Ephesus had some impressive claims to fame:

- Fourth largest city in the Roman empire (behind Rome, Alexandria & Syrian Antioch). Estimated population--250,000
- Important financial center, seaport and hub for trade
- Home of Artemis, the mother goddess also called Diana. her temple, larger than two football fields, was called one of the seven wonders of the world and attracted visitors from far and wide
- Center for the imperial religious cult with temples honoring the goddess Roma & Julius Caesar, Augustus, Domitian and Hadrian
- A *neokoros* city, which means it was designated as the official warden in Asia for the imperial temple
- A magnificent 24,000 seat amphitheater
- Home of the Pan-Ionian games (second only in its spectacle and prestige to the Olympic Games in Athens)
- Traditionally known as the home church for Timothy until he was murdered and of Mary, Jesus’ mother, until she died

- Center of the Christian movement

v.1 - **“holds the seven stars... walks among the seven golden lampstands”**... direct reference from the description of Jesus in 1:12-16. Each letter will do the same, selecting different parts of the picture. The reminder here is that Jesus is near, among them, and that he is in control.

v.2 - **“hard work”**... means strenuous and exhausting work, they are putting out great effort because of their faith... **“tested those who claim to be apostles”**... they have a remarkable and commendable concern for orthodoxy in their belief (This is a good church!).

v.3 - **“persevered... endured hardships for my name”**... failure to participate in the imperial cult and the worship of the fertility goddess Artemis would have brought social isolation, economic deprivation and even mortal danger...

v.4 - **“forsaken your first love”**... the fatal flaw in the life of this “good church.” Earl Palmer, in Revelation in the Communicator’s Commentary Series, offers this insight:

*“The first love has been abandoned, and in its place is the starchy, high-cholesterol diet of activity and church work that will never nourish the human soul... The irony of this latter condition of the ‘Ephesian syndrome’ is that the Christian becomes totally preoccupied, fascinated with themes and goals which would have never won him or her in the first place to have joined the church.”*



**The Seven Letters...** Though they are addressed to individual churches, they are each meant for all the churches. None of them exist in any manuscript apart from the others. Note also that each message's conclusion includes these words:

*"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches..."* (always plural). Seven, as we have noted, is a highly symbolic number indicating completeness, so these seven probably stand for all churches, and their problems and opportunities are those of the whole Church in all of its local expressions.

### A Suggested Chiastic Structure (see Introduction) for the Seven Letters of Revelation 2 & 3:

(Note similar words and ideas)

#### 1. Ephesus (2:1-7)

"hear/overcome"  
concern for love  
promise is to eat from the tree of life  
warning is sever (take away your lamp)

#### 2. Smyrna (2:8-11)

"hear/overcome"  
"I have this against you" section is missing  
little in wealth, poor and afflicted  
"synagogue of Satan, Jews who are not Jews"  
encouragement for coming "suffering"

#### 3. Pergamum (2:12-17)

"hear/overcome"  
"you have people there who..."  
"white stone... new name"  
"I will soon come to you"

#### 4. Thyatira (2:18-29)

"overcome/hear"  
problem: lack of loyalty to Jesus  
Christ, toleration:  
- of "Jezebel"  
- of compromised faith  
- of "both/and" beliefs

#### 5. Sardis (3:1-6)

"overcome/hear"  
"you have a few people" who...  
"dressed in white... his name"  
"I will come like a thief"

#### 6. Philadelphia (3:7-13)

"overcome/hear"  
"I have this against you" section is missing  
little in strength  
"synagogue of Satan, Jews who are not Jews"  
protection in coming time of testing

#### 7. Laodicea (3:14-22)

"overcome/hear"  
concern is love  
promise is to eat with Jesus  
severe warning of expulsion (spit you out of my mouth)

The style and arrangement of the messages bears similarities with a type of Jewish writing called "prophetic oracles" (Amos 1-2 provides an example of this genre with its repeated *"This is what the Lord says"* to different groups). They also seem to reflect elements of "imperial or royal edicts," words of Persian Kings or Roman Emperors to their subjects. Thus Jesus is presented as *God* speaking to his redeemed people and like *the Emperor* speaking to his royal subjects. (Note: These are the two meanings of the Greek word *KURIOS* which we translate as "Lord.")

Each letter begins with the phrase *"to the angel of the church in [that city]."* "Angel" could mean a "messenger" or the church (thus perhaps a pastor or teacher), or a particular leader in the congregation, or an actual "guardian angel" overseer (the best choice--though also least understandable for us--based on other Biblical use of this word).

The overall structure of the letters (See "Suggested Chiastic Structure") points to the middle one (Thyatira) and may suggest that the issues raised there are most central to the purposes of them all and of the whole Book.

All seven messages follow the same basic structure:

1. Jesus identifies Himself with images
  - a. from the previous vision and/or
  - b. from the history & uniqueness of that particular city
2. He says "I know" some things about the church's situation
3. He affirms and/or criticizes the church
4. He calls them to repent, to turn from what is wrong and toward Him
5. He warns them of what will happen if they don't repent
6. He promises blessings to those who overcome
7. He calls them all to "hear what the Spirit is saying"