

The Letter to the Church at Ephesus – Revelation Ch. 2 vs. 1 – 7

Bible Study Notes on the Letter to the Church at Ephesus

Ephesus – History

Founded 1400BC with an early temple to an ancient Hittite fertility deity who later became identified with Diana/Artemis (Tacitus)

Ionian colonists from Athens settled there 1100BC

Lydians captured the city in 6th century BC – in 41BC their king, Croesus was routed by the Persians and Ephesus became joined with other cities in the Ionian confederation.

It was about this time that the tutelary deity became identified with Diana/Artemis

Ephesus was involved, to its own detriment, in the Peloponnesian and Persia wars (431-404 BC) and served as a key naval base

In 334BC the city fell to the Macedonians under Alexander and after his death Lysimachus became master of the city and added great improvements

Ephesus unwisely sided with Antiochus of Syria against the Romans - the city eventually became the Roman capital of the province of Asia

As a free city, Ephesus had its own government and senate

Ephesus - Geography

Called ‘the Queen of Asia’

It was the proud capital of Ionia and the chief harbour of proconsular Asia

An extremely wealthy and beautiful city, located near the mouth of the River Cayster (now Lower Meander)

The Romans deforested the area, causing erosion - so the harbour silted up and thus today it is 6 miles inland from the sea

It was the principal line of communication between Rome and the eastern provinces:

One major road eastwards went to Sardis, then Galatia and beyond

Another road led to Magnesia and up the valley of the River Meander to Iconium

Another road ran through Collosae and Laodicea to the Euphrates

Ephesus - Architecture

Architecturally superb – its theatre was 495 feet in diameter and held 25,000 people (Acts19)

The Marble Way, lined with statues and fountains, ran from the Temple of Artemis to the Magnesia Gate

The Arcadian Way, another main road, from the theatre to the harbour was 1735 feet long and 70 feet wide lined with columns and shops (& brothels) and illuminated at night

The first bank (in the world?) functioned at the temple (of Diana) under the chief priests

The library at Ephesus had 200,000 volumes

Today, the archaeological digs are extensive

The Temple of Diana

The most outstanding architectural feature was the Temple of Diana

Diana was the daughter of Zeus and the sister of Apollo

It was one of the 'seven wonders' of the ancient world - four times as large as the Parthenon at Athens, it stood on a platform 425 ft by 220 ft

The building itself was 340 ft by 165 ft, with 127 Ionic columns each 60 ft high

Ecstatic sexual rites took place at the temple, involving both male and female prostitutes

Maps of Ephesus

See Supplementary Note 10 'Ephesus Maps'

Ephesus in the New Testament Period

Ephesus was the largest city of its day

As the harbour gradually became silted up and became unusable, traffic shifted to Smyrna

Ephesus was the centre for study of arts and magic

Renowned over the world for talismans, incantations, books, charms, etc

See Acts 19: 19 Burning of Occult Artefacts

Paul's first visit was brief and directed towards the Jewish community

Paul later made a second visit – was driven from the synagogue and settled in the school of Tyrannus for 2 years until the uproar in 58AD (*Acts 19: 24 – 20: 1*)

Ephesus later became the entre for missionary operations throughout Asia

Timothy may have become Ephesus' first bishop (*1 Timothy 1: 3*)

It is at Ephesus we find Aquila, Priscilla and Apollos

According to Eusebius and others, John returned there in 95AD, after Patmos, and spent his closing years there - John's gospel was apparently written from there

Timothy, John and Mary's tombs are there

After Paul left Ephesus and journeyed through Macedonia, he returned (to Miletus) where he bade farewell to the Ephesian elders (*Acts 20: 16-38*)

The first letter to the Corinthians was penned during Paul's second visit to Ephesus

Paul's Epistle to Ephesus was written from Rome

Jesus' letter, in Revelation chapter 2, is about 35 years after Paul's departure

The Letter to Ephesus – Revelation 2: 1-7

V 1 The Address and Sender

To Whom is the Letter Addressed?

'To the Angel of the Church of Ephesus' - clearly the ultimate recipient is the Ephesian church itself.

What do you think this tells us?

The Lord uses His messengers to communicate to His church.

Angel - the word literally means "messenger" – angels are used by the Lord as messengers (e.g. Gabriel – see *Daniel 9: 20-23, Luke 1: 19 and 26-28*).

It may be that (true) churches have an angelic messenger who speaks by the Spirit into the church, to those who are attentive to the Holy Spirit.

John MacArthur in his commentary thinks 'angel' here refers not to an angelic being but to a leader or elder in the church. Other commentators think it may be a reference to Timothy. Personally, I see no reason to suppose these are not angelic beings

The Name of the Church – Ephesus means 'The Desired One'

An equivalent term is 'darling' or 'the one and only'

Who is the Letter From?

From 'He who holds the seven stars in His right hand who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands'.

It is from Jesus Christ, from Yeshua.

The Titles of Christ

His Titles are from Chapter 1, verses 16 and 12, and are explained in verse 20.

What does the Title 'He who holds the seven stars in His right hand' tell us?

Yeshua holds the Angels of the churches in His right hand – they are under His control and act with His power

What does the Title 'He who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands' tell us?

Yeshua is present (amongst) of His churches – walking in the midst them

What is the Meaning of the Titles of Christ for the Church?

Stars and Lampstands indicate that Yeshua is Light

He is the one who is the Light (of the World – *John 8: 12*) and who brings light and understanding to His church

Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, “I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.” **John 8: 12**

VS 2 & 3 Commendations from Yeshua

How many things are commended?

Unsurprisingly – it is **seven!**

Their works, their labour, their patience, they do not tolerate those who are evil, they test those who say they are apostles, their perseverance, and their unwearied works for His name’s sake

What does this tell us about Yeshua and His church?

Yeshua knows what is going on in the church – he is fully aware – this applies personally too

What Lessons are there for Us in these Commendations?

1. Their Works – the Example of Yeshua (*John 10: 25*) – bearing witness to the Father

‘Jesus answered them, “I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in My Father’s name, they bear witness of Me.’ **John 10: 25**

2. Their Labour – see *Luke 12: 35-38*, the Parable of the Faithful and Evil Servants

The Example of Yeshua:-

‘And He said to them, “Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father’s business?” **Luke 2: 49**

3. Their Patience – as in Paul’s letter to Timothy, he was a pastor at Ephesus for some time - see *1 Timothy 1: 16*

‘However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life.’ **1 Timothy 1: 16**

4. Intolerance of Evil People – their intolerance of the Nicolaitans

5. Testing Apostles and their Doctrine – they did a good job at digging out heresy and clinging to sound doctrine

Can you recall warnings to the Ephesian Church about False Teachers?

A. Testing Doctrines - Paul’s farewell warning (*Acts 20: 16-38*)

See also other farewell warnings *2 Corinthians 11: 14-15* & *1 Thessalonians 5: 20-21*

Paul in his farewell message to the Ephesian elders warns them about false teachers and false doctrine

Acts 20: 16-17 Paul gets the Ephesian elders to come to him at Miletus (Miletus was a better port than Ephesus) by this time. He was trying to get to Jerusalem in time for Shavuot (Pentecost). When he was last in Ephesus there was a riot!

Acts 20: 18-21 Paul reminds them of his ministry in Ephesus

Note, *verse 20* 'house to house' – the NT church met in home fellowships, all the incidents in Acts take place in homes – formal churches were not established until the 3rd century. Home fellowships were ostracised by the medieval church, by reformation churches and by many churches today. Most of a believer's Christian growth and discipleship occurs in home fellowships (and personal devotion)

Home fellowships are the viable form for underground churches: prophetic voices have suggested that, ultimately, the remnant church will go underground and the attack against them will be led by the denominational churches

Acts 20: 21-24 Paul shares about his future and his heart's ambition (v24)

Acts 20: 25-27 Paul says he has discharged faithfully his apostleship toward them – he has not shunned to declare to them the whole counsel of God. It is a protection against deceit and a necessity for spiritual maturity.

Acts 20: 28-31 Paul warns them, prophetically: to shepherd the flock (they are Christ's blood bought bride) and that 'savage wolves' will come in...and there will arise from within those with false teaching - to draw away the disciples

The letter from Jesus in Revelation indicates that they heeded this warning – they were commended for testing apostles

Acts 20: 32-35 Paul has set them an example of how to be shepherds – in verse 35 Paul quotes Jesus as saying 'it is more blessed to give than to receive'...interestingly, this is not recorded in the gospels.

Acts 20: 36-38 Paul's emotional parting from the Ephesian elders

B. Testing Doctrines - John's warnings

John's first epistle is written to the church at Ephesus (his second and third epistles are personal letters [2 – Mary (?) and 3 – Gaius])

1 John 4: 1-3: There are many false prophets (he gives them a test to apply)

Test the spirits to discern those that are of God and those which are of the antichrist

See 1 John 5: 9-12 for a further test to apply

2 John 7-11: There are many deceivers (he repeats the test to apply)
Do not receive those who preach false doctrine

6. Their Perseverance – bearing the afflictions, reproaches, and persecutions, which can lay heavy on ministers and churches – see *James 1: 12*

'Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.' **James 1: 12**

7. Their Unwearied Works – some grow weary of doing the Lord's work...it can be hard and wearying and there is opposition – see Galatians 6: 9

'And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.' **Galatians 6: 9**

V 4 Concerns (Criticisms) of Yeshua

This is the key verse of the letter – the Ephesians had left their first love – first...*'protos'* - means the first in rank, influence, or honour, the chief, the principal, the superlative

What sort of things may have happened to bring this about?

Too busy on the business of the King to have any time for the King – God prefers devotion above doctrine (both are required)

To be a Christian is to love the Lord Jesus Christ (*John 14: 21 & 23; 1 Corinthians 16: 22*)

The Ephesians' passion and fervour for Christ had become cold, mechanical orthodoxy – their doctrinal and moral purity, their undiminished zeal for the truth, and their disciplined service were no substitute for the love for Christ they had forsaken

It is the love of espousal (betrothal) which is being referred to:

- Joy of their salvation (*Psalm 51: 12; Jeremiah 2: 2; 2 Corinthians 11: 2; 1 John 4: 19*)
- Love is the first named fruit of the Spirit (*Galatians 5: 22*)
- God uses the marriage to communicate His most intimate truths
- There are 20 references to this grace (love) in Paul's epistle to the Ephesians

Mary vs. Martha (*Luke 10: 38-42*) – Jesus sanctions Mary sitting at his feet in devotion – 'one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part'

VS 5 & 6 Exhortations from Yeshua

What Yeshua call upon the Ephesians to do?

Remember – from where you have fallen – the devotion of first love

Repent – turn around, return to devotion...do the first works (first love)
 – or I will come quickly to you and remove your lampstand
 (lampstand – light bearing witness)

Remember...Repent...Repent – are in *aorist* tense – no delay, do it now!

Yeshua's judgement would effectively bring an end to the Ephesian church as a witness to Him...it would become a church in name only

They had ‘lost their first love’ but what did Yeshua say they had kept?

Deeds of the Nicolaitans are hated by the Ephesians and by Yeshua (the deeds, not the Nicolaitans themselves)

Nicolaitans: Some scholars say this was a 1st century sect claiming apostolic authority for their opinions (Nicolas was appointed a deacon in Acts 6) – others say it is an untranslated word:

- *Nicao* meaning conquer, overcome, rule
- *Laos* meaning laity, people
- Hence the deeds hated are the clergy ruling over the laity, creating hierarchies

Note: What are Nicolaitans ‘deeds’ in Ephesus are doctrines in Pergamos (see verse 15)

Yeshua’s organisation chart for the church – washing of feet (*John 13: 1-17*)

V 7 The Common Phrase and the Promise to the Overcomer

The Common Phrase is not the final line of the letter – as with the first three letters it is in the body of the letter

The promise to the overcomer is an appendage, a postscript, to the letter after the common closing phrase (unlike the last 4 letters)

What is Promised to the Overcomer and what does it Mean?

The promise is to eat from the ‘Tree of Life’

The ‘Tree of Life’ in the Garden of Eden in Genesis, which disappears through biblical history, is in the Paradise of God (*Luke 23: 43*) in heaven

The Promise is eternal life in ‘the Paradise of God’

Myths of the Heathen (echoes of Genesis in pagan cultures)

The homa-tree of the Persians, growing at the spring of Arduisar which comes from the throne of God

The halpasoma-tree of the Hindus, which furnished the water of immortality

The tuba-tree of the Arabs and the lotus-tree of the Greeks

The tree of Assyria adorned by royal figures and guarded by genii, similar to the cherubim

Overcomer – According to John's own definition, to be an overcomer is to be a Christian (see *1 John 5: 4-5*)

For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

1 John 5: 4-5

Applications of this Letter

Local Application

What was the Application to Ephesus...and what has happened?

Rediscover your love for the Lord, first and foremost (above doctrine)

See notes above on vs. 5 & 6

Dénouement: Paul's warning in *Acts 20* & John's warnings – where is Ephesus' lampstand today?

Ephesus is now over six miles from the sea, unapproachable by ship. What was a major harbour is now a marsh and what was once the key city of Asia is now desolation.

Admonitory Application (to all churches)

What is the Application to Churches Generally (including today)?

Doctrinal purity, abhorrence of heresy – are acknowledged and commended by Jesus

Devotion to the King – this was lacking...they had left their first love

It is possible, in a church, to be too busy on the business of the King rather than love for the King himself – devotion, not just doctrine is the admonition to churches

Paul's letter to the Ephesians, written from Rome four years after his farewell, was a letter full of Paul's love for the church there but also urging them to be fully instructed in the profound doctrines of the gospel...and it closes with a focus on the love relationship between Christ and His church

Personal Application

What is the Application of this letter Personally?

Jesus wants Devotion, not just Doctrine

- First commandment (The Sh'ma...*Deuteronomy 6: 5*)
- No thought of self (Love - the greatest gift...*1 Corinthians 13*)
- First love is the abandonment of all for a love that has abandoned all

David vs. Solomon:

- David pervades the scriptures
- Solomon is mentioned (outside of his story) only with adverse or 'backhanded' comments (*Matthew 6: 28*)
- Solomon sought wisdom, yet later became apostate through his foreign wives
- David simply sought fellowship – even though he fell, he repented...and his heart was toward the Lord (*Psalms 23: 6*)

Do not neglect the priorities – devotion comes first

The 3rd Commandment – is about ambassadorship not vocabulary (*Exodus 20: 7*)

Devotional life is God's first priority for us – private worship, heart attitude to Him

Prophetic Application

Ephesus appears to be a profile of the Apostolic Church – Diligent on doctrine but ultimately leaving its first love, lacking in devotion

The postscript of the promise to the overcomer is indicative that this is a church not specifically in existence any longer...superseded by other 'church ages': i.e. it is not there at the end of the 'church age'

However - all of today's churches have some element of or heritage from, the apostolic church – not least the blessing of the New Testament itself

Matthew 13

There are seven 'Parables of the Kingdom' in Matthew chapter 13

The Ephesus Church is reflected – by its commendations – in the parable of the Sower and the Four Soils – the planting of the Word in and through the Early Church

Paul's Epistles

Clearly the one that relates most directly to the church at Ephesus is Ephesians

Yeshua's 2nd Coming

There is no explicit reference to it in this letter

Ephesus Pictures



