

Revelation 2:1-11 - Churches at Ephesus and Smyrna

© 2003-2004 Tony Garland - contact@SpiritAndTruth.org

COURSE COMMENTARY

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2:1 - Letters to Seven Churches

The Seven Churches of Asia

Overview of Churches

For an introduction and overview of the letters to the churches, see the lesson on [Revelation 1:3-4](#).



2:1 - Ephesus - introduction

Temple of Artemis at Ephesus



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- 1) An important seaport city at the time of John (now several miles from the sea).
- 2) Famous for Temple of Artemis (Diana) ([Acts 19:24-41](#)).
- 3) Imperial cult: temples to emperors Claudius, Hadrian, and Severus.
- 4) Reputation as a seat of learning, Paul taught at *School of Tyrannus* ([Acts 19:9](#)).
- 5) Paul taught in Ephesus for three years ([Acts 20:31](#)).
- 6) Tradition records that John relocated to Ephesus in about A.D. 66.

2:1 - Ephesus - title

- [Titles used in Each Letter](#)

The title Christ uses in each letter is primarily derived from the vision given John in [Revelation 1:12-18](#). The choice of title is related to the characteristics and situation of each church.

- [holds the seven stars in His right hand](#)

The seven stars are the angels of the churches ([Rev. 1:20](#)). The Ephesian church has **lost its first love** so Jesus reminds them that it is He who holds their angel.

- [walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands](#)

The seven golden lampstands are the seven churches ([Rev. 1:20](#)). Christ has promised to *always* be in the midst of His churches ([Mat. 28:20](#)).

2:2 - Ephesus - commendation

- [I know your works](#)

Know is *oida* , perfect tense: "I have known." He knows every detail of every church and that knowledge results in the commendations, exhortations, and promises given now.

- **cannot bear those who are evil**
The Ephesian church practiced church discipline ([Mat. 18:17](#); [1Cor. 5:5](#); [1Ti. 6:3-5](#)).
- **tested false apostles**
The Ephesians applied the standard of God's Word to those claiming to be apostles ([Isa. 8:20](#)). These deceivers are all the more effective because *they themselves are deceived* ([2Ti. 3:13](#)). We are to *test the spirits whether they are of God* ([1Jn. 4:1](#)).
- **persevered**
Greek *hypomonen*, the Ephesians had "abided under" a load, as had John ([Rev. 1:9](#)).
- **have labored**
The Ephesians were producing fruit which evidenced their faith ([Jas. 2:17-26](#)).
- **My name's sake**
We must take care that our labors are *for His name's sake*. Since we are called by His name, when our actions do not match Scripture, then we *profane His name* ([Eze. 36:21-23](#)).

2:4 - Ephesus - criticism

- **left your first love**
"Left" is *aphe'kes* meaning "to send away... to depart... of a husband divorcing his wife." The Ephesians were following in the footsteps of Israel before them.
- **Stage 1: Love of Betrothal**
"Go and cry in the hearing of Israel... I remember you, the kindness of your youth, the love of your betrothal, when you went after Me in the wilderness" ([Jer. 2:2](#)).
- **Stage 2: Idolatry**
"What injustice have your fathers found in Me, that they have gone far from Me, have followed idols, and have become idolaters? Neither did they say, 'Where is the Lord.'" ([Jer. 2:5-6](#)).
- **Stage 3: Loss of Relationship**
"I brought you into a bountiful country... but when you entered... you defiled My land... and those who handle the law did not know me... the prophets prophesied by Baal and walked after things that do not profit." ([Jer. 2:7-9](#)).

2:5 - Ephesus - exhortation

- **remember... repent... do!**
All three steps are in the imperative tense. "Repent" is *metanoein* which involves three steps: 1) accurate knowledge of the past; 2) change of mind; 3) change of **behavior**.
- **from where you have fallen**
The **distance** in relationship from Jesus is equated with the **depth** of the fall.
- **do the first works**
The **quantity** of the works were not lacking, but the **quality**. The motivation and focus had drifted with time.

- **I will come... and remove your lampstand**
"I will come" is a futuristic present, *I am coming, presently underway* ! The Ephesian church no longer exists.

2:6 - Ephesus - Nicolaitans

- **hate the deeds**
God hates the evil **deeds** and false **doctrine** (Rev. 2:13). We must separate hatred for the **sin** from hatred for the **sinner** . Believers are to have no fellowship with unfruitful works and expose them (Eph. 5:11; 2Jn. 1:9).
- **Nicolaitans**
 - 1) An early cult which followed or perverted the teachings of Nicolas (Acts 6:5) ?
 - 2) Denotes a group which taught an unnatural distinction between clergy and laity? italics Nicolaitans = *nica'o* (to conquer) + *la'os* (people).

Teachings may be related by association to Balaam (Rev. 2:14-15).

2:7 - Ephesus - promises

- **overcomer**
 - 1) A special class of Christians, those who are spiritual and not carnal?
 - 2) A group of Christians set apart for eventual martyrdom?
 - 3) Another name for those who are genuinely regenerate believers?

The rewards given the overcomer **correlate with the general benefits of salvation**.
- **tree of life**
 - 1) The means of eternal life originally in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:9).
 - 2) The *Tree of Life* in this age is the cross of Jesus (John 3:14-16) !
 - 3) Believers will once again have access to the Tree of Life in the eternal state (Rev. 22:2, 14).
- **paradise of God**
 - 1) Prior to the cross, paradise was a compartment within Hades (Luke 16:22-23).
 - 2) At His crucifixion, Jesus promised the repentant thief, "Today you will be with Me in paradise" (Luke 23:43).
 - 3) Now, paradise is in heaven (2Cor. 12:4).
 - 4) Paradise will eventually be in the New Jerusalem on the new earth (Rev. 21-22).

2:8 - Smyrna - introduction

Temple of Athena in Old Smyrna



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- 1) According to Tertullian, Polycarp was consecrated bishop of Smyrna by St. John. Polycarp was martyred in A.D. 168.
- 2) A coastal city involved in trade in the Eastern Mediterranean.
- 3) *Smyrna* means "bitter" or "death."
- 4) One of only two churches (Philadelphia being the other) for which Christ gives no word of criticism.

2:8 - Smyrna - title

- **the First and the Last**
Jesus emphasizes His eternality to the church which will face martyrdom. Martyrdom is the ultimate test of the **eternal perspective** of the saints (**Rev. 12:11**) ! It is to this church that He promises "the crown of life" (**Rev. 2:10**).
- **who was dead, and came to life**
Jesus emphasizes His victory over death. He alone has eternal life and will grant it to the faithful ones at Smyrna. Although the devil could destroy the body, he could do no more (**Mat. 10:28**; **Luke 12:4**).

2:9 - Smyrna - commendation

- **I know your... poverty... but you are rich**
The church *appeared* poor, but was truly rich. Their riches were laid up in heaven (**Mat. 6:20**; **19:21**; **Luke 12:21**; **Jas. 2:5**).
- **synagogue of Satan**
Early Christianity encountered opposition from three primary sources: 1) pagan beliefs and practices; 2) heretical teachings; 3) **Jews**. Of the three, the Jews were the earliest and most vociferous (e.g., Saul of Tarsus). True Jews are those whose "circumcision is of the heart" (**Rom.**

2:28-29).

2:10 - Smyrna - exhortation

- you are about to suffer**
 God warns the church of Smyrna about what is ahead. Having the perspective of God makes all the difference in how we understand trials and tests. This is a key purpose of the *Book of Revelation*.
- devil is about to throw**
 Devil is *dia'bolos* from *dia* (against) and *ballo* (to throw). He *throws* accusations *against* the saints ([Job 1:6](#); [Zec. 3:1-2](#); [Rev. 12:10](#)).
- that you may be tested**
 God makes use of evil for His own purpose. He already knows what is in a man. But does the man? Usually not ([Luke 22:31](#)). Testing makes it self-evident ([John 21:15-17](#)).
- until death**
 This phrase speaks of intensity rather than chronology. "To the point of death."
- crown of life**
 Death would be merely a transition for the faithful at Smyrna ([Php. 1:21-23](#)).

2:11 - Smyrna - promises

- not be hurt by the second death**
 There are *two births*, *two deaths*, and *two resurrections* within Scripture.

Event	Unbeliever	Believer	Description
Born Again	No	Yes	The first birth is <i>physical</i> birth. The second birth is <i>spiritual</i> and occurs when a person comes to faith in Jesus Christ. Only believers are "born twice."
1st Death	Yes	Yes	The first death occurs at the end of one's physical life.
1st Resurrection	No	Yes	The first resurrection is a category and occurs in stages, beginning with the resurrection of Christ (1Cor. 15:20) and ending with the resurrection of the just prior to the Millennial Kingdom (Rev. 20:5-6). Only <i>believers</i> participate in the first resurrection.
2nd Resurrection	Yes	No	The second resurrection occurs at the end of the millennial kingdom at the Great White Throne judgment (Rev. 20:11-13). Only <i>unbelievers</i> participate in the second resurrection.
2nd Death	Yes	No	The second death is after the Millennium and the Great White Throne judgment (Rev. 20:14-15). The second death is commonly known as <i>hell</i> .

- born again**
 The overcomer is one who has faith in Christ's atoning work on the cross. He is "born

again." Those who are "born twice" only "die once." This promise had special significance for the saints at Smyrna.

For additional information on this topic, see the [commentary](#).