

The Book of Revelation

Lesson Four

Revelation 2:1-7

LETTER TO THE CHURCH AT EPHESUS

Introduction:

1. The book of Revelation begins with the image of Jesus in close fellowship with His followers, the churches.
2. This vision is followed by a letter addressed to each of these seven congregations.
3. Ephesus was located on the western coast of Asia Minor, 100 miles west of Colossae.
4. The Temple of Artemis (one of the Seven Wonders) was located in Ephesus.
5. It was a wealthy and prosperous city.
6. It was also a “free” city; its citizens were allowed by Rome to govern themselves.
7. It was made up of Jews, Gentiles, pagans and mystics.

I. The Church in Ephesus

- A. Before he left Ephesus, Paul gave warnings to the elders of the congregation (Acts 20:18-38).
- B. About five years later (circa AD 60), from his prison cell in Rome Paul penned a letter back to this congregation.
- C. The book of Ephesians builds upon Paul’s experiences, teachings and warnings in the city of Ephesus.
- D. **Chapter One** – Jesus the Christ: *The Head of the Church*
- E. **Chapter Two** – Grace and Faith: *The Salvation of the Church*
- F. **Chapter Three** – Inspiration: *The Revelation of the Church*
- G. **Chapter Four** – Truth: *The Unity of the Church*
- H. **Chapter Five** – Family: *The Purity of the Church*
- I. **Chapter Six** – Armor: *The Warfare of the Church*
- J. How clear it should be to all Christians from the story of the church in Ephesus that God is more powerful than Satan and, by being in Christ, we are assured of victory!

II. The Challenge in Ephesus

- A. About 5 years after he wrote the epistle to the Ephesians, and about 10 years after he left Ephesus (AD 65), Paul wrote a letter to his “son in the faith,” Timothy.
- B. Some two and a half or three years later (AD 68), Paul wrote his final inspired epistle, also addressed to Timothy.
- C. At the time of these writings, Timothy was laboring with the church in Ephesus.
- D. By the time of these writings, the Ephesians were facing some great challenges.
- E. **THE CHALLENGE IN DOCTRINE**
- G. **THE CHALLENGE IN DISCIPLINE**
- H. **THE CHALLENGE IN DEVOTION**
- I. Clearly, the church at Ephesus was facing grave threats.
- J. In only ten years, error had begun to infiltrate the church – from the eldership to the worship services to the person in the pew.

The Book of Revelation

Lesson Four

Revelation 2:1-7

- III. The Change in Ephesus
- A. History indicates that the apostle John also lived and worked in Ephesus.
 - 1. Many of the early “church fathers” (including Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, and Eusebius) write about John’s work in Ephesus.
 - 2. Irenaeus claims that John wrote his account of the Gospel while living in Ephesus.
 - 3. Clement says that he returned to Ephesus after being exiled to the island of Patmos (where he wrote the book of Revelation).
 - 4. Eusebius says that John died and was buried in the city of Ephesus.
 - B. What an historic congregation – to be able to hear and grow under the preaching of Paul, Timothy, John and (according to tradition) Luke!
 - C. The final biblical record of the church at Ephesus comes some 30 years after Paul’s epistles to Timothy were written (35 years after the book of Ephesians and 40 years after Paul left the city).
 - D. This record is an epistle to the church at Ephesus from Jesus the Christ, written by the hand of John and recorded in Revelation 2:1-7.
 - 1. Each letter to the seven churches of Asia follows a similar pattern.
 - 2. It is likely that Ephesus is addressed first because of the history of the congregation and the importance and prominence of the city.
 - E. **2:1a – Salutation**
 - F. **2:1b – Description of Jesus**
 - G. **2:2-3 – Commendation**
 - 1. The Ephesians were commended for their work, labor and endurance.
 - 2. They were commended for resisting those who were wicked and troublesome.
 - a. Compare this with verse 6. [Cf. vs. 14-15]
 - b. The Ephesians were haters of evil!
 - 3. They were commended for putting men and their doctrines to the test.
 - a. They did not accept a claim of apostleship on face value.
 - b. They had been warned by Paul and Timothy of those who would be “wolves in sheep’s clothing.”
 - 4. They were commended for doing the work of the church.
 - a. They bore burdens.
 - b. They patiently endured hardship and persecution.
 - c. They labored diligently for the name of Christ.
 - d. They did not give up or grow weary.
 - H. **2:4 – Condemnation**
 - 1. In spite of all the good things about the church at Ephesus, there existed a serious problem – she had left her first love.
 - 2. She had lost her initial love for Christ.
 - a. Though these Christians were doing all the right things, they were doing them with a wrong motivation.
 - b. Compare to a marriage where the initial “love” has diminished.
 - c. Compare to the passing of time after conversion.
 - 3. She had lost her love for her brethren.
 - a. This was something they had possessed (Eph. 1:15).

The Book of Revelation

Lesson Four

Revelation 2:1-7

- b. Could it be possible that their fear of false teachers had caused an overabundance of suspicion toward one another?
- c. While we must earnestly contend for the faith, we must never lose our love for our brethren – even for those in error.
 - i. This does not mean that we accept their false teaching.
 - ii. Nor does it mean that we continue in fellowship with those who will not repent.
 - iii. But we must never forget that they are erring brethren and, out of love, we must seek the best for their souls.
- 4. She had lost her love for lost souls.
 - a. In her early days, the church in Ephesus was evangelistic – to all Asia Minor (Acts 19:10).
 - b. Perhaps this church had turned her attention inward and failed to love those outside the body of Christ.
 - c. Could it be that they focused on defending the Gospel to the exclusion of extending the Gospel?
- I. **2:5 – Warning**
 - 1. Remember – *God’s Word and their former obedience*
 - 2. Repent – *Change their attitudes and be as they once were*
 - 3. Removal – *Without the former two, they would be separated from Christ*
- J. **2:6 – Exhortation**
- K. **2:7 – Blessings**
 - 1. Tree of Life – *Eternal life...*
 - 2. Paradise of God – *Heaven...*
 - 3. Overcome – *Those who are faithful unto death (2:10)...*
- IV. The Condemnation of Ephesus
{*The following points are taken from a sermon by Eddy Craft at the “Seek The Old Paths” Lectures, 1996, pgs. 136-138*}
- A. Jesus declared that this congregation had left their first love (cf. Jeremiah 2:2).
- B. Consider the privileges to keep them from leaving their first love:
 - 1. The godly influence of others on the congregation
 - a. Paul (Acts 18 – 20)
 - b. Apollos (Acts 18:24-28)
 - c. Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18:24-28)
 - d. Timothy (1 Timothy 1:2-3)
 - e. Likely both John and Luke
 - 2. The scriptural organization of the congregation (Acts 20:17)
 - 3. The miracles done by the congregation (Acts 19:6, 11-12)
 - 4. The protective armor of the congregation (Ephesians 6:11-17)
 - 5. The victories of the congregation (Acts 19:13-19)
 - 6. The Truth taught to the congregation (Acts 20:20; epistles)
 - 7. The good works of the congregation (Revelation 2:2-3)
 - 8. Still, they left their first love.
- C. Consider the pressures they faced to leave their first love:

The Book of Revelation

Lesson Four

Revelation 2:1-7

1. Ignorance (Acts 18:25; 19:2)
 2. Ridicule (Acts 19:9)
 3. Error (Acts 19:13, 19, 24)
 4. Materialism (Acts 19:25-26)
 5. Treason (Acts 20:29-30)
 6. Heresy (1 Timothy 1:4-7)
 7. Persecution (2 Timothy 1:11-13; 2:7-13)
 8. Sadly, eventually, they left their first love.
- D. Consider the consequences of leaving their first love:
1. The Lord held this against them (2:4; cf. Matthew 5:23-24).
 2. They were fallen (2:5).
 3. They needed repentance (2:5).
 4. Their light would cease to shine (2:5).
- E. One must never leave his first love – Jesus the Christ!