

1. **Introduction:** Continuing our study of Revelation, we begin at 2:1. John is told by the heavenly Jesus in a vision to write to the angel of the church at Ephesus.
2. **Ephesus - Revelation 2:1-3:** *“To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: ‘The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands.’² “I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false.”³ I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary.”*
 - From last lesson, Ephesus was a cosmopolitan seaport, a center of business, a center of pagan idol worship, and sexual immorality, and guardian of Artemis’ temple.
 - It was a wicked city opposed to most Christian principles. Yet, Paul was successful in evangelizing in Ephesus.
 - 2:1 The words in the letter are the words of Jesus, the One who holds the “angels” of the seven churches in His right hand and who walks in oversight among the seven churches.
 - 2:2-3 Jesus says, *“I know your works, your toil, and patient endurance.”* The members constitute the church. They work hard at doing the Lord’s will. They persevere even in the face of difficulties, being steadfast in obedience to Christ and doctrinal purity.
 - The Ephesus church wisely tests those who come to them claiming to be apostles. Those whom they find to be false are rejected. The people in the congregation patiently endure whatever hardships come along, keeping an unwavering positive outlook for Jesus’ sake.
3. **Things Against and For - Revelation 2:4-7:** *But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first.⁵ Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.⁶ Yet this you have: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.⁷ He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.’*
 - Jesus points out a problem. Constant struggle against attacks on their faith has hardened them, causing them to focus on the details of their struggle and forget that the reason that they struggle is their love for Jesus and His truth.
 - Jesus holds against them the loss of their initial love for Him and all He represents.
 - They are to think back to their beginning love and fervor, repent, and return to the love and works they did at first. Be excited and fruitful. If they don’t repent Jesus will come to remove their lampstand from its place.
 - **Favorable Things:** In their favor, they hate the works of the Nicolaitans that Jesus hates. The Nicolaitans falsely taught that Christians were not bound by God's moral law. They promoted forbidden behaviors claiming they were permitted by Christian freedom.

- To believers who are victorious in overcoming hinderances to their faith, Jesus will give the right to eat from the tree of life which is in the paradise of God.
 - The tree of life was originally created for Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and then withheld because of their sin (Gen 2:9; 3:22-24). In the final paradise of God, believers will be allowed to eat from the tree of life, symbolizing eternal life (Rev 22:2, 14).
 - This letter to Ephesus has a vital message for us today. In fact, it is a message throughout Scripture. That is the message, the truth and love are connected. All Scripture portrays God as holy, righteous, and truthful, as well as loving, gracious, and compassionate.
 - Jesus came to us from the Father full of **“grace and truth.”** Jesus clearly commends the Ephesian church for their doctrinal purity and the hard work necessary to keep it.
 - Just as clearly, He faults them for failing to continue the “works of love” they did in the beginning (1 Cor 13). They need to recognize what they are doing right, what they are doing wrong, and what they are not doing that they should be doing.
 - That requires knowing Scripture and carefully analyzing, in the light of Scripture, the “what and why” of the way they function daily. Not easy and likely not pleasant but essential.
4. **Smyrna - Revelation 2:8-11:** *And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: “The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life. ⁹ ‘I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. ¹⁰ Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life. ¹¹ He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death.’”*
- Smyrna (modern Izmir, Turkey) was a harbor city located about 40 miles northwest of Ephesus. Ancient Smyrna was known for its architectural beauty.
 - Smyrna had strong ties to Rome. It was the first city in the province of Asia to build a temple to the goddess Roma (195 BC). It also had a temple to the imperial cult (26 AD).
 - “The first and last” is one of several overlapping terms used to describe both God and Jesus and convey their eternal sovereignty.
 - The terms used are, “First and Last” (1:17; 22:13), Alpha and Omega (1:8; 21:6; 22:13), and “the Beginning and the End” (21:6; 22:13).
 - Jesus knows the people in the church are facing tribulation and are materially poor. But, though materially poor, they are spiritually and relationally rich. They have Jesus. As the One victorious over death, Jesus has shown the way for believers facing persecution.
 - At least some of the persecution Smyrna faces comes from the local unbelieving Jewish community who were denouncing Christians to the Roman authorities, probably as being atheists for not worshipping the Emperor.

- Believers in Smyrna are not to fear what they are about to suffer. Some will be thrown into prison. That will be a time of testing. The time of tribulation will be ten days. The phrase "ten days" symbolizes a finite, limited period of suffering, not necessarily a literal ten-day span. The tribulation is real and painful, but it will come to an end.
 - Throughout Revelation, God calls His people to faithful endurance. Those who are faithful unto death during times of testing will receive the crown of life.
 - ***“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”*** This admonition is to use the “ears” God has provided to hear the message to the churches (notice, not the church but the churches).
 - Believers who hear the Spirit and endure and conquer will not be hurt by the second death.
 - All seven letters (in fact the whole document) will be read aloud to the congregation of each of the seven churches.
 - Jesus and early believers were ethnic Jews. Many Jews did not recognize Jesus as Messiah, which eventually lead to a rift between “devout” Jews and Christians (Jews and Gentiles).
 - Jewish condemnation of Christians was active in Smyrna at the time of John and continued into the second century. Devout Jews, who considered belief that Jesus is Messiah as blasphemy, condemned Polycarp (the Bishop of Smyrna and a disciple of the apostle John) to Roman authorities for the crime of refusing to worship the Emperor.
 - When threatened with death, the elderly bishop stated he had served Christ for 86 years and could not blaspheme his King and Savior. He was to be condemned to be burned at the stake. When the flames didn’t kill him, he was stabbed.
 - Jews joined with pagans in clamoring for Polycarp’s death. Jews carried logs to fuel the fire. The martyrdom account reveals the Jews even broke the Sabbath to gather the wood.
 - Polycarp was martyred around 155 AD. Church history is filled with examples of believers whose hope in eternal life sustained them through torture and vile death.
5. **Pergamum – Revelation 2:12-13:** *And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: “The words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword.”¹³ ‘I know where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is. Yet you hold fast my name, and you did not deny my faith even in the days of Antipas my faithful witness, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.*
- Pergamum was located about 70 miles north of Smyrna. Jesus begins the letter to Pergamum pointing out that God’s Word is both penetrating and discerning, able to separate truth from falsehood, revealing the depths of the human heart.
 - Jesus knows the evil conditions under which they dwell are so bad it as though Satan’s throne is in Pergamum. It is a city of many temples including one for the Imperial Cult.

6. **Favorable Things (2:13-14):** Jesus commends them for faithfully persevering despite the evil all around them. He warns them not to compromise with the idolatrous, immoral culture in which they live. The moral challenges of Pergamum are like those of Ephesus.
- They have remained faithful, persevering in the evil environment of Pergamum even when Antipas, one of them, was murdered. Faithfulness in such an environment means they succeeded in persevering in the face of rampant evil and persecution.
7. **Things Against - Revelation 2:14-16:** *But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality.¹⁵ So also you have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans.¹⁶ Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth.*
- Some in the church hold to the teaching of Balaam and that of the Nicolaitians, both of whom encourage Christians to use their freedom to participate in pagan worship activities, including worship of the Emperor.
 - Christians who refused to participate in this compromise suffered social and economic persecution or worse.
 - The church in Ephesus dealt properly with false teaching. The Pergamum church needs to take a firm stand in rejecting the teaching and practices of false teachers in their midst.
 - The "sword" coming from Jesus' mouth is a metaphor for His powerful, piercing word which He will use as a tool of judgment against false teachings and unrepentant sin within the church. It represents spiritual authority and the ability to discern and expose spiritual falsehood, rather than physical violence.
8. **Revelation 2:17:** *He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it.'"*
- "Hidden manna" refers to the spiritual sustenance and abundant provision God provides for believers who endure in their faith. It symbolizes the nourishment found in a deep relationship with Jesus.
 - It's "hidden" because it is not physical but rather a divine grace that provides deep, often inexplicable, satisfaction that only those faithful in Christ can experience.