

REVELATION

The 7 Churches

Ephesus

Revelation 2:1

January 20, 2024

In the 1st chapter of Revelation, the focus of the vision was entirely on the Being walking in the midst of the Lampstands and not on the Lampstands themselves. Chapters 2 and 3 focus on the Lampstands concerning “what is now” (1:19). Each church represents one of the positions of the Lampstands with Thyatira – the longest message – at the center.

1. Ephesus - Lovelessness and legalism
2. Smyrna - Faithfulness - no rebuke - opposed by Jews
3. Pergamum - Apostasy - little good
4. Thyatira - Divided Church (longest message)
- 3'. Sardis - Apostasy - little good
- 2'. Philadelphia - Faithfulness - no rebuke - opposed by Jews
- 1'. Laodicea - Lovelessness and legalism

Each message identifies Jesus in a special way and reveals an intimate knowledge of the church.

The primary context of chapters 2 and 3 are the literal 7 churches named in the text. The messages address the historical and cultural situation of the city in which the church was located as well as the condition and needs of each church.

The messages were sent as one letter, so were intended for an audience beyond the local congregation. They are timeless and universal and are intended for everyone “who has an ear” and is willing to listen.

Of secondary importance is the prophetic significance of each message.

The spiritual condition of the seven churches correspond remarkably to the spiritual condition of Christian Church throughout history:

Church	Characteristic	Suggested Dates
Ephesus	Loveless	31-100 AD
Smyrna	Persecuted	100-313 AD
Pergamum	Compromising	313-538 AD
Thyatira	Corrupt	538-1517 AD
Sardis	Spiritually Dead	1517-1755 AD
Philadelphia	Faithful	1755-1844 AD
Laodicea	Lukewarm	1844-end of time

The order of the churches was based on the direction of the postal route, which began in Ephesus and ended in Laodicea.



Each message follows the same format:

- Address.
- Introduction / description of Jesus.
- Jesus' appraisal / analysis of the spiritual condition of each church - "I know".
- Jesus' counsel and warning to each church - change your condition (*repent or encouraged in faith*).
- Appeal to hear what the Spirit says to each church.
- Promises to the overcomers - fulfilled in Revelation 21-22.

That brings us to the 1st church

Ephesus (2:1-7)

Ephesus (modern-day Selçuk, Turkey) was the capital city of the province of Asia and the 4th largest city in the Roman Empire with a population estimate of 100,000 people. It was the closest city to Patmos.

The City

- Was located on the coast where the river Cayster meets the Aegean Sea.
- Sat at the crossroads of 2 major trade roads and was known as the gateway to Asia.
- Was a famous political, commercial and religious center.
- Was full of public and commercial buildings including the library of Celsus, a theatre capable of holding 25,000 people, gymnasiums, bathhouses, brothels and temples:
 - There were 2 temples devoted to Emperor Worship along with about 15 temples devoted to a variety of gods. The Temple to the goddess Artemis (Diana) was considered one of the 7 wonders of the ancient world and there was a thriving silversmith industry associated with her Temple (see Acts 19:23-41).
- Was the home of the Pan-Ionian Games.
- Was famous for the practice of magic.

Despite its clear devotion to religion, Ephesus was also notorious for its immorality and superstition – it was viewed as a city full of criminals.

Ephesus was destroyed by the Goths in 263 AD – rebuilt – and partially destroyed again in 614 AD by an earthquake.

Today, the ruins of Ephesus are a popular tourist attraction and in 2015 they were designated an UNESCO World Heritage Site.

The Church

- Was established by Paul during his 3 years there. It grew rapidly and quickly became an important center of early Christianity.
- Was the most influential Christian church in the province.
- The Christians faced losing their legal status, could not join the guilds, suffered social isolation and persecution for their refusal to participate in pagan religious activities:
 - They were accused of atheism for not participating in emperor worship.
 - They were accused of cannibalism in connections with the Lord's Supper and stories circulated that they sacrificed children at these services – eating their flesh and drinking their blood.

To the angel at the church in Ephesus write

Jesus presents himself as the "One who holds the Seven Stars in His right hand and who walks in the midst of the 7 golden Lampstands."

- Christ was present in the church and was aware of the persecution they faced for the sake of the gospel.

Jesus' appraisal:

- I know your labor and endurance.
- I know you cannot bear evil and you have tested those who call themselves apostles – finding them to be liars. The church was doctrinally sound and resisted the practices of the Nicolaitans. It is not clear who this group was, but some scholars suggest that they were followers of Nicolas of Antioch, one of the 7 deacons of the Jerusalem church who fell into apostasy. This group advocated conformity to pagan practices to avoid hardship and persecution (see Paul's warning in Acts 20:29-30). This group is also mentioned in the message to the church in Pergamum.
- I know you have perseverance.
- I know you have born up because of My name.
- I know you have not grown weary.

BUT This I have against you:

- You have left your first love. The Ephesian church had been known for their faith in Jesus and their love for God's people (Eph.1:15), but now their love was being replaced with an emphasis on right action and sound doctrine. Their love for Jesus was being eroded by a legalistic religion. They were doing what was right, but they were cold and loveless.

Jesus' counsel and warning:

- Remember your first love.
- Repent and turn away from your present condition.
- Return to your first love.

If you do not, I will remove your lampstand from its place.

Christians have always found themselves caught between strict religious practices and expressing love and compassion. The warning to the church at Ephesus is a fitting reminder to those Christians who are primarily concerned with doing the right thing ---- never forget that the central theme of the Gospel is the love of God.

Appeal to hear what the Spirit says to the churches

Promises to the overcomers:

- The right to eat from the tree of life.

******* This message corresponds to the situation and spiritual condition of the church in general in the 1st century (31-100). The first century was characterized by love and faithfulness to the gospel, but by the time John wrote Revelation, the church had begun losing the fire of its first love – departing from the simplicity and purity of the gospel.**