

Revelation, Part 4

The Seven Churches — Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos

The next two chapters of the Revelation is a special address to the church. Some believe the message is broken down into various periods of church history, Ephesus represents the first century of the church and Laodicea the last day church. That view is very unlikely. The method of the revelation and distribution to the church indicates the epistles deal with the local assemblies and the church throughout the periods of time. Some of the message addressed the need and condition of specific churches, times and places, while it is evident that the overall message is to the whole church. Therefore, the message is both universal and specific. The conditions in the various churches portray the walk of every believer with Jesus. In all cases, the Lord knows His church.

By addressing the angel of the church, the Lord is speaking to the pastor and ultimately the local church.

These seven individuals have an assignment from Jesus Christ to watch over the church. The wording makes it clear that Jesus was addressing a pastor or bishop and not a holy angel. Jesus is the Lord of Hosts and has infinite and personal contact with His holy angels. This revelation was given to John to share with the churches.

The address to the churches begins with the church at Ephesus.

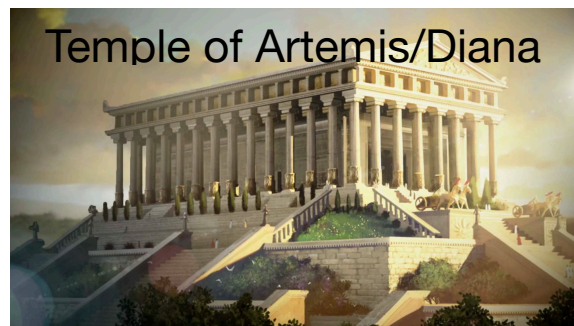
Revelation 2:1 NKJV “To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, ‘These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands:

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The Lord is reminding pastors and churches Who He is and that He is in the midst of His church.

Ephesus was the first to be addressed.

It was the most important city of the seven listed. It was a commercial and religious center. The Temple of Diana was its name to the Romans and the Greeks called it the Temple of Artemis. The Temple of Diana was located in Ephesus and was one of the seven wonders of the world. It had 127 pillars that were 60 feet tall. Diana (or Artemis) was the goddess of fertility and was worshipped with immoral sexual activities. They believed her image fell out of heaven. Ephesus was a stronghold for Satan and many superstitious and satanic practices. It held a great library that was filled with books on sorcery, forbidden arts, and practices of the occult.



Ephesus was not only a famous city, it had an influential church.

Apollos came to Ephesus and Aquilla and Pricilla heard him and received the message of Christ, (Acts 18:24-28). When Paul came to Ephesus, he found disciples and they received the Holy Spirit. He continued in ministry there for three years, (Acts 19). Timothy worked in Ephesus, (1 Timothy 1:3) and the Apostle John also ministered there.

Revelation 2:2-3 NKJV “I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name’s sake and have not become weary.

The Lord is omniscient and knows our professions, desires, and good intentions. He knows our work, labor, patience and perseverance. In all of the seven letters the Lord says, “I know your works.” As a result of the prestige and influence of the church, it became the focus of false apostles and teachers. Gnosticism was attempting to deny the deity of Christ. Many false apostles, prophets and teachers had an influence on believers and the church. In the midst of spiritual and doctrinal attack, the Lord knows what is happening. Jesus praised their resistance against falsehood and evil. They persevered with patience and continued to labor for Christ name’s sake and did not become weary.

Revelation 2:4-5 NKJV Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent.

In Ephesians 1:15, the church was recognized for their faith and love for all the saints. Their love for God and one another was a demonstration of their hunger for a deeper relationship with Christ. They experienced great spiritual heights, but ultimately lost their first love. Losing their first love means a great diminishing and turning away from the Lord. They had been under extensive spiritual and personal attack. From within, false apostles perverted the truth and on the outside they faced constant perversion by the worship of Diana. Wickedness abounded all around them.

In a day of great compromise and spiritual attack, the church is being challenged to remain true to the Word of God.

Whenever we see a spirit of compromise and loss of first love, we must personally repent and return to the Lord.

Jesus warned the church that if they did not repent and do their first works, He would remove their lampstand from its place. What does that mean?

The Lord will have a church that remains faithful to the end and overcomes Satan and the evil that is prevalent. If He removes their lampstand, their light and influence would be lost. Nothing is as bad as a church that professes to

have something that is not being seen or experienced. A church loses its purpose for being when it grows cold and loses its relationship with Christ. The Lord is able to raise up a body of believers that will remain true to Him. We should not only be known for the light and power of God, we must possess that light and power.

Revelation 2:6 NKJV But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

The Nicolaitans were a heretical group that influenced the churches in Ephesus and Pergamos. They followed the doctrine of Balaam who sacrificed to idols and committed sexual immorality, (Revelation 2:14-15).

2 Peter 2:19 NKJV While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage.

Jude 4 NKJV For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ.

In a day of moral decline, the church must remain true to the faith and righteousness that is in Christ.

The Lord concludes the message to Ephesus with a word to all the churches.

Revelation 2:7 NKJV He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.

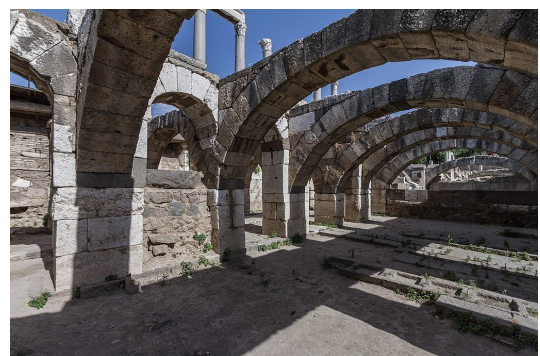
All believers must have hearing ears to what the Holy Spirit is saying. Jesus promised the Holy Spirit would come to direct and guide believers into the truth.

To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.

The tree of life refers to the blessing that is to be obtained in the Paradise of God. Rather than being hurt by the second death, which is eternity in the lake of fire, they will eat of the tree of life. This is a promise of eternal life in the presence of God.

Smyrna had a golden street which ran from the sea up to Mount Pagos.

Along the road were many pagan temples to the nature goddess (Cybele), the sun god (Apollo), the healing god (Asclepius), the goddess of love and beauty (Aphrodite), and Zeus the head deity. The city was a



large seaport 35 miles north of Ephesus.

Revelation 2:8-9 NKJV “And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write, ‘These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life: “I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

They faced bitter persecution, afflictions and extreme poverty. They were persecuted by pagan Gentiles, hostile Jews and Satan.

Hebrews 10:34 NKJV You had compassion on me in my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven.

Early believers accepted the fact that *“They who live Godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.”*

Revelation 2:10 NKJV Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.

“Do not fear” what is about to happen.

The Lord knows our works, tribulation, and poverty. He Who has conquered death says, “Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer.” To one degree or another, each of us may face suffering or persecution. Jesus said, “Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.” The Lord said what they were facing was going to be short lived, but the crown of life is eternal.

Romans 8:18 NKJV For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

Revelation 2:11 NKJV “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.”

Once again Jesus told the church to hear what the Spirit says. Every believer must have an ear for what the Holy Spirit is saying, especially during days of trouble and trial.

“He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.”

Jesus is promising the same blessing that He gave to the church in Ephesus. Keep faithful unto the end, knowing that death cannot hold you, Jesus holds the key to hades and death.

Pergamos was the capital city of the province of Asia and the site for the famous temple to Asclepius, the god of healing.

It had temples to Greek and Roman gods Dionysus, Athena, Demeter, Zeus and three temples to the Roman Emperor.



Revelation 2:12 NKJV “And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write, ‘These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword:

Notice the difference in the Lord’s address to this church.

- To Ephesus, “He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands.”
- To Smyrna, “These things says the First and the Last, Who was dead, and came to life.”
- To Pergamos, “These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword.” This letter shows Jesus as the Word of God.

Hebrews 4:12 NKJV For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. The Lord was speaking to Pergamos with the authority of the all-knowing, heart searching word of God.

Revelation 2:13 NKJV I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is. And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.

Jesus looked upon Pergamos as Satan’s throne. The temple where the people worshipped had an image of the god of healing with a serpent wrapped around his staff. The religion and politics of Pergamos was under the stronghold of Satan’s power. It had a huge throne-like altar that was dedicated to the Roman god Zeus. The believers in Pergamos faced severe persecution and many were martyred for their faith.

In the face of persecution, it is easy for some to compromise their faith. The Lord praised them for holding fast to His name and for not denying the faith while facing the martyrdom of fellow believers.



Revelation 2:14-15 NKJV But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality. Thus you also have those who hold the

doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.

The doctrine of Balaam and the doctrine of the Nicolaitans encouraged immorality and compromise. This sexual immorality was part of the Romans and Greeks religion. Balaam encouraged eating things sacrificed to idols and sexual immorality. The Nicolaitans were mentioned in Ephesus and Pergamos. Their teachings were almost identical with Balaam and Jezebel who associated with pagan gods. The Lord was speaking against the accommodation of immoral behavior in the church.

Revelation 2:16 NKJV Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth.

The Lord wants His church to be holy and pure. We are called to be the righteousness of God in Christ. Jesus warned the church that He would fight against immoral behavior with the sword of His mouth.

Revelation 2:17 NKJV He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it.

Those who overcome will receive hidden manna, a white stone and a new name.

Hidden manna from heaven is a contrast of the food offered to idols. The white stone and new name refers to heavenly blessing and possession. This white stone and new name are an association with the glorified Christ and position in heaven. I believe this new name is associated with the fact that our names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life. These blessings are to be given to those who overcome.

These first three churches faced severe challenges due to Satan's persistent attack. The whole church must guard against evil and stay true to Christ, especially in the day of compromise.