

The Book of the Revelation to John

Study 1

The Church at Ephesus

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Chapter 2

In the year 52 AD a ship appeared on the horizon of the Aegean Sea, on board was the apostle Paul, and a Husband and wife named Aquila and Priscilla who were part of Paul's missionary Team. People went about their business unaware that these three passengers were to embark at Ephesus to bring the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ to a pagan city.

This beautiful city of Ephesus was known as The Gateway to Asia, the largest trading centre and the fourth greatest city in the world, the first being Rome, the second Alexandria, the third Antioch then Ephesus. From the rich blue of the Aegean the ship travelled five miles up the Cayster River to the magnificent manmade harbour of Ephesus. This river and harbour has long gone and today Ephesus cannot be reached from the Sea but much of the splendour of this city has been excavated to reveal what a wonderful city it was. 800 years earlier this entire area was a natural bay on the Aegean Sea but the bay filled up with silt over many centuries and blocked the Cayster River which was the only access to Ephesus from the seaward end. In the third and second centuries BC several rulers deepened and widened the river to make room for trading ships to dock at Ephesus. The inland end of the river was widened to some 1500 feet so that more than 100 trading ships could be docked at any one time coming from all parts of the world.

As their ship docked at Ephesus Paul, Aquila and Priscilla exchanged the fresh salt sea air for the smells of fruit, corn, wheat, clothes, wooden boxes, clay pots and other trade goods, together with the noise and sounds of voices, shouts and calls associated with a big seaside harbour, Paul and his team prepared to disembark. I wonder what was going through his mind as he and his friends got swept up in the excitement. My guess is that he looked at this mass of people and claimed them for the Lord in prayer. The Holy Spirit had led Paul to Ephesus this second occasion to establish a ministry that would impact the whole area with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Because of this amazing port, the excellent city, buzzing commerce that had built up, new roads were made from this remarkable port to all the towns and cities for miles around. The list of these is found in Revelation Chapter 1. In our venture into Chapter 2 we will visit these Churches to find out what God thought of them.

Ephesus welcomed all kinds of people from all walks of life to this most illustrious city in the Roman province of Asia Minor. It became known as "the light of Asia" because it was a city of tolerance and a place where new ideas were birthed. The people expressed themselves in plays and dramas of all kinds in the massive theatre at the end of a road of huge marble slabs made by the Romans who were good at that sort of thing! Originally this marble road went right down to the Harbour to show the opulence of Ephesus to those coming ashore. Also on one side of the road were shops of all kinds and carved into the marble slabs on the road were images to show the type of trade offered in the shops. During a visit to Ephesus my wife and I stepped on the figures advertising the brothel; we again stepped on the carved image of the goddess Diana, the Roman name for Artemis, which was outside the shop of Demetrius the silversmith. He was a very wealthy man and it would seem had influence with the other traders for miles around as he called them all together to complain about Paul's successful ministry and the fact that thousands of pagans were turning to Christ and sales of the idol makers were dwindling fast.

During the same visit we stepped round the figure of a fish pointing to a building that advertised Christian meetings and we offered up a silent prayer of thanksgiving. The Great Theatre itself was enormous, from the very large stage up rows and rows of seats cut into the rock up to the top from where you could see where the port would have been miles away and the river which now only had imaginary boats on it! My wife Pauline and I stood on the stage while a young holiday maker from the crowd walked to the top and was then asked to speak in his normal voice which he did, and we heard every word he said. Acts 19v23-27 records a great riot on the stage of this great theatre. Some of the wealth of the

city was derived from the tourist trade coming to pay homage to Diana and visit her temple in Ephesus. The trinket-makers were upset when this stopped due to the preaching of Paul and many came to know Christ as their Saviour.

Acts 19v23-27

And the same time there arose no small stir about that way. For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith which made silver shrines for Diana (Artemis) brought no small gain unto the craftsman. Whom he called together with the workmen of like occupation and said, Sirs, you know that by this craft we have our wealth. Moreover you see and hear that not alone at Ephesus but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods, which are made with hands: So that not only this our craft is in danger to be set at nought; but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised, and her magnificence should be destroyed whom all Asia and the world worshipped.

Acts Chapter 19 explains that two of Paul's traveling companions Gaius and Aristarchus were caught and taken into this Theatre and a great riot erupted. These ancient stone seats were filled with thousands of screaming protesters together with the enraged makers of these silver amulets, fetishes, and jewellery and models all of a pagan nature who were losing their large incomes. And this was because Paul was leading these people to Christ.

I strongly recommend you read Acts 19 to get an all-round understanding as to why the people of Ephesus were against Paul and his Christ.

As we know from the book of Acts that the Lord did many mighty miracles through Paul and his team. In Chapter 19v11 the Bible calls them special miracles, as soon as Paul entered Ephesus he met some new inexperienced Christians and taught them about the Baptism in the Spirit and speaking in tongues, he prayed over pieces of cloth that were sent to the houses of the sick and diseased and evil spirits came out of those prayed for. He also persuaded the Ephesians to stop buying images of their god Diana also called Artemis causing a great disturbance. Paul's preaching of the Word of God had so great a conviction, that new believers had a great burning of their tangible traces of their pagan past in an act of public repentance.

Some would have lost their income, so there was a price to pay for following the Lord. But He is entirely faithful and will provide for all aspects of our lives and for all our needs.

There was no doubt that although Ephesus was a great city, much work had been done to make this city the envy of all in Asia, the young church was the only voice for God and to show the way to live a Godly life. Because of its tolerance and easy way of living all sorts of idol and pagan worship became the norm. But the Holy Spirit had led Paul, Aquila and Priscilla to Ephesus for a special reason and that was to establish a ministry base that would impact the entire region and build churches in the area.

Revelation Chapter 2v3 to the church at Ephesus.

I know your works and your labour and your patience and how you cannot bear them which are evil and you have tried them which say they are Apostles and are not and have found them liars.

Since Paul's visit it had not been easy for the Ephesian Christians to persevere, or to toil in patience; they had met with hardship, hostility and rejection. God praised them for their fight against evil men who pretended to be Christians and there were some who had pretended to be apostles but when tested were found to be false. In every century the Church has had its very survival threatened by sweet talking deceivers whose persuasive rhetoric has made them appear what they are not. In Mk.13v22; Mat.24v11 Christ himself warned that false prophets and even false Christs would appear.

And you have had patience and endured and laboured for My Name's sake and have not fainted.

The secret of their perseverance and suffering was for His Name's sake it was not to score points it was because the Lord had a claim on their lives, He purchased them with His own blood. He asks His followers to suffer with Him, He also said,

Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake (or on My account) Mat. 5:11.

And the Apostles departed from the presence of the council rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. Acts 5:41

Verse 4

Nevertheless I have somewhat against you because you have left your first love.

Note; Jesus didn't say you have *lost* your first love but you have **left** it, and whatever fancy reasoning you use to try and safeguard your belief in eternal security it will not wash when you stand at the judgment seat before Christ. This refers to a departure from the Cross and its teaching, what else? You have **left** it and put the Lord to open shame, this being so serious that it will lead the Church, or an individual to ruin. The magnitude of this violation exposed a problem in the Ephesian congregation so serious that Jesus said, "I have this against you" meaning their hardness of heart was personally disturbing to Him. To have **left** your first love is such an important step that Christ, the One walking in the midst of the Candlestick in the Church or in every born again follower of Christ, the one who brings light, love, joy and peace deems it necessary to point out to His Church to repent and get it corrected. He said if you don't He will remove the Candlestick from His church leaving it in spiritual darkness.

The lampstand represents the Holy Spirit who they received when Paul arrived. In the Tabernacle the lampstand is opposite the showbread which is Jesus – the Word made flesh and the bread of life. So the Holy Spirit illuminates the Word. (Eph. 6 tells us that the sword of the Spirit is the Word of truth). So God intends the two to go together. If the lampstand is removed the Word of God is no longer illuminated and results in a dead religion, the church will fall away from its first love, and no longer be a light in a dark world. The Lord says He will remove His light from His church unless there is repentance and they

get back to their first love - at the Cross. It is the removal of the candlestick not the extinction of it which is spoken of here. The light of Christ still shines for those who want their darkness changed so the candlestick is moved to those who receive it. Anyone who visited Ephesus later found only three Christians there and they were so ignorant of the Faith they hardly knew of Paul or St John. Their candlestick was removed. He says He will do it quickly, **why? Because He says He cannot look upon sin and those who are not following Christ walk in darkness He says so!**

The Lord asks a person, or a church being taught such false teaching to remember from where you are fallen, this means they have fallen from Grace thereby stopped their dependence on Christ and the Cross. Galatians 5v4 supports this, so does Hebrews 6.

Hebrews 6v4-6. Amp.

For it impossible to restore and bring again to repentance those who have been once for all enlightened, who have consciously tasted the heavenly gift and have become sharers of the Holy Spirit, and have felt how good the Word of God is and the mighty powers of the age and world to come. If they then deviate from the faith and turn away from their allegiance; it is impossible to bring them back to repentance for because, while as long as they nail up on the cross the Son of God afresh as far as they are concerned and are holding Him up to contempt and shame and public disgrace.

I am as you know not an advocator of modern translations of the Bible but the Amplified Bible tells it stronger than I have. We are studying our Lords return, we are doing our best to learn and recognise the signs and times of His appearing, the purpose of this study is to make sure we are ready and watchful and in a good place with God so as not to be left behind. So how can we play fast and loose with our salvation, we cannot accept Jesus as Lord and then go and play with the devil!

But I have this one charge to make against you that you have left (abandoned) the love you had at first, you have deserted Me your first love.

We are safe in the knowledge that the Church universal is safe in God's hands and no power will ever be able to prevail against the Church of Christ (Mat.16v18) but as we learn from this warning this does not mean that any one church in particular or indeed one person in that church cannot lapse into the darkness of extinction.

Ephesus in fact was one of the churches that burned so brightly for the Lord in the early centuries but whose light has been taken and it is no longer to be seen. To finish verse 5;

Remember therefore from whence you are fallen and repent and do the first works or else I will come unto you quickly and will remove your candlestick out of his place, except you repent.

If you are still in doubt notice how the Lord personalises the candlestick and its place. It is *your* candlestick and it is in *your* place and He says He will remove *your* candlestick, take away God's light to you and you are left in darkness without God and open to the onslaughts of the enemy.

These letters confirm that God knows all our works, all of them, bad works as well as good works, successful works as well as our failures'. We have only touched a little of Paul's entry into Ephesus but his work for God made a great impact on the people but the Ephesians were idol worshipers and gave their souls to paganism.

Verse 7

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says unto the Churches To him who overcomes will I give him to eat of the tree of life which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.

At the end of this chapter we are exalted to hear, responsible hearing is imperative because it is God the Holy Spirit speaking. We have the ability to hear something but take no notice, we don't take it into our deepest consciousness and we are hardly able to repeat it a few minutes later. God wants us to hear so that what He says goes deep down into our hearts and even disturbs our spirits to the point of doing something about it.

Verse 7

To him who overcomes will I give to eat of the tree of life which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.

No! It is not easy to be an overcomer, an overcomer, faced with difficulty in marriage, your job or serious trials, you grit your teeth when great pain comes as I have to sometimes and fight and push through, be determined to overcome when it would be easy to give up or give in. But Jesus says we must overcome to receive that crown of life and to eat of the tree of life in the midst of God's Paradise. Let me encourage you to be an overcomer that together we will eat together in God's garden.

Remember: *Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love Him. James 1v12*

Let us have our ears tuned in to His message, let us *hear* what He has to say because He loves us and also because the time is short, He will come at any moment and wants us to be ready.

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Bless you all

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