

## **THE MESSAGE TO THE CHURCH AT EPHESUS**

Ephesus was an ancient Greek city, and later a major Roman city, on the west coast of Asia Minor, near present-day Selçuk, Izmir Province, Turkey. It was one of the twelve cities of the Ionian League during the classical Greek era. In the Roman period, it was for many years the second largest city of the Roman Empire ranking behind Rome, the empire's capital. Ephesus had a population of more than 250,000 in the 1st century BC, which also made it the second largest city in the world.

The city was famed for the Temple of Artemis (completed around 550 BC), one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. The temple was destroyed in 401 A.D. by a mob led by St. John Chrysostom. Emperor Constantine 1 rebuilt much of the city and erected new public baths. The town was again partially destroyed by an earthquake in 614 AD. The city's importance as a commercial center declined as the harbor was slowly silted up by the Cayster.

Ephesus was one of the seven churches of Asia that are cited in the Book of Revelation. In Revelation Chapter two they were commended by Jesus for their labor to the point of exhaustion, and for their perseverance and their unwillingness to listen to the false teachers of their day. Jesus does hold one thing against them... ***"...because thou hast left thy first love."*** Rev. 2:4b. Their Christianity had become a faithful ritual but not a relationship of love to the Lord. The Gospel of John may have been written here. It is also the site of a large gladiators' graveyard.

Today's archaeological site lies 3 kilometers southwest of the town of Selçuk, in the Selçuk district of Izmir Province, Turkey. The ruins of Ephesus are a favorite international and local tourist attraction, partly owing to their easy access from Adnan Menderes Airport and via the port of Kuşadası.

### **REV 2:1**

***"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;"***

We learned from Chapter 1 that Jesus is the one that held the seven stars and walked among the seven golden candlesticks. The word angel denotes the Pastor or the Messenger of each church. The Pastor is the one held responsible for the sheep that he shepherds.

## **REV 2:2**

*“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:*

Jesus commends them for the works and labor that they have done. He sees their patience. He knows they cannot stand the evil going on in their city. The Church at Ephesus had false apostles and they were made known by the church. These were the commendations. Notice that Jesus does not point out the things wrong first. He always commends them for what they have done right.

## **REV 2:3**

*“And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted.”*

One of the fruit of the Spirit is patience, and Jesus commends them for being patient. They had been doing works, and He tells them not to get weary in doing the right things. He saw their strength that they had not fainted in their labors but stayed strong.

**II THESS. 3:13** *“But ye, brethren, be not weary in well doing.”*

**GAL. 6:9** *“And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.”*

**HEB. 10:36** *“For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise.”*

## **REV 2:4**

*“Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.”*

*“Thou hast left thy first love.”* It had become a ritual to serve God rather than a labor of love. They did it out of duty rather than for the love of Christ. Jesus lets them know that this displeases him. We should never do what we do for the Lord or anything else out of duty. If it isn't done because of love, it fails the test.

## **REV 2:5**

*“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.”*

Jesus tells them that they have lost the relationship they once had with Him. They are told to repent and do what they did at the first. They were to let the love they once had for the Lord be their priority instead of their works. The lampstand or candlestick is the local Church and Pastor at Ephesus. It would be removed if they didn't repent.

## **REV 2:6**

*“But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate.”*

Jesus tells them that the works of the Nicolaitans was something that He hated. They also hated the deeds of these false teachers. The Nicolaitans taught doctrine that is contrary to scripture. He commended them for their stand against this heresy.

## **1 Timothy 1:3-7**

*As I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia, that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine, Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith: so do. Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned: From which some having swerved have turned aside unto vain jangling; desiring to be teachers of the law; understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm.”*

It appears that their “first love” may have been in reference to the time when they were more interested in obeying HIS Commandments from a pure heart, a good conscience and from sincere faith (believing what GOD has said), instead of getting caught up in fables ,(unbiblical practices) and endless genealogies and following those who have strayed, and have turned aside(from what GOD has said) to idle talk, falling into the trap of following those without understanding...

## **REV 2:7**

*“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.”*

## **TREE OF LIFE**

**GEN 2:9** *And out of the ground made the LORD God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil.*

**GEN 3:22** *And the LORD God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever:*

**GEN 3:24** *So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life.*

**REV 22:2** *In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, [was there] the tree of life, which bare twelve [manner of] fruits, [and] yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree [were] for the healing of the nations.*

The tree of life is symbolically seen as JESUS CHRIST.

## **THE MESSAGE TO THE CHURCH AT SMYRNA**

Smyrna was an inland seaport about 50 miles north of Ephesus. During Roman times, it surpassed Ephesus both as a seaport & trading center, disputing with that city & Pergamum the claim to "the first city of Asia." Many considered it to be the most brilliant city in all of Asia Minor. Its streets were wide & paved. It was widely celebrated for its schools of medicine & science.

The church in Smyrna is not mentioned much elsewhere in Scriptures, but based on this letter, it is apparent that the church in Smyrna was severely persecuted and suffered a great deal for maintaining their faith. Yet it should be noted that this "poor persecuted church" received no condemnation whatsoever from the Lord in His letter to them, and only commendations and

encouragement.

This letter is unique in that it contains no criticism or rebuke. Smyrna's letter contains neither as much praise on the one hand, nor the slightly negative observation on the other.

The letter is also unique in its length, containing just four verses. (In contrast, the letter to Thyatira spans twelve verses.) It is so brief that it almost appears abrupt. Jesus gives neither a lengthy admonition to repent, nor much praise. To use a military metaphor, it resembles a commander's final instructions to his company of Special Forces. They are already focused and disciplined, aware of what is expected of them, wholeheartedly committed to their duty, and willing to go to their deaths for their cause if need be, unlike new recruits or infantry misfits who continually have to be reminded of the basics. These are seasoned veterans. This letter is from the Captain of their salvation to a unit that knows its marching orders and has been following them faithfully. Little needs to be added.

The letter to Smyrna also has death as a recurring theme. Death is directly mentioned three times in these four verses, and the name *Smyrna* contains a probable fourth reference as well. Jesus Christ refers to His own death, points to their death as a finish line, and also mentions the second death. While He is not warning that their deaths are imminent, these references combine to produce a sober message.

*Smyrna means "myrrh,"* a highly valued spice. Many of its uses in Scripture fit with what we know of the church at Smyrna. For example, myrrh was a primary ingredient in the holy anointing oil that God commanded Moses to make ([Exodus 30:22-33](#)), which was used to consecrate the Tabernacle, the Ark, two of the altars, all of the utensils, as well as Aaron and his sons. In Smyrna, we likewise see a people who are set apart and consecrated, whose lives are dedicated in service to God despite the cost.

A second use of myrrh is found in the book of Esther, where the eligible maidens were prepared for twelve months before they were sent to meet the king ([Esther 2:12-13](#)). For the first six months of their preparation, they were purified with the oil of myrrh. Looking at this spiritually, myrrh could represent purification before being able to meet the King of kings, Jesus Christ. From what we have read of Smyrna, this also parallels their situation.

A third use of myrrh helps to understand why it is linked with death. In Mark's account of the crucifixion, Jesus is offered wine mixed with myrrh ([Mark 15:23](#)). *Easton's Bible Dictionary* points out that the Jews commonly did this for prisoners because it would render them insensible during their torture. The myrrh used in this concoction is thought to be a species that had many of the characteristics of opium. Here, then, myrrh was a drug given to dull the senses of those who were condemned to death—and Jesus rejected it. Considering Christ's letter to Smyrna in this light, we see a people who may not all actually be condemned to death, but who are still admonished to be faithful until death. Christ set the example of this, rejecting the option of compromise that would have eased His sacrifice.

A fourth use of myrrh also refers to death, as myrrh is a spice used for embalming bodies. More specifically, Nicodemus used it to prepare Christ's body for burial (**John 19:39**). For this reason, myrrh is often associated with bitter circumstances. Realizing what the people of Smyrna were going through, it is fitting that their name would mean myrrh.

After addressing His letter to the "church of myrrh," Jesus draws attention to the fact that He was dead but "came to life" (**Revelation 2:8**). In doing this, He encourages them by highlighting His own experience. To this church of bitter circumstances He says, in essence, "I was martyred too, just as some of you will be. But I was resurrected, and now live eternally." He reminds them that He has overcome death, and that it is not the end (**I Corinthians 15:50-57**).

### **REV 2:8**

*"And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive;"*

#### **FIRST AND THE LAST REFERS TO JESUS**

**REVELATION 1:17** ; *And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last:*

**ISAIAH 41:4** *Who has performed and done it calling the generations from the beginning? 'I the LORD am the first; And with the last I am He.'*

#### **WHICH WAS DEAD, AND IS ALIVE**

**REVELATION 1:18** *I [am] he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.*

**Romans 6:9** *Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him.*

### **REV 2:9**

*"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."*

## SYNAGOGUE OF SATAN

**Matthew 23:27-33** *Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchers, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchers of the righteous, and say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets. Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers. Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?*

**John 8:42-47** *"<sup>42</sup>Jesus said unto them, If God were your Father, ye would love me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me.<sup>43</sup> Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye cannot hear my word. <sup>44</sup>Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it. <sup>45</sup>And because I tell you the truth, ye believe me not. <sup>46</sup>Which of you convinceth me of sin? And if I say the truth, why do ye not believe me? <sup>47</sup>He that is of God heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God."*

### **REV 2:10**

*"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."*

The 10 days of Tribulation appear to possibly also represent a prophetic message for this church age, referring to 10 literal periods of suffering under 10 different Roman Emperors –

Nero,

Domitian,

Trajan,

Marcus Aurelius,

Severus,

Maximinius,

Decius,

Valerian,

Aurelian,

Diocletian. Diocletian also tried to destroy the Bible from the face of the earth.

This period is known in Church history as "the period of the Roman Persecution of the Church" for it was during this period that more Christians suffered tremendous persecution and were killed than in any other specific time period. During these years, some historians have estimated that up to 5 million Christians were martyred (killed) solely for their faith. Before this point, Rome considered the Christian movement merely another Jewish matter. However, as Christianity spread throughout the Roman Empire, they were viewed as subversive elements to the Authority and Power of Rome. Christians would not accept Roman gods, pagan practices, and viewing the emperor himself as a god and Rome began to make the conscious effort to completely eliminate Christians from the face of the earth.

They were not allowed to participate in commerce (the letter refers to being poor), were frequently tortured and killed (the letter refers to being persecuted). Yet, ironically, in spite of all this, the Church continued to grow like wildfire in number. Also, their passion for Jesus was very strong. One could not be indifferent or "lukewarm" for Jesus during this time period. You were either stone cold and not in the church or you were hot for Jesus and persecuted.

### **CROWN OF LIFE**

The Greek word from which we get "crowns" in our English Bibles, is the word, "stephanos." It was a familiar word to the First Century reader. Anyone living in that day would have understood the full implication of this word. It was a prize given to the victor in the Greek athlete games. To the runner who crossed the line first; to the athlete who would hurl the discs the farthest; to the wrestler who pinned his opponent to the mat; or, even, at times, for work deserving a reward. "Stephanos" were even worn at times of celebration, such as a marriage feasts; also as a symbol of victory or deserved honor. This was not a jeweled head piece. It was not a diadem. It was not some imperial crown to be worn by a king sitting on his throne.

This "crown," or "stephanos," was usually woven from oak leaves, ivy vines, pine leaves, parsley, myrtle, wild olive branches, violets, or even roses. This word in Greek means something EARNED, REWARD, OR RECOMPENSED. Sometimes the same word is used to speak of an employee's pay. That's a far cry from the idea of a royal diadem, isn't it?

When a man came to Christ, in the day in which the New Testament was written, he learned that he could earn a "stephanos." He knew exactly what it meant. His familiarity with the Greek games made that word an instant revelation to him. He knew at once there was something to be WON for Christ.

**1 Corinthians 9:24-25** (Phillips Translation)

***"Do you remember how, on a racing track, every competitor runs but only one can win the prize? Well, you ought to run with your minds fixed on winning the prize! Every competitor in the games goes into serious training. Athletes will take***



***tremendous pains - for a fading crown of leaves. But our contest is for an eternal crown that will never fade."***

Paul says that we are to become as equally determined in making Christ the absolute master of our lives, just as those Greek athletes were in winning their contest. Not only straining in our tasks, but, also, denying ourselves many of the good things in this life. Paul's illustrative use of the Greek games was not only to provide clearer teaching. He seeks to communicate the heat and desperation of all-out competition in Christ. Paul means for us to become contestants, *literally*.

In the Greek games, the judges took their places on an elevated stand called the "*Bema*." Remember that word. You'll understand why in a moment. From the "*Bema seat*," *the judge, or umpire*, could watch the runners. As each event closed, he summoned the contestants before him. They lined up to receive their rewards. Can't you just see the picture? They are breathing heavily. Their bodies still trembling and wet with perspiration. As their names are called, they step forward. The judge leans over and places a wreath of woven leaves on the victor's brow. That woven wreath was the origin of the present-day medals of gold, silver and bronze won in the Olympics of our day.

The Greek word "bema," means, "the judges stand." It is the very same word Paul uses for the Judgment Seat of Christ. "We will all appear before the BEMA seat of Christ," says Paul in **2 Corinthians 5:10**. In the context of the setting against the sweaty, straining, competitive background of the Greek games is what Paul pictures this judgment of the Christians. It is not a matter of accepting gifts, but of being rewarded while still huffing and puffing as one comes directly from the competition.

The picture God draws in His Word is not a nice, goody goody little Christian who gets a crown on his head because he has been wise enough to accept God's free gift in Christ. The "*Bema seat*" is not a place for handing out gifts. There is NO reward for accepting gifts. These Greek athletes were still perspiring and panting, when they came to the "*bema seat*" *to receive a reward for winning in competition*.

Every one of the awards is based on competition. That is why the "*Judgment Seat*" is referred to as the "*Bema Seat*." Along with that word, keep in mind the Greek word "*stephanos*" . . . the competition crown . . . something that is EARNED! Only *competition crowns* are presented to the servants of Christ. They are only for the competitors. Spectators are never crowned. Therefore, spectators in Christianity will NOT be crowned either.

All six crowns of the New Testament are reserved for those who earn them. They are:

1. The **crown of righteousness** for those who love Christ's appearing - 2 Timothy 4:8
2. The **crown of** life for those that have been faithful unto death- Revelation 2:10
3. The **incorruptible crown** for those that are victorious- 1 Corinthians 9:25
4. The **crown of rejoicing** – 1 Thessalonians 2:19-20
5. Worker's **crown of glory** – for shepherds that feed the flock 1 Peter 5:2-4

## **REV 2:11**

***“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.”***

## **SECOND DEATH**

The second death is for those that have not received salvation through Jesus Christ. Those born again will not see this death.

**BORN ONCE DIE TWICE  
BORN TWICE, DIE ONCE**