

REVELATION 2

9-17-2023

Revelation 2:1-7 (NIV) **1** "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands: **2** I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. **3** You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary. **4** Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. **5** Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place. **6** But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. **7** He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

INTRODUCTION: In Chapter 1...we began the revelation (the unveiling). The Lord appeared to John the Apostle most likely in his cave in the mountain on the Island of Patmos. When John saw Jesus standing in the midst of the lampstands (the churches), he fell at His feet as dead! You have to wonder, what was it that John saw... felt... that moved him so much, that he fell at Jesus feet as though dead? His glory, the weightiness of His holy Presence that John experienced, we have to admit, even if we have felt God's presence, who of us has experienced Him to this level? Can we? Should we? Oh Lord, help me to love you more, and have a greater reverence for your holy Presence!

The angel has instructed John to send a letter to the **7 churches** He has identified. These were 7 real churches in John's day. In his address, you'll see a pattern--each letter includes a commendation (except the letter to Laodicea), a rebuke (except the letters to Smyrna and Philadelphia), an exhortation, and an encouraging promise to those heeding its message. In general, these letters to the seven churches help us to know what Jesus values in His church and addresses the problems inherent in churches throughout church history. This helps us to know how Christ evaluates the church today.

Revelation 2:1-7 (NIV) "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands:



Ephesus, a major city of Asia Minor (nearly ¼ million people), a seaport, and home to wide avenues, huge public buildings and market squares, luxurious private homes, a theater that held 25,000 people. Ephesus flaunted dozens of temples for various gods and was the location of the **great temple of Artemis** [called Diana by the Romans]. The temple was one of the 7 wonders of the ancient world—425 ft. long and 225 ft. wide, made of solid marble. It has 127 columns measuring 60 ft. high/4 ft in diameter. Artemis was the fertility goddess. The temple and streets were full of goddess prostitutes. People believed they could experience more of the goddess' power by sexual intimacies with her priests and priestesses. It was a wicked city.

ARTEMIS WAS THE TWIN SISTER OF APOLLO. DELPHI, GREECE CONTAINED AN ANCIENT RELIGIOUS SANCTUARY DEDICATED TO THE GREEK GOD APOLLO... THE SANCTUARY WAS HOME TO THE ORACLE OF DELPHI AND THE PRIESTESS PYTHIA, WHO WAS FAMED THROUGHOUT THE ANCIENT WORLD FOR DIVINATION (witchcraft).

Immorality (witchcraft—control & manipulation, and **sexual immorality** to enhance religious experience) flourished and flooded over into society and families in Ephesus. This same spirit operates in this region of Indiana... evidenced by stories from Techumseh, and "The Prophet," his brother. So what we see/hear about Ephesus ties closely to us. The church in Ephesus was founded by the Apostle Paul. Ephesus was thoroughly stirred by Paul's preaching. Timothy later became pastor, and John (Revelation writer) later was an elder/bishop/maybe pastor as well.

Here's what you'll see about Ephesus if you read thru Acts 19. There is tells:

The Ephesian believers were filled with the Holy Spirit—and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. The more God moved, some hardened their hearts and spoke evil of the followers of Jesus.

The more opposition they experienced, the more they experienced God's miraculous hand. ie. God worked unusual miracles by the hands of Paul.

Demon spirits were cast out of people.

ACTS 19 & 20 SPEAKS OF PAUL'S MINISTRY IN EPHESUS: Paul began, as he always did, preaching truth. He spoke in the synagogue concerning the kingdom of God, i.e., God's rule over the hearts of men and his desire to bless them, fulfill them and to lead them into the place of dominion and authority under the control and sovereignty of God. With the first coming of Jesus, the kingdom of God came (a spiritual kingdom). His rule...opposed to the rule of Satan. Wherever the gospel went it found men bound by the kingdom of Satan. The powers of darkness reigned in human affairs. That is why human history is the checkered account of man's struggles to be free from that from which he cannot free himself. It is this rule of darkness, this authority of the kingdom of Satan, which the kingdom of God in Christ challenges. This is what Paul was preaching in the synagogue.

At first it was welcomed—the Jews here had made Paul welcome, and had invited him to come back. Every Sabbath day, he reasoned with them out of the Scriptures about the kingdom of God. But when some of the Jews understood that to submit to the rule and authority of the Lordship of Jesus meant to have to confess the emptiness of their religious respectability, they opposed Paul. When they realized that having an outward religiousness—appearance that brought them respect wasn't enough. When they realized they had to acknowledge that inwardly they were just as desperately dark and evil anyone else, they resisted him. Religious respectability is the toughest nut to crack in all the satanic kingdom of evil. And to some, they paid the consequences:

Some people who were not right with God tried to do the same ministry as the apostles & pastors -- **Acts 19:13-16**

(NLT2) A group of Jews was traveling from town to town casting out evil spirits. They tried to use the name of the Lord Jesus in their incantation, saying, "I command you in the name of Jesus, whom Paul preaches, to come out!"

¹⁴ Seven sons of Sceva, a leading priest, were doing this. ¹⁵ But one time when they tried it, the evil spirit replied, "I know Jesus, and I know Paul, but who are you?" ¹⁶ Then the man with the evil spirit leaped on them, overpowered them, and attacked them with such violence that they fled from the house, naked and battered.

Acts 19:17-20 (NIV) When this became known to the Jews and Greeks living in Ephesus, they were all seized with fear, and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honor. ¹⁸ Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed their evil deeds. ¹⁹ A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly. When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to fifty thousand drachmas [50,000 days' wages]. ²⁰ In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power.

*****The Bible Knowledge Commentary** says of the Ephesians tells us that they used these scrolls (manuals) to gain power over people. After this incident, they publicly **burned** their manuals of **sorcery**.

SO, JOHN GOES ON TO SAY... to their credit...

² I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. ³ You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.

EPHESIAN CHURCH COMMENDED FOR THE FOLLOWING:

1. **Deeds and hard work** -- to labor to the point of weariness, sweat, exhaustion; long hours; the limit of one's ability...NOT THEIR "SECULAR EMPLOYMENT," BUT FOR THE KINGDOM AND THE GOSPEL.
2. **Perseverance** – Thru temptations, trials, persecution – proclaimed gospel/ministered to the needs of people.
3. **Cannot tolerate wicked (evil) men** – The normal Greek word for evil is "poneros" meaning grievous (people who cause you grief). This word here is "kakos," and means those whose words/efforts brought injury to others. He commended Ephesians for not tolerating people who exercise ill intent to injure others.

Reading the commentary (Enduring Word): "The Ephesian church pursued doctrinal purity. When Paul left them, he warned the Ephesians in **Acts 20:29-31: For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also, from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.**

- a. **The church** today, like the Ephesian church then, must vigorously test those who claim to be messengers from God. Where God is moving, the devil will seek every opportunity to tear it apart.
- 4. **Tested those who claimed to be apostles but are not** – Most pagan religions are ok with mixing religions. So, to add Christianity to their ongoing religious practices was ok by them... but not the truth Paul preached. Therefore, as an ongoing process, the early church leaders scrutinized those who claim to speak for God, who wanted have a voice in the church. Yet after testing them, the leaders found some that did not speak for God... In fact, they found them to be deceitful (the Gk. Literally, “pseudo-apostles”)
 - a. **Since Ephesus** was the large city with a large church...if someone could be endorsed by the church at Ephesus, their ministry would be unleashed. Church leaders had the difficult, sometimes thankless job to scrutinize each person, so that only those who should be in leadership were put in leadership.

With a growing church and unleashing new ministries, new leaders are being placed. With TL & AHG approximately ½ of our leaders a new to DFAG leadership. We do that with joy, yet with seriousness. We have set it up to have accountability and regular leaders’ training. The greatest leaders are servants, who find it a privilege, not a right to be used of God. Our goal is to with each leader/new leader to see personal growth, to become the person/the leader that God wants you to be. Ministry is to people—God’s most precious possessions! Remember, we use the 2-deep rule to protect our kids and leaders. Leadership/ministry development, helping our leaders grow in the fruit of the Spirit and the character/behavior/actions/words that are pleasing to the Lord is vital, so we present ourselves to God and before others, being mentally, emotionally, and spiritually healthy!

MOVING ON! The Lord, thru John commends the church for...

5. **Persevered/endured hardships w/o growing weary** – You didn’t stop, you didn’t quit! Jesus commends the Ephesians for their **Hard work**, good deeds, perseverance, not tolerating false apostles (people who come across as if they are speaking for God and are not) finding they’re not speaking the truth. And, this is commendable in all churches... and with us... the last-days Church.

So many good things about this church – but then the Lord has something shocking to say to them!!!

⁴ Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. ⁵ Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.

JESUS WANTS NOT JUST THE HANDS AND FEET OF BELIEVERS; HE WANTS THEIR HEARTS! **Thirty-five** years before John wrote this, Paul wrote to the Ephesians **Ephesians 1:15-16 (NLT2)** “Ever since I first heard of your strong faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for God’s people everywhere, ¹⁶ I have not stopped thanking God for you. I pray for you constantly,

IN SPITE OF ALL THESE WONDERFUL THINGS...THE LORD SAYS HE IS DEEPLY DISTURBED BY THIS...YOU’VE LEFT YOUR FIRST LOVE! **That early love** where someone has just fallen in love. The awe, the wonder, the early passion for relationship with the Lord. They didn’t abandon it. In all their busy-ness for Jesus, their labor for Jesus, their life on earth, they just left that relationship behind!

THE LORD THRU JOHN SAID “KEEP UP YOUR ACTIONS, BUT COME BACK TO YOUR FIRST AFFECTIONS.” **They were** to continue serving, but not simply because it was right but out of their love for Christ. Without repentance, He would remove their lampstand – His Spirit and His light from them!!! **Wow! This was serious.**

LOVE GOD IS THE 1ST COMMANDMENT!!! SERVE YES, BUT LOVE COMES FIRST AND MUST NOT BE LEFT BEHIND!

⁶ But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

HATE - Greek word *miseo*, which means to find utterly repulsive; find completely objectionable; loathe entirely. Part of loving Jesus, is to hate/find repulsive what Jesus hates! The “practices” not the people.

What did the Ephesians hate about the Nicolaitans? Let's turn to scholar Rick Renner for an explanation:

Acts 6:5 tells us that this Nicolas was "a proselyte of Antioch." The fact that he was a proselyte tells us that he was not born a Jew but had converted from paganism to Judaism. Then he experienced a second conversion, this time turning from Judaism to Christianity. **From this** information, we know these facts about Nicolas of Antioch:

- **He came** from paganism and had deep pagan roots. Nicolas' pagan background meant that he had previously been immersed in the activities of the occult.
- **He was not** afraid of taking an opposing position, evidenced by his ability to change religions twice. Converting to Judaism would have estranged him from his pagan family and friends. He was not impressed or concerned about the opinions of other people.
- **Judaism** was very different from the pagan and occult world in which he had been raised. For him to shift from paganism to Judaism reveals that he was very liberal in his thinking. Most pagans were offended by Judaism. He was obviously not afraid to entertain or embrace new ways of thinking.
- **When he** converted to Christ, it was at least the second time he had converted from one religion to another. His ability to easily change religious "hats" implies that he was not afraid to switch direction in midstream and go a totally different direction or mix all his past religions with the present.

According to the writings of the Early Church leaders, Nicolas taught a doctrine of compromise, implying that total separation between Christianity and the practice of occult paganism was not essential. From Early Church records, it seems apparent that Nicolas was so immersed in occultism, Judaism, and Christianity that he had a stomach for all of it. He had no problem intermingling these belief systems in various concoctions and saw no reason why believers couldn't fellowship with those still immersed in the black magic of the Roman empire and its countless mystery cults.



Occultism was a major force that warred against the Early Church. In Ephesus, the primary pagan religion was the worship **of Diana (Artemis)**. There were many other forms of idolatry in Ephesus, but this was the primary object of occult worship in that city. In Ephesus and the city of Pergamos, there were numerous dark and sinister forms of occultism. Believers were lambasted and persecuted fiercely by adherents of pagan religions, forced to contend with paganism on a level far beyond all other cities.

It was very hard for believers to live separately from all the activities of paganism because paganism and its religions were the center of life in these cities. Slipping in and out of paganism would have been very easy for young or weak believers to do since most of their families and friends were still pagans. A converted Gentile would have found it very difficult to stay away from all pagan influence.

It is significant that the "deeds" and "doctrines" of the Nicolaitans are *only* mentioned in connection with the churches in these two occultic and pagan cities. **It seems that the "doctrine" of the Nicolaitans was that it was all right to have one foot in both worlds and that one needn't be so strict about separation from the world in order to be a Christian.** This, in fact, was the "doctrine" of the Nicolaitans that Jesus "hated." It led to a weak version of Christianity that was without power and without conviction — a defeated, worldly type of Christianity.

This kind of teaching would result in nothing but total defeat for its followers. When believers allow sin and compromise to be in their lives, it drains away the power in the work of the Cross and the power of the Spirit that is resident in a believer's life. This is the reason the name **Nicolas** is so vital to this discussion. **His name means "one who conquers the people."** The evil fruit of Nicolas' "doctrine" encouraged worldly participation, leading people to indulge in sin and a lowered godly standard. In this way he literally *conquered the people*, by drawing them to himself and leading them into sin. Jesus HATED the teaching and the deeds of the Nicolaitans, because it used who everyone thought was a follower to lead people into sin and compromise...

7 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.