

## *Lesson 4*

### **Arrival at the Seven Churches**

As I listened to and read different commentaries on the seven churches, I found that Chuck Missler's audio commentaries to be the best and most complete of all the references. I will not give you complete references for the following lessons on the seven letters of the seven churches. Just know that this material is readily available in the literature of today if you have the hankering to look for it. The Haley's Bible Handbook has wonderful descriptions, history, and culture, of the land where these seven churches were located.

Before we get started on digging into the seven letters to the seven churches, I would like you to name each one of the lamps of the menorah in the empty space on the page below with the names of each of the seven churches. Each lampstand will also have an angel that has been assigned to it, so please place an angel on each of the lampstands, as well.

There are seven angels for seven churches. Some believe the Greek word, *Angelos*, for angels, means "pastors". This might be the case, but it cannot be determined that there was only one pastor for each of the churches. Pastors were overseers. However, *Angelos*, traditionally means "messengers," and refers to the Angelic beings God created individually in eternity past. They were to be helpers for Mankind. The archangel Michael is the *Angelos* who watches over and fights for Israel. The archangel Gabriel brought the message to Mary of God's choice of her person to bear the Christ child in her womb.

## *Day 1* The Church of Ephesus

### **Background of History for the Church at Ephesus – the great political center/ the preoccupied church**

Please read the book of Ephesians and also, Acts 18:18-21 and Acts 19 for background material in understanding this church. You will understand from these passages in Acts that Paul had visited Ephesus twice. The second time he caused quite the stir. The city was founded about 1400 B.C. Ephesus was the fourth largest city in the Roman Empire for its time. The city had a temple to the goddess Diana (Artemis), or the ancient Hittite fertility deity, also called the Mother Goddess. Colonists from Athens made their homes in Ephesus 300 years after the city was founded. Five hundred years later after the Athenians, the Lydians captured the city. Then the Peloponnesian/Persian war came to Ephesus and Ephesus became a key naval base. Soon, after that, in 334 B.C., the Macedonians under Alexander the Great conquered the city. After Alexander the Great died, his kingdom was divided amongst his four generals and Ephesus went to Lysimachus. Lysimachus made great advancements for the city. Eventually, Rome conquered Ephesus and made it the capital of the province of Asia.

John was the pastor of the church at Ephesus. This was the culture and history of this great city 2000 years ago. The church made inroads to the Asia Minor area. Constantine, in the fourth century, actually moved the headquarters for the church from Rome to Constantinople (Istanbul today). Remember, from earlier in this study, Asia Minor (Turkey) is 99% Muslim, today. What happened? As I write this, a military coup has taken the government of Turkey (July 2016). With 160 deaths, many civilians, and 6000 arrests of those involved from the coup's inception, the government has retaken the country. Because the military coup took out the communications for the country, the leader of Turkey had to rally his forces through the use of FACE TIME.

### **Geographic Position**

Ephesus was known as the “Queen of Asia” because of her harbor and her wealth. The name of the city means “Little Darling.” Communications from Rome ran through Ephesus to the eastern provinces of Rome. Major roads ran through Ephesus to Sardis, and through Ephesus to Laodicea and to the Euphrates River. Commerce with Greece and Italy often came through the port. It must have been an incredible city.

### **Architecture**

The Ephesians had a theater that held 25,000 people. To give you a comparison, Denver's Pepsi Center holds 18,007 people. This was 2000+ years ago that Mankind had the capability to build a structure to hold 25,000 people in the same place watching the same event at the same time. There also was an even bigger amphitheater that seated over 100,000 people in Ephesus. This stadium is roughly comparable to the stadium that houses the Rose Bowl in California each year. Mankind has done some pretty

spectacular things on his own and it hasn't all been recent. Imagine what Mankind will be able to do if all Mankind speaks the same language.<sup>1</sup> Or are we there already?

The temple of Diana (Artemis), the fertility goddess, was in Ephesus. The temple was one of the seven wonders of the Ancient World. It was huge: four times the size of the Parthenon in Athens. Both male and female prostitutes made their living at the temple of Diana. Behind a purple curtain in the Temple was the lewd/crude image of Diana. It was many breasted. She had a club in one hand and a trident in the other.<sup>2</sup> You can imagine that Paul was not well received in Ephesus, because his preaching meant loss of income for the prostitutes. The first bank in the world had its operating location in the temple of Diana. In A.D. 256, the Goths destroyed the temple of the goddess Diana. However, the temple was still standing in Paul and John's Day.

### **New Testament Period**

Ephesus was the center for the arts and magic during John's day. Paul visited Ephesus briefly the first time he journeyed there and he spoke mainly to the Jewish community. During his second visit to Ephesus, Paul brought the news of the baptism by the Holy Spirit to those who already believed. Paul left Ephesus this time because some were speaking evil of the Way and he journeyed on to the school at Tyrannus, where he taught two years. The timing of Paul's second visit had to be during the first 30 years of the church, some say, A.D. 53. John must have been the pastor at Ephesus much later than Paul's visit. Certainly, Jesus' letter to the Ephesian church was some 43 years after Paul's departure from Ephesus for the last time.<sup>3</sup>

### **Later History**

The present day village of Seljuk is located where Ephesus was. The harbor of Ephesus was turned into a swamp by the Romans who stripped the area of its' wood. Erosion took over and subsequently filled in the harbor with silt. The city of Seljuk has none of Ephesus' former glory. Apparently Lysimachus, one of Alexander's generals, moved the people of Ephesus to a higher location and the ruins of the great city of Ephesus can be seen today at this higher elevation.

### **Personal Time Right Now Right Here**

Do you remember what it was like when you were a new Christian? I know I was so excited about my "personal" relationship with the God of the Universe. He knew me separately from everyone else on this planet. Jesus died for me...FOR ME! And by golly, I was zealous for Him. I was so hungry for the written Word of God. I went to work right away memorizing Scripture, getting involved with other Believers, and

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<sup>1</sup> J Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible, Revelation*, (Thru the Bible Radio), pp. 900-904.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> John H. Walwood, Roy B. Zuck, *Bible Knowledge Commentary*, (ChariotVictor Publishing, 1997), pp. 933-935.

spending time in prayer. I think I could have done anything He asked of me. I certainly thought He talked to me quite regularly and I shared all the time with my new friends about what He was personally showing me in my life. I did all the right things. Then...it seemed like the world (or older, wiser Christians) came into my life, and told me to cool it. Then I lost something that I've been fighting to get back to all of my Christian Life...I believe that "Something" is My First Love, Jesus Christ. Oh yes, I have times when I am right on, but I do notice that if I do not spend time communicating with Him, reading His word, fellowshiping with other Believers, being aware to talk to others about Him when He gives me opportunity, and for me particularly, writing Bible studies, I tend to fall back away. Its not like I am going off and committing some kind of atrocity, but Something or Someone is lacking access to my life. If I were a betting person, you too, have known this cycle. I really do look back to those early days before I got some sensibility.

For the rest of today, I would like you to take a look at the deeds that are before us as Christians in maintaining that relationship with Christ so that it is open and fruitful. I want you to name the deeds you did at first (the Ephesian Church) that were evidence that He was your first love. Then I want you to look at what it was like when you first came to know Him and where you are now. Prayerfully, fill out the following chart:

**Have I left my first love?<sup>4</sup>**

<b>The Deeds of the Ephesian Church</b>	<b>What it was like when I first came to know Him?</b>	<b>What it is like where I am right now?</b>
Having a hunger to read God's written Word and delighting in Truth		
A desire to be with other Christians in fellowship with others of the same mind and an eagerness to serve Him		
An awareness of being in God's presence at all times, delighting in knowing that He hears my prayers		
A desire to share with others what I have found so that they, too, can experience salvation		

<sup>4</sup> Kay Arthur, *Precept Upon Precept Revelation 1*, (Precept Ministries of Reach Out, Inc., 1993), p. 26.

A desire to fund God’s work and share with those who are in need		
A desire to know His will not only for me, but for others as well. Be a humble, obedient servant to Him		

*Day 2 - 4* – Revelation 2:1-7

**What is the title of Christ used for the Church at Ephesus?**

“The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands.”

How does Jesus explain the mystery of the seven stars which are in His right hand, and the seven golden lampstands in Revelation 1:20?

Remember that we’ve already looked at the Holy Spirit, collectively the seven spirits of the Holy Spirit, in the menorah both on the earth and in heaven. He is in the midst of these seven spirits. We’ve also already looked at the seven angels, one angel for each of the seven churches. Remember, the seven angels may be the seven pastors of each of the seven churches, or they may be the seven “angelos,” seven messengers to each of the seven churches. These seven stars (angels) Jesus holds in His hands.

We read that Jesus was the one who held the seven stars (seven angels of the seven churches) in His hands. If this is true, what can you say positively about those hands? If you don’t know, take a look at the disciple Thomas in the Gospel of John 20:24-29.

Does he hold your life and my life in His hands as well? If this is true, what can you say positively about those hands?

## What is the Commendation Christ uses for the Church at Ephesus?

There are seven words of commendation for this church: <sup>5</sup>

1. I know
2. I know
3. I know
4. I know
5. I know
6. I know
7. I know

Remember, these seven churches were all local churches of John's day. They all had their literal strengths and their literal problems. As you are going through the commendation of the church at Ephesus, please think on how your church does in each of these areas. Is your church worthy of any of these commendations? How about you personally? Are you diligent, hard working, persevering and patient in suffering, not tolerating evil men, continuously checking the Scripture to verify what is spoken by others, enduring the taunts of godless men for His Name's sake, and no matter what is happening, not growing weary? You do know that "tolerance" is a big word in our culture. Remember, that we are aliens in this world and this world is not our home. Write your thoughts below:

Those men who called themselves apostles and are not, are the cult called the Nicolaitans. See what you can find in your references on this cult and write what you discover below:

Some think the Nicolaitans were a priestly order that was beginning to take shape and rule over the people. Nicolaus of Antioch (one of the 7 deacons of Acts 6:5) who apostatized from the Truth formed an Antinomian Gnostic cult that taught one must indulge in sin to understand it. They gave themselves over to sensuality with the explanation that such sins did not touch the Spirit. The Ephesians hated this cult. Just think on this: one of the seven deacons who was in on the beginning of the Church, followed his own pathway into a cult and took others down with him. It didn't take long for the church to go astray. Again, test the spirits, are they of God or not? We will find out later in our study of the seven churches that the church at Pergamum tolerated the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Pergamum was also the church that married the

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<sup>5</sup> Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry Commentary, Revelation*, (Zondervan Publishing House, 1961), pp. 1971-1972.

world. Does this bother any of you? Sounds like today, just slightly twisted. The word *Nicolaitan* comes from two Greek words, *Nike*, which means “victory over” and *laitan*, meaning “laity.” Together these two words mean victory over the laity. The Nicolaitans were priests who had power over the common people. Jesus hated the deeds of the Nicolaitans, too. Jesus hates the deeds, not the Nicolaitans.

For to be sure, there are some who believe that what was said to one church concerns not only all the churches of Revelation, but also all the churches, in every place and in every age. Look what Jesus says in Revelation 2:7. Write Revelation 2:7 below:

Do you see that? It says churches in the plural? And it also says, “He who has an ear.” Do you have an ear? Most of us have two ears that hear. Some need hearing aides to hear or other helps, but this does not exclude them from heeding these words.

### **The Rebuke**

I would like you to fast forward down to Day 5 and read Jeremiah 2:2 from the Sar Shalom web site. The word used in the English for love is Espousal. What do you think God is saying here about the love that was once shown to Him by His own?

The Ephesians had deeds or works for sure. Jesus just listed them for the Ephesian church above. They were busy. They worked and worked, but what did they not have? What did Jesus say He had against them?

### **The Instructions and Warnings**

Write the verse here for God’s warning and Instructions to the Ephesian Church.

Early on in Ephesus, in Paul’s day, Timothy was in charge of the congregation at Ephesus. See 1 Timothy 1:3. John must have inherited the works in place of relationship problem from Timothy. John was the right man for the job as pastor of the Ephesian Church for John had an understanding of who Jesus was on a universal level. Even before penning the unveiling of Jesus Christ, John’s understanding of Jesus was evidenced in the writing of the Gospel of John. But of course, at the moment of writing Revelation, John wasn’t pastoring the Church of Ephesus. He was in exile on the island of Patmos, away from his congregation. The Ephesians must have fallen back into their old habits after John was sent away from them. The *aorist* tense in the Greek for the word “repent” heavily implies to turn from their ways with **no delay**.

## The Promise to the Overcomer

Write the verse here for God's promise to the overcomer.

What does Jesus promise to those who overcome this obstacle of works before relationship?

The relationship between Adam and God in the Garden, before Adam sinned, was as it was intended to be. Before Eve fell for the serpent's lie, she and Adam actually lived in God's presence continuously, unencumbered in their relationship with Him, walking and talking with Him every day. Before the fall, Adam and Eve were given access to all the trees in the garden except one, including the Tree of Everlasting Life. When Eve ate the fruit of the forbidden Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and gave some to her husband, Adam and Eve lost access to eat from the Tree of Eternal Life and also lost that intimate relationship they once had with God. Now, God offers all men access to eat of the Tree of Life through acceptance of His Son's sacrifice on the cross, His blood spilt, for their salvation. This is from the last chapter of the last book in the Bible, the book of Revelation: "on either side of the river was the Tree of Life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. There will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it and His bond-servants will serve Him; they will see His face...." - Revelation 22:2-4. What started out perfect, went south, but now has come full circle in God's redemptive plan.

It is interesting that there are inklings of the Tree of Life in other cultures. I'll name just a few of them, here:<sup>6</sup>

- The homa-tree of the Persians, growing at the spring Arduisur which comes from the throne of God
- The halpasoma-tree of the Hindus, which furnished the water of immortality, the libation of the gods
- The tuba-tree of the Arabs
- The lotus-tree of the Greeks
- The tree of Assyria adorned by royal figures and guarded by genii, similar to the cherubim – cf. – see Ezekiel 47:12.

One final note concerning the story of redemption: this is a story of two trees and two gardens. What were the two trees here?

Access to the Tree of Eternal Life was cut off from Mankind when Adam and Eve were kicked out of the Garden and two angels were placed at the entrance to the Garden to

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<sup>6</sup> Chuck Missler, Supplemental Notes: The Book of Revelation, (Koinonia House Inc., 1995), p. 23.



guard their access to the Tree of Life. As the story goes, if Adam and Eve, in their fallen state would have eaten of the Tree of Life, they would have remained in those fallen bodies for eternity. The second tree in the story of redemption is the tree that Jesus was crucified upon, the cross.

What were the two gardens here?

This letter is for the Ephesian church of the day of John, the rest of the seven churches in Asia, to every church that has ever existed anytime, including all the present churches, and is also for each of us in the Body today. So, what do you see in Jesus' admonition here that you and your church need to attend to? What do you see in your own life? Prayerfully consider these two questions and write your thoughts below:

What can you do to help your church (the Believers of your congregation) and your church as a whole?

### **Message of the Spirit to the Churches**

What is the first commandment of the 10 commandments? If you cannot remember, then turn to Exodus 20:1-2 and write your answer here:

Jesus summed up the Law in this one statement, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." ' This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" Take a little closer look at the first four commandments: Exodus 20:1-11. In a nutshell what do these verses say?

Now, look at the remaining six commandments in Exodus 20:12-17. In a nutshell, what do these verses say?

What was the implied message of the Spirit to the Churches?

The Ephesian church was noted for their devotion for doing the work of the Kingdom. They were so busy doing the King's work that they no longer had time to be with the King. God wanted time with them, one on one. We need to heed these words and also guard our daily time with Him alone. I do so much better at keeping my appointment

with Him if I get up early and spend time with Him first thing in the morning. If I put it off until later, until I have taken care of just a few chores, I never go back to it. Find yourself a quiet place where only you and the LORD can meet. For me, it's my clothes closet. I have pictures and rough prayer lists pinned to the wall and a map of the world. The more time you spend there, the more you will find yourself wanting to be in that place. You all know how much my dogs mean to me, but at my house, even my dogs are shutout of my prayer closet. It's God and me in there! The espousal relationship we have with the Lord is the most important relationship of all. Make time for Him. You will be glad you did!

### **The Closure**

As referred to earlier, this letter was not only for the church at Ephesus, but also for the other six churches (plural) written to in the book of Revelation as well as the church universal at that time and throughout all history.

Where is the lampstand of the church of Ephesus, today?

We've already talked about this earlier. The country of Turkey today is 99% Muslim. Were the Ephesians obedient to the exhortation of Jesus Christ, to repent, to place the relationship with their Savior at the top of their priority?

Ephesus today is six miles from the sea, yet because of the silt deposit, no ship can come close to her. She is unapproachable by sea today. What once was the "Queen of Asia," is now desolation.

### *Day 5*– **Old Testament Concealed is in the New Testament Revealed.**

I would really like you to cross-reference the verses of Revelation 2:1-7 with their counterpart in the Old Testament just like you did for chapter 1. Again, I want to encourage you to record your thoughts in the space provided. This exercise will greatly enhance your understanding of that which was once concealed in the Old Testament is now revealed in the New Testament. In the Introduction to this study, I told you that we will be able to refer to the Hebrew text more completely by cross referencing the verses written originally in Greek in Revelation with those written (or mentioned) in Hebrew in the Tanakh. These are listed for you here:

**Revelation 2:4 with Jeremiah 2:2,**

**Revelation 2:4 with Genesis 2:9, 3:22-24**

**Revelation 2:4 with Proverbs 11:30, 13:12**

**Revelation 2:4 with Ezekiel 31:8**