

NOON BIBLE STUDY: REVELATION 2: EPHESUS

AFTER A POWERFUL INTRODUCTION AND OPENING TO THE BOOK OF REVELATION, CHAPTERS 2-3 ARE MADE UP OF 7 LETTERS TO THE 7 CHURCHES LISTED PREVIOUSLY (1:11). JESUS SENDS A SPECIFIC AND RELEVANT MESSAGE TO EACH OF THE SEVEN CHURCHES BY NAME.

THESE LETTERS ARE GOING TO BE RELATIVELY SIMILAR IN STRUCTURE, BUT UNIQUE IN CONTENT. THEY ARE GOING TO HIGHLIGHT AREAS THAT ARE GOING WELL FOR THE CHURCHES, AND IN MOST CASES ADDRESS AREAS THAT ARE NOT GOING WELL AND MUST BE REPENTED OF. THESE LETTERS ARE REMARKABLE BECAUSE THEY ARE DIRECTLY FROM JESUS, EMPHASIZING THE FACT THAT THE RISEN LORD IS NOT PASSIVE OR DISTANT - BUT IS WATCHING OVER THE CHURCH AND MINDFUL OF WHAT IS GOING ON IN HER.

WE WILL READ THESE LETTERS TOGETHER AND SEEK TO UNDERSTAND WHAT JESUS' MESSAGE WAS FIRST TO THESE SEVEN CHURCHES IN ASIA AND THEN EXAMINE WHAT WE MUST HEAR FROM HIM FOR OUR OWN CHURCH TODAY.

BEFORE WE MOVE ON, A WORD OF INTRODUCTION TO THESE LETTERS. THE SEVEN LETTERS ARE MOSTLY STRUCTURED IN THE SAME PATTERN.

- JESUS WILL SPEAK AND INTRODUCE SOMETHING ABOUT HIMSELF TO EACH CHURCH
- HE WILL SAY "I KNOW..." WHICH IS THE GREEK WORD **οἶδα** (OIDA) WHICH LITERALLY MEANS "TO SEE". IN OTHER WORDS, THIS "KNOWING" IS ONE BASED ON FIRST HAND OBSERVATION.
- BASED ON WHAT JESUS SEES AND KNOWS HE WILL TYPICALLY GIVE A COMMENDATION OF WHAT THEY ARE DOING WELL FOLLOWED BY A REBUKE OF SOMETHING THAT NEEDS REPENTANCE.
- HE WILL GIVE THEM GUIDANCE AS TO WHAT REPENTANCE LOOKS LIKE AND WARN THEM WITH THE CONSEQUENCE OF DISOBEDIENCE.
- IN EVERY CASE HE WILL GIVE THEM A PROMISE AND REWARD FOR THEIR OBEDIENCE AND OVERCOMING - ROOTED IN THE PROMISES OF THE AGE TO COME.

SEE CHART FROM ESV STUDY BIBLE

REVELATION 2:1-7 - TO THE CHURCH IN EPHESUS

DESCRIPTION OF CHRIST:

WHAT CHRIST KNOWS & SEES:

COMMENDATION:

REBUKE:

SOLUTION:

CONSEQUENCE OF DISOBEDIENCE:

PROMISE FOR THOSE WHO OVERCOME:

OF ALL THE 7 REVELATION CHURCHES, EPHESUS IS THE ONE THAT IS MOST FAMILIAR TO BIBLE READERS TODAY. PAUL TRAVELED TO EPHESUS IN ACTS 18-19 AND WILL STAY THERE FOR OVER TWO YEARS. HE SET UP SHOP IN THE "SCHOOL OF TYRANNUS" AND EPHESUS BECAME A HUB OF CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP. EPHESUS WAS A MAJOR CITY IN THE REGION AND AT TIMES THE MOST IMPORTANT CITY IN THAT ASIAN REGION.

BECAUSE OF THE SPREAD OF THE GOSPEL THERE PAUL RUNS INTO INTERFERENCE NOT FROM THE JEWS BUT FROM THE MERCHANTS, MAKING MONEY OFF THE TEMPLE TO THE GODDESS ARTIMUS (ONE OF THE SEVEN WONDERS OF THE ANCIENT WORLD). AS EPHESIANS ARE REJECTING IDOLATRY AND TURNING TO THE LIVING GOD, THE MERCHANTS FEAR LOSS OF THEIR PROFIT.

LATER PAUL WILL WRITE TO THIS GROWING CHURCH HIS LETTER TO THE "EPHESIANS". EPHESIANS IS A CLASSIC PAULINE EPISTLE WHICH HIGHLIGHTS THE GOSPEL, THE EFFECTS OF THE GOSPEL ON THE CHRISTIAN AND CALLS THE CHRISTIAN TO RESPOND TO THE GOSPEL BY LIVING A HOLY LIFE BY THE SPIRIT'S POWER. EPHESIANS HAS SOME OF THE MOST WELL KNOWN VERSES IN ALL OF SCRIPTURE, INCLUDING THE FINAL VERSES REGARDING THE ARMOR OF GOD AND THE SPIRITUAL BATTLE.

AS PAUL JOURNEYS TOWARDS JERUSALEM AND HIS IMPENDING ARREST AND IMPRISONMENT, HE SPECIFICALLY CALLS FOR THE EPHESIAN ELDERS TO MEET WITH HIM. AS YOU MAY RECALL, HE DOESN'T STOP IN EPHESUS PROPER BECAUSE HE FEARS THE "GOODBYES" MIGHT TAKE TOO LONG. SO THEY PLAN TO MEET IN MILETUS, JUST SOUTH OF EPHESUS. LET'S CONSIDER WHAT PAUL SAYS TO THE EPHESIAN ELDERS AT THIS TIME, AROUND THE YEARS 52-55 AD.

ACTS 20:17-38 - PAUL & EPHESIANS ELDERS

V. 28-31 - PAUL'S SPECIFIC WARNING TO THE ELDERS

AFTER PAUL'S IMPRISONMENT, TIMOTHY BECOMES THE LEADER OF THE EPHESIAN CHURCH. HERE IS WHAT PAUL WILL WRITE TO TIMOTHY:

1 TIMOTHY 1:1-6 (NLT) - THIS LETTER IS FROM PAUL, AN APOSTLE OF CHRIST JESUS, APPOINTED BY THE COMMAND OF GOD OUR SAVIOR AND CHRIST JESUS, WHO GIVES US HOPE. 2 I AM WRITING TO TIMOTHY, MY TRUE SON IN THE FAITH. MAY GOD THE FATHER AND CHRIST JESUS OUR LORD GIVE YOU GRACE, MERCY, AND PEACE. 3 WHEN I LEFT FOR MACEDONIA, I URGED YOU TO STAY THERE IN EPHESUS AND STOP THOSE WHOSE TEACHING IS CONTRARY TO THE TRUTH. 4 DON'T LET THEM WASTE THEIR TIME IN ENDLESS DISCUSSION OF MYTHS AND SPIRITUAL PEDIGREES. THESE THINGS ONLY LEAD TO MEANINGLESS SPECULATIONS, WHICH DON'T HELP PEOPLE LIVE A LIFE OF FAITH IN GOD. 5 THE PURPOSE OF MY INSTRUCTION IS THAT ALL BELIEVERS WOULD BE FILLED WITH LOVE THAT COMES FROM A PURE HEART, A CLEAR CONSCIENCE, AND GENUINE FAITH. 6 BUT SOME PEOPLE HAVE MISSED THIS WHOLE POINT. THEY HAVE TURNED AWAY FROM THESE THINGS AND SPEND THEIR TIME IN MEANINGLESS DISCUSSIONS.

IT'S INTERESTING TO CONSIDER PAUL'S CONCERN FOR THE EPHESIAN CHURCH DECADES BEFORE REVELATION. AFTER TIMOTHY LEAVES AND PAUL DIES, GUESS WHO BECOMES THE OVERSEER IN EPHESUS? JOHN THE APOSTLE. FOR JOHN TO GET THE MESSAGE FROM JESUS FIRST ABOUT EPHESUS, THESE PEOPLE WOULD HAVE BEEN KNOWN NOT JUST BY JESUS, BUT BY JOHN TOO.

REVELATION 2:2-3 - COMMENDATION

IT SEEMS THAT THE EPHESIAN CHURCH DID HEED PAUL'S WARNING! JESUS' COMMENDATION TO THEM WAS THAT THEY DID NOT "TOLERATE EVIL MEN" AND TESTED "THOSE WHO CALL THEMSELVES APOSTLES AND ARE NOT." THIS IS GOOD NEWS! FROM THE EARLY WARNING OF PAUL TO TODAY, THE EPHESIAN CHURCH HAD STOOD STRONG AGAINST FALSE TEACHING AND FALSE TEACHERS.

THIS IS REALLY AN IMPORTANT CHARACTERISTIC OF THE CHURCH. WE ARE SWIMMING IN A WORLD OF FALSEHOOD AND DECEPTION AND WE MUST BE WILLING TO "TOIL" AND "PERSEVERE" THROUGH THE LIES AND REALLY CLOSE TO TRUTH AND HOLD FAST TO BIBLICAL AND GOSPEL TRUTH. IT DOES MATTER WHAT YOU BELIEVE. THE INCREASINGLY POPULAR IDEA OF "YOUR TRUTH" IS A FALLACY. GOD'S TRUTH IS WHAT MATTERS, GOD'S TRUTH IS WHAT SAVES.

BUT IN OUR ZEAL FOR TRUTH AND SCRIPTURAL PURITY, WE MAY BE PRONE TO A COMMON MISTAKE. FEAR NOT, OUR GOOD LORD KNOWS AND SEES.

REVELATION 2:4-5 - "BUT, I HAVE THIS AGAINST YOU..."

JESUS IS A GOOD LORD. HE DOESN'T LEAVE US OUT OF BALANCE. HE COMMENDS EPHESUS' STAND FOR TRUTH BUT DOESN'T IGNORE THEIR NEED FOR LOVE. IN FACT, HIS WARNING HERE IS VERY DIRECT AND HONEST.

SOMEWHERE ALONG THE WAY, THE EPHESIANS HAD LET THEIR LOVE GROW COLD. IN THEIR ZEAL FOR TRUTH, THEIR HEARTS GOT HARDENED. THEY WERE GOOD ON DOCTRINE, WEAK ON LOVE.

THE IDEA OF "LEFT YOUR FIRST LOVE" HAS TWO INTERPRETATIONS. IT SEEMS TO BE SPEAKING THAT EITHER (1) THEY LEFT THEIR LOVE FOR GOD OR (2) THEY LEFT THEIR LOVE FOR EACH OTHER. THE IDEA OF "FIRST LOVE" MEANS EITHER THE LOVE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT (FIRST) THING OR THE LOVE THEY HAD AT THE BEGINNING (FIRST).

THE WORD "LEFT" IS ἀφίημι (APHIEMI) WHICH MEANS TO LEAVE BEHIND, ABANDON. IT'S ALMOST AS IF IN THEIR QUEST TO STOP FALSE TEACHING, THEY FORGOT TO PACK AND CARRY THEIR MOST IMPORTANT BAG. SO WHILE THEY ARRIVE AT THEIR DESTINATION, THEY DON'T HAVE WHAT THEY NEED.

THE CHALLENGE OF BEING A TRUTH SEEKER AND FALSEHOOD REJECTOR IS THAT YOU CAN GROW HARD HEARTED. ON THE OTHER HAND, THE CHALLENGE OF BEING A LOVER IS A MINIMIZATION OF TRUTH (WHICH JESUS WILL ADDRESS TO PERGAMUM & THYATIRA). BUT OUR FIRST WARNING NEEDS TO BE TO NOT LOSE, LEAVE OR ABANDON OUR FIRST LOVE.

IF WE ASSESS OUR HEARTS AS BEING HARD AND LACKING LOVE AND COMPASSION, SOMETHING IS WRONG. MAYBE WE'RE SO TROUBLED BY INJUSTICE IN THE WORLD, MAYBE WE REALLY CARE ABOUT MISINFORMATION OR FALSE TEACHING, MAYBE WE'RE UPSET BY PEOPLE'S SIN AND THE DECLINE OF OUR SOCIETY AND MORALITY - ALL GOOD THINGS TO BE TROUBLED BY. HOWEVER, IF WE LOSE LOVE AS A RESULT, SOMETHING IS WRONG AND WE NEED TO REPENT.

ANYTIME IN YOUR LIFE WHERE YOU ARE NOT COMPASSIONATE OR WITHHOLDING LOVE, THERE IS A PROBLEM. ANYTIME IN YOUR LIFE YOU ARE LIVING FOR GOD OUT OF OBLIGATION ALONE, THERE IS A PROBLEM. ANYTIME YOU PURSUE HOLINESS AND LOSE A TENDER HEART, THERE IS A PROBLEM. ANYTIME YOU CARE ABOUT TRUTH BUT NOT ABOUT PEOPLE, THERE IS A PROBLEM. ANYTIME BEING RIGHT IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN HOW YOU TREAT YOUR ENEMY, THERE IS A PROBLEM.

AND JESUS SAYS TO EPHESUS, AND US: "**REMEMBER** FROM WHERE YOU HAVE FALLEN AND **REPENT** AND **DO THE DEEDS YOU DID AT FIRST...** (REVELATION 2:5)". REMEMBER, REPENT, AND DO THE DEEDS OF LOVE (NOTE, NOT JUST FEEL THE FEELINGS OF LOVE).

Q - WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?

IF THEY DON'T, THEIR CHURCH, WHICH AT THE TIME IS A LIGHT TO THE WORLD AND THE OTHER CHURCHES, IS IN TROUBLE. HEAR THIS: IF A CHURCH LEAVES LOVE BEHIND, THAT CHURCH WILL NOT REMAIN. NO MATTER HOW CONCERNED ABOUT THE TRUTH THEY ARE, EVEN IF THEY "KNOW ALL MYSTERIES AND ALL KNOWLEDGE:...BUT DO NOT HAVE LOVE, (THEY ARE) NOTHING." (1 CORINTHIANS 13:2).

REVELATION 2:6 - THE NICOLAITANS

NOT MUCH IS KNOWN ABOUT THE "DEEDS OF THE NICOLAITANS (2:6)" NOR "THEIR TEACHING (2:15)" OTHER THAN THE REFERENCES IN THESE CHAPTERS. BUT IN JESUS' SECOND COMMENDATION, HE REITERATES "I AM HAPPY THAT YOU CARE ABOUT TRUTH. I DO TOO."

"THE *NICOLAITANS* WERE A SECT (SOMETIMES ASSOCIATED WITH NICOLAUS, ONE OF THE SEVEN ORIGINAL DEACONS IN THE CHURCH IN JERUSALEM ACCORDING TO ACTS 6:5) THAT APPARENTLY TAUGHT THAT CHRISTIANS COULD ENGAGE IN IMMORAL BEHAVIOR WITH IMPUNITY" (NET BIBLE NOTE, REVELATION 2:6).

WE'LL DISCUSS THIS MORE IN THE NEXT SECTION.

REVELATION 2:7 - REWARD FOR THOSE WHO OVERCOME

IN JESUS-LIKE FASHION, JESUS LIFTS HIS VOICE TO ASK IF THE CHURCH IS LISTENING AND HAS A "EAR TO HEAR". TO THOSE WHO HEAR JESUS AND RESPOND TO HIS MESSAGE, HE PROMISES TO GIVE THEM ETERNAL LIFE IN THE COMING KINGDOM OF GOD. SPECIFICALLY, HE SAYS HE WILL "GRANT" THOSE WHO OVERCOME "TO EAT OF THE TREE OF LIFE WHICH IS IN THE PARADISE OF GOD (2:7)."

THESE WORDS REMIND THE READER THAT THE END OF GOD'S STORY IS A RESTORATION OF ALL THINGS AND A NEW HEAVEN AND NEW EARTH FILLED WITH THE KNOWLEDGE AND GLORY OF THE LORD, WHERE GOD'S WILL IS DONE ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN. JESUS' LANGUAGE ABOUT ETERNAL LIFE IS NOT "CLOUDS" AND "HARPS" BUT TREES AND GARDENS. A REMADE WORLD AND EDEN-LIKE CONCLUSION. THE TREE OF LIFE WAS IN THE CENTER OF THE GARDEN OF EDEN AND SUSTAINED LIFE FOR ADAM AND EVE. THE TREE OF LIFE WILL REAPPEAR IN THE AGE TO COME AND SUSTAIN LIFE AND HEALING FOR THE WORLD.

IF THROUGH THIS WORLD OF EVIL, SIN, LIES AND DEATH - YOU REMAIN FAITHFUL TO CHRIST - ZEALOUS FOR TRUTH AND DEVOTED TO LOVE - ACCESS TO THAT WONDERFUL NEW WORLD IS YOURS. THIS IS WHAT IT MEANS TO "OVERCOME". "THIS IS NOT A SPECIAL BLESSING AWARDED TO A PARTICULAR GROUP OF CHRISTIANS... EVERY DISCIPLE OF JESUS MUST BE IN PRINCIPLE A MARTYR AND BE READY TO LAY DOWN HIS LIFE..." (GEORGE ELDON LADD, "A COMMENTARY ON THE REVELATION OF JOHN", PAGE 41).

THAT'S QUITE THE INVITATION *AND* MOTIVATION FROM OUR LORD.

SO DO YOU HEAR WHAT THE SPIRIT IS SAYING TO THE CHURCHES? THE CHURCH OF EPHEBUS WAS IN THE MIDST OF A TRIAL AND MORE TRIALS WERE TO COME. YET THEIR BATTLE *REMAINED* A "SPIRITUAL BATTLE" (CP. **EPHESIANS 6:10-13**). AND THE SPIRIT CALLS US TO CONTINUE TO WORK HARD AND PRESERVE THROUGH WHATEVER TRIALS MAY COME. LIES WILL WHISPER AT TIMES, SHOUT AT OTHERS. HOLD ON TO THE TRUTH. DON'T BE DECEIVED. REMEMBER THAT CHRIST IS SHINING BRIGHTLY IN A DARK WORLD AND THE CHURCH IS A STAR AND LAMPSTAND IN THE FOG.

AND IN ALL OF OUR ENDURING AND WORKING, DO NOT FORGET ABOUT LOVE. LOVE REMAINS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE. AS EVIL ABOUNDS AND LAWLESSNESS INCREASES, OUR HEARTS WILL BE CHALLENGED TO GROW HARDENED, COLD AND WITHDRAWN - EPICLY FIGHT AGAINST THAT TEMPTATION WITH ALL YOU HAVE. REPENT OF HATRED AND BITTERNESS. REMEMBER THE LOVE YOU ONCE HAD AND BEG GOD FOR A HEART THAT BEATS WITH COMPASSION AGAIN. AND REDEEM THE TIME, NO MATTER HOW SHORT IT MIGHT BE. REDEEM THE TIME BY GETTING BUSY ONCE AGAIN WITH THE DEEDS OF LOVE.

LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD. LOVE YOUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS. LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR. LOVE THE STRANGER. LOVE YOUR ENEMIES. AND EACH STEP OF LOVE YOU TAKE LEADS YOU CLOSER TO THE DAY YOU REST FROM THIS LABOR OF LOVE AND CELEBRATE AROUND THE TREE OF LIFE.