

## **EPHESUS** **FIRST LOVE**

### I. BACKGROUND

#### A. Geographical/Commercial/Political

1. Ephesus was located about 60 miles North of the Isle of Patmos. It was situated 7 miles inland from the Aegean Sea, but the Cayster River gave it ready access to the Sea.
2. Prosperous business center – located at the convergence of four major Roman trade routes
3. Capital of Roman province: “The Light of Asia”. Estimated population – 500,000

#### B. Cultural/Spiritual

##### 1. Cultural

- The theater held 25,000 and every spring Ephesus hosted athletic games rivaling the ancient Olympics.

##### 2. Diana/Artemis Worship

- a. Diana (Roman)/Artemis (Greek)
  - mother or fertility goddess
  - Diana worship involved drunkenness, sexual deviancy and self-mutilation.
- b. The Temple of Diana in Ephesus was one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World
  - Acts 19:35 – may refer to a meteorite which was housed in the temple.
- c. Despite the spiritual darkness prevalent in Ephesus, the Good News thrived there and expanded across Asia Minor (Turkey).

#### C. Biblical Characters

##### 1. PAUL

- a. Acts 19 – Paul stopped in Ephesus on his second missionary journey and stayed there for approximately 2 to 3 years on his third missionary journey.
- b. Acts 19:23-20:1 – Riot incited by Demetrius the silversmith. Paul had to leave Ephesus due to fear for his safety.

##### 2. TIMOTHY

- a. I Timothy 1:3-4 – Timothy apparently shepherded the church in Ephesus for some time.

##### 3. JOHN

- a. Legend has it that John spent a considerable portion of his later life in Ephesus.

##### 4. PRISCILLA AND AQUILA

- a. Acts 18
- b. I Corinthians 16:19
- c. II Timothy 4:19

##### 5. APPOLLOS

- A. Acts 18:24-26

\* The Church in Ephesus had a strong history of faithful leaders and teachers.

## II. THE LETTER TO EPHESUS - REV. 2:1-7

### A. Who Sent The Letter

1. Christ
2. How Christ Describes Himself: "Him who holds the seven stars in His right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands."
  - a. As used in this context the word "hold" implies holding the whole of something in one's hand.
  - b. Christ describes Himself differently at the beginning of each of the seven letters. He does not mass produce advice to His Churches. Each letter is carefully crafted for that particular Church.
  - c. Psalm 139:1-12 – Christ is ever present in each believer's life. This passage in Revelation also makes it clear that Christ is ever present in each Church. The reference to Christ as one "who walks among the candle stands" could be loosely paraphrased, "Christ walks up and down the aisles of this Church."

### B. The Church's Strengths – Rev. 2:2-3,6

1. Active
  - a. Christ commends this church for its "hard work"
  - b. Galatians 6:9 – "Let us not become weary in doing good ...."
2. Endurance
  - a. Some hardship had apparently afflicted the church and it had responded with endurance and perseverance. Perhaps it had further difficulties with the worshippers of Diana.
3. Doctrinal Purity
  - a. Recall Acts 20:29-31 – Paul's last instructions to the Ephesian elders, "...after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them."
  - b. In accordance with Paul's instructions, this church had "tested the spirits" (1 John 4:1) and had exercised good Christian discernment.
  - c. Nicolaitans: this group is mentioned by name in this letter and in the letter to Pergamum. It may also be implied in the letters to Thyatira and Sardis. Exactly who they were and what they taught is not possible to say with certainty. The following are some of the common conceptions of Nicolaitanism:
    - 1.) Some of the early church fathers believed that they were disciples of Nicholas of Antioch who is mentioned in Acts 6:5 as one of the original seven deacons. This is highly questionable.
    - 2.) It is believed that they condoned the eating of things offered to idols and of sexual immorality.
    - 3.) In the early Catholic Church, a priest who had broken his vow of celibacy was charged with "Nicolaitanism."
    - 4.) Many commentators believe that the name is symbolical. The Greek word Nicolaos means "conqueror, overcomer or seducer of the people." The name may simply be symbolic of false teachers and false prophets.

### C. The Church's Weakness – Rev. 2:4-5

1. Love
  - a. Matthew 24:3-13 – "...the love of most will grow cold...."

- b. Notice that Christ does not say, “You are in danger of”. He says, “You have forsaken your first love.” This is past tense and indicates that it has already occurred.
  - c. The bride example is used throughout scripture
    - Ezekiel 16:8
    - Jeremiah 2:2
    - Hosea 2:14-16; 19-20
    - I Corinthians 11:2-3
  - d. This loss of its first love was probably a slow, silent, imperceivable change, like erosion. Pure, simple devotion to Jesus was missing. Despite all of its activity, its perseverance, and its doctrinal purity, this Church was spiritually cold. Four decades had passed between the early days of the Church under Paul and John’s vision on Patmos. The passion of that first generation had apparently cooled. The second generation may have simply been following what had been handed down to them. Their collective devotion to Christ was being replaced by a dutiful coldness. While they maintained all the right external behaviors, and held to the correct doctrine, their service to the Lord was no longer prompted by their original fiery love for Him. It had drifted toward rote behavior, robotic service.
- D. Christ’s Command – Rev. 2:5
- 1. Remember
  - 2. Repent
    - This is urgent: don’t wait, do it now
  - 3. Resume
    - “do the things you did at first”
    - \* Without its first love, the Church’s work is lifeless. Activity becomes drudgery if it is not a labor of love. Endurance can be hard and bitter if it is not softened and sweetened by love. Doctrinal purity can be cold and dead without the warmth and beauty which love invests in it.
- E. Christ’s Warning – Rev. 2:5
- 1. If the Church does not obey Christ’s command, He will “remove its lampstand”.
  - 2. No Church has a secure and permanent place in the world. It is continuously on trial. Christ’s warning to Ephesus is just as appropriate to us today. Our own Church’s light will be extinguished if we fail to love Christ. The Church has no light without love. Only when its love burns can its light shine.
- F. Christ’s Promise - Rev. 2:7
- Those who obey are promised eternal life.