

**Revelation as Trilogy**  
**The Fellowship of the King**  
**Chapter 2: Meeting the Fellowship - Part 1**

**Introduction:** In Chapter 2 we meet several churches that are representative of the church at large and may thus be understood as the Fellowship of the King. Each of the churches has both strengths and weaknesses. Each of these churches are struggling with some aspect of their communal life. Within the address to the churches there will be references to a variety of local particularities, such as a city's architecture, commerce or even water supply. These references would be well known to those who first read this letter. Finally, the writer makes it clear that there are both negative and positive consequences for the church's faithlessness/faithfulness.

**The Story: The church in Ephesus:** Ephesus was a port city and one of the largest and most prosperous cities in the Roman Empire. The church in the city had been established by the Apostle Paul, several decades earlier. The strength of this church was that it was theologically sound and was able to distinguish between true and false teaching. The weakness of this church was that it had lost its "loving feeling." For the letter writer this meant that while the church knew what to believe, they were failing to do what they were supposed to do. If they return to their original love their reward will be to eat from the tree of life which is a reference to the tree of life in Genesis 2.

**The church in Smyrna:** Smyrna was a city that was firmly committed to the worship of the goddess Roma and the Emperor. There was also a large community of Jews who were firmly committed to their traditions and to maintaining their precarious exemption from participating in worshipping Roma or the Emperor. These two factors made it difficult for Christians to freely practice their faith. The implication in the letter is that the Christians are poor because they have been expelled both from the guilds in the city and the commerce associated with the synagogue because they have chosen to follow Jesus. Their strength is that they have maintained their faith in the face of poverty. Their possible weakness is that they may give in when faced with death. If they do not give in, their reward will be to not die following the judgment at the end of this age.

**The church in Pergamum:** Pergamum was a city with an immense temple to Zeus, perched on a 1,000-foot high hill above the city (Satan's throne). People came from across the empire to be healed at this temple. The church's strength is that it has not lost its faith even in the face of persecution. The church's weakness is that its theology has been hijacked. The references to the inappropriate theology are rather cryptic and we are not sure how it deviates from the faith of the early church. All we know is that this unorthodox faith was leading the believers away from early orthodoxy. If the people reject these unorthodox teachings and remain faithful, they will receive spiritual sustenance (manna) and an invitation to the final heavenly banquet (white stones were used as party invitations).

**The church in Thyatira:** Thyatira was an up and coming center of trade. There were more guilds in the city than in any other city in the Empire (Lydia the seller of purple dye was from there). Each guild had its own god and thus there was a comfortable acceptance of multiple deities. The strength of this church was that it was growing in love, faith and service...it was doing the right things. The weakness of the city was that it was allowing a prophetess to lead it back to worshipping at local temples (fornication and eating meat sacrificed to idols). These practices would be a slippery slope to losing a faith centered on Jesus. The reward for faithfulness is to sit with Jesus in the judgment of the nations.

**Questions:**

1. How would you describe the strength and weakness of your church?
2. Which of these warnings resonates most with you?
3. Which of these rewards either confuses or resonates with you?