

## **Lessons from the Seven Churches of Asia:**

### **Part One: Introduction and Ephesus**

#### **1. Revelation 1:9-11:**

- a. When first begin to read what was recorded for these seven churches, our Author John recalls that he was writing from a place of exile and imprisonment; John had been banished, most likely as a political prisoner, to the small and desolate island of Patmos, some 65 miles SW from the city of Ephesus.
- b. One particular Sunday, John, like many other prophets before him was “in the Spirit”; It seems that this is more than simply saying that John was perhaps worshipping, but like Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Paul before him, John was being shown things by the Spirit of the Lord: And the first thing to be revealed to John in vs 10 was a great and loud voice; calling John to attention like a trumpet
- c. the voice gives the solemn command to take this message that he is about to hear, and record it for these 7 churches in Asia:

#### **2. 1:12-16**

- a. Naturally, as we might expect, John turns to see who this voice belongs to, and when he does there are two things that he sees, both of them important, but one far more imposing than the other: First he sees a set of 7 Golden candle sticks; the significance of these will be explained later in the chapter...
  - i. But in the middle of those candlesticks was by far the most impressive part of the vision:

- b. The character is said to be like unto the “Son of Man”: This is a phrase that occurs over 80 times in the New Testament; and is used to emphasize the humanity of Jesus when he was on Earth. But now what John sees is hardly Human, but is much more magnificent.
  - i. Similar to the priest’s garb described in Exodus chapters 28 and 39, The lord is here seen wearing His own robe girded with a golden sash: This is certainly fitting attire as Hebrews 7:26 reminds us that Jesus now serves as our high priest:
- c. His hair was is not simply being described as someone with a grey head of hair; It is uniquely white; not just like wool; but as pure as the snow; This is someone who is both wise and pure:
- d. His eyes on the other hand were like fire: This calls to mind descriptions of the unique vision that God possesses;
  - i. As **Hebrews 4:13** reminds us *And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.*
- e. His feet are described like a strong metal purified and made sturdy by being put through the furnace; and the voice that he speaks with is overwhelming and powerful; imagine the sound of a great waterfall or crashing waves on the ocean
- f. Out of his mouth came a great two edged sword; The word of God is said to be sharper than any sword, as it pierce men’s hear and discerns wills:
  - i. Finally, after describing everything else; clothes, head, hair, eyes, feet and voice, we are told that his face shone in an overpowering way like the Sun.

- g.** As we've read through the description of John's vision of the Son of Man; there are many comments that we perhaps could make regarding this great description; But on the most basic level John has been told to write down a message and what followed was a description that says *this is someone that DEMANDS that you pay attention.*

### **3. 17-20**

- a.** When John beheld this vision as the sum of its parts he fell to the ground like a dead man—I think we can understand: After being assured that there was no cause for fear, the figure confirms that He is indeed the Christ; the one who conquered death through His death;
- b.** The 7 stars He says, represent the angels of the seven churches, and the 7 candle sticks represent the churches themselves:

### **4. The General Focus of the Letters:**

- a.** There is a great deal of emphasis and focus in each of these letters placed on remembering just who it is that is really delivering the message. Even though there has just been a very detailed introduction of the Lord, each one of the letters is going to give attention to these details a second time:

  - i.** In the first letter to Ephesus in 2:1 we are again reminded of the candlesticks
  - ii.** Smyrna is reminded that He is the first and the last, was dead but now lives in 2:8
  - iii.** Pergamum is reminded of the sharp two edged sword in 2:12
  - iv.** Thyatira is reminded of his deity, eyes of fire, and feet of brass in 2:18

v. Sardis is reminded that he holds the Seven spirits and stars in 3:1

vi. And finally Laoedecia is reminded in 3:14 of His eternal nature

b. One might ask; why is that after taking the time to reveal Himself to John, to have John record the details of His appearance; why would Jesus then have John immediately start giving the same details again to these 7 churches?

i. The purpose would seem to be that the Lord wanted these Christians to have it impressed upon them that what they were hearing was the Word of the their Lord;

ii. Yes they were receiving it in physical form; yes it was recorded down by a man; but its origin was divine:

1. Is this not an important point of emphasis for us today?

Would we not do well as we read any portion of scripture to call to mind the same thing? This is word of Him who walks among the candlesticks: This is the word of Him whose eyes are like fire and is the Beginning of Creation: It would certainly help in increasing our reverence and eagerness to obey God's Word.

## 5. Four Common Statements:

a. **To the angel of the church:** Angel is often translated messenger; this might mean that it was addressed to either the Elders, preachers, or any inspired teachers present who would have led the Church

b. **I Know they works:** Each congregation received a reminder that while they may have had God in the back of their minds; their deeds

and actions were always laid bare before His; and He was ready to pronounce judgment based on these; for good or for bad

- c. To Him who overcomes:** Overcomes means to conquer, or gain the victory: This refers to one who has remained faithful to Christ in spite of circumstances; Those who win their spiritual battle are said to inherit a number of different rewards throughout the letters:
- d. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says:** This is a compelling reminder that although the letters were themselves written to 7 specific churches; the messages that are written down are intended for all who are willing to hear: The message of God is open and available for any person in any age who is willing to open their heart and listen to it:

## **6. The Letter to Ephesus: 1-7**

- a. General comments about the Church:**
  - i.** Ephesus was the 4<sup>th</sup> Largest city in the Roman Empire: It has a booming population of around 250,000 people: It was a center of trade and commerce and was given the lofty title of “Supreme Metropolis of Asia” Even though it part of the Roman Empire, it was known as a free city that was given the right to have a certain amount of Self-Government:
  - ii.** Paul had stopped by Ephesus on his second journey, and had stayed there on his third for a period longer than any other place:
  - iii.** Like many cities Ephesus was thoroughly rooted in idolatry and paganism; no greater example of this can be seen than the great riot that broke out when the silversmiths of the city incited the

people to flood the temple of Diana for hours, screaming for a reason that nobody seemed to know

- iv. Fortunately, there were many who were open to the Gospel, and as we mentioned this morning those in Ephesus completely renounced their previous devotion to Idols:
- v. IN addition to the great zeal they showed in the start, Ephesus was among those who followed Paul as he made his last fateful journey to Jerusalem, wishing one last time to see their faithful friend:
- vi. Ephesus: a city of evil; a church of good:

### **1. READ**

#### **b. The Seven Golden Lampstands: 1**

- i. Not a menorah: these were 7 separate candlesticks: Each church would be judged by its own deeds, not as a collective of churches: This is one point among many that emphasizes the autonomy and separation of the individual churches:

#### **c. I know your deeds 2:**

- i. Notice that it was not just their deeds; but it was also their toil and perseverance: IN other words these were people who had been busy: They had kept themselves occupied by working hard in the Lord's vineyard, and they had done so even in the face of opposition and persecution:

#### **ii. You cannot bear evil men:**

- 1. These were people who were quick to defend the truth; whether that be exposing the false doctrines taught by the Nicolaitans, exposing false apostles, or anyone else who might be teaching contrary to the truth:

2. They were determined to work hard; they were determined to expose error; and they were determined that they would not stop:

**d. I have this against you:**

**i. What does this mean?**

1. Were they not showing their great love by their hard work and sacrifice? Were they not showing it when they refused to give up in the face of opposition?
2. Here was the problem: Ephesus had not lost their zeal—they were just as active as ever; they had lost what should have been their number one motivating factor: love for Christ:
3. They were a sound congregation: They had sound teaching and hard work; but without a passion and love for Christ it left them lacking: God will not be satisfied with service that is simply part of a routine or any complacency in worship:

**e. Remember where you've fallen from:**

- i. It isn't too late: You can still remember; you can still repent; you can still return:
- ii. They are admonished to do again the works that they did upon their initial conversion: Filled with a Love for Christ they were excited and enthusiastic in their work: God wanted to see the passion that was there the day they all burned their books!
- iii. **The alternative** was to have their candlestick removed: They would be rejected by Christ if they did not renew their love for Him:

- f. What is the biggest takeaway** for us from the Church at Ephesus?
- i.** Ephesus was a church who was active: They taught exactly as they ought and exposed those who taught falsely; Isn't that what we want to be?
  - ii.** And yet; Ephesus was a church whose actions had become custom. Their business may have been driven by any number of selfish motives—it was not driven by the zeal and love for Christ that they knew when they first obeyed the Gospel;
  - iii.** A congregation that has the right actions but is not driven by the right motive is not one that will overcome.