

1 A Season in Revelation with Dr. Paige Patterson

2 Session 4

- Revelation 2:1-11
- To Church at Ephesus and Smyrna

3

4 2:1-7, Ephesus

- “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.

5 2:1-7, Ephesus

- 3 I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary. 4 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 2:1-7, Ephesus

- 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.’

7 2:8-11, Smyrna

- 8 “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[a] of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

8 2:8-11, Smyrna

- 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.’

9 Interpretations of Churches

- One common interpretation is to see the 7 churches of Revelation as characterizing different eras of church history.

- Ephesus - representing the church at the end of the apostolic era, continuing to function with a certain militancy but with a receding of its first love.
- Smyrna - era of the Roman persecution, beginning approximately with Trajan (AD 98) and continuing to the reign of Constantine (AD 313).

10 Interpretations of Churches

- Pergamum - represents the church in the period immediately following Constantine's embracing of Christianity when the church became married to the world and then theologically and morally apostate.
- Theater - usually viewed as the church of the Middle Ages, immersed in heretical teaching and moral turpitude.

11 Interpretations of Churches

- Sardis - the church of the Reformation when some are found who have not defiled their garments, even though the majority of the church is still dead.
- Philadelphia is pictured as the church of missionary expansion, beginning with the work of William Carey (1792) and continuing until the contemporary period.

12 Interpretations of Churches

- Laodicea - which is merely lukewarm, is almost inevitably applied to the present period.

13 Pattern of Address

- The message to each church is addressed to the city where the church resides and more specifically to the angel of that church.
- Then the ultimate author of the book, the Lord Jesus, reveals himself in each case in a way that is uniquely applicable to the problems and prospects of that individual local church.

14 Pattern of Address

- There follows an assessment of the church, which is sometimes positive (Philadelphia), sometimes negative (Thyatira), and sometimes mixed (Sardis).

15 Pattern of Address

- A negative assessment is followed by either counsel or threat or both, and comfort and commendation also follow when there is need.
- In each of the letters to the seven churches is a concluding promise accompanied by an admonition.

16 Pattern of Address

- Once again, the promises are uniquely applicable to the seven historic congregations in Asia Minor but, by extension, valuable for all generations.

17 Why these seven churches?

- We have no idea
- Speculation as to why these particular seven were chosen includes the possibility that John himself had some special relationship to these churches.

18 2:1-7, Ephesus

- “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.

19 2:1-7, Ephesus

- Angel/messenger - again, up for interpretation, but most likely, the pastor/elder of the church.
- Church - close of the first century, the word *ekklēsia* had apparently been widely accepted as standard nomenclature for the assembled body of Christ in a given location.

20 2:1-7, Ephesus

- Seven stars in his right hand - the seven angels of the seven churches.
- Seven golden lamp stands - these are the 7 churches he is about to speak to.

21 Ephesus

- Ephesus, located at the mouth of a beautiful harbor where the Cayster River flowed into the Aegean, was the chief city of this section of proconsular Asia.
- Foremost among them was the Artemision, or the Temple of Artemis or Diana of the Ephesians.
- This structure, built in phases over a long period, had by the time of the writing of the Apocalypse become known as one of the wonders of the ancient world.

22 Ephesus

- The temple itself was 425 feet long by 220 feet wide and boasted 60 foot columns.
- In addition to being something of an architectural wonder, the temple served as the center for the localized worship of Artemis, to whom the citizens of Ephesus were probably more devoted than were the citizens of almost any other ancient metropolis.

23

24 Ephesus

- Ephesus had a huge cultic center that supported multiple worship activities of Greek gods.

- “With the emphasis on feeling rather than thought, these cults utilized many different means to affect the emotions and imaginations of their followers: drama, acts of purification, processions, fasting, and esoteric liturgies.

25 Ephesus

- During Paul’s missionary journeys he encountered a strong reaction from this idolatrous culture when he convinced many of the Ephesians to stop following idols. [Acts 19:21-41]
 - This hurt the local trade from selling the “Artimis dolls” and caused a riot.

26 Ephesus

- The current archaeological investigation of the ancient city of Ephesus is probably the finest example of a massive project in archaeology anywhere in the world.
- The street coming from the harbor has been completely excavated, and as one approaches that famous broad thoroughfare, he becomes instantly aware of the magnificent theater looming ahead.
- This structure, which at one time would seat 24,000 people, is mentioned in the book of Acts.

27

28 Ephesus

- Library of Celsus
- Temple of Domition
- Bathhouses

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30 Ephesus

- While the social life of the city of Ephesus was probably no more degrading than that of any other large Greco-Roman city, and perhaps not as degenerate as Corinth, nonetheless, temple prostitution and mutilation in rituals were reasonably common in the city.
- Ephesus boasted a population during the time of the Revelation between 100,000-250,000.


31 Rev. 2:2-3, Positive

- 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.


32 Rev. 2:2-3, Positive

- There are four such affirmations:


- the church is commended for its labor, its patience, its inability to bear those that were evil, and for the fact that it had put to a test certain ones who claimed to be apostles and had found them to be liars.

33  **Rev. 2:2-3, Positive**

- Finally, undoubtedly because Ephesus was the chief city of proconsular Asia, the apostle Paul visited the city, and John himself ministered there.
- This cultural center and emporium would be a magnet for those claiming apostolic authority but who were embracing positions inconsistent with New Testament Christianity—most certainly the Nicolaitans mentioned in v. 6.

34  **Rev. 2:2-3, Positive**

- The church had demonstrated its unwillingness to tolerate such heresy. This lack of tolerance did not manifest itself only in terms of an attitude.
- Understanding the necessity for doctrinal purity, the Ephesian church tried or tested these teachers.

35  **Rev. 2:2-3, Positive**


- “Tested” is a translation of the aorist active indicative of *peirazō*, suggesting a thorough examination.
- Since this is almost always an unpleasant pursuit, the Ephesian church appears all the more remarkable.

36  **Rev. 2:2-3, Positive**


- Painting a picture of church life in Ephesus on the basis of v. 2, one can possibly affirm that the church at Ephesus was a diligent, hardworking church characterized by great patience in the apostolic endeavor, a love for moral purity, and an unquestioned orthodoxy, which made the congregation quite different from her sister churches in Pergamum or Thyatira.

37  **Rev. 2:2-3, Positive**

- Both persecution and the pursuit of doctrinal purity wear down those of weak faith and commitment. Once again the picture is of the near perfect congregation.


38  **Rev. 2:4-6, Negative**

- 4 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.


39  **Rev. 2:4-6, Negative**

- Having commended the Ephesians for so many features in their ecclesiastical life, the Lord of heaven now says that he has one thing against them: They have forsaken their first love.


- The difficulty - what does this mean?

40  **Rev. 2:4-6, Negative**


- The speculation of the present commentator is that the reference is probably to a loss of love for Christ.
- How, someone may ask, could a church as perfect as that of Ephesus possibly fail to love Christ or God appropriately?
 - But to ask the question is almost to answer it. What is in view in the church of Ephesus is a question of motivation and priority.

41  **Rev. 2:4-6, Negative**


- Certainly, one can do all the right things and yet do them for an inadequate or ignoble reason. One can even do the right things for some of the right reasons but fail in the service of the Lord in terms of the noblest reasoning.
- Perhaps Ephesus had succeeded well in many areas, but the maintenance of that success [tradition?] had become more important than the motivation for service—namely, the love for Christ.

42  **Rev. 2:4-6, Negative**


- Is this correct? Evidence.
 - First, the expression “first love” has biblical precedent since the highest commandment explicitly declared in both the Old and New Testaments is to “love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength” (Deut 6:5; Mark 12:30).
 - Christian readers, and perhaps even Gentile readers, would instantly have taken the “first love” statement to refer to the need to love God.

43  **The Rev. 2:4-6, Negative**


- The second reason favoring such an interpretation arises out of the admonitions for remedying the situation.
- The church is called first, to remember; second, to repent; and third, to activate themselves in terms of what they did “at first” or in the earliest days of the church in Ephesus.

44  **Rev. 2:4-6, Negative**


- Here repentance is conditioned upon remembering. One finds difficulty in repenting of something for which he feels no guilt.
- The Ephesian Christians are asked to remember the lofty perch of the early development of the church when most and perhaps all of them had experienced the new birth, the release of the burden of the guilt of sin, and the elation of knowing that one is right with God.

45  **Rev. 2:4-6, Negative**


- The Ephesians are to remember those days; and, having assessed the difference between their present habitual pursuits versus the love-motivated pursuits of the early years, they are to repent.
- This command is to pursue all of the activities above: adjudication in matters of heresy, endorsement of moral good, perseverance, and copious labor for the proper reason—the love of Christ. It is the love of Christ that “compels us” (2 Cor 5:14).

46  **Rev. 2:4-6, Negative**


- In the midst of what seemed to be such a successful evangelistic and missionary foray into the most prestigious city of that part of Asia Minor, the congregation has been threatened with removal because of improper motivation. For the church in any era, this should give significant pause.
- Neither history nor appropriate activity is sufficient to demand the continued blessings of God; rather, the only motivation must be love for Christ.

47  **Rev. 2:4-6, Negative**


- Who are the Nicolaitans? 3 views
 - An apostate deacon from Acts 6 (Nicholas, proselyte of Antioch) - supporters are -Irenaeus, Tertullian, Hippolytus, Jerome, Augustine, but not all church fathers.
 - A Gnostic movement
 - Heretical group related Balaam

48  **Rev. 2:4-6, Negative**


- First, the Lord does not say that the church at Ephesus hates the Nicolaitans or, for that matter, that he hates the Nicolaitans. Specifically, “the practices” of the Nicolaitans merit that hatred.
- Here again is a lesson in every era for the church concerning her response to heresy.

49  **Rev. 2:4-6, Negative**

- While the heresy and its practice must be despised, the heretic himself remains an object of God’s love and potential candidate for redemption.
- In any era of the church of Christ, responding to heresy with hate for the heretic has not earned the blessings of God but rather his judgment.

50  **Rev. 2:7, Overcoming**

- 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.’

51  **Rev. 2:7, Overcoming**

- Each of the seven letters concludes with this admonition.

- The formula raises the question of the incomprehensibility of anyone who would not want to benefit from the promises God offers to each of these seven churches.
- Nowhere is that more true than in the promise to the church at Ephesus.

52 **Rev. 2:7, Overcoming**

- The one who overcomes does so based on two things. First is the blood of Jesus Christ, which alone makes it possible for God to be both just and the justifier of them who are saved (Rom 3:24).
- However, as Paul also says in Rom 10:9–10, an appropriation of that atonement must be made in the life of the believer, and hence one must “confess with your mouth ... and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead,” which results in his salvation. Therefore, the second, appropriating basis for overcoming is the “word of their testimony.”

53 **Rev. 2:7, Overcoming**

- The verb overcome - nikao - “Nike”
- To this individual God promises that he will give the right to eat from the tree of life that is in the midst of the paradise of God.
- Numerous aspects of this verse will interest the interpreter.

54 **Rev. 2:7, Overcoming**

- First, there is the apparent connection to the Artemesion, which was the jewel of Ephesus.
- Excavations, as well as examination of historical sources, have led to the discovery that a large garden area was a part of the temple of Artemis in Ephesus. In the heart of that garden, there was a tree, either an oak or an elm.

55 **Rev. 2:7, Overcoming**

- This “tree-shrine” was a special holy place for the worship of Artemis. Evidence suggests that it was, in fact, the most sacred of all the parts of the famous temple shrine and may even have been spoken of as a “tree of life.”


56 **Rev. 2:7, Overcoming**

- John suggests that just as that tree of life was found in the midst of the initial paradise of Eden, so it has been somehow transplanted to “the paradise of God.”
- The overcomer is promised that he will have the right to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.


57

58 **Rev. 2:8-11, Smyrna**

- 8 “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[a] 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.


59  **Rev. 2:8-11, Smyrna**

- 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. 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.’

60  **Rev. 2:8-11, Smyrna**


- Ismir, the third largest city in modern Turkey, is literally built on the rubble of ancient Smyrna.
- Possessing a land-locked and protected harbor, the city began at sea level and climbed, even as it does today, up the slopes of Mount Pagus.

61 

62  **Rev. 2:8-11, Smyrna**


- There was a cohesiveness and a pattern about the architecture that made it blend together; and as one stood at the sea harbor looking up toward the top of Mount Pagus, he could see a panorama that led it to be called “a crown.”
- Others referred to it as “a flower” or “a statue.” There was a winding thoroughfare ascending Mount Pagus and passing the magnificent temples to Cybele, Apollo, Aesculapius, Aphrodite, and toward the top a notable shrine to Zeus himself.
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64  **Rev. 2:8-11, Smyrna**

- In addition to this plethora of religious sentiment, there is also evidence that Smyrna had become the center of Caesar worship for all Asia.
- Birthplace of Homer and Lysimachus had restored the city to greatness after a period of nearly 400 years of decline.
- There are evidences, in fact, that Smyrna had lost its status as a city and had degenerated into a series of disorganized settlements only to be revived into urban status by Lysimachus.

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66  **Rev. 2:8-11, Smyrna**

- For Christians, Smyrna also became well known as the place of the execution of Polycarp, one of its most famous early martyrs.
- This bishop of the church in Smyrna was executed there on February 23, AD 155.

67 

68 **Rev. 2:8-11, Smyrna**

- It is very possible that Polycarp was the “angel” at Smyrna, judging by his age and the traditional date of authorship of Revelation.
- Smyrna then was famous for two things: first, its beauty and, second, its suffering.
- Those two things will then be observed prominently in the letter to the church at Smyrna.

69 **Rev. 2:8, First and Last**

- The One who speaks to the angel of the church at Smyrna is the One who precedes all creation and will remain when all else is gone. The statement is in keeping with the high Christology provided the reader in the prologue to John’s Gospel and moves along the same lines in suggesting both the preexistence and the eternity of Christ.
- Finally, the Lord identifies himself to the church in Smyrna in a way that undoubtedly recalled the history of the city as well as the history of the Christ. He describes himself as the One who “died and came to life again.”

70 **Rev. 2:9-11**

- 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.’

71 **Rev. 2:9-11, Synagogue of Satan**

- After the fall of Jerusalem to Rome in A.D. 70, life for the Jewish Christians became more difficult.
- The fact that some Christians continued to associate closely with the synagogues was apparently not a matter of great comfort to Jewish leaders.
- The whole situation continued to decline with growing hostility of Jews toward Christians and fostering an increasing determination not to allow them to be identified with the synagogues.

72 **Rev. 2:9-11, Synagogue of Satan**

- Apparently all came to a crisis point about AD 90 with the so-called “Curse of the Minim” in the Shemoneh ‘Esreh.
 - This was a curse placed specifically on followers of the “Jesus the Nazarene.”

- This document produced by the Jews is apparently to be understood primarily as an official effort to divest synagogue worship everywhere of those Christians who claimed also to be Jewish.

73  **Rev. 2:9-11, Synagogue of Satan**

- Shortly after the issuing of the curse of the Minim, the Emperor Domitian, who had come to the throne in AD 81, intensified his own determination to extend emperor worship and to bring to bay any unruly elements in the empire.
- The combination of all of these events left Christians in a serious predicament. Though they had never been granted the status of an approved faith in the empire, they had existed without serious discrimination and persecution by virtue of their identification as a sub-Jewish sect.

74  **Rev. 2:9-11, Synagogue of Satan**


- The curse of the Minim generally brought that to an end; and Christians, especially Jewish Christians, found themselves facing the unhappy alternatives of either denying Christ and embracing Judaism entirely or else preparing themselves for serious persecution at the hands of both the Romans and the Jews.

75  **Rev. 2:9-11, Synagogue of Satan**


- There were certain centers—apparently Smyrna, Philadelphia, and perhaps to some extent Thyatira—where the persecutions faced by Christians at the hands of both Romans and Jews were particularly ominous.

76  **Rev. 2:9-11, Synagogue of Satan**

- How can Jesus say they are rich, when they are under affliction and persecution?
 - Although sometimes difficult for humans to appreciate adequately, the Scriptures seem to make clear that for every injustice and evil suffered by believers on the earth, there is significant reward in heaven.
 - Here is a promise that because of the conditions of poverty and tribulation through which Smyrnan believers were walking, their value in God's eyes was exponentially increasing.


77  **Rev. 2:9-11, Slander**

- Though the exact nature of the slander is not revealed in the text, some of the characteristic accusations hurled at first- and second-century Christians are fairly well known.
- These included the charge of cannibalism since Christians were heard to talk about “eating the body” and “drinking the blood” of Christ.
- Because they had “love feasts,” they were accused of immorality, specifically of an orgiastic nature.


78  **Rev. 2:9-11, Slander**

- Because they did not accept the Greek gods, they were accused of atheism; and because they spoke so much about the fire of the Spirit and the fires of divine judgment, they were accused of being arsonists or incendiaries.


- In addition to that, their unwillingness to pay homage to Caesar as lord earned them the accusation of disloyalty to Rome.

79  **Rev. 2:9-11, Slander**


- The intense loyalty they tended to demonstrate toward one another once they had embraced Christianity and the fact that particularly Jewish families would often virtually disown those who did become Christians were sufficient to have them charged with the splitting of families.

80  **Rev. 2:9-11, Slander**


- Those Jews who had been guilty of the slanderous accusations against the Christians had not only rejected the Jewish Messiah but had also indulged in behavior clearly forbidden by Jewish law in order to guarantee their own physical and financial well-being.
- Consequently, John did not hesitate to say that though they claimed to be Jews, they were not the people of God and were, in fact, a part of the synagogue of Satan.

81  **Rev. 2:9-11, Do Not Fear**

- Ten Days - The possibility that “ten days” was a numerical means indicating the thoroughness of persecution to befall them is certainly a possibility.
- That any code was needed on that particular point, however, is unlikely.
- The suggestion of other commentators that the “ten days” referred to ten distinctive persecutions that would come and be felt at Smyrna across the succeeding years is also speculative at best.

82  **Rev. 2:9-11, Do Not Fear**

- More recently, with some merit Hemer has argued, based on inscriptions and ancient literature, that the “ten days” was a period in which those who were to be sent forth in gladiatorial combat were imprisoned.
- It is conceivable that Christians in Smyrna were actually being forced to enter gladiatorial combat or, at least, to be the targets of such combat.
- Prior to their appearance in the arena, they experienced a ten-day incarceration followed by almost certain death.

83  **Rev. 2:9-11, Crown of Life**

- The crown promised here is the stephanos, the victor’s crown, as opposed to the diadēma or diadem.
- The stephanos was not worn by royalty, at least not as a sign of that position, but rather was awarded to the athlete who had won an athletic event.
- In other words, it was a “winner’s crown,” and the Smyrnans are invited to see themselves, whatever their sufferings, not as losers but as winners.

84 **Rev. 2:9-11, 2nd Death**

- The final promise coming in v. 11 is that those who overcome will not be hurt at all by the second death.
- Notably no one is excluded from being hurt by the first death.
- Smyrnan Christians would certainly have read this promise as a two-edged sword. On the one hand, they could anticipate that some would be martyred. On the other hand, no matter what happened about the first death, those who overcome would not be hurt by the second death.

85 **Rev. 2:9-11, 2nd Death**

- Consequently, the first death is defined as the separation of the soul from the body, whereas the second death is the separation of the soul from God and its confinement in the place the Bible denominates as hell.
- Overcoming saints at Smyrna may have to face physical death, but they will have no fear of the second death and by it will be untouched and unhurt.

86 **Questions?**

87 **Next Session, Feb 25th**

- Next Week - Iron Sharpens Iron - Topic: Satan & Demons, War in the Spiritual World
- March 4th - Revelation
 - 2:12-29 - Pergamum and Thyatira