

# A SERIES THROUGH THE REVELATION

## EPHESUS: LOYAL, BUT LOVELESS | 1.6.22

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### I. THE CITY OF EPHESUS

- A. Paul landed in the city of Ephesus around 52 A.D. with Priscilla and Aquila on his second missionary journey to establish a ministry base, which would eventually impact the entire region of Asia Minor. Upon Paul's death around 67 A.D. John took charge of the Apostolic ministry leading the Church from Ephesus while caring for Jesus mother (**John 19:25-27**).
- B. Around 95 A.D. when John wrote the Revelation, Ephesus had a population of between 36,000-172,000 with the slave population being as high as 50%.
- C. The city of Ephesus was the largest of the seven cities, a thriving metropolis and the third largest city in Asia Minor, though it wasn't the capital. It was a large seaport that worked as an entrance to the other cities because of its proximity to the water.
- D. Walking off the ship and into the city you had to travel down a 1,800-foot walkway (*Arcadiane*) lined with over 200 columns made of marble and granite and 30 ft. in height. The road was a dead end leading into the Great Theater. To the left was the temple of Artemis and to the right was the school of philosophy (*Celsus library*). Passing more statues and idols than a person could count; you could go straight into Theater (bloodshed), to the right Education (secular humanism) or to the left into the Temple of Artemis (idolatry).
1. The Great Theater—This Theater seated around 25,000 people. It very well may have been the place where Paul fought off wild beasts (**1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 15:32**).
  2. During the time of Nero, Christians had animal skins sown to their bodies as they were loosed in the Theater to be chased by lions, wild dogs, tigers, leopards and bores and at night then used as human torches to light up posh parties.
  3. It was also common for believers to be paraded across the stage dressed in provocative, sensual clothing that violated their conscience. This might have been what Paul also meant in **1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 4:9** when he said, "For I think that God has displayed us, the apostles, last as men condemned to death; for we have been made a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men." That word spectacle is the Greek word "Theatron" which speaks of a theater or performance. The actually reading would be, "*We are made a theater to the world.*"
    - a. John's house in Ephesus was said to be located just above the Great Theater where he possibly could've heard the screams of his Christian brothers and sisters dying to the shouts of sold out crowds.
  4. The Temple Of Artemis—This temple was one of the Seven Wonders of the ancient world. Nearly the length of a football field, lined with over 127 columns, 8 feet in width and towering some 67 feet in height. The temple of Artemis was home to Diana, the said goddess of fertility. She was possibly covered in breasts, eggs or the testicles of sacrificed bulls—all of which represented fertility.
- E. **Acts 19:21-34** tells us some more of Paul's history with the Great Theater and the goddess Diana.

### II. THE CHURCH OF EPHESUS (Rev. 2:1-7)

- A. **Revelation 2:1a** "To the angel of the Church of Ephesus write..."
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1. Jesus' ADDRESS to the Church of Ephesus is being directed to angel of the Church. This word Angel is debated among some but agreed on by most. The Greek word is "Angelos" (ang'-el-os) and it can mean either a heavenly or earthly messenger (**Lk. 1:11;9:52; Heb. 1:13-14; Jude 6; 2<sup>nd</sup> Pet. 2:4**). I believe it to be an earthly messenger—a Pastor, Shepherd, Bishop or overseer
  - a. Jesus understands that as the Pastor goes, so goes the people. Addressing the overseer is Jesus' pattern of (*hopefully*) addressing/reaching the people. These leaders embody the message they are receiving.
- B. **Revelation 2:1b** *"...these things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands..."*
  1. **Revelation 1:20** *"The mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands; The seven stars are the angels of the seven Churches which you saw in My right hand, and the seven lampstands which you saw are the seven Churches."*
  2. With the address given Jesus now applies two important ATTRIBUTES of Himself to the Church.
    - a. He who holds the seven stars in His right hands = Jesus is pictured as holding the overseers of the Church of Ephesus in His right hand. The idea of God's right hand is significant throughout the scriptures (**Psalm 118:15-16; Revelation 1:16,17,20**). It speaks of the Omnipotence of God, a place of authority and a place of privilege (*Dextera Domini—the hand of God*).
    - b. Who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands = He is also pictured as standing in their midst. He's up-close and personal. Even though the Church has problems, Jesus hasn't distanced Himself from her; He's standing in her midst fighting for her destiny (**Hebrews 13:12-14**).
      1. The prophetic heart of God is put on clear display as He speaks to the Churches, not as they are (broken), but as they will (golden) be. God will have His bride (**Eph. 5:22-33**).
      2. **Revelation 1:13** *"...and in the midst of the seven lampstands One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to His feet and girded about the chest with a golden band."*
  3. To the Church of Ephesus, Jesus is about to level a serious accusation against them. But prior to His accusation He needs them to know He is their Great High Priest, He's holding them in His nail scarred hands, walking among them, and committed to seeing them through if they will respond rightly to Him.
- C. **Revelation 2:2-3** *"...I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My names sake and have not become weary."*
  1. Jesus, in typical tender fashion APPROVES the Church for many good things they are doing.
    - a. I know your works = For some this would have been exposing and for others it would have been encouraging. The Omniscient God, sees everything, perfectly. He doesn't simply see their wishes, desires or good intentions, but their works (*this speaks of complete clarity in vision*).
    - b. Your labor = The idea is that they were laboring to the point of weariness. It was a word associated with apostolic and ministerial labor (**Romans 16:12; 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 15:10; Galatians 4:11**). They weren't just spinning their tires in the mud; they were doing real kingdom work.

- c. Your patience = Jesus said that they had persevering endurance, the kind that's needed to get to the end of a race.
- d. You cannot bear those who are evil = The Church was commended for not bearing long with the evil of others, especially those who called themselves brothers and sisters in Christ (**1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 5:9-11; Galatians 6:2**). This is the opposite of what He will tell Thyatira.
- e. You have tested those who say they are apostles and are not and have found them to be liars = The Church was being praised for having good enough doctrine that after close observation of others, they could find discrepancies between their doctrine and practice (**Matthew 7:15-20**).
  - 1. To test something means we have to be close enough to thoroughly examine it, over time, holding it against the standard of Truth Himself. Many ministries I disliked because of the opinions of others, but after I listened to them, watched them and studied them, they became my closest comrades.
    - i. *"None should be cast off until they are thoroughly tried. Those that impartially search after truth may come to the knowledge of it."* –Matthew Henry
- f. You have persevered and have patience = The Church had *patient endurance* that was inspired by the age to come. Doing ministry in Ephesus meant that you had to endure a steady tidal wave of opposition from the culture which helps us understand why they were *loyal, but loveless*.
- g. And have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary = From Jesus' own admission, in His post-resurrection, He affirms that this Church was laboring unto weariness with apostolic ministry for His namesake.
  - 1. Though wearied out, laboring to the point of being emotionally fatigued, the Church of Ephesus didn't quit and throw in the towel. And history tells us they persisted this way for over 40 years. Moffat said, *"The Church of Ephesus can bear anything, except imposters."*
- h. We can endure much when it's for our Beloved (**Song of Songs 7:9; Luke 22:42**).

**D. Revelation 2:4** *"Nevertheless, I have this against you, that you have left your first love."*

- 1. The One standing in their midst with a garment down to His feet (Priest/Tender) is also girded about the chest with a golden band (King/Truthful) (**Acts 3:21-22; Hebrews 4:14-16; Rev. 1:13**). Here is Jesus' ACCUSATION against them.
  - a. In the midst of serving others, defending doctrine and exposing false ministries the Church of Ephesus had lost the most important thing; affection for the Son of God. The leaders were serving others more than they were serving Jesus, which resulted in a Church that was busy working but had lost love.
  - b. Paul's epistle to the Ephesians speaks of their growing passion and fervent affection for the Lord, but 30 years later, Jesus walks among a people whose fiery love had given way to loveless orthodoxy, a Church that was *loyal, but loveless*.
    - 1. This loss of love starts with the SAVIOR, goes onto the SAINTS and ends with SINNERS.

**E. Revelation 2:5** “Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent.”

1. Jesus’ ADVICE to the Church was threefold;
  - a. Remember = Jesus was calling them to remember when they were first born again, when they couldn’t wait to get to the prayer meeting, when they couldn’t wait to read their Bibles and be with other believers.
    1. **Jeremiah 2:2** “I remember you (Israel), the kindness of your youth, the love of your betrothal, when you went after Me in the wilderness.”
  - b. Repent = Jesus calls them to repent of their neglect of Him, calling it what it is. It’s not being busy; it’s neglect (**1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 7:9-11**)!
  - c. Return = This was a call to return to a Sermon on the Mount lifestyle. Returning to the rudimentary elements of their faith, a simple devotion rooted in deep affection for Christ.
2. God’s call to the Ephesian overseers was to tend to their lampstand, just as the priests in the Old Testament were to keep the lampstand trimmed, oiled, and burning, so also was this Church (**Matt. 25:1-13**).
3. Because the Church of Ephesus was a flagship Church in Asia Minor it was being held accountable for what they were exporting, which was doing more negative than positive. Not only does Jesus plant Churches, He also shuts them down.

**F. Revelation 2:6** “But this you have, you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.”

1. Jesus affirms them for hating this destructive doctrine that was running rampant in their day. Most believe it was a doctrine inspired by a deacon (*Nicolas*) who encouraged Christians to sin under the grace of God (**Acts 6:5; Titus 2:11; Jude 3-4**). Though this doctrine was an issue in John’s day, it is also today, and will continue to be until Jesus returns.

**G. Revelation 2:7** “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the Churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.”

1. Jesus gives the APPEAL to listen alongside the final ASSURANCE of reward. History tells us that there was a tree shrine near the temple of Artemis where if criminals could reach, they were granted asylum and protected.
  2. Either way, the reference is clear; the overcomer will be with Christ in the midst of the paradise of God (*This was a Persian word meaning Garden of God/ the intermediate state for the righteous dead prior to the resurrection*).
    - a. According to Jesus, overcoming wasn’t automatic, but something each individual believer needed to reach for. The promise of reward is connected to those who overcome.
  3. Jesus asks the Church of Ephesus to not only give their ear, but their heart to His tender request and respond rightly to the Holy Spirit.
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