

## *Revelation Chapter 2 v 1 to 7*

### *Letters to Seven Churches – Ephesus*

*Jesus tells John: “Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea” (Revelation 1 v 11). These ancient cities were clustered together in the Roman province of Asia (now western Turkey); the seven letters are recorded in Chapters 2 and 3.*

*The ‘seven churches’ represent the whole Church, but have you ever wondered why these seven particular churches were chosen? There must have been around 100 churches at the end of the first century – why not the church at Rome? Jerusalem? Antioch?*

The letters can be read at four levels:

1. **Local** – these were actual first century churches with real issues (archaeological research pioneered by Sir William Ramsay in late nineteenth century)
2. **Admonitory** – “let him hear what the Spirit says to the *churches*” (plural) – each message applies, to some extent, to all the churches, and you can ‘map’ any present day church by applying these messages in varying proportions (e.g. 10% of Ephesus + 25% of Smyrna...)
3. **Homiletic** – “He who has an ear...” – the letters apply to each one of us, personally
4. **Prophetic** – in their particular order, they appear to profile the history of the Church, from apostolic times to the present day (this would not be true if the letters were presented in any other order)...

The letters generally have seven design elements:

- (1) Name of the church
- (2) Special title of Jesus (from chapter 1); then a ‘report card’:
- (3) Commendations (here’s what you’re doing right)
- (4) Concerns (here’s where you’re not doing so well)
- (5) Exhortations (here’s what you have to do to fix it)
- (6) Special promise to the individual overcomer
- (7) Closing statement: “He who has an ear, let him hear...”

Notice that in some cases one of the elements is missing:

For two of the churches (which ones?), there are no concerns (nothing bad is said); and for two other churches (which ones?) there are no commendations (nothing good is said).

Notice also that for the first three letters (Ephesus, Smyrna and Pergamum), (7) comes before (6), i.e. the promise to the overcomer is ‘post scripted’ – is this significant?

**[MORE OVER...]**

### *The first letter – to Ephesus (the ‘Apostolic’ Church)*

Founded in 1400 BC, becoming the centre of the cult of the goddess Artemis (Diana). The temple built in 365 BC was one of the seven wonders of the world. The city had a fertile hinterland, a good port and about 300,000 people. The theatre seated 25,000 people (see Acts 19). The city is now in ruins, uninhabited except for the tourists, with the harbour silted up since Roman times.

- The name “Ephesus” means ‘Desired One’ or ‘Darling’.
- The title – note the paradox: Jesus holds us in his (nail-scarred) hands, yet he walks among us; a lampstand is a bearer of light, not the source.
- What good things had the church at Ephesus done?
- What were Paul’s warnings to the Ephesian elders (see Acts 20 v 17 to 38)? Had they heeded those warnings?
- What was Jesus’ concern? What does “your first love” mean? What is the first commandment?
- What did Jesus tell the church members to do? What would happen if they didn’t?
- What does Jesus promise the individual overcomer? Why is the reference to the “tree of life” significant for this church?
- Where is the lampstand of Ephesus today?
- In what ways does Ephesus represent or symbolise the ‘apostolic’ (first century) church?

“Nicolaitans” (v 6) could be derived from νικαω (*nikao* = conquer) and λαος (*laos* = people), referring to those who use their clerical status to rule over the laity, instead of serving.

For Jesus devotion is more important than duty or doctrine (see Luke 10 v 38 to 42). ‘First love’ is the *abandonment of all, for a love that has abandoned all*: “We love because he first loved us” (1 John 4 v 19).

*Prayer –*

*Lord, thank you for this letter. Help us never to forsake our first love, but to remember your amazing love for us. Help us to repent of our coldness, and to love you with all our hearts. Amen.*