



The Church at Ephesus

A Bit of History



Library at Ephesus



Ephesus was an ancient city located in southwestern Asia, in what is today western Turkey. Ephesus in its time was a leading city in that part of the world. The Romans gave it the title "the first and greatest metropolis of Asia." Its greatest non-Christian attractions were the pagan Temple of Diana, known as "Diana of the Ephesians," and its open theater, capable of containing 50,000 spectators - then largest in the world, and still very big in comparison to modern-day stadiums. The city was most famous for the nearby Temple of Artemis (completed around 550 BC), one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. Among many other monumental buildings are the Library of Celsus.

Paul first visited the city near the end of his Second Missionary Journey, about 51 A.D., while returning from Greece to Syria (Acts 18:18-21). He at that time remained only briefly, as he was hurrying to be back at Jerusalem for Pentecost, but he left Priscilla and Aquila behind to carry on with the work of the Gospel.

Paul returned to Ephesus on his third missionary journey, arriving from an overland journey through Asia Minor. This time he remained for about three years, gaining such popularity that everyone heard the Word of the Lord preached.

Acts 19:10 (NIV), "...all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the Word of The Lord."

The apostle John, according to one tradition, spent many years in Ephesus while caring for Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ, as The Lord had commanded him (John 19:26-27). Some believe that both Mary and John are buried there.

The Message to the Ephesian Church

(Revelation 2:1-7)

¹“To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this: ²‘I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false;³ and you have perseverance and have endured for My name’s sake, and have not grown weary. ⁴But I have this against you, that you have left your first love. ⁵Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place—unless you repent. ⁶Yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. ⁷He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.’



he Backslidden, Loveless Church – Ephesus was a church that was once strong, but **lost its first love**. It had become lifeless, forgetting the passion and excitement of its original love for Jesus.

Commendation: “I know your works, and your labor, and your patience, and how you cannot stand them that are evil; and you have tried them, who say they are Apostles, and are not, and found them to be liars. For my namesake have labored and not grown weary.”

The Complaint: “...You have left your first love”

The Warning: To repent or your candlestick will be removed out of its place

The Praise: That they hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans which God hates also.

The Promise: “To him who overcomes, I will give to eat from the tree of life which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.”

A Closer Look at Ephesus



he complaint that Christ makes against this Church is that it “**had left its first love.**” Its character is seen in its very name, for Ephesus means to “let go,” “to relax.”

How did they lose their First Love?¹

The first love which characterized the Ephesians was the zeal and eagerness with which they embraced their salvation as they realized they loved Christ because He first loved them ([1 John 4:19](#)) and that it was, in fact, His love for them that had made them “alive together with Christ.” So overwhelmed were they by the joy that came from understanding their former state—dead in trespasses and sins—and their new life in Christ, that they exhibited the fruit of that joy ([Ephesians 2:1-5](#)). Because of God’s great love for the Ephesians, they were “made alive in Christ” and that new life was exhibited in the passion of gratitude. That passion for the Savior spilled over onto one another and out to those in the culture they inhabited, corrupt as it was.

Jesus commends the Ephesians for their many good works and hard work. They tested teachers to see whether their professions were real; they endured hardship and persevered without growing weary. They had **LOST THEIR WARMTH AND ZEAL FOR CHRIST**, and when that happened, they began to “go through the motions” of good works, motivated not by the love of and for Christ, but by the works themselves. What was once a love relationship cooled into mere religion. Their passion for Him became little more than cold orthodoxy.

Surrounded by paganism and false teachers, the Ephesian church would have had ample opportunity to correct false doctrine and confront heretical teachers. If they did so for any reason other than love for Christ and a passion for His truth, however, they would have lost their way. Instead of pursuing Christ with the devotion they once showed, much like a bride who follows her groom “through the desert” ([Jeremiah 2:2](#)), the Ephesians were in danger of **FALLING AWAY** from Christ completely. This is why He warns those who have “ears to hear” to prove the reality of their salvation by returning to Him and rekindling the love that had begun to cool. No doubt there were among the Ephesians those whose profession was false and whose hearing had become dulled. He warns the rest not to follow them, but to repent and return to Him with the passion they once had for Him.

¹ <https://www.gotquestions.org/left-first-love.html>

Ephesus had become a Backslidden Church

(33-100 A.D.)

John, who founded the church, warned it of what could happen in his parting message.

Acts 20:29-30, "I know this, that after my departing shall grievous 'wolves' enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, 'speaking perverse things,' to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears."

The significance of this warning is seen in the commendation of the Message.

Revelation 2:6, "But this you have, that you 'hate' the deeds of the Nicolaitans which I also hate."

Here John's "wolves" are called Nicolaitans. They were not a sect, but a group in the Church who were trying to establish a "**Priestly Order**," probably trying to model the Church after the Old Testament order of Priests, Levites, and common people.

This is seen in the meaning of the word, which is from "**NIKO**" to conquer, to overthrow, and "**LAOS**" the people or laity. The object was to establish a "**HOLY ORDER OF MEN**," and place them over the laity, which was foreign to the New Testament plan, and call them not pastors, but **CLERGY, BISHOPS, ARCHBISHOPS, CARDINALS, and POPES**. Here we have the origin of the dogma of "**APOSTOLIC SUCCESSION**,"² and the separation of the Clergy from the Laity, a thing that God hates. The Church at Ephesus was not deceived by the Nicolaitans, but the church recognized them as false apostles and liars.

The character of the Church at Ephesus is a fair outline of the Church Period from A.D. 33 to A.D. 100.

² <http://www.bible.ca/cath-apostolic-succession.htm>