

EPHESUS - THE SEVEN CHURCHES

Patterns in Chapters 2-3:

1) Jesus addresses 7 churches of Asia, beginning with Ephesus, and continuing a clockwise pattern. Probably a route a courier would have taken from Patmos at that time. We believe that Hierapolis and Troas existed at that time (perhaps Colossae, but it experienced an earthquake around 60-61 A.D. and never fully recovered. That may be why it's not mentioned by the time John writes his letter). Its believed 7 was intentional, because it was an apocalyptic number describing completeness or perfection. In this way, the description addresses the body of Christ. Every church would read about one another.

- 1) Jesus describes Himself to each church using descriptions from chapter 1.
- 2) "I know" statements. He knows the church's condition. He acknowledges the positive (except for Sardis & Laodicea) and negative (except Smyrna & Philadelphia).
- 3) Comfort and commands come from the diagnosis.
- 4) The churches are commanded to hear and obey all of the letters.
- 5) A blessing is promised to "the one who conquers."

The City

- Ephesus was a gateway to Asia and its most important seaport on the west coast.
- The most major city of the Roman province of Asia.
- Fourth largest city of the Roman world with a population of about 250,000.
- A major commercial center. Ephesus enjoyed the title, "Supreme Metropolis of Asia" because it was a city where all classes of people met, lived, and carried on trade.
- The city's landmark was the temple of the Greek goddess Artemis.
 - *"In all likelihood, the temple began around a meteorite that fell to earth and resembled the figure of a woman, probably became associated with a fertility goddess before the Greek invasion and was later identified with Artemis (cf. Acts 19:35). The temple was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world; at 360 feet long and 180 feet broad, it truly would have been an impressive sight."*
- Ephesus was also politically important because it was a "free city." In fact, the Romans granted Ephesus the right to limited self-government.

History:

- Acts 18:19-21 Paul, Priscilla and Aquila arrived in Ephesus. Paul reasoned in the synagogue. The Jews asked him to stay, but he declined leaving Priscilla and Aquila.

- Acts 18:24-28 Apollos entered Ephesus and taught about Jesus, but Priscilla and Aquila took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately. The "brothers" encouraged him to travel to Achaia. Around 52 A.D.
- Acts 19:1-10 Paul returned to Ephesus (Around 54 A.D.) and found disciples. They weren't familiar with the Holy Spirit. They were baptized in the name of Jesus. Paul taught for three months in the synagogue. Then he reasoned daily in the hall of Tyrannus for two years. All the residents of Asia heard the word of God, both Jews and Greeks.
- Acts 19:11-20 We learn about the miracles performed by Paul. The learn about the 7 sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva. The demon knew Jesus and recognized Paul, but not these men. They were attacked and fled the house naked and wounded. We also learn about those who practiced magic arts repented and burned their books. The word of the Lord continued to increase.
- Acts 19:21-20:1 We learn how Demetrius, a silver smith, worked up a crowd against Paul. It moved to the theater and Paul wished to go in, but was even discouraged from officials of Ephesus. Eventually the crowd calmed, but Paul sent for and encouraged the disciples there and then left. It looks as though Paul never returned to Ephesus.
- 1 Corinthians 15:32 Paul referenced how he "fought with beasts" in Ephesus.
- 2 Corinthians 1:8-10 He also seems to reference his time there and how it seemed as though they had received a death sentence.
- Acts 20:17-38 Sometime around 58 A.D., Paul sent for the elders in Ephesus to come to him at Miletus. He reminded them of his work while he was with them "for three years", encouraged them, warned them, and stated that he would never see them again.
- Ephesians Paul wrote to the saints around 60-62 A.D.
- 1 & 2 Timothy Paul wrote to Timothy while he was in Ephesus. Timothy was charged with helping the saints and given instruction regarding the house of God, shepherds, deacons, false teachers, etc. So, there were probably some of the remaining elders there from the time that Paul had called them to see him in Miletus. Timothy would know what to expect from such men and what kind of men could serve if need be, etc. These letters were likely written between 63-68.
- Revelation 2:1-7 Traditionally, a later date has been attributed to this letter. This is not without internal evidence as well. If that's correct, we're looking at 84-96 A.D. Traditionally, it's said that John retired at Ephesus after being released from Patmos.

Ephesus:

vs. 1 To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: 'The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands.

- This description connects to **1:12-13, 16, 20.**
- Interesting: "A silver denarius minted by the emperor Domitian to commemorate the death of his infant son. His wife, Domitia, appears on the obverse. On the reverse, the defied child sits on the globe and reaches out with his hands to the seven stars, representing the sun and the then-known planets. The inscription on the reverse reads, 'The Divine Caesar, Son of the Emperor Domitian'."

vs. 2-3, 6 **'I know your works**, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false. I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for My name's sake, and you have not grown weary . . . Yet this you have: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

- "I Know" will be repeated to the other six churches. Nothing gets by Jesus whether good or bad.
- They served. They didn't grow weary. They were holy. They tested all spirits. They had backbone. They didn't give into temptation.
- The text doesn't give much insight regarding the Nicolaitans.
 - Irenaeus, who lived about 180 AD, had this to say about the group. "The Nicolaitans are the followers of that Nicholas who was one of the seven first ordained to the diaconate by the apostles. the Nicolaitans lead lives of unrestrained indulgence. The character of these persons is very plainly pointed out in the Apocalypse of John. It shows that they teach that it is a matter of indifference to practice adultery and to eat things sacrificed to idols."
 - Tertullian, who wrote about 207 AD, stated, "I do not aim at destroying the happiness of sanctity, as do certain Nicolaitans in their maintenance of lust and luxury."
 - Eusebius (fourth century) quoting Clement of Alexandria (second century) wrote, "At this time the so-called sect of the Nicolaitans made its appearance and lasted for a very short time. Mention is made of it in the Apocalypse of John. They boasted that the author of their sect was Nicolaus, one of the deacons who, with Stephen, were appointed by the apostles for the purpose of ministering to the poor. Clement of Alexandria, in the third book of his Stromata, relates the following things concerning him. "They say that he had a beautiful wife, and after the ascension of the Saviour, being accused by the apostles of jealousy, he led her into their midst and gave permission to any one that wished to marry her. For they

say that this was in accord with that saying of his, that one ought to abuse the flesh. And those that have followed his heresy, imitating blindly and foolishly that which was done and said, commit fornication without shame."

- Bottom line: we don't know.

vs. 4 But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first.

- Is this love for the brethren? Love for God? Or does this have to do with their zeal?
- "They were straight as a gun-barrel theologically, and spiritually just as empty."
- Written in mid 90's? What happened?
- You've probably heard this before, but God doesn't have any grandchildren.

vs. 5 **Remember** therefore from where you have fallen; **repent**, and **do** the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.

- We forget what God has done for us. We forget that He's interested and sees our hearts. It's not about outward appearance and labor with no love. So, He wants us to "do", but "do" with the right motive. "If you _____ Me, you will keep My commandments." John 14:15. Same works, different motivation.
- It's worth taking note that vs. 6 came afterwards. There was something good to say and He said it. If there's something good to say . . . don't forget to say it!

vs. 7 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.'

- He's providing life. A throwback to the garden scene. Will we conquer or be defeated? Will we take hold of life or throw it away?