

REVELATION: THE SEVEN CHURCHES

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GENESIS & REVELATION - COMPLIMENTARY BOOKS

Creation of the heavens and earth (chaps. 1-2)	Creation of the new heavens and earth (chaps. 21-22)
The first Adam reigning on earth (1:26)	The Last Adam reigning in glory (21:5)
Night and seas created (1:5, 10)	No more night; no more sea (21:1, 25)
A bride brought to Adam (2:18-25)	The Bride prepared for Christ- (19:7ff)
A tree of life in Eden (2:9:9; 3:22)	A tree of life in the new creation (22:2)



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Death and a curse (3:14, 17-19)	No more curse; no more death or tears (22:3)
Conflict between Christ and Satan (3:15)	Satan's final doom (20:10)
Man driven from God's face (3:23; 4:16)	Men see His face in glory (22:4)
Believers looking for a city (Heb. 11:13-16)	The holy city presented in glory (21:10)
"Where is the Lamb?" (22:7)	The Lamb reigns (22:3)
Satan utters the first lie (3:1)	Nothing that makes a lie enters the city (21:27)



GENESIS & REVELATION – COMPLIMENTARY BOOKS

Revelation then outlines God's program for human history. What began ages ago in the first creation will ultimately be completed in the new creation. This is the "book with a blessing" (1:3 and see the six other "blessings" in 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7, 14). It shows us that "history is His story" - that human affairs are in the hands of our victorious Christ. As we study this book, we should be encouraged, inspired to serve, and enabled to live clean lives, that we might be ready when He returns.



**IN THIS LESSON WE WILL LOOK AT EACH OF THE SEVEN
CHURCHES FROM A PROPHETIC PERSPECTIVE.**

Chapters 2 and 3 of the Book of Revelation provide us with a capsule history of the church through the ages. As we carefully examine each church, we will see the entire scope of church history from Pentecost to the Rapture.





THE LETTER TO EPHESUS — LOSING OUR FIRST LOVE

REVELATION 2:2-4

² “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; ³ and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name’s sake and have not become weary. ⁴ Nevertheless I have *this* against you, that you have left your first love.



OVERVIEW OF REVELATION 2:1-7

As we study the letters to the seven churches, there are several things we need to keep in mind. First, the letters must be understood in their primary association. These are literal messages written to seven literal churches (Revelation 1:1), and an interpretation of the letters in their original setting must be taken seriously.

The letters must also be understood in light of personal application. They are of personal value to every believer since they portray every kind of Christian throughout the ages. They provide tests by which the church can discern its true spiritual state in the sight of God. Many problems of the modern church could be solved by careful adherence to the instructions given in these letters.



OVERVIEW OF REVELATION 2:1-7

Another thing we must understand is the prophetic value of the seven letters. Many expositors believe these churches represent the chronological spiritual development of the church from the day of Pentecost to the Rapture. Ephesus is characteristic of the Apostolic church while Laodicea represents the final state of apostasy which will precede the coming of the Lord for His own.



DESTINATION OF THE LETTER

The first letter is written to the church at Ephesus. When the Book of Revelation was written, Ephesus was the most prominent city in the Roman province of Asia. "It was the religious and commercial center of the entire world. The Temple of Diana, one of the Seven Wonders of the World and the largest Greek temple ever built was there.

Diana was the goddess of fertility, and Ephesus derived much of its wealth from the sale of images of the many-breasted goddess. Here, paganism was strong, seasoned, and respectable. Ephesus was the hotbed of every false religious cult and superstition imaginable. It was in this environment that Paul established a church, to which John port writes some 35 years later.



DESTINATION OF THE LETTER

John's letter begins, "To the angel of the church of Ephesus" (Revelation 2:1). As we saw in the last lesson, the angel was literally the messenger to the church, or the pastor. It is probable that John had been the pastor of the Ephesian church at one time, since we know that he lived there. He may have succeeded Timothy who was originally appointed by Paul to oversee the church after Paul left Ephesus.



DESCRIPTION OF THE LORD

Christ presents Himself to each of the seven churches in a manner which meets the specific needs of the church and in a way that echoes the vision of Christ in chapter one. To Ephesus, Christ addresses Himself as the One "who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands" (Revelation 2:1). Marcus Loane has captured the significance of this statement in the following Quote:



DESCRIPTION OF THE LORD

"To walk among the golden lampstands was a fresh concept; it would express the idea of never-ceasing activity. He was like a priest who walks to and fro, feeding the lamps with oil, trimming their wicks with care, in the sanctuary where the presence of God hallows the whole. The same care and the same detail would be applied to both of the golden lampstands, and it was as the Lord of all seven churches that the Son of Man now singled out the angel and the church of Ephesus for more personal attention."



THE DIAGNOSIS OF THE CHURCH

- It was a dynamic church
- It was a dedicated church
- It was a determined church
- It was a disciplined church
- It was a discerning church
- It had left its first love



DIAGNOSIS OF THE CHURCH

Christ addresses the church at Ephesus with five commendations, the first of which pertains to their works: "I know your works," (v. 2). He sees that the Ephesian church is a busy, dynamic church, energetically and actively doing the work of the Lord.

Jesus also knows their labor. In the Greek language, the word "labor" indicates weariness or working to the point of exhaustion. Ephesus is a dedicated church that has paid a price to serve; their works are marked by self-denial. The saints in Ephesus are able to bless because they have been able to bleed!



DIAGNOSIS OF THE CHURCH

The church is a determined church. Christ mentions their patience twice; once in regard to service (v. 2), and once in respect to suffering (v. 3). This is the kind of patience that endures and still retains a forward drive. These believers are steadfast in their endurance, refusing to give up, even in the face of fierce opposition.

Ephesus is also a disciplined church: "You cannot bear those who are evil" (v. 2). They have no tolerance for evil among their members. They condemn those who profess the name of Christ but conduct themselves as unbelievers.



DIAGNOSIS OF THE CHURCH

Finally, the Lord commends the church for being a discerning church. "You have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars" (v. 2). This church cares about purity in the pulpit.

Up until A.D. 150, there were church leaders who professed to be of apostolic succession, by the laying on of an apostle's hands. These impostors continued to penetrate the church, but the Ephesus carefully examined any visiting ministers to see if they were genuine.



DIAGNOSIS OF THE CHURCH

The Ephesians also hated the deeds of the Nicolaitans (v. 6). This sect promoted a special priest class that ruled the average Christian. Louis Talbot wrote, "When we come to the study of the situation existing in the churches of Pergamos and Thyatira we shall find this system in full bloom, with bishops, archbishops and other religious dignitaries domineering the people."

Another view regarding the Nicolaitans is that they were a sect characterized by impurity and immorality. Whatever the sect involved, it is noteworthy that a true love for God involves a fervent hate of that which counterfeits and distorts the purity of Biblical truth. The church at Ephesus saw false doctrine and dealt with it.



NEVERTHELESS . . .

Certainly, the church at Ephesus was a dynamic, dedicated, determined, disciplined, and discerning church, but there is one little word from the lips of Jesus Christ that takes us from this good news to the bad news. The Lord says, "Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love" (v. 4).

Good deeds represent the outward works of the church, but the Lord Jesus has piercing eyes that look past all the outward qualities into the heart. Despite their good deeds, the Ephesian church had a heart problem, and a church that does not have a healthy heart cannot long endure.



NEVERTHELESS . . .

What is "first love?" It is the devotion to Christ that so often characterizes the new believer. It is that personal, fervent, uninhibited, excited, openly displayed, "honeymoon" kind of love that you have when you first come to Christ!

Real devotion to Christ and His truth will always manifest itself in our relationships to others. Love for Christ will result in love for fellow Christians. The two cannot be separated. These Ephesians had stopped loving Christ and each other the way they once had.



NEVERTHELESS . . .

The same thing happens in marriages. Any couple that has been married any length of time knows perfectly well what the text means. The Southern lady complained to her husband, "John, what is wrong with you? Before we got married you used to say you loved me so much you could eat me up." John said, "Well, I guess I lost my appetite."

This is basically what happened in the church at Ephesus. They just lost their appetite. They no longer had the throbbing excitement for the Lord they once had.



DEMANDS MADE TO THE CHURCH

Having made the diagnosis, Christ now gives His prescription for the one major flaw in the life of the Ephesian church. He continues with three demands (v. 5).

First, He tells the church to "remember therefore from where you have fallen." Take some time to remember how it was in the beginning. Go back to the place of departure.



DEMANDS MADE TO THE CHURCH

Secondly, the Lord tells them to repent. The Greek word for "repent" is metanoeson, which means "to change the mind." The Ephesians need to have a different attitude toward Christ. They need to turn around and go in a different direction, resuming a fervent love for Christ.

After repenting, the church needs to repeat the works they did at the beginning. Be obedient to do the works you did at the first, then watch the old feelings begin to follow. Your heart will begin to beat anew after Christ.



A WARNING TO THE CHURCH

Christ concludes His exhortations to the Ephesian church with a sober warning. If they do not heed His admonitions, He will remove their lampstand out of its place (v. 5), and they will no longer be an influence for Christ in the world.

This actually happened many years later when Ephesus declined as a city. It is now uninhabited and is one of the major ruins of the area. Thus, the history of Ephesus is a testimony to Christ's faithfulness in keeping His word.



A WARNING TO THE CHURCH

What makes a great church? Jesus said, "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35). How sad to read of a church that had that love and then abandoned it!

