**Lesson 4 Rev Chap 2 1-7**

**Revelation 2:1-7 (NASB77)**
1  "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this:
2  ' I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot endure evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them *to be* false;
3  and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary.
4  'But I have *this* against you, that you have left your first love.
5  'Remember therefore from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you, and will remove your lampstand out of its place-- unless you repent.
6  'Yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds 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 grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God.'

**II. Letters to the Seven Churches: "What Is Now" (**[**chaps. 2-3**](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Rev+2-3)**)**

As stated in [Revelation 1:11](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Rev+1%3A11) Christ sent a message to each of seven local churches in Asia Minor. The order of scriptural presentation was geographic. A messenger would naturally travel the route from the seaport Ephesus 35 miles north to another seaport Smyrna, proceed still farther north and to the east, to Pergamos, and then would swing further to the east and south to visit the other four cities ([1:11](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Rev+1%3A11)).

There has been much debate as to the meaning of these messages for today. Obviously these churches were specially selected and providentially arranged to provide characteristic situations which the church has faced throughout its history. Just as Paul's epistles, though addressed to individual churches, are also intended for the entire church, so these seven messages also apply to the entire church today insofar as they are in similar situations. There were many other churches such as those at Colosse, Magnesia, and Tralles, some larger than the seven churches mentioned in Asia Minor, but these were not addressed.

As the contents of the letters are analyzed, it is clear that they are, first, messages to these historic local churches in the first century. Second, they also constitute a message to similar churches today. Third, individual exhortations to persons or groups in the churches make it clear that the messages are intended for individuals today. Fourth, some believe that the order of the seven churches follows the order of various eras in church history from the first century until now.

There are some remarkable similarities in comparing these letters to the seven churches to the movement of church history since the beginning of the apostolic church. For instance, Ephesus seems to characterize the apostolic church as a whole, and Smyrna seems to depict the church in its early persecutions. However, the Scriptures do not expressly authorize this interpretation, and it should be applied only where it fits naturally. After all, these churches all existed simultaneously in the first century.

Though each message is different, the letters have some similarities. In each one Christ declared that He knows their works; each one includes a promise to those who overcome; each one gives an exhortation to those hearing; and each letter has a particular description of Christ that related to the message which follows. 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 address the problems inherent in churches throughout church history and are an incisive and comprehensive revelation of how Christ evaluates local churches.

This portion of Scripture has been strangely neglected. While many turn to the epistles of Paul and other portions of the New Testament for church truth, often the letters to these seven churches, though coming from Christ Himself and being climactic in character, are completely ignored. This neglect has contributed to churches today not conforming to God's perfect will.

*See* [*map*](file:///C%3A%5CProgramData%5CWORDsearch%5CWORDsearch%2011%5CCache%5CLinked%5Cimagesnt%5Cimages932.png?caption=Map,%20Locations%20of%20the%20Seven%20Churches), *Locations of the Seven Churches*

**A. The letter to the church in Ephesus (**[**2:1-7**](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Rev+2%3A1-7)**)**

**1. Destination (**[**2:1**](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Rev+2%3A1)**)**

[**2:1**](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Rev+2%3A1)**.** At the time this letter was written, **Ephesus** was a major city of Asia Minor, a seaport, and the location of the great temple of Artemis (cf. [Acts 19:24](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Ac+19%3A24), [27-28](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Ac+19%3A27-28), [34-35](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Ac+19%3A34-35)), one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Paul had visited Ephesus about a.d. 53, about 43 years before this letter in Revelation was sent to them. Paul remained in Ephesus for several years and preached the gospel so effectively "that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord" ([Acts 19:10](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Ac+19%3A10)). This large city was thoroughly stirred by Paul's message ([Acts 19:11-41](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Ac+19%3A11-41)), with the result that the silversmiths created a riot because their business of making shrines of Artemis was threatened.

**The church** accordingly had a long history and was the most prominent one in the area. The pastor or messenger of the church was addressed as **the angel** (*angelos*). The word's principal use in the Bible is in reference to heavenly angels (William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957, pp. 7-8). But it is also used to refer to human messengers (cf. [Matt. 11:10](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Mt+11%3A10); [Mark 1:2](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Mk+1%3A2); [Luke 7:24](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Lk+7%3A24), [27](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Lk+7%3A27); [9:52](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Lk+9%3A52)).

Christ was holding **seven stars in His right hand** and walking **among the seven golden lampstands.** The "stars" were the angels or messengers of the churches and the "lampstands" were the seven churches ([1:20](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Rev+1%3A20)).

**Matthew 11:10 (NIV)**
10  This is the one about whom it is written: "'I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.'

**Mark 1:2 (NIV)**
2  It is written in Isaiah the prophet: "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way"--

**Luke 7:24 (NIV)**
24  After John's messengers left, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: "What did you go out into the desert to see? A reed swayed by the wind?

**Luke 7:27 (NIV)**
27  This is the one about whom it is written: "'I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.'

**Luke 9:52 (NIV)**
52  And he sent messengers on ahead, who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him;

**Revelation 1:20 (NIV)**
20  The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and of the seven golden lampstands is this: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

**2. Commendation (**[**2:2-3**](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Rev+2%3A2-3)**)**

[**2:2-3**](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Rev+2%3A2-3)**.** Christ commended those in the Ephesian church for their **hard work... perseverance,** their condemnation of **wicked men,** and their identification of **false** apostles. \_\_Rev 2

\_\_(False teachers were present in each of the first four churches; cf. [vv. 2](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Rev+2%3A2), [6](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Rev+2%3A6), [9](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Rev+2%3A9), [14-15](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Rev+2%3A14-15), [20](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Rev+2%3A20).) In addition they were commended for enduring **hardships** and **not** growing **weary** in serving God. In general this church had continued in its faithful service to God for more than 40 years.

**Revelation 2:2 (NIV)**
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.

**Revelation 2:6 (NIV)**
6  But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

**Revelation 2:9 (NIV)**
9  I know your afflictions and your poverty--yet you are rich! I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

**Revelation 2:14 (NIV)**
14  Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality.

**Revelation 2:15 (NIV)**
15  Likewise you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans.

**Revelation 2:20 (NIV)**
20  Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols.

**3. Rebuke (**[**2:4**](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Revelation%202:4)**)**

[**2:4**](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Rev+2%3A4)**.** In spite of the many areas of commendation, the church in Ephesus was soundly rebuked: **Yet I hold this against you: you have forsaken your first love.** The order of words in the Greek is emphatic; the clause could be translated, "Your first love you have left." Christ used the word *agapēn*, speaking of the deep kind of love that God has for people. This rebuke contrasts with what Paul wrote the Ephesians 35 years earlier, that he never stopped giving thanks for them because of their faith in Christ and their love (*agapēn*) for the saints ([Eph. 1:15-16](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Eph+1%3A15-16)). Most of the Ephesian Christians were now second-generation believers, and though they had retained purity of doctrine and life and had maintained a high level of service, they were lacking in deep devotion to Christ. How the church today needs to heed this same warning, that orthodoxy and service are not enough. Christ wants believers' hearts as well as their hands and heads.

**Ephesians 1:15 (NIV)**
15  For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints,

**Ephesians 1:16 (NIV)**
16  I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.

**4. Exhortation (**[**2:5-6**](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Rev+2%3A5-6)**)**

[**2:5-6**](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Rev+2%3A5-6)**.** The Ephesians were first reminded to **remember the height from which you have fallen!** They were told to **repent** and to return to the love they had left. Similar exhortations concerning the need for a deep love for God are frequently found in the New Testament ([Matt. 22:37](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Mt+22%3A37); [Mark 12:30](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Mk+12%3A30); [Luke 10:27](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Lk+10%3A27); [John 14:15](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Jn+14%3A15), [21](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Jn+14%3A21), [23](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Jn+14%3A23); [21:15-16](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Jn+21%3A15-16); [James 2:5](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Jas+2%3A5); [1 Peter 1:8](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=1Pe+1%3A8)). Christ stated that one's love for God should be greater than his love for his closest relatives, including his father, mother, son, and daughter ([Matt. 10:37](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Mt+10%3A37)). Paul added that love for God should even be above one's love for his or her mate ([1 Cor. 7:32-35](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=1Co+7%3A32-35)). In calling the Ephesian believers to repentance Christ was asking them to change their attitude as well as their affections. They were to continue their service not simply because it was right but because they loved Christ. He warned them that if they did not respond, the light of their witness in Ephesus would be extinguished: **I will... remove your lampstand from its place.** The church continued and was later the scene of a major church council, but after the 5th century both the church and the city declined. The immediate area has been uninhabited since the 14th century.

One additional word of commendation was inserted. They were commended because they hated **the practices of the Nicolaitans.** There has been much speculation concerning the identity of the Nicolaitans, but the Scriptures do not specify who they were. They apparently were a sect wrong in practice and in doctrine (for further information see Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament*, 4:563-65; Merrill C. Tenney, *Interpreting Revelation*, pp. 60-1; Walvoord, *Revelation*, p. 58).

**Matthew 22:37 (NIV)**
37  Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.'

**Mark 12:30 (NIV)**
30  Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'

**Luke 10:27 (NIV)**
27  He answered: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"

**John 14:15 (NIV)**
15  "If you love me, you will obey what I command.

**John 14:21 (NIV)**
21  Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him."

**John 14:23 (NIV)**
23  Jesus replied, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.

**John 21:15 (NIV)**
15  When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."

**John 21:16 (NIV)**
16  Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep."

**James 2:5 (NIV)**
5  Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him?

**1 Peter 1:8 (NIV)**
8  Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy,

**Matthew 10:37 (NIV)**
37  "Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me;

**1 Corinthians 7:32 (NIV)**
32  I would like you to be free from concern. An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord's affairs--how he can please the Lord.

**1 Corinthians 7:33 (NIV)**
33  But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world--how he can please his wife--

**1 Corinthians 7:34 (NIV)**
34  and his interests are divided. An unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the Lord's affairs: Her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit. But a married woman is concerned about the affairs of this world--how she can please her husband.

**1 Corinthians 7:35 (NIV)**
35  I am saying this for your own good, not to restrict you, but that you may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord.

**5. Promise (**[**2:7**](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Rev+2%3A7)**)**

[**2:7**](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Rev+2%3A7)**.** As in the other letters, Christ gave the Ephesian church a promise addressed to individuals who will hear. He stated, **To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.** The tree of life, first mentioned in [Genesis 3:22](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Ge+3%3A22), was in the Garden of Eden. Later it reappears in the New Jerusalem where it bears abundant fruit ([Rev. 22:2](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Rev+22%3A2)). Those who eat of it will never die ([Gen. 3:22](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Ge+3%3A22)). This promise should not be construed as reward for only a special group of Christians but a normal expectation for all Christians. "The paradise of God" is probably a name for heaven (cf. [Luke 23:43](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Lk+23%3A43); [2 Cor. 12:4](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=2Co+12%3A4)—the only other NT references to paradise). Apparently it will be identified with the New Jerusalem in the eternal state.

**Genesis 3:22 (NIV)**
22  And the LORD God said, "The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever."

**Revelation 22:2 (NIV)**
2  down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.

**Genesis 3:22 (NIV)**
22  And the LORD God said, "The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever."

**Luke 23:43 (NIV)**
43  Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."

**2 Corinthians 12:4 (NIV)**
4  was caught up to paradise. He heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell.

This encouragement to true love reminded them again of God's gracious provision for salvation in time and eternity. Love for God is not wrought by legalistically observing commands, but by responding to one's knowledge and appreciation of God's love.

The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty.

**Open it**

1. Why does love—even the most fervent and committed love—sometimes grow cold over time?
 **My Opinion, either it isn’t love, or they are not working on it any more, it isn’t just there, it takes time and talk and work and seeing things from their side, sometimes just not letting your pride get in the way.**

2. What are some mementos or heirlooms you are especially attached to?
  **Pictures of our family**

**Explore it**

3. Who was addressing John with this message? ([2:1](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Rev+2%3A1))
 **The people of church of Ephesus**

4. What church was the subject of this letter from Jesus? ([2:1](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Rev+2%3A1))
 **The Church of Ephesus**

5. Jesus praised the church at Ephesus for what deeds? ([2:2-3](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Rev+2%3A2-3))
 **Their deeds, toil, and perseverance, and they cannot endure evil men, putting to test the false apostles. They have not grown weary.**

6. With what in the Ephesian church was Christ unsatisfied? ([2:4](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Rev+2%3A4))
 **They had left their first love.**

7. What did Christ command the church at Ephesus to remember? ([2:5](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Rev+2%3A5))
 **Remember from where you have fallen**

8. How did the church at Ephesus need to change? ([2:5](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Rev+2%3A5))
 R**epent and do the deeds you did at first**

9. What warning was given to the church if it failed to obey Christ’s words? ([2:5](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Rev+2%3A5))
 **I will come to you and remove your lampstand out of its place**

10. What did the church at Ephesus have in its favor? ([2:6](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Rev+2%3A6))
 **They hated the deeds of the Nicolaitans, *(note at bottom)***

11. Whom else did Jesus want to benefit from this message? ([2:7](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Rev+2%3A7))
 ***Revelation 2:7 (NASB77)*** *7  ' He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God.'*
**Get it**

12. If Jesus were to write you a personal letter, for what would He commend you, and in what ways would He correct you?
 **My perseverance, and don’t have enough time to list them all**

13. What do your actions say about who or what is most important in your life?
 **I hope God and family**

14. What does it mean to repent?
 **To turn away from the sin and never to repeat it**

15. At what time in your life did you feel closest to God or the most dedicated to God?
 **Any time I am teaching or giving the sermon**

16. What can cause us to lose our love for God?
 **Our own folly**

17. How can we keep our commitment to Christ from waning over time?
 **Keep on keeping on, sound like a cliché but you must keep going**

**Apply it**

18. In what concrete ways can you show today that Jesus Christ is your first love?
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19. What is one step you can take this week to build the quality of perseverance in your faith?
 **Sin less study more**

20. What can you do or say to encourage a Christian friend to remain loyal to Christ?
 **Talk that person in loving terms, expressing your concern for them and how you were helped in the past by others and how they overcame.**

The Nicolaitans appear to come from a sect group at the time that followed a man by the name of Nicolas. His name can derive from a Greek root meaning “conqueror” or “destroyer.”

Some think Nicolas is the same man who appears to convert to Christianity in [**Acts 6:5**](http://www.christianity.com/bible/search/?ver=niv&q=acts+6:5), but lost his way to a teaching known as [**Gnosticism**](https://www.christianity.com/church/church-history/timeline/1-300/gnosticism-11629621.html), a heretical teaching that swept away many members of the church in the second century. But nothing, other than the roots of his name, seem to link him to the sect that seemed to plague the church of Ephesus.

If, however, the Nicolas in Antioch mentioned in Acts began the sect of the Nicolaitans, he seems to have fallen away from his faith. Revelation was written long after Acts, and perhaps during that time Nicolas fell in love with idolatrous teachings and chose those over the ones of Christianity. That seems to align with the fact that Nicolaitans buckled under the pressures of Roman rule, lost their faith, and seemed to want to drag other Christians along with them.

**Doctrine and Practices of Nicolaitans**

**Who were the Nicolaitans in the historical context?**

Later in chapter 2 of Revelation, the author seems to link the practices of the Nicolaitans with the practices of those who listened to Balaam ([**Revelation 2:14-15**](http://www.christianity.com/bible/search/?ver=niv&q=revelation+2%3a14-15)). Those who followed Balaam back in Numbers used Midianite women to seduce the men of Israel and lead them to worship other gods. Examples of such acts have played out with Solomon, for instance, when his wives from pagan religions led him astray and after other gods ([**1 Kings 11:1-5**](http://www.christianity.com/bible/search/?ver=niv&q=1-kings+11%3a1-5)).

Because Revelation seems to link Balaam with the Nicolaitans, one can assume the church of Ephesus faced a similar dilemma. Immersed in pagan Roman culture in that city, the sect of the Nicolaitans may have attempted to woo the Christians away from their [**religion**](https://www.christianity.com/), just as they had been wooed before.

Nicolaitans also appeared to eat food offered to idols, which Acts appears to decree against ([**Acts 15:29**](http://www.christianity.com/bible/search/?ver=niv&q=acts+15:29)). Although this one doesn’t seem like a major offense, in their context, they had committed a serious spiritual crime.

**Why does that last one matter?**

Roman rule required sacrifice to their gods. Emperors such as Decius attempted to weed out Christians by enforcing sacrifices to various Roman deities. Those who resisted faced persecution and possible execution.

The Nicolaitans appeared to conform to this Roman culture, and seemed to encourage Christians in Ephesus to do the same in a time of dire persecution ([**1 Corinthians 6:12**](http://www.christianity.com/bible/search/?ver=niv&q=1+corinthians+6:12)). In eating the food given to the idols, this implies they had gone to the temples to receive this food and would’ve had to engage in the immoralities there to acquire this meat.

They seemed planted in the Asia Minor region to test the faithfulness of Christians in times where it seems that loyalty matters most: when physical and spiritual life and death are on the line.

## ****The Nicolaitans Now****

Although the sect of the Nicolaitans seems to have disappeared into historical obscurity, ideologies of this group seem to persist today.

In American culture, Christians now face a choice to blend in society or stand out in this culture of compromise. Many people in the church today, like Solomon, attempt to marry several wives in a spiritual sense. We serve both God and money and [insert idol here].

But we can only serve one master. Our culture is reaching a tipping point where we do have to choose who we will follow; it requires sacrifice. We can serve gods or God, and if we choose the latter, like the church of Ephesus, we resist the Nicolaitans and their attempts to drag us with them in acts of idolatry and immorality.