

EPHESUS

POPULATION | Over 250,000

RELIGION | Home of the Great Temple of Artemis, the center for worship of the goddess Artemis (Greek) or Diana (Roman)

ECONOMY | The commercial center of Asia Minor in the first century, Ephesus was not only significant to the broader culture at the time, the city was very important in the context of the ancient Christian world. It played a key role in the early years of the Christian movement.

RESPONSE TO CHRIST | Paul had his most successful ministry in Ephesus. So many people became followers of Jesus here that the church became one of the most significant influences in early Christianity. It was known as the mother church in Asia Minor.

WRITINGS | “While in Ephesus, John wrote his gospel, three letters and possibly the book of Revelation (after his return to Patmos). Three of Paul’s letters relate to Ephesus: Ephesians and 1 and 2 Timothy. And it is thought that possibly the two letters of Peter and that of Jude originated in that region.”

SUMMARY

While Ephesus had much influence and significance, the Ephesian Church receives a strong warning from Christ (**Revelation 2:1-7**) - “I know your hard work but you have forsaken your first love.” The Ephesians were commended for doctrinal knowledge and zeal, but they lacked one thing - *devotion to their first love*. The church in Ephesus held true to solid teaching and persevered in troubled times. They wisely protected their people from false prophets and condemned the licentious living of the Nicolaitans. However, **their love grew cold**. Our Lord’s warning to them speaks of the high priority of always holding onto heartfelt love for Jesus and all that he has done for us. He came to break through death, sin, despair and darkness so we could walk with him on this earth.

REVELATION 2:1-7

¹To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These are the words of him who holds the 7 stars in his right hand and walks among the 7 golden lampstands. ²I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. ³You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.

⁴Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first.

⁵Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place. ⁶But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

⁷Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

EMPHASIS ON THE BACKGROUND

- Each week as we travel through the series *Seven Churches of Revelation*, we'll look at the unique characteristics of one of the 7 churches. Because Revelation can feel mysterious and somewhat even cryptic to read, it's important to remember that these were real churches with real people who lived in real time.
- We'll be exploring the 7 letters sent to 7 churches in the late first century. The letters were penned by the Apostle John but were authored by the resurrected, glorified Jesus who came to John in a vision.
- As you read the 7 letters, you'll see some common threads throughout them.
 1. Jesus starts each letter with, "**These are the words of...**"
 2. He gives a one phrase description of himself.
 3. He then gives the church a job review.
- Depending on the Church, Jesus will affirm, commend, warn, scold or correct these churches. His goal is to keep them on the target, of fulfilling his mission to reach the world with the Good News. Jesus' words were written specifically to them and the real issues they faced.

Q: *Why is this background information so important to our understanding of the church in Ephesus?*

Q: *How would you describe the culture in which they lived and served?*

Q: *What are your initial impressions of this church?*

Q: *What have they done right? What's lacking? What will be the outcome if they continue this pattern?*

EMPHASIS ON CHRIST

- In each letter, Christ is uniquely described.
- In this letter, Jesus is described as holding the 7 stars and walking among the 7 lampstands. As stated in Revelation 1, the 7 stars are angels for each church and the lampstands are the churches.
- Jesus is declaring his authority and oversight of these churches. He's also expressing his deep care for them.
- The book of Ephesians is a letter written from Paul to the church in Ephesus 30 years prior to Revelation.
 - In short, the letter of Ephesians beautifully describes all that Jesus has done for them (chapters 1-3)
 - and how they should respond to Jesus' love and sacrifice (chapters 4-6).

Q: *What had Christ done for them?*

Q: *How had they changed because of Jesus?*

Q: *What were they to become as a result?*

Q: *What happens when we forget or lose sight of these critical truths?*

EMPHASIS ON THE CHURCH

- Thirty years later, John draws the Ephesians back to their past. He tells them that they have “forsaken their first love.” He then asks them to remember how far they have fallen.

Q: *What do you think happened for them to lose or forsake the love they had decades before? What’s the value of remembering or looking back?*

EMPHASIS ON ME

- Keep in mind, as we compare and contrast these letters - that the Church is not a building; it’s a community of people.
- In the case of Ephesus, it’s not only the church that lost their love, but its people.
- Over time, PEOPLE can drift in their passion for Christ and in their pursuit of loving people.
- Drifting happens to most Christ followers at some point in their spiritual walk.

Q: *Based on the letter to the church at Ephesus, what’s the warning for churches like FBC Monett?*

Q: *Is our lampstand in Monett permanent?*

Q: *Why or why not?*

Q: *Describe how a church can do good things, but be loveless or heartless.*

Q: *How may a church guard against this?*

This simple study compiled by Robert Bradow using the following commentaries:

Matthew Henry (*Blue Letter Bible*)

Gene Stokes (*The History of a church called Ephesus*)

Adrian Rogers (*The Adrian Rogers Study Bible*)

Bible Reference.com. (*A study of Ephesus*)