# Revelation 2

## *Letters to Four Churches: Return to Your First Love*

**OBSERVATION · INTERPRETATION · APPLICATION**

*"These were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so."*
**Acts 17:11**

CHAPTER THEME

Jesus knows His churches — every deed, every tear, every compromise. He praises what is real, names what is wrong without flinching, calls for repentance, and holds out a promise to anyone who overcomes. His eyes are on Ephesus's cold heart, Smyrna's prison cells, Pergamum's compromises and Thyatira's tolerance, and His word to each is meant for me: "He who has an ear, let him hear."

Ed Smith · Started 20 October 2026

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# 00 The Text

REVELATION 2 (KJV), MARKED

▲ Gold God — His character & actions | Green Command / instruction | Sky Key repeated word
⚠ Rose Sin / warning | ★ Violet Promise / blessing | Amber Time / place / contrast

[1] Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that ▲ holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks;

[2] ⇄ I know thy works, and thy labour, and ★ thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars:

[3] And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted.

[4] Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because ⚠ thou hast left thy first love.

[5] Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and ⇄ repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and ⚠ will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou ⇄ repent.

[6] But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of ⚠ the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

[7] ⇄ He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that ⇄ overcometh will I give to eat of ★ the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.

[8] And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, ▲ which was dead, and is alive;

[9] ⇄ I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, ◷ (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are ⚠ the synagogue of Satan.

[10] Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, ⚠ the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee ★ a crown of life.

[11] ⇄ He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that ⇄ overcometh shall not be hurt of ★ the second death.

[12] And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges;

[13] ⇄ I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even ◷ where Satan's seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein ★ Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth.

[14] But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold ⚠ the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.

[15] So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of ⚠ the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.

[16] ⇄ Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

17 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.

18 And unto the angel of the church in Thyatira write; These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass;

19 I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last to be more than the first.

20 Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols.

21 And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not.

22 Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds.

23 And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works.

24 But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak; I will put upon you none other burden.

25 But that which ye have already hold fast till I come .

26 And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations:

27 And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father.

28 And I will give him the morning star.

29 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

## Marked in the text

- **v1** holdeth the seven stars in his right hand
- **v2** I know thy works *(every occurrence)*
- **v2** thy patience
- **v4** thou hast left thy first love
- **v5** Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen
- **v5** repent *(every occurrence)*
- **v5** do the first works
- **v5** will remove thy candlestick
- **v6** the Nicolaitans *(every occurrence)*
- **v7** He that hath an ear *(every occurrence)*
- **v7** overcometh *(every occurrence)*
- **v7** the tree of life
- **v8** which was dead, and is alive
- **v9** (but thou art rich)
- **v9** the synagogue of Satan
- **v10** the devil shall cast some of you into prison
- **v10** be thou faithful unto death
- **v10** a crown of life
- **v11** the second death
- **v13** where Satan's seat is
- **v13** Antipas was my faithful martyr
- **v14** the doctrine of Balaam
- **v17** the hidden manna
- **v17** a white stone
- **v18** the Son of God
- **v20** that woman Jezebel
- **v23** searcheth the reins and hearts
- **v28** the morning star

*Marks are drawn on the KJV text. Quotations in the notes are from the NASB95, so their wording may differ from the KJV above.*

# 01 Observation

WHAT DOES THE TEXT SAY?

KEY VERSE · REVELATION 2:5 (KJV)

5 Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.

## Setting

John has just seen the risen Christ walking among the seven lampstands (1:12–20). Now that same Jesus dictates letters to the first four churches on the circuit — Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum and Thyatira. Each letter follows the same pattern: an address, a title of Christ drawn from chapter 1, "I know," praise, rebuke, command, "He who has an ear," and a promise "to him who overcomes."

## Structure

- vv1–7 — **Ephesus, the busy church that left its love:** from "the One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands" (v1). They have toil, perseverance, and sound judgment about false apostles (vv2–3). "But I have this against you, that you have left your first love" (v4). "Remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first" — or lose the lampstand (v5). They hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans (v6). Promise: "the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God" (v7).
- vv8–11 — **Smyrna, the poor rich church:** from "The first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life" (v8). "I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich)," and the slander of "a synagogue of Satan" (v9). "Do not fear what you are about to suffer"; some will be thrown into prison, "and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life" (v10). Promise: "will not be hurt by the second death" (v11). No rebuke.
- vv12–17 — **Pergamum, faithful where Satan lives but tolerant of compromise:** from "The One who has the sharp two-edged sword" (v12). "I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is"; they held fast His name even when Antipas, "My witness, My faithful one," was killed (v13). But some hold "the teaching of Balaam" and of the Nicolaitans (vv14–15). "Therefore repent" (v16). Promise: "hidden manna," "a white stone, and a new name written on the stone" (v17).
- vv18–29 — **Thyatira, growing in love but tolerating Jezebel:** from "The Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet are like burnished bronze" (v18). Love, faith, service, perseverance — "your deeds of late are greater than at first" (v19). "But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess" (v20). "I gave her time to repent" (v21); judgment is coming, so "all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts" (v23). To the rest: "what you have, hold fast until I come" (v25). Promise: "authority over the nations" (v26) and "the morning star" (v28).

### Repeated words

I know (vv2, 9, 13, 19); repent (vv5, 16, 21, 22); overcomes (vv7, 11, 17, 26); "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (vv7, 11, 17, 29); I have this against you (vv4, 20); hold fast (vv13, 25); Satan (vv9, 13, 24); tribulation (vv9, 10, 22).

### Contrasts

Ephesus has sound doctrine without first love ⟷ Thyatira has growing love without sound doctrine. Smyrna's poverty ⟷ "but you are rich" (v9). "Satan's throne" (v13) ⟷ "a white stone, and a new name" from Christ (v17). Jezebel's "deep things of Satan" (v24) ⟷ the One who "searches the minds and hearts" (v23). Faithful "until death" (v10) ⟷ "not be hurt by the second death" (v11).

### Chapter theme (my words)

Jesus knows His churches — every deed, every tear, every compromise. He praises what is real, names what is wrong without flinching, calls for repentance, and holds out a promise to anyone who overcomes. His eyes are on Ephesus's cold heart, Smyrna's prison cells, Pergamum's compromises and Thyatira's tolerance, and His word to each is meant for me: "He who has an ear, let him hear."

## 02 Interpretation

WHAT DOES THE TEXT MEAN?

KEY VERSE · REVELATION 2:1 (KJV)

[1]Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks;

### How to read the seven letters

These were real churches in real cities, and the details fit their history closely. But each letter ends with what the Spirit says "to the churches" — plural — so every letter is for every church and every believer. Guzik applies them to all churches in all centuries. Some Bible teachers also see the seven as a preview of church history (Ephesus the apostolic age through Laodicea the last days); Guzik does not press that view, and I hold it loosely if at all.

### Ephesus — left, not lost (vv1–7)

Ephesus was the great city of Asia, home of the temple of Diana, and the church had the best teachers in the New Testament — Paul, Priscilla and Aquila, Apollos, Timothy and, by tradition, John himself. They worked hard, endured, and could spot a fake apostle. Guzik notes they had *hypomonē*, steadfast endurance. But they *left* their first love — Guzik stresses that leaving is a deliberate act, even if it happens slowly. First love is love for God and for His people together. Spurgeon: "Lose love, lose all," and "When love dies orthodox doctrine becomes a corpse, a powerless formalism." The cure is three steps: remember, repent, do the first works. Guzik names those first works as the basics — the Word, prayer, fellowship, sharing Christ. The Nicolaitans are uncertain; early writers (Irenaeus) tied them to

license and idol feasts, and some see in the name (*nikaō* + *laos*, "conquer the people") a lordly clergy over the laity. Jesus hates their deeds — and He commends the Ephesians for hating them too.

### Smyrna — the rich poor church (vv8–11)

Smyrna was devoted to emperor worship; refusing to say "Caesar is Lord" cost jobs, property and sometimes life. Its name comes from myrrh, a spice of burial — and Jesus introduces Himself as the One "who was dead, and has come to life." Their poverty was the word for abject, beggarly poverty (Walvoord, in Guzik). Guzik: "Better to be a rich poor church than a poor rich church." Those who said they were Jews but slandered believers were "a synagogue of Satan" — Guzik notes a true Jew is one who trusts God (Rom 2:28–29). "Ten days" has been read as ten years, ten persecuting emperors, or a short time; Guzik takes it as a limited period of severe persecution. The crown is the *stephanos*, the victor's wreath, not the king's diadem. Smyrna's bishop Polycarp later died there at the stake, refusing to revile the Christ he had served for eighty-six years.

### Pergamum — Satan's throne and Balaam's teaching (vv12–17)

Pergamum was the provincial capital, with temples to the emperor, a huge altar to Zeus, and the healing cult of Asclepios with its serpent symbol. Any of these could be "Satan's throne"; Guzik surveys them all. Antipas — known only from this verse — died rather than deny Christ, and Jesus calls him "My faithful one." Yet the church tolerated people who held "the teaching of Balaam." Balaam couldn't curse Israel, so he taught Balak to seduce them with idol feasts and immorality (Num 25:1–3; 31:16). The danger wasn't persecution from outside but compromise from inside. Jesus warns He will make war against them "with the sword of My mouth." The promise: hidden manna, Christ Himself as the true bread (John 6:32–35); and a white stone — perhaps a token of acquittal, admission to a feast, or a victor's badge — with a new name known only to the one who receives it, a picture of personal intimacy with Christ.

### Thyatira — love growing, discernment missing (vv18–29)

The smallest city of the seven, but a city of trade guilds, each with its patron god and feasts. Barclay, in Guzik: no merchant or trader could hope to prosper outside the guilds. Here the only use of "the Son of God" in Revelation, with eyes of fire that see through every cover. Thyatira's love and service were increasing — the opposite of Ephesus. But they tolerated a self-appointed prophetess Jesus calls "Jezebel," after Ahab's queen who brought Baal worship into Israel (1 Kgs 16:31). She taught believers that sexual immorality and idol feasts were fine. Jesus gave her time to repent, "and she does not want to repent" (v21). The "deep things of Satan" (v24) sound like the boast of a hidden, higher knowledge. To the faithful He lays no other burden — just "hold fast until I come." The overcomer will share His rule (Ps 2:8–9), and Walvoord, in Guzik, notes the word for "rule" means to shepherd. And He gives "the morning star" — Guzik: Christ Himself (22:16).

### Word study (Greek)

- **deeds — *ergon* (G2041):** works, what a person actually does.
- **perseverance — *hypomonē* (G5281):** steadfast endurance under pressure.
- **left — *aphiēmi* (G863):** to send away, let go, forsake.
- **first — *prōtos* (G4413):** first in time or in rank.
- **repent — *metanoeō* (G3340):** to change the mind, turn around.

- **overcomes — *nikaō* (G3528):** to conquer, win the victory.
- **Paradise — *paradeisos* (G3857):** a park or garden; the dwelling of God.
- **tribulation — *thlipsis* (G2347):** pressure, crushing affliction.
- **poverty — *ptōcheia* (G4432):** beggarly, destitute poverty.
- **faithful — *pistos* (G4103):** trustworthy, reliable.
- **crown — *stephanos* (G4735):** the victor's wreath.
- **witness — *martys* (G3144):** one who testifies — and here, dies for it.
- **manna — *manna* (G3131):** the bread from heaven.
- **white stone — *psēphos* (G5586):** a small smooth stone used for votes, verdicts and tokens.
- **searches — *eraunaō* (G2045):** to search out, examine closely.
- **rule — *poimainō* (G4165):** to shepherd, tend, rule.

### Cross-references

Gen 2:9; 3:22–24; Num 22–25; Num 31:16; 1 Kgs 16:31; 2 Kgs 9:22; Ps 2:8–9; Ps 7:9; Jer 17:10; Matt 24:12; John 6:32–35; Acts 19–20; Acts 20:29–31; Rom 2:28–29; 1 Cor 13:1–3; Eph 6:24; 2 Tim 4:7–8; Jas 1:12; Rev 1:5, 13–18; Rev 20:6, 14; Rev 22:2, 14, 16.

## 03 Application

HOW DOES IT CHANGE ME?

KEY VERSE · REVELATION 2:7 (KJV)

7 ⇄ He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that ⇄ overcometh will I give to eat of ★ the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.

### Command to obey — "Remember … and repent and do the deeds you did at first."

Jesus doesn't tell Ephesus to feel more; He tells them to go back and do again what they did when love was new. When my heart has gone cold toward Him, I'll do the first works on purpose — open the Word, pray out loud, sit with His people, tell someone about Him — and trust feelings to follow obedience.

### Sin to confess — busy without love

I can write the books, build the tools and teach the studies and still have left my first love. Ephesus could spot a false teacher a mile away and still lose its lampstand. I confess the times my service has been about getting things done instead of loving Jesus and the men in front of me.

### Warning to heed — what I tolerate

Pergamum and Thyatira weren't rebuked for what they believed but for what they put up with — Balaam's teaching and Jezebel's. Compromise rarely kicks the door in; it gets invited to dinner. A man

in recovery knows this: the relapse usually begins with a "small" thing he decided to tolerate. Jesus is patient — "I gave her time to repent" — but that time runs out.

### Promise to trust — "Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life."

Jesus told Smyrna ahead of time that some would be thrown into prison. He didn't promise to keep them out; He promised a crown and that the second death couldn't touch them. For the man behind bars, prison is not the end of his story or proof that God forgot him. Jesus knows his tribulation and his poverty — and calls him rich.

### Example to follow — Antipas

One verse, one name, and Jesus calls him "My witness, My faithful one." He lived where Satan's throne was and held fast. I want that to be the summary of my life — and I want the men I disciple to know that faithfulness in a hard place, unseen by the world, is exactly what Jesus sees and names.

### Worship

He walks among the lampstands. His eyes are a flame of fire. He was dead and has come to life. He searches minds and hearts and still offers hidden manna, a white stone and a new name. I worship the Son of God who knows me fully and still calls me to Himself.

### Prayer

Lord Jesus, You know my deeds. Where I have left my first love, bring me back to the first works. Where I have tolerated what You hate, give me courage to repent and to deal with it. Strengthen the men in prison and in recovery to be faithful until death, and let them hear You say, "but you are rich." Give me ears to hear what the Spirit says to the churches. Amen.