

# REMAIN FAITHFUL

## Lesson 2

### Revelation 2–3



#### WELCOME

When you think of a faithful church or faithful person, what qualities and characteristics come to mind?

#### INTRODUCTION

Revelation was written as a letter to seven churches in Asia Minor. In chapters 2–3, the churches received individual letters. These were like letters within a letter. Each one was a call for believers to remain faithful to Christ in the face of the various challenges they were experiencing.

#### Tips for meaningful engagement with the Word:

- The individual letters would have been circulated to all seven of the churches (see map on page 4 for context), as well as other churches. Each church would have seen every letter.<sup>1</sup>
- There were more than seven churches in Asia Minor, however, seven churches were chosen for a specific reason. As we learned in the introductory information section, numbers had symbolic value. The number seven symbolizes “completeness,” so it is understood that these letters were not only for those historical churches; the principles found in them are for the whole and complete Church and are applicable for believers today.<sup>2</sup>
- Each section has an *At a Glance* chart to highlight the key points in each letter.
- The specific Scripture for each church’s letter is inserted in that church’s section of this lesson. The verse numbers have been removed

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<sup>1</sup> Bauckham, 12

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. 16

from the Scripture passages and footnotes have been inserted. These footnotes are intended to help clarify the passage and provide better understanding.



## WORD

***As you come to the Word, pause and ask God to make it come alive for you. Ask Him to make it understandable and transformational.***



EPHESUS

### **Historical Setting and Context:**

Ephesus was an extremely powerful city in Asia Minor. While it was part of the Roman Empire, its local government had a certain amount of self-rule, allowing the city to become the epicenter of business and religious life in the region.<sup>3</sup> Because Ephesus had three major land trade routes running through it, as well as a large port, businesses boomed.<sup>4</sup> One of the largest businesses was religion. Ephesus housed one of the ancient wonders of the world, the temple of Artemis (Diana), which employed thousands of priests and priestesses.<sup>5</sup> In addition, there were temples to other gods and to Emperor Caesar, and there were those who practiced magic and the occult.<sup>6</sup> The Ephesian church was started by Paul in AD 53 on one of his missionary journeys, and he later served there for three years. Timothy served in Ephesus after Paul.<sup>7</sup> Because of their rich history, the church knew the truth and followed it without deviation in spite of the false teachers and immoral culture. However, they had lost their first love.

### **Revelation 2:1–7**

*“Write this letter to the angel of the church<sup>8</sup> in Ephesus. This is the message from the one who holds the seven stars in his right hand, the one who walks among the seven gold lampstands:<sup>9</sup> “I know all the things*

<sup>3</sup> Barton, 19; Duvall, 45-46

<sup>4</sup> Barton, 19

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. 19

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. 19; Duvall, 46

<sup>7</sup> *Life Application Study Bible*, 1997

<sup>8</sup> Each letter starts with this wording. The repetition demonstrates importance and reveals unity of purpose. “Some say that these are angels designated to guard the churches; others say that they are elders or pastors of the local churches.” (*Life Application Study Bible*, 2170) This language is found in **Revelation 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14.**

<sup>9</sup> The gold lampstands represent the seven churches, and the seven stars are the messengers or leaders of the churches. This is a picture of Jesus’ power and authority over the churches and their leaders. Jesus is claiming His position and reminding them that He is the head of the Body, His Church. (*Life Application Study Bible*, 2171, 2174)

you do. I have seen your hard work and your patient endurance. I know you don't tolerate evil people. You have examined the claims of those who say they are apostles but are not. You have discovered they are liars. You have patiently suffered for me without quitting.

"But I have this complaint against you. You don't love me or each other as you did at first! Look how far you have fallen! Turn back to me and do the works you did at first. If you don't repent, I will come and remove your lampstand from its place among the churches.<sup>10</sup> But this is in your favor: You hate the evil deeds of the Nicolaitans, just as I do."<sup>11</sup>

"Anyone with ears to hear must listen to the Spirit and understand what he is saying to the churches.<sup>12</sup> To everyone who is victorious<sup>13</sup> I will give fruit from the tree of life in the paradise of God."<sup>14</sup>

**AT A GLANCE**

Description/ Name of Jesus:	The One who holds seven stars in His right hand. The One who walks among the seven gold lampstands. <b>(2:1)</b>
Commendation:	Hard work, patient endurance; you don't tolerate evil people; you test false apostles, suffer without complaint and hate evil Nicolaitans. <b>(2:2-3, 6)</b>
Rebuke:	Lost your first love—for God and others. <b>(2:4)</b>
Call:	Turn back to God; do the work you did at first. <b>(2:5)</b>
Potential punishment:	He will come and remove the lampstand from the churches. <b>(2:5)</b>
Reward:	Will be given fruit from the tree of life in paradise. <b>(2:7)</b>

<sup>10</sup> Jesus' complaint against them was this: though they followed and obeyed Him, they had lost their love for Him and for others. He wrote this warning to them so they would recognize what they were doing and turn back to Him. If they did not, He said He would remove their lampstand from its place among the churches. This would mean that the church in Ephesus would no longer be effective. (*Life Application Study Bible*, 2172)

<sup>11</sup> Nicolaitans were believers who compromised their faith in order to enjoy sinful practices. (*Life Application Study Bible*, 2172)

<sup>12</sup> This reminder is given to each of the seven churches, and all who will listen. It emphasizes Jesus' desire that everyone listen to and follow the Spirit. (Fee, 28) This language is found in **Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 21**.

<sup>13</sup> This wording is found in every letter. The victorious (overcomers) are those who remain faithful to Christ until the end, no matter what it costs them. (Barton, 24) This language is found in **Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21**.

<sup>14</sup> This is a reference that goes all the way back to creation. In the Garden of Eden there were two trees: the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (**Genesis 2:9**). To eat from the tree of life meant eternal life with God. (*Life Application Study Bible*, 2172) They would never be separated from Him.

1. The Ephesians knew and upheld the truth about God but their love for God and others had diminished. Both truth and love are extremely important; one without the other is dangerous. How would living without one or the other be dangerous?

Which one (truth or love) do you have an easier time with and why?



#### **Historical Setting and Context:**

Smyrna<sup>15</sup> was a city 25-35 miles north of Ephesus and it, too, had a booming harbor and export business.<sup>16</sup> It was known throughout the region for its beauty, especially its architecture.<sup>17</sup> While Smyrna, like Ephesus, had an element of self-government, it also had strong ties to Rome and was the center for the cult of emperor worship.<sup>18</sup> Life was not easy for the believers in Smyrna. The church there faced hostility not only from those pressuring them to worship Caesar, but also from the large Jewish population that actively opposed and persecuted them.<sup>19</sup>

#### **Revelation 2:8–11**

*“Write this letter to the angel of the church in Smyrna. This is the message from the one who is the First and the Last, who was dead but is now alive:<sup>20</sup> “I know about your suffering and your poverty—but you are*

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<sup>15</sup> Smyrna is the only one of the seven cities that still exists today (Izmir, Turkey). (Barton, 24)

<sup>16</sup> Barton, 24

<sup>17</sup> Duvall, 57

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. 24-25

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. 25

<sup>20</sup> Jesus was called the “First and the Last,” which overlaps with the vision in **Revelation 1:13–16** where He was called the “Alpha and Omega,” the “Beginning and End.” Jesus, the one who rose from the dead, has ultimate eternal sovereignty. (Duvall, 52)

rich!<sup>21</sup> I know the blasphemy of those opposing you. They say they are Jews, but they are not, because their synagogue belongs to Satan.<sup>22</sup> Don't be afraid of what you are about to suffer. The devil will throw some of you into prison to test you. You will suffer for ten days.<sup>23</sup> But if you remain faithful even when facing death, I will give you the crown of life.<sup>24</sup>

“Anyone with ears to hear must listen to the Spirit and understand what he is saying to the churches. Whoever is victorious will not be harmed by the second death.”<sup>25</sup>

**AT A GLANCE**

Description/ Name of Jesus:	The First and Last; He was dead but is now alive. <b>(2:8)</b>
Commendation:	Though you are suffering and poor, you are rich. <b>(2:9)</b>
Rebuke:	None. <b>(2:10)</b>
Call:	Remain faithful. <b>(2:10)</b>
Potential punishment:	None.
Reward:	Will not be harmed in the second death and will receive the crown of life. <b>(2:10–11)</b>

<sup>21</sup> The church in Smyrna was highly persecuted. Their suffering was intense, yet God told them to not be afraid of their suffering and actually warned them more was coming. Satan may harm their physical bodies but they were not going to suffer spiritual harm; they would never be out of God's hands. (*Life Application Study Bible*, 2172) That is why Jesus said they were rich; their treasure was not on earth, but in heaven.

<sup>22</sup> The Jews who were persecuting the Christians were serving Satan and doing his will.

<sup>23</sup> This was not a literal ten days. The suffering would be for a limited time and would have a definite end. It would not last forever. (Duvall, 54; Barton, 26)

<sup>24</sup> “Smyrna was famous for its athletic games. A crown was the victory wreath, the trophy for the champion at the games.” (*Life Application Study Bible*, 2172) They would have understood this to mean that they would ultimately receive the victory if they remained faithful.

<sup>25</sup> Everyone will experience both a physical death and a resurrection. Believers will be resurrected to eternal life with God. Those who do not believe in God will experience a second death, which is eternal separation from God (**Revelation 21:8**). (*Life Application Study Bible*, 2172)

2. Very few people view suffering as something to expect. Rather, in many cases it's feared, dreaded and agonized over. While suffering is not something we should wish for or seek out, as believers we should expect and be prepared for it.<sup>26</sup> What is your typical response to suffering, whether yours or someone else's?

a. Could it help you in any way to change your view of suffering? If so, how?

b. Think of some practical examples of how to remain faithful while suffering.



**Historical Setting and Context:**

Pergamum was the capital of the province of Asia and was a natural fortress, built on a hill overlooking the surrounding countryside.<sup>27</sup> This city was best known for its worship of four Greek gods: Zeus, Athene, Dionysus and Asclepius. Asclepius, the god of healing, was chief among them and many came to Pergamum seeking healing.<sup>28</sup> The church there faced pressure to renounce the faith, worship Caesar as god and live according to the customs of the culture around them.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Matthew 5:10–12; 24:9–13; John 15:18–20; 16:33; Luke 6:26

<sup>27</sup> Barton, 27

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. 28

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. 28

## Revelation 2:12–17

*“Write this letter to the angel of the church in Pergamum. This is the message from the one with the sharp two-edged sword:<sup>30</sup> “I know that you live in the city where Satan has his throne,<sup>31</sup> yet you have remained loyal to me. You refused to deny me even when Antipas, my faithful witness, was martyred among you there in Satan’s city.*

*“But I have a few complaints against you. You tolerate some among you whose teaching is like that of Balaam, who showed Balak how to trip up the people of Israel.<sup>32</sup> He taught them to sin by eating food offered to idols and by committing sexual sin. In a similar way, you have some Nicolaitans among you who follow the same teaching. Repent of your sin, or I will come to you suddenly and fight against them with the sword of my mouth.<sup>33</sup>*

*“Anyone with ears to hear must listen to the Spirit and understand what he is saying to the churches. To everyone who is victorious I will give some of the manna that has been hidden away in heaven.<sup>34</sup> And I will give to each one a white stone, and on the stone will be engraved a new name that no one understands except the one who receives it.<sup>35</sup>*

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<sup>30</sup> Jesus was described as the One with the sharp two-edged sword. The city of Pergamum had been given authority by Rome to perform executions with the sword. This image shows that Jesus has ultimate authority. He will judge His enemies. (Duvall, 58)

<sup>31</sup> Jesus called Pergamum “Satan’s city,” where Satan had his throne. Worship of other gods and the emperor was so prevalent, it was clear that Satan had control of the city, which makes it all the more significant that the believers there refused to deny God.

<sup>32</sup> Balaam’s story can be found in **Numbers 22–24, 31**. Balak, the king of Moab, greatly feared the Israelites who were traveling through his kingdom. He hired Balaam, who was known for his effective blessings and curses, to curse the people of Israel. Balaam, though not part of the people of Israel, knew that God was a powerful God and through a series of events ended up blessing the people of Israel instead of cursing them. However, Balaam eventually led them astray by getting them to participate in idol worship and turning away from God. (*Life Application Study Bible*, 239, 2173) Jesus was warning the people that this very thing was happening again and to not tolerate those who were leading people away from the Lord.

<sup>33</sup> In keeping with imagery of the sword, Jesus warned that if they did not repent of tolerating those people, He would “fight against them with the sword of [His] mouth.” The sword of Jesus’ mouth is also seen in **Revelation 1:16** and represents the power and force of His message (**Hebrews 4:12**); His judgment is sharp like a sword (**Isaiah 49:2**). (*Life Application Study Bible*, 2170)

<sup>34</sup> God provided manna for the people of Israel as they wandered in the desert before entering the Promise Land. They were never without nourishment (**Exodus 16:13–18**). He is promising that the people of Pergamum will never be spiritually hungry again. (*Life Application Study Bible*, 2173)

<sup>35</sup> This is one of the mysteries of Revelation as it is not clear what the white stones mean. However, it is clear that the believers who remain faithful will be given a new name.

**AT A GLANCE**

Description/ Name of Jesus:	The One with sharp two-edged sword. <b>(2:12)</b>
Commendation:	Remained faithful and refused to deny God. <b>(2:13)</b>
Rebuke:	You tolerate some who teach sinful living like Balaam did. <b>(2:14–15)</b>
Call:	Repent of sin. <b>(2:16)</b>
Potential punishment:	God will come suddenly and fight against them. <b>(2:16)</b>
Reward:	Will be given manna from heaven and have their new name recorded on white stones. <b>(2:17)</b>

3. What are some ways that we, as a church, can be tempted to compromise and accept culturally common beliefs or practices?

Brainstorm ways the church can stand firm and remain faithful. What might this cost us?

**Historical Setting and Context:**

Thyatira was a city 40 miles from Pergamum and known for its clothmaking, dyeing, leatherworking, bronzeworking and pottery.<sup>36</sup> Because it was a hub of manufacturing, the city was run by trade guilds that had powerful social, economic and religious influence. A Christian who joined one of the guilds would have faced immense pressure to partake in many

<sup>36</sup> Barton, 32

idolatrous and immoral activities.<sup>37</sup> In addition, there was pressure to worship the Emperor and other gods, including the Greek god Apollo, who was considered the guardian of the city.<sup>38</sup>

## Revelation 2:18–29

*“Write this letter to the angel of the church in Thyatira. This is the message from the Son of God, whose eyes are like flames of fire, whose feet are like polished bronze:<sup>39</sup> “I know all the things you do. I have seen your love, your faith, your service, and your patient endurance. And I can see your constant improvement in all these things.*

*“But I have this complaint against you. You are permitting that woman—that Jezebel who calls herself a prophet—to lead my servants astray.<sup>40</sup> She teaches them to commit sexual sin and to eat food offered to idols. I gave her time to repent, but she does not want to turn away from her immorality.*

*“Therefore, I will throw her on a bed of suffering, and those who commit adultery with her will suffer greatly unless they repent and turn away from her evil deeds. I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am the one who searches out the thoughts and intentions of every person. And I will give to each of you whatever you deserve.*

*“But I also have a message for the rest of you in Thyatira who have not followed this false teaching (‘deeper truths,’ as they call them—depths of Satan, actually). I will ask nothing more of you except that you hold tightly to what you have until I come. To all who are victorious, who obey me to the very end, to them I will give authority over all the nations. They*

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<sup>37</sup> Duvall, 62-64

<sup>38</sup> Barton, 32

<sup>39</sup> These are powerful statements about Jesus. The believers in Thyatira likely would have caught the reference to **Daniel 10:6** that described a messenger in Daniel’s vision with eyes like torches and feet like polished bronze. “The blazing eyes indicate the penetrating power of his vision; the feet of bronze indicate strength for executing judgment.” (Barton, 32)

<sup>40</sup> In the Old Testament, Jezebel was the wife of King Ahab and she was known for her extreme opposition to the prophets of the Lord (**1 Kings 16–18**). Since that time, her name had become a symbol of wickedness and idolatry for the people of Israel. (Duvall, 65) It’s not known if the woman mentioned in the letter was actually named Jezebel or if John used it as an example of the kind of woman that she was. (Barton, 33) In any case, there was a Jezebel-type woman who was leading the people away from the Lord with sexual sin and eating food sacrificed to idols, much like the false teachers in Pergamum. She was teaching the very truths of Satan (**Revelation 2:24**). Jesus promised that she would be judged because she was unrepentant. He gave those who had been led astray by her the chance to repent, but those who continued to follow her, her spiritual children, would be struck dead. (Barton, 34)

will rule the nations with an iron rod and smash them like clay pots.<sup>41</sup> They will have the same authority I received from my Father, and I will also give them the morning star!<sup>42</sup>

“Anyone with ears to hear must listen to the Spirit and understand what he is saying to the churches.”

**AT A GLANCE**

Description/ Name of Jesus:	The Son of God, His eyes like flames of fire, His feet like polished bronze. <b>(2:18)</b>
Commendation:	Love, faith, service, patient endurance, constant improvement. <b>(2:19)</b>
Rebuke:	Permitting Jezebel to lead servants astray, commit sexual sin and eat food offered to idols; no repentance. <b>(2:20–21)</b>
Call:	For those following Jezebel: You will suffer unless you repent and turn. For the rest: Hold tightly to what you have. <b>(2:22–25)</b>
Potential punishment:	He will strike Jezebel’s children dead—give each what they deserve. <b>(2:23)</b>
Reward:	Authority over the nations and the morning star. <b>(2:26–28)</b>

4. The Old Testament reference to Jezebel is a reminder that the battle between right and wrong has been going on for a long time and still continues today.<sup>43</sup> The church at Thyatira had the opposite problem of Ephesus—they loved well but they were tolerating false teachers. Today, how can believers identify false teachers and graciously take a stand for believing and doing right? (If you would like further insight see **Romans 16:17; 1 Timothy 6:3–5; 2 Timothy 3:1–5; Titus 3:10–11; 1 John 4:1–6; 2 John 1:9–11**)

<sup>41</sup> **Psalm 2:8–9**

<sup>42</sup> The morning star is Jesus Christ (**2 Peter 1:19**). Christ is the reward; He is coming. (*Life Application Study Bible*, 2174)

<sup>43</sup> Duvall, 66



SARDIS

### Historical Setting and Context:

Sardis was a unique city built in two locations, with one part on a mountain and one part in the valley below.

Once Sardis had been an extremely wealthy city, the place where gold and silver coins were first minted. However, by the time this letter reached them they were deeply indebted to Rome after being devastated by the earthquake of AD 17. Their former wealth had led to moral depravity and laziness, even as the city had lost much of its former splendor.<sup>44</sup> Like the culture of Sardis, the church had become lazy and complacent, looking no different from everyone else.<sup>45</sup>

### Revelation 3:1–6

*“Write this letter to the angel of the church in Sardis. This is the message from the one who has the sevenfold Spirit of God and the seven stars:<sup>46</sup> “I know all the things you do, and that you have a reputation for being alive—but you are dead. Wake up!<sup>47</sup> Strengthen what little remains, for even what is left is almost dead. I find that your actions do not meet the requirements of my God. Go back to what you heard and believed at first; hold to it firmly. Repent and turn to me again. If you don’t wake up, I will come to you suddenly, as unexpected as a thief.<sup>48</sup>*

*“Yet there are some in the church in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes with evil. They will walk with me in white, for they are worthy. All who are victorious will be clothed in white. I will never erase their names from the Book of Life, but I will announce before my Father and his angels that they are mine.<sup>49</sup>*

<sup>44</sup> Barton, 37-38

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. 69

<sup>46</sup> The way Jesus is described in this letter is reminiscent of His description in the letter to the church at Ephesus. The sevenfold Spirit is another name for Holy Spirit and the seven stars represent the leaders of the churches. (*Life Application Study Bible*, 2174) By stating that Jesus has the seven stars, John is declaring that they belong to Christ.

<sup>47</sup> This church was not given any commendations. They looked good on the outside, but they were dead on the inside. Instead of the typical rebuke, however, Jesus appealed for change: “Wake Up!” As a church, they had been lulled to sleep; complacency had led to spiritual death. (*Life Application Study Bible*, 2175)

<sup>48</sup> Often the imagery of a thief is used to depict Christ’s second coming (**1 Thessalonians 5:2**). “In each biblical case the metaphor points not just to the coming of Christ, but to his coming when people are not expecting it. In the case of the believers in Sardis ... No longer are they looking forward with eagerness to Christ’s coming, but they are now ‘coasting,’ feeling secure and impregnable, and are no longer watchful.” (Fee, 48)

<sup>49</sup> The Book of Life is the heavenly record of all of those who have salvation through Christ. It is used throughout Scripture (**Exodus 32:32–33; Psalm 69:28; Daniel 12:1**). Those in the book are guaranteed citizenship in heaven for eternity. (Barton, 41) They will be dressed in white, symbolic of purity and righteousness, (Walvoord, 938) and they will live with Christ forever.

*“Anyone with ears to hear must listen to the Spirit and understand what he is saying to the churches.*

**AT A GLANCE**

Description/ Name of Jesus:	The One who has the sevenfold Spirit and the seven stars. <b>(3:1)</b>
Commendation:	None. <b>(3:1, 4)</b>
Rebuke:	Reputation for being alive but actually dead; actions don’t meet God’s requirement. <b>(3:1–2)</b>
Call:	Wake up! Strengthen what little remains; believe what you did at first and hold to it; repent and turn to Him. <b>(3:2–3)</b>
Potential punishment:	He will come suddenly like an unexpected thief. <b>(3:3)</b>
Reward:	Clothed in white; names never erased from Book of Life; He will announce to the Father they are His. <b>(3:4–5)</b>

- Accountability and community are key to staying awake spiritually and to not being lulled into complacency or looking like the culture around you. Who do you have by your side to help you stay awake spiritually, and how do they help you accomplish that?



**Historical Setting and Context:**

The city of Philadelphia was located in a lush area of Asia Minor. Its economy was agriculturally driven, and the residents mainly worshipped the god of wine, Dionysus. The same earthquake that devastated Sardis in AD 17 greatly impacted Philadelphia and they, too, had received help from Rome in order to rebuild.<sup>50</sup> The church in Philadelphia was tired; they were constantly faced with opposition and persecution from the powerful Jewish community.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Barton, 42

<sup>51</sup> Duvall, 76

### Revelation 3:7–13

*“Write this letter to the angel of the church in Philadelphia. This is the message from the one who is holy and true, the one who has the key of David.<sup>52</sup> What he opens, no one can close; and what he closes, no one can open: “I know all the things you do, and I have opened a door for you that no one can close. You have little strength, yet you obeyed my word and did not deny me. Look, I will force those who belong to Satan’s synagogue<sup>53</sup>—those liars who say they are Jews but are not—to come and bow down at your feet. They will acknowledge that you are the ones I love.*

*“Because you have obeyed my command to persevere, I will protect you from the great time of testing that will come upon the whole world to test those who belong to this world.<sup>54</sup> I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take away your crown. All who are victorious will become pillars in the Temple of my God, and they will never have to leave it. And I will write on them the name of my God, and they will be citizens in the city of my God—the new Jerusalem that comes down from heaven from my God. And I will also write on them my new name.<sup>55</sup>*

*“Anyone with ears to hear must listen to the Spirit and understand what he is saying to the churches.*

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<sup>52</sup> This is a reference to an Old Testament story found in **Isaiah 22:15–24**, in which the key of the house of David was taken from the palace administrator, Shebna, and given to Eliakim, giving him the highest authority. By using this reference, John is making the connection that Jesus now holds the key of David and He has the highest authority. John goes on to confirm this authority with his next statement, claiming that what Jesus opens no one can close and vice versa. Christ alone has the authority to grant entrance into God’s kingdom. (Duvall, 77)

<sup>53</sup> Satan’s synagogue refers to the pagan-influenced, oppressive Jewish community.

<sup>54</sup> It’s not entirely clear as to what this time of testing will be and how those who remain faithful will be spared. We know that Christians should expect struggles and suffering in this life (**Matthew 5:10–12; 24:9–13; John 15:18–20; 16:33; Luke 6:26**), but ultimately believers have spiritual protection. (*Life Application Study Bible*, 2175)

<sup>55</sup> The images and descriptions of temple pillars, new names and the new Jerusalem in this letter seem to indicate that many of the blessings and promises first directed to the nation of Israel are now being given to Jesus’ followers, both Jew and Gentile. (Duvall, 78)

**AT A GLANCE**

Description/ Name of Jesus:	Holy and true; He has the key of David; what He opens no one can close and what He closes no one can open. <b>(3:7)</b>
Commendation:	Though you have little strength, you have obeyed God's word, did not deny God, obeyed God's commands and persevered through suffering. <b>(3:8, 10)</b>
Rebuke:	None. <b>(3:9)</b>
Call:	Hold on to what you have so no one will take away your crown. <b>(3:11)</b>
Potential punishment:	None.
Reward:	Those who belong to Satan will bow down at your feet and acknowledge you are loved by God; protection from time of testing; will be pillars of God; will have the name of God written on you; will be citizens of God's city; He will write on you His new name. <b>(3:9–10, 12)</b>

6. What comes to mind when you think of the word “protection”? How does knowing that you have protection in Christ affect your ability to remain faithful to Him, especially during a difficult time?



LAODICEA

### Historical Setting and Context:

Laodicea was the wealthiest of the seven cities and was known for its banks and banking systems. While the earthquake of AD 17 devastated Sardis and Philadelphia, Laodicea was able to rebuild without any assistance from Rome. It was a self-sufficient and extremely affluent city.<sup>56</sup> Its citizens worshipped a variety of gods as well as the emperor.<sup>57</sup> The biggest struggle the people of Laodicea had was poor water supply. They had a six mile long aqueduct that brought them water from the south, and by the time it got to them it was lukewarm and disgusting.<sup>58</sup>

### Revelation 3:14–22

*“Write this letter to the angel of the church in Laodicea. This is the message from the one who is the Amen<sup>59</sup>—the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God’s new creation: “I know all the things you do, that you are neither hot nor cold. I wish that you were one or the other! But since you are like lukewarm water, neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth!<sup>60</sup> You say, ‘I am rich. I have everything I want. I don’t need a thing!’ And you don’t realize that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked. So I advise you to buy gold from me—gold that has been purified by fire. Then you will be rich. Also buy white garments from me so you will not be shamed by your nakedness, and ointment for your eyes so you will be able to see. I correct and discipline everyone I love.<sup>61</sup> So be diligent and turn from your indifference.*

*“Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal together as*

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<sup>56</sup> Duvall, 83

<sup>57</sup> Barton, 46

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. 46

<sup>59</sup> This letter doesn’t just hold a description of Jesus but a declaration of who He is—“the Amen.” Saying “Amen” is an acknowledgement that something is both true and binding. (Barton, 46) By saying this, Jesus was declaring that He is the ultimate foundation of life and completely trustworthy. (Johnson, 116)

<sup>60</sup> The believers in Laodicea were keenly aware of what lukewarm water was; it was a daily struggle for them. By reading or hearing this imagery, they would have understood that their half-hearted, non-committal, nominal faith was disgusting and nauseating to Jesus.

<sup>61</sup> The Laodiceans were complacent and content with their material possessions and the relative ease and comfort in which they lived. They thought they were rich, but they were wretched, miserable, poor and spiritually blind. Jesus offered them His gold, purified by fire—spiritual riches. He offered them white garments—purity and righteousness only found in Him. He offered ointment for their eyes—enabling them to see the truth. (*Life Application Study Bible*, 2176) He offered healing and hope for every aspect of their lives because of His great love.

friends.<sup>62</sup> *Those who are victorious will sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat with my Father on his throne.*

*“Anyone with ears to hear must listen to the Spirit and understand what he is saying to the churches.”*

**AT A GLANCE**

Description/ Name of Jesus:	The One who is the Amen—the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God’s new creation. <b>(3:14)</b>
Commendation:	None. <b>(3:15)</b>
Rebuke:	Neither hot nor cold; say you are rich but you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked. <b>(3:15–17)</b>
Call:	Buy gold from God, buy garments from Him, take His discipline, be diligent; turn from indifference. <b>(3:18–19)</b>
Potential punishment:	Spit you out of His mouth. <b>(3:16)</b>
Reward:	If you hear His voice, open the door, He will come in and share a meal with you as friends. You will sit with Him on His throne. <b>(3:20–21)</b>

7. Even in His discipline, Jesus offered a beautiful invitation as an act of love. He wanted to bring healing and a deeper relationship with His followers then, just as He does with you now. As you picture Jesus standing at the door of your heart and knocking, longing to come in and share a more intimate relationship, what comes to your mind? How does your soul long to respond?

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<sup>62</sup> This letter holds the harshest rebuke and punishment, but also the greatest invitation. (Johnson, 114-115) By presenting the image of a door, Jesus is giving believers a choice; they can choose to listen, open the door and let Him in. Sharing a meal together is an intimate act of friendship. That is the relationship Jesus wants with His people. He gives harsh warnings and rebukes because He doesn’t want His children to miss out on the greatest relationship of all, both now and forever.



## WORSHIP

*Take a moment to enter into a time of worship—both on your own and with your community—to show praise, adoration and love for God.*

As you read over the descriptions and names of Jesus from Revelation 2–3 listed below, consider picking one to use as you pray this week. Spend time thinking about the ways you have seen this aspect of Jesus in your own life, and turn that into prayers of praise and worship.

If you are meeting together with others, use some of these names and descriptions to praise Jesus together during your prayer time.

### JESUS IS:

The One who holds seven stars in His right hand, The One who walks  
among the churches.

The First and Last, He was dead but is now alive.

The One with a sharp two-edged sword.

The Son of God with eyes like flames of fire and feet like polished bronze.  
Holy and true.

He has the key of David—what He opens no one can close and what He  
closes no one can open.

The One who is the Amen—the faithful and true witness, the beginning of  
God’s new creation.



## WITNESS

*Believers are called to reflect Christ in the world. This section will help you engage with how to be a witness—reflecting Christ—this week.*

Review the summary below on how to remain faithful as seen in the letters to the seven churches. Remaining faithful to Jesus is how we overcome.

Ephesus: Remain faithful by returning to your first love.

Smyrna: Remain faithful in the face of suffering.

Pergamum: Remain faithful by not denying God or compromising your beliefs.

Thyatira: Remain faithful by staying true to the teachings of Christ.

Sardis: Remain faithful by waking up.

Philadelphia: Remain faithful by persevering even though you have little strength.

Laodicea: Remain faithful by listening for His voice and opening the door for Him.

One idea we can learn from the letters to the churches is that the Church can be influenced and shaped by its geographical and cultural location. What might a letter to the church in Salem, Oregon (or wherever you live) contain? How could we be asked to remain faithful?

Take a moment to listen to Holy Spirit and write your thoughts here.

