

# Revelation 2:1-7 Letter to Ephesus

## BACKGROUND TO THE ECCLESIA AT EPHEBUS

In AD96, Ephesus was a large, thriving city, the main centre of commerce in Asia, with a significant harbour. The most notable feature of the city was Diana's temple, one of the 7 wonders of the world. Today the city is of no significance, mainly due to the silting up of its harbour over centuries. The geographical and historical facts of Ephesus mirror the behaviour of the ecclesia.

Paul spent two years in this thriving ecclesia and it became the centre of gospel preaching in Asia: **Acts 19:10**. By the 4th Century the Roman Church convened a great council in the city, during which the worship of Mary was officially recognised. The truth became gradually bogged down with doctrinal corruption.

At the end of his second journey Paul visited Ephesus: **Acts 18:19-21**. He returned on his third journey to establish a focal point of preaching in Asia: **19:8-10**. At the end of his time there, Paul exhorted the elders to hold fast to the Truth: **20:16-20,26-27**. He warned of false teachers arising from within, as wolves to scatter and destroy the flock: **20:28-31**. Jesus gives similar **last words** in Revelation. With sorrow, Paul left and continued to Jerusalem: **20:36-38**. Paul requested Timothy remain at Ephesus to silence false teachers and guide the ecclesia: **1 Tim 3:14-15**.

## THE REVEALING OF JESUS CHRIST

**v1 The angel:** literally means *messenger*. An elder or group of elders in the ecclesia who were specially appointed: **Acts 20:28**.

**He that holdeth the seven stars:** These represent elders: **1:20**. In **Rev 1:16** he simply has 7 stars in his right hand but in this letter, a stronger word is used. Here he is *firmly grasping* them. Christ says in **Jn 10:28**, "no one shall snatch them out of my hand". The elders are in his power and under his protection. This introduction no doubt takes into account Paul's words to the elders in **Acts 20:17-35**; **Eph 4:1-16**. **Right hand:** Symbolises strength and power: **Psa 80:17; 110:1; Eph 1:20-21; 1 Pet 3:22**.

**Walking in midst:** In **1:13**, he is *in the midst* of the lampstands but now he is actively *walking* among them. Christ is not just a casual observer. He is fully aware of their problems. A warning as well as comfort. He also walks amongst ecclesias today: **2 Cor 6:16** "Ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them." See also **Deut 23:14**. An allusion also to the angel *walking in the midst* of the garden: **Gen 3:8**. The **tree of life** was *in the midst* of the garden: **Gen 2:9; 3:3**.

**Lampstands:** In the tabernacle it was a stylised **tree**. There were also 10 lampstands in Solomon's temple. Christ is walking *in the midst* of the **trees** (ecclesias) in what *should have been* a garden of love. The first marriage was in Eden, pointing forward to the Marriage of the Lamb in a garden. Christ appeals to them *emotionally* to go back to their first love. This is the story of Song of Songs where the *bride herself* is likened to a **garden** (**Song 4:12,16; 5:1; 6:2,11; 8:13**). The Song is based on principles from the tabernacle and Solomon's temple with an emphasis on **trees** (**Song 1:17; 2:3; 3:9; 5:15; 8:9**). Similarly this letter.

Colour code: Blue (God and Jesus Christ); Red (sin/devil/judgment of wicked); Green (Kingdom); Orange (important words & phrases); Purple (return of Jews to the land); Yellow (practical exhortation). Prepared for Rathmines Bible School Teenagers.

## CHAPTER 2.

What is commanded to be written to the angels, that is, the ministers of the churches.

**U**NTO <sup>a</sup>the angel of the church of <sup>b</sup>Ephesus write; These things saith <sup>c</sup>he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh <sup>d</sup>in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks;

<sup>e</sup>I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them <sup>f</sup>which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars:

<sup>g</sup>And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted.

<sup>h</sup>Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast <sup>i</sup>left <sup>j</sup>thy first love.

<sup>k</sup>Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else <sup>l</sup>I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove <sup>m</sup>thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.

<sup>n</sup>But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of <sup>o</sup>the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate.

<sup>p</sup>He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; <sup>q</sup>To him that overcometh will I give to eat of <sup>r</sup>the tree of life, which is in the midst of <sup>s</sup>the paradise of God.

## THE LORD'S COMMENDATION

**v2 I know they works:** Stated to all 7 ecclesias. **Labour:** Str. "toil with pains". Same word as in **Phil 2:16; 4:3**. See **2:5** "do the first works". **Patience:** Diaglot "patient endurance". A fundamental principle! See **Jas 5:7-11** where Job is cited as a prime example. Emphasised 7x: **Rev 1:9; 2:2,3,19; 3:10; 13:10; 14:12**. One of the hardest principles to accept. A constant Scriptural theme: **Lk 8:15; Rom 2:7; 5:3-4; 8:25**.

**Not bear them which are evil:** This ecclesia heeded the warnings of Paul in **Acts 20:28-31** "grievous wolves will enter in among you, not sparing the flock." Also foreseen by Paul in **1 Tim 1:6-8,19-20: 4:1-3; 2 Tim 4:3-4**. **Found them liars:** A characteristic of the seed of the serpent: **Gen 3:4-5; Jn 8:44; 1 Jn 2:22; 4:20**.

**v3 Patience:** The only time in Revelation where this is re-emphasised. This is to reinforce the importance of their persistence, so this is not forgotten when we come to **2:4-5**. **For my name's sake hast laboured:** They continued to toil over a long period of time and had not given up. Their labour was genuine, for Christ's sake. **Not fainted:** Translated "wearied" in **Heb 12:3** and "sick" in **Jas 5:15**. These teach that weariness is overcome by an appreciation of Christ's life and prayer.



## Patient Endurance...

**Jas 5:7-8** "Be patient then brothers, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains. You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near." NIV

**Hebrews 12:1** "Seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us." KJV

## THE LORD'S DISAPPROVAL

**v4 Left thy first love:** Gk. *agape*, a self-sacrificing love: **Jn 21:16-18; 1 Jn 3:16-18**. Not just self-sacrifice: **Mt 7:20-23; 1 Cor 13:3**. Sacrifice is incidental to *agape*. It is not an end in itself. Love is seen in the way we behave: **1 Cor 13:4-8**. This ecclesia were working out of a sense of duty. Similarly, Israel lost "the love of thine espousals": **Jer 2:2-3**. Consider **Eph 1:15; 4:1-3; 5:25-28**.

**v5 Repent:** A changed way of life for our benefit. It involves facing up to our faults, confessing to God and resolving to try better. God commands everyone to repent: **Isa 55:6-9; Lk 5:32; 13:3; Acts 3:19**. The promise of **paradise** in **2:7** is an appeal to go back to **Song of Songs**, the ultimate book on love.

**Do the first works:** Examples are in **Mt 13:44-46** and **Gal 4:15**. These are works done in absolute love for God and the ecclesia: **Col 1:4**. They involve conviction: **1 Thess 2:13**. Also humility and submission: **Acts 19:5**. Often by those new to the Truth.

**Will remove thy lampstand:** Symbol of the ecclesia: **1:13,20**. Judah had her lampstand taken away: **Jer 25:10; 52:19**. Without Christ's love, there is no use continuing as an ecclesia: **1 Jn 3:18**.

**v6 Hate the deeds of the Nicolaitanes:** The only letter where an ecclesia is commended *after* the warning. Christ did not want them to forget the importance of fighting error. From the Greek *nikos* (to vanquish, overcome) and *laos* (the people). In some way they were vanquishing people. They also had false doctrine: **2:15**. Prophesied in **1 Tim 6:20-21; 2 Tim 2:16-18**.

## PROMISE OF ETERNAL LIFE

**v7 He that hath an ear:** Takes us to Christ's parables: **Mk 4:9,11**. Faith comes by hearing God's Word: **Rom 10:17**. Christ is our example: **Isa 50:4**. **Him that overcometh:** See notes on **2:11**.

**Tree of life:** Literally **wood of life**, a forest, not just one tree. In **22:1-8** the forest is on both sides of the river. In **Gen 2:9** it is literally "tree of the lives", one tree imparting life to many. Here is it **many** trees, **one** life, for the "healing of the nations" **22:2**.

**Paradise of God:** Gk. "a park, an eden", word found only 3x in NT, also **Lk 23:43; 2 Cor 12:4**. Equivalent Hebrew word has Persian origins and is only found 3x in the OT: **Neh 2:8; Eccl 2:5; Song 4:13**. Christ's bride in **Song 4:13** is the **paradise** of God, the fully grown perfected garden. In **Lk 23:43** Jesus is on a dead tree, thirsting, with a crown of thorns. In **Rev 22:1-3** he reveals living trees, pure water and "no more curse" in Eden restored. **Paradise** is all about **healing**, cp. **Lk 4:18; 9:11; Isa 51:3; 61:1-3**. Luke's gospel records this as he is a doctor. The solution to the problem in Ephesus is to reach out to others in healing. If we heal others now we will be with those who heal others in the Kingdom age.

