

**WEEK 4**  
**JOHN'S AWESOME VISION**  
**40 DAYS THROUGH REVELATION**  
**REVELATION 2:1-11**

In yesterday's reading, we were introduced to seven churches and their pastors in Asia Minor. John was apparently their general overseer. In today's lesson, we will focus our attention on the strengths and weaknesses of two of these churches—those in Ephesus and Smyrna. With your Bible still accessible, consider the following insights on the biblical text, verse by verse.

**REVELATION 2:1-3**

***“To the angel of the church” (2:1)*** : This could be either an angel assigned to protect the church in Ephesus or, more likely, the pastor (literally, “messenger”) of the church.

***“In Ephesus” (2:1)*** : Ephesus was well known for its temple of the Roman goddess Diana (in Greek, Artemis). Many pagans lived here. During his third missionary tour, the apostle Paul spent about three years in Ephesus building up the church (Acts 19). When he left, Paul's young associate Timothy pastored there for another year (1 Timothy 1:3). Paul later wrote his epistle to the Ephesians while a prisoner in Rome in AD 61.

***“The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand” (2:1)*** : That Christ holds the stars (apparently the pastors of the churches) in His hand symbolizes His sovereign and providential control over each church and its leaders.

***“Who walks among the seven golden lampstands” (2:1)*** : Jesus was intimately acquainted with all that was going on in each of the churches. He walks among them, observing what is right and was is wrong in each.

***“I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance” (2:2)*** : In Revelation 2–3, Jesus reveals that the churches are often in need of correction. Still, He commends them if they have done something commendable.

***“You cannot bear with those who are evil” (2:2)*** : The believers in Ephesus refused to compromise by participating with pagans, whose immoral acts indicated they had no fear of God.

***“Have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false” (2:2)*** : These Ephesian believers tested false apostles against the clear teachings of Scripture (compare with Acts 17:11; 1 Thessalonians 5:21). Decades before Revelation was written, the apostle Paul warned the Ephesian elders that false teachers would seek to lead them astray (Acts 20:28-31; see also 2 Corinthians 11:13). The discerning believers at Ephesus remembered this and rejected the teachings of the false apostles.

***“You are enduring patiently” (2:3)*** : At the time of the writing of Revelation, the church at Ephesus had patiently remained faithful to the Lord for some 40 years.

***“Bearing up for my name's sake” (2:3)*** : It was for the sake of the Savior that these Ephesians were willing to suffer. They took up their cross and followed Christ (Matthew 16:24).

***“You have not grown weary” (2:3)*** : These believers had not given up. Their commitment to Christ kept them unbendingly faithful, even amid great suffering.

## REVELATION 2:4-5

**“I have this against you” (2:4)** : Despite their faithfulness and commitment to sound doctrine, they were still in need of correction.

**“You have abandoned the love you had at first” (2:4)** : Thirty years earlier, the church at Ephesus had been commended for the love it had shown to others and to the Lord (Ephesians 1:15-16). Their love had since waned. They needed to renew their love (Matthew 22:37-38; John 14:21,23; 1 Corinthians 16:22).

**“Remember therefore from where you have fallen” (2:5)** : The Greek word translated “remember” literally means “keep on remembering.” They were never to forget from where they had fallen.

**“Repent, and do the works you did at first” (2:5)** : To repent is to change one’s thinking and behavior (Matthew 4:17; Luke 24:47; Acts 3:19). These believers in Ephesus were to change by increasing their love for Christ.

**“If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place” (2:5)** : This may mean that the Lord would remove the church from its place of service and usefulness. Or it may mean that God would bring an end to the church.

## REVELATION 2:6-7

**“Yet this you have” (2:6)** : Despite their lack of love, something was still very much in their favor.

**“You hate the works of the Nicolaitans” (2:6)** : The Nicolaitans condoned license in Christian conduct, ate food sacrificed to idols, and engaged in idolatry. Christians at Ephesus were commended for their stand against the Nicolaitans.

**“He who has an ear, let him hear” (2:7)** : In Bible times, hearing often implied obedience.

**“What the Spirit says to the churches” (2:7)** : Ultimately, the Holy Spirit inspires all Scripture (2 Timothy 3:15-17; 2 Peter 1:21). The Holy Spirit is God (Acts 5:3-4) and the Spirit of truth (John 15:26; 16:13), so this Scripture containing prophecy is trustworthy (John 10:35).

**“The one who conquers” (2:7)** : Jesus promised a blessing for conquering or overcoming Christians (Revelation 2:11,17,26; 3:5,12,21). “Conquering” and “overcoming” are essentially synonyms for “faithfulness” and “obedience.” Christians who fail to conquer (those who are unfaithful and disobedient) suffer a loss of rewards but not a loss of salvation (Romans 14:10-12; 1 Corinthians 3:10-15; 2 Corinthians 5:10).

**“Eat of the tree of life” (2:7)** : The tree of life is first seen in Eden. It bestows continuing life (Genesis 2:9,17; 3:1-24). It will appear again in the eternal city of heaven, the new Jerusalem (Revelation 22:2).

**“In the paradise of God” (2:7)** : The word “paradise” literally means “garden of pleasure” or “garden of delight.” It refers to heaven in 2 Corinthians 12:3.

## REVELATION 2:8-9

**“To the angel of the church” (2:8)** : This is likely the pastor of the church.

**“In Smyrna” (2:8)** : Smyrna was located about 35 miles north of Ephesus and was a prosperous commercial center. The Roman imperial cult severely persecuted Christians in this city who refused to say, “Caesar is Lord.”

**“The first and the last” (2:8)** : Christ indicates He is eternal God, who has always existed and who always will.

**“Who died and came to life” (2:8)** : Christ was crucified (John 19:17-42) but was gloriously resurrected (Matthew 28:9-10,16-20; Luke 24:13-43; John 20:11-18,26-29; 1 Corinthians 15:3-6).

**“I know your tribulation and your poverty” (2:9)** : Christ sees everything (Revelation 1:14), so He is aware of all circumstances of all believers (Matthew 11:27; John 2:25; 21:17; Acts 1:24; Hebrews 4:13). He was fully aware of the suffering of the Christians in Smyrna.

**“But you are rich” (2:9)** : These believers actually had a large storehouse of eternal riches awaiting them in heaven (see Matthew 6:19-20).

**“The slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not” (2:9)** : Because the apostate Jews in this city hated Christ, they also hated all who followed Christ. They slandered Christians, just as the devil does. They were Jews by physical lineage but did not hold to the religion of their Jewish ancestors, such as Abraham. They had become paganized in a pagan culture.

**“Synagogue of Satan” (2:9)** : Because these apostate Jews were engaged in false religion, they were instruments of the devil, and the synagogue they attended was in reality a habitat of Satan.

## REVELATION 2:10-11

**“Do not fear what you are about to suffer” (2:10)** : “Do not fear” in the Greek is literally “stop having fear.” The believers in Smyrna were already experiencing fear. God knows in advance the sufferings His people will encounter (see Genesis 15:13; Acts 9:16). Christ knows in advance the suffering about to be experienced by the Christians in Smyrna. He thus exhorts them not to be fearful.

**“The devil” (2:10)** : The devil is a fallen angel who is aligned against God and His purposes. The word “devil” carries the idea of “adversary” (1 Peter 5:8).

**“Is about to throw some of you into prison” (2:10)** : It is not stated whether apostate Jews or pagans will accomplish this. But the devil will be the instigator behind it.

**“That you may be tested” (2:10)** : The testing will show where their true loyalty lies.

**“For ten days you will have tribulation” (2:10)** : This may refer to ten literal days of particularly intense persecution yet to come, or it may refer to ten short outbreaks of persecution under ten Roman emperors: Nero, Domitian, Trajan, Hadrian, Septimus Severus, Maximin, Decius, Valerian, Aurelian, and Diocletian.

**“Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life” (2:10)** : In the second century, the pastor of the church in Smyrna, Polycarp (a pupil of the apostle John), was burned alive for refusing to worship Caesar.

All believers must face the judgment seat of Christ (Romans 14:8-10; 1 Corinthians 3:1-10; 2 Corinthians 5:10). Believers will either receive or forfeit rewards, such as the crown of life. The crown of life is given to those who persevere under trial and especially to those who suffer to the point of death (James 1:12).

**“He who has an ear, let him hear” (2:11)** : Hearing implies obedience to that which was heard.

**“What the Spirit says to the churches” (2:11)** : The Holy Spirit is ultimately behind these prophetic revelations (2 Timothy 3:15-17; 2 Peter 1:21).

**“The one who conquers” (2:11)** : This refers to faithful and obedient Christians.

**“Will not be hurt by the second death” (2:11)** : The “first death” is physical death, the separation of the spirit or soul from the body (as in Genesis 35:18). Virtually all people (except Christians who are raptured) will experience the first death. The second death is for unbelievers only and refers to eternal separation from God in the lake of fire, or eternal hell.

In this figure of speech, a positive idea is emphasized by negating its opposite. For example, “I am not amused” means “I am annoyed.” The Lord’s point is that faithful believers may eagerly anticipate a wonderful eternal life.

## MAJOR THEMES

**True apostles** — The apostles were chosen messengers of Christ, handpicked by the Lord or the Holy Spirit (Matthew 10:1-4; Acts 1:26). They were the special recipients of God’s self-revelation (1 Corinthians 2:13). They recognized their special divine authority (1 Corinthians 7:10; 11:23) and were authenticated by miracles (Acts 2:43; 3:3-11; 5:12-16; 9:32-42; 19:11-17).

**The resurrection of Christ (Revelation 2:8)** — The resurrection of Christ is the foundation stone of the Christian faith. Paul wrote, “If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile” (1 Corinthians 15:17). Jesus made many appearances to many people over many days to prove that He had been resurrected (see Acts 1:3; 1 Corinthians 15:6).

## DIGGING DEEPER WITH CROSS-REFERENCES

**Love for God** —Matthew 22:37; Mark 12:30; Luke 10:27; John 14:15,21,23; 21:15-17; James 2:5; 1 Peter 1:8.

**Spiritual riches** —Matthew 6:19-21; 19:21; Luke 12:13-21; Hebrews 10:34; 11:26; James 2:5; 1 Peter 1:3-4.

**Satanic persecution** —John 8:44; Acts 16:16-18; Revelation 2:10,13; 12:4,12.

## LIFE LESSONS

**Take up your cross** — Living as a committed Christian can be costly. As we continue to near the end times, the persecution of Christians will continue to increase. Regardless of what the world throws at us, however, our destiny is secure, and a glorious inheritance awaits us in heaven (Romans 8:18; 1 Peter 1:4). Never hesitate to take up your cross and follow Jesus on a daily basis (Matthew 16:24).

**Repentance** — True repentance shows itself in the way one lives. John the Baptist urged Jewish leaders to “bear fruit in keeping with repentance” (Matthew 3:8). People are urged to “repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance” (Acts 26:20).

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

Do you test all religious teachings against the Scriptures, whether you hear them at church, on the radio, or on TV? (Meditate on Acts 17:11 and 1 Thessalonians 5:21.)

Is your love for the Lord as fervent as it was when you first became a Christian?

Do you pay more attention to building up eternal riches than accumulating material riches?