

## The Letters to the Seven Churches

*Most people have been intrigued by the unusual language and vision of Revelation.*

*It is mysterious and yet, Jesus exhorts the reader of the letter to pay attention! In particular, Jesus tells the reader of Revelation to pay attention to what is said to the churches found in Revelation chapters 2-3.*

*That's where this series of conversations steps in. What is it that Jesus is telling you and me as a reader today? Why should we pay attention to this? How does this message impact or affect my life?*

*Follow the conversation as we seek to discover these answers together.*

*"Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near." Revelation 1:3*



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# Letters to My Church: reflections on the 7 letters of Revelation

Part Two: The Church at Ephesus

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# Map of The Seven Churches

Located in modern day Turkey, this map represents our best understanding of where the seven churches of Revelation in Asia Minor are located.

Although not identified on the map, Patmos is one of the smaller islands west of Didyma.



Use this space to write a response to Jesus based on the letter you've just read.

*Dear Jesus,*

## Introduction:



The seven churches did exist in John's day in Asia Minor (what is now Turkey).

"Seven" is the number of completeness, perfection, and fulfillment. These seven churches perfectly represent the strengths and weaknesses that have been and will be characteristic of various churches throughout history.

The warnings and exhortations given to the churches apply to us today. Though each letter is written to a specific church, all seven letters close with the words,

***"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."***

It is important to note, the word "churches" (ekklesiais) is plural. John is writing for all who will listen!

Each letter follows a particular structure made of six shared themes. These literary themes are as follows:

1. The commission ("To the angel of the church in...")
2. The character (Christ's self-description in Rev 1:12-20)
3. The commendation (NOTE: The Letter to Laodicea does not have this)
4. The correction (NOTE: The Letters to Smyrna and Philadelphia do not have this)
5. The call ("He who has an ear, let him hear...")
6. The challenge ("To him who overcomes...")

A theme chart is included for your own benefit and reflection to complete along your journey through this participant guide.

A map of the seven churches is included for reference as well.

# The Letter To Ephesus

*This letter is a personal and artistic interpretation of the letter to the Ephesian church found in our focus study this week. Imagine Jesus writing this letter to you personally. After reading the letter, turn the page and write a response to Jesus. Before reading the letter, write your name in the blank.*

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,  
It's been a while. I wanted to write and let you know that I see all that you do.

I know how hard you work. I know your character and how you can't stand evil in the world today. But for some reason, you don't explore hard truths. You've let lies creep into your thinking...lies that move your heart away from me.

I know that you go through many hard times and often wonder if I'm there. I know these hard things weaken your faith in me. Don't lose heart. Don't lose faith. I am here.

Remember how energized you once were to follow me? Remember how exciting it was when our relationship first started? Take a step back from all of the distractions and business in your life today and revisit those moments. Make them alive today! Stop believing the lies that have stolen your heart and mind away from me and refresh your faith today.

Listen to what I'm saying. It all comes from my love for you. Live out your love for me. Don't be discouraged. Real life is found in faithfully following me.

With Everything,  
Jesus

## DAY 5: THE PROMISE

1. What insight do we gain from these passages concerning the “tree of life which is in the Paradise of God”? Read the following passages and respond to each.

Genesis 2:8-9

Genesis 3:22-24

Luke 23:43

Revelation 22:1-2

2. What do you think Jesus is promising to those who overcome when He says, **“I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God”**?

3. Why might this promise be especially meaningful to the Ephesian church?

4. Read the letter on the following page...

## The Letter to Ephesus

It is appropriate that the church at Ephesus is addressed first. Ephesus was the largest city of the Roman province of Asia and was a significantly influential city for the early church.



Ephesus was located near the mouth of the Cayster River only three miles from the coast. It became the capitol of Asia Minor, was connected by highways with the interior of Asia and all her chief cities, and became a great commercial center.

The emperor made Ephesus a free city and it was given the title *“Supreme Metropolis of Asia.”*

It also contained one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, the temple of Artemis (or Diana, if you prefer Roman mythology), and was a center of mystical cult worship.

The temple was 425 feet long, 220 feet wide, and 60 feet high, with great folding doors and 127 marble pillars, some of them covered with gold. The worship of Artemis was ‘religious immorality’ at its worst.

The pictures on this page show an artist’s representation of the temple as it stood in the ancient world (top) and how it looks today (bottom).



By the time the gospel was preached here it had a population of more than a quarter of a million people. Ephesus was also the “depot city” for the great road from the Euphrates, as well as other roads from the Cayster and Meander valleys.

The traveler from Rome landing at Ephesus would proceed up a magnificent avenue thirty-five feet wide and lined with columns which led from the harbor to the center of the city. It boasted a major stadium, marketplace, and theater.

The church of Ephesus was established by Paul on his third missionary journey (read Acts 19-20), and it was from this church that Paul called the elders of Ephesus to meet him at Miletus when he was on his way to Jerusalem (Acts 20:16f).

Paul had visited Ephesus around A.D. 53, about 43 years before this letter in Revelation was sent to them.

From what we read in the New Testament we know that the church in Ephesus was founded by the apostle Paul, the believers were disciplined by Aquila and Priscilla, taught by Apollos, and pastored by Timothy (1 Tim 1:3). Ephesus became the home of the Apostle John before and after his exile, but no church stands there today.

Either directly or indirectly, Ephesus was the recipient of eight (and quite possibly 13) New Testament books: the gospel of John (by association, the other Gospels would circulate through Ephesus as well), Ephesians (and quite possibly Colossians and Philemon from what we understand of the letters today), 1 and 2 Timothy, 1, 2, and 3 John, and Revelation. The book of Acts also carries with it heavy influence from Paul's interactions and work there.

Suggested Additional Bible Reading on the Church of Ephesus:

Acts:19:1-41; 20:17-38

Ephesians 1:1-6:21

1 Timothy 1:3-11; 4:1-16; 5:20-25; 6:1-10; 6:17-21

2 Timothy 1:8-18; 3:1-17

1 John 2:15-27; 3:1-10; 3:19-24; 4:13-21; 5:1-12

2 John 1:4-9

3 John 1:11

Notes:

Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977)

Merrill C. Tenney, *Interpreting Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1957)

Warren W. Wiersbe, *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the New Testament*, (Victor Books, electronic publishing).

#### DAY 4: THE INSTRUCTIONS AND WARNING

1. What are Jesus' instructions to the church at Ephesus?
2. Why would it be important to remember **"from where they had fallen"** ?
3. What is repentance? Why do you think it is necessary?
4. What is the difference between being sorry and repenting?
5. What was it like when you first believed in Jesus? Were you more excited to engage the things of faith (serving, reading the Bible, sharing your faith, worship, etc.)?
6. How about your excitement over these things today? Are you still as excited? Has excitement grown or waned over the years?
7. Is there something in your life today that Jesus is telling you to remember Him in...to repent...and return to faithful ways?



## DAY 1: JESUS AND EPHEBUS

1. How is Jesus described in verse 1 and what does this description imply?
2. Read Acts 20:25-32. Paul shared this with the leaders of the church in Ephesus some 43 years earlier, what was he most concerned about for this church?
3. According to Paul's instructions to Timothy in 1st Timothy 1:3-7, what were some issues in the church of Ephesus?
4. How would you recognize "false teaching" in the church today?
5. Would you consider yourself well-grounded in God's Word? Explain your thoughts.
6. Fox News, MSNBC, CNN, Talk Radio...there are so many opposing messages (and most don't root in God's word). How do you know what is true? How do you recognize hearing false teaching today?
7. What issues do you most struggle with in regards to true or false teaching?
8. How can you protect yourself from being "led astray" by false doctrines? What about our church...how can we encourage one another toward the truth today?

## DAY 2: THE COMMENDATION

1. For what was the church at Ephesus commended?
  2. In light of Paul's farewell message to the elders of this church in Acts 20:28-32, which you read yesterday, how has this church done over the years in following Paul's exhortation?
  3. What does it mean that one "cannot tolerate evil men" and why would that be considered a strength? How would you define an "evil man" today?
  4. What is the balance between not tolerating an "evil man" and loving the sinner?
  5. This church was commended for their perseverance and not growing weary. Is there currently a situation in your life that is causing you to grow weary? If so, how are you handling it?
  6. How does one practically persevere and not grow weary?
- We don't know who the Nicolaitans are. There are several viewpoints but they are simply speculation. What do we know for sure about the Nicolaitans based on the Scripture itself in Revelation 2:6 and 2:14-15?
- Which of the commendations mentioned in verses 2-3 would He be able to commend you for?