

Lesson 4 Arrival at the Seven Churches

As I listened to and read different commentaries on the seven churches, I found that Chuck Missler's audio commentaries to be the best and most complete of all the references. I will not give you complete references for the following lessons on the seven letters of the seven churches. Just know that this material is readily available in the literature of today if you have the hankering to look for it. The Haley's Bible Handbook has wonderful descriptions, history, and culture, of the land where these seven churches were located.

Before we get started on digging into the seven letters to the seven churches, I would like you to name each one of the lamps of the menorah in the empty space on the next page with the names of each of the seven churches. I realize that this is the second time I have asked you to draw the menorah. Each lampstand will also have an angel that has been assigned to it, so please place an angel on each of the lampstands, as well.

There are seven angels for seven churches. Some believe the Greek word, *angelos*, for angels, meant pastors. This might be the case, but it cannot be determined that there was only one pastor for each of the churches. Pastors were overseers. However, *angelos*, traditionally means "messengers," and refers to the Angelic beings God created individually in eternity past. They were to be helpers for Mankind. The archangel Michael is the *angelos* who watches over and fights for Israel. The archangel Gabriel brought the message to Mary of God's choice of her person to bear the Christ child in her womb. However, others believe that the word for angels in Hebrew, which is *malach*, can be ambiguous in the Biblical texts. Each time angel (*malach*) is used in the Bible, it assumes the presence of a supernatural heavenly being, but it can also mean a human messenger. So, you see how some see that *angelos* could be a pastor or overseer as above.

The English word in Greek for church does not appear in Revelation. The word used for church is *ekklesia*, but does not mean anything more than "a gathering" or a "crowd." Remember, in the Hebrew, Messianic communities are called *kehilot*. The early churches were not like ours today. There were no crosses, no steeples no communion tables, no stained-glass windows, no baptistries or large congregations. They were small gatherings in individual homes more like home synagogues.

Day 1 – The Church at Ephesus

Background of History for the Church at Ephesus – the great political center

Previously, I asked you to read the book of **Ephesians 3 and 5** and also, **Acts 18 and 20** for background material in understanding this church. You will understand from these passages in Acts that Paul had visited Ephesus twice. The second time he caused quite the stir. The city of Ephesus was the third largest city in the Roman Empire for its time, **population around 150,000**. The city of Ephesus is no longer today, but Selcuk is 3 km away from where the city existed at the time of Paul. The population for Selcuk is about the same as Ephesus was 2000 years ago. The city of Ephesus had a temple to the goddess Diana (Artemis), or the ancient Hittite fertility

deity, also called the Mother Goddess. She was also known as the goddess of virginity, child birth, and wild beasts. Her temple in Ephesus was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

Both male and female prostitutes made their living at the temple of Diana. Behind a purple curtain in the Temple was the lewd/crude image of Diana. It was many breasted. She had a club in one hand and a trident in the other. ¹

You can imagine that Paul was not well received in Ephesus, because his preaching meant loss of income for the prostitutes and for the artisans crafting idols. The first bank in the world had its operating location in the temple of Diana. The Goths destroyed the Temple of Diana in A.D. 256. However, the temple was still standing in Paul and John's Day.

John was the pastor of the church at Ephesus. The church made inroads to the Asia Minor area. I said previously that Paul was able to speak to ALL who were in Asia. Even though no synagogues have been found in archeological searches in Ephesus, Paul in Acts 19:8 said he entered the synagogue in Ephesus and spoke there for 3 months "arguing persuasively about the Kingdom of God."

¹ Ibid, pp. 900-904.

In the message to the church at Ephesus, we have the first of seven “Thus saith the Lord,” “*Ko amar ADONAI.*” But, in Revelation, the “Lord” is substituted with language typically associated with Israel’s God. The example given in the letter to the Ephesian assembly is this: “*These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, he that walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks.*” So, instead of saying, “Thus saith the Lord,” we have “Thus saith the One who has a firm grasp on the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands.”

The Ephesians had a theater that held 25,000 people. To give you a comparison, Denver’s Pepsi Center holds 18,007 people. There also was an even bigger amphitheater in Ephesus that seated over 100,000 people. This stadium is roughly comparable to the stadium that houses the Rose Bowl in California each year. Paul spoke in this stadium and was able to reach many. The present-day village of Seljuk is located where Ephesus was in John’s day, although it has none of Ephesus’ former glory.

Jesus’ letter to the Ephesian church here in Revelation was some 43 years after Paul’s departure from Ephesus for the last time. ²

Personal Time Right Now Right Here

Do you remember what it was like when you were a new Christian? I know I was so excited about my “personal” relationship with the God of the Universe. He knew me, separately from everyone else on this planet. Jesus died for me...FOR ME! And by golly, I was zealous for Him. I was so hungry for the written Word of God. I went to work right away memorizing Scripture, getting involved with other Believers, and spending time in prayer. I think I could have done anything He asked of me. I certainly thought He talked to me quite regularly and I shared all the time with my new friends about what He was personally showing me in my life. I did all the right things. Then...it seemed like the world (or older, wiser Christians) came into my life, and told me to cool it. Then I lost something that I’ve been fighting to get back to all of my Christian Life...I believe that “Something” is My First Love, Jesus Christ. Oh yes, I have times when I am right on, but I do notice that if I do not spend time **with Him, I tend to fall back away. For me, spending time with Him means** communicating with Him, reading His word, fellowshiping with other Believers, being aware to talk to others about Him when He gives me opportunity, and writing Bible studies. It’s not like I am going off and committing some kind of atrocity, but Something or Someone is lacking access to my life. If I were a betting person, you too, have known this cycle (**probably not writing Bible studies**). I really do look back to those early days before I got some sensibility.

For the rest of today, I would like you to take a look at the deeds that are before us as Christians in maintaining that relationship with Christ so that it is open and fruitful. I want you to name the deeds you did at first (the Ephesian Church) that were evidence that He was your first love. Then I want you to look at what it was like when you first came to know Him and where you are now. **Notice that He wants us to repent and go back to doing the deeds that we did at the beginning.**

² Bible Knowledge Commentary, John H. Walwood, Roy B. Zuck, pp.933-935, ChariotVictor Publishing, 1997,.

Those were the deeds that kept Him front and center in the relationship. Prayerfully, fill out the following chart:

Have I left my first love?³

The Deeds of the Ephesian Church	What it was like when I first came to know Him?	What it is like where I am right now?
Having a hunger to read God's written Word and delighting in Truth		
A desire to be with other Christians in fellowship with others of the same mind and an eagerness to serve Him		
An awareness of being in God's presence at all times, delighting in knowing that He hears my prayers		
A desire to share with others what I have found so that they, too, can experience salvation		
A desire to fund God's work and share with those who are in need		
A desire to know His will not only for me, but for others as well. Be a humble, obedient servant to Him		

Day 2 - 4 – Revelation 2:1-7

Title of Christ used for the Church at Ephesus

Please write the name or title used for Christ for the Church of Ephesus, here. **You can also begin to fill out Appendix E here and as we continue through the seven churches.**

³ Precept Upon Precept Revelation 1, Precept Ministries of Reach Out, Inc.

How does Jesus explain the mystery of the seven stars which are in His right hand, and the seven golden lampstands in **Revelation 1:20**

Remember that we've already looked at the Holy Spirit, collectively the seven spirits of the Holy Spirit, in the menorah both on the earth and in heaven. He is in the midst of these seven spirits. We've also already looked at the seven angels, one angel for each of the seven churches. Remember, the seven angels may be the seven pastors of each of the seven churches, or they may be the seven "angelos," seven messengers to each of the seven churches. Jesus holds in His hands these seven stars (angels).

We read that Jesus was the one who held the seven stars (seven angels of the seven churches) in His hands. If this is true, what can you say positively about those hands? If you don't know, take a look at the disciple Thomas in the Gospel of **John 20:24-29**.

Does he hold your life and my life in His hands as well? If this is true, what can you say positively about those hands?

What does it imply for us that Jesus' hands or wrists or palms have nail markings on them?

Commendation Christ uses for the Church at Ephesus

There are seven words of commendation for this church; list them below or on the next page.
Rev. 2:1-3

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.

Remember, these seven churches were all local churches of John's day. They all had their literal strengths and their literal problems. As you are going through the commendation of the church at Ephesus, please think on how your church does in each of these areas. Is your church worthy of any of these commendations? How about you personally? Are you diligent, hard-working, persevering and patient in suffering, not tolerating evil men, continuously checking the Scripture to verify what is spoken by others, enduring the taunts of godless men for His Name's sake, and no matter what is happening, not growing weary? You do know that "tolerance" is a big word in our culture. Remember, that we are aliens in this world and this world is not our home. Write your thoughts below:

Those men who called themselves apostles and are not apostles, are the cult called the Nicolaitans. **The word is not Nicolatians, but Nicolaitans.** See what you can find in your references on this cult and write what you discover below:

Some think the Nicolaitans were a priestly order that was beginning to take shape and rule over the people. Nicolaus of Antioch (one of the 7 deacons of Acts 6:5) who apostatized from the truth, formed an Antinomian Gnostic cult which taught that one must indulge in sin to understand it. They gave themselves over to sensuality with the explanation that such sins did not touch the Spirit. The Ephesians hated this cult. Just think on this: one of the seven deacons who was in on the beginning of the Church, followed his own pathway, started a cult and took others down with him. It didn't take long for the church to go astray. Again, test the spirits, are they of God or not? We will find out later in our study of the seven churches that the church at Pergamum tolerated the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Pergamum was also the church that married the world. Does this bother any of you? Sounds like today, just slightly twisted. The word *Nicolaitan* comes from two Greek words, *Nike*, which means "victory over" and *laitan*, meaning "laity." Together these two words mean victory over the laity. The Nicolaitans were priests who had power over the common people. Jesus hated the deeds of the Nicolaitans, too.

John Lightfoot, who was a 17th century Christian Hebraist, in considering Revelation as a Jewish composition, offered a different explanation and origin of the word "Nicolaitans." He believed the word was a Hebraism. A Hebraism is something originally expressed in Hebrew but spelled with Greek letters. "Let us eat" is the meaning behind the Hebrew word "Nokhal" and is tied to the Balaam and Balak incident in Numbers 24-25. We see this connection in the verses written to Pergamum in Revelation 2:13-15. The Nicolaitans professed the freedom to eat anything and the freedom to engage in sexual immorality. In Acts 15, when addressing those who wanted the Gentiles to be circumcised, James says this, "Wherefore my judgment is, that we trouble not them that from among the Gentiles turn to God; but that we write unto them that they abstain from the pollution of idols and from fornication, and from what is strangled, and from blood." The cult of the Nicolaitan's of the day wanted to be able to eat meat that had been sacrificed to idols and also engage in sexual immorality and yet be a part of the "Way" or the followers of Jesus Christ. Of course, both of these things that the Nicolaitans thought they had the freedom to do were detestable to the Jewish converts to Christianity. So, in Revelation 2:6, Jesus says to the Ephesians, "But this thou hast, that thou hatest the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches. To him that overcometh, to him will I give to eat of the Tree of Life, which is in the paradise of God." In other words, those who forego the eating of food sacrificed to idols now are the victors and they will eat of the Tree of Life later. So, we see, that the term "Nicolaitans may not have its origin from Nicholas of Antioch after all. It may be describing the "let-us-eat people."

Earlier, to the church at Ephesus, Jesus says, "Remember therefore 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." Do you see here the connection between losing

your first love, which is Jesus Christ, and abandoning the works which flowed out of that love for Jesus? Jesus did say that to love Him was to obey Him. Works are important and the kind of works that we set our efforts on, should reflect our obedience to Christ.

“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” is also a Hebraism. There are some who believe that what was said to one church in Revelation concerns not only all the churches of Revelation, but also all the churches, in every place and in every age. Look what Jesus says in Revelation 2:7. Write Revelation 2:7 below:

Do you see that? It says **churches** in the plural? Remember also it says, “He who has an ear.” Do you have an ear? Most of us have two ears that hear. Some need hearing aids to hear or other helps, but this does not exclude them from heeding these words.

The Rebuke

I would like you to fast forward down to Day 5 and read Jeremiah 2:2 from the Sar Shalom web site. The word used in the English for love is Espousal. What do you think God is saying here about the love that was once shown to Him by His own? **Does He want us to go after Him, having no other love interests, forsaking all else for the relationship with Him? The Sar Shalom web site can be accessed here:**

<http://www.sarshalom.us/resources/scripture/asv/bible.html>

The Ephesians had deeds or works for sure. Jesus just listed them for the Ephesian church above. They were busy. They worked and worked, but what did they not have? What did Jesus say He had against them?

What is the first commandment of the 10 commandments? If you seriously cannot remember, then turn to **Exodus 20:1-2** and write your answer here:

Jesus summed up the Law in this one statement, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” “This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Take a little closer look at the first four commandments: **Exodus 20:1-11**. In a nutshell what do these verses say?

Now, look at the remaining six commandments in **Exodus 20:12-17**. In a nutshell, what do these verses say?

The Ephesian church was noted for their devotion for doing the work of the Kingdom. They were so busy doing the King's work that they no longer had time to be with the King. God wanted time with them, one on one. We need to heed these words and also guard our daily time with Him alone. I do so much better at keeping my appointment with Him if I get up early and spend time with Him first thing in the morning. If I put it off until later, until I have taken care of just a few chores, I never go back to it, having that quiet time with Him. Find yourself a quiet place where only you and the LORD can meet. For me, it's my clothes closet. I have pictures and rough prayer lists pinned to the wall and a map of the world. The more time you spend there, the more you will find yourself wanting to be in that place. You all know how much my dogs mean to me, but at my house, even my dogs are shutout of my prayer closet. It's God and me in there! No cell phones allowed. The espousal relationship we have with the Lord is the most important relationship of all. Make time for Him. You will be glad you did!

The Exhortation

Please write the exhortation to the Church of Ephesus below, **Revelation 2:5-6:**

Early on in Ephesus, in Paul's day, Timothy was in charge of the congregation at Ephesus. See **1 Timothy 1:3**. John must have inherited the works in the place-of-relationship problem from Timothy. John was the right man for the job as pastor of the Ephesian Church for John had an understanding of who Jesus was on a universal level. Even before penning the unveiling of Jesus Christ, John's understanding of Jesus was evidenced in the writing of the Gospel of John. But of course, at the moment of writing Revelation, John wasn't pastoring the Church of Ephesus. He was in exile on the island of Patmos, away from his congregation. The Ephesians must have fallen back into their old habits after John was sent away from them. The *aorist* tense in the Greek for the word "repent" here heavily implies to turn from their ways with **no delay**.

The Closure

Please write the closure below to the Church of Ephesus: **Revelation 2:7a.**

As referred to earlier, this letter was not only for the church at Ephesus, but also for the other six churches (plural) written to in the book of Revelation as well as the church universal at that time and throughout all history.

Where is the lampstand of the church of Ephesus, today?

We've already talked about this earlier. The country of Turkey today is 99% Muslim. Were the Ephesians obedient to the exhortation of Jesus Christ, to repent, to place the relationship with their Savior at the top of their priority?

Ephesus today is six miles from the sea, yet because of the silt deposit brought on by the Romans who cut down all the trees and the subsequent erosion, no ship can come close to her. She is unapproachable by sea today. What once was the “Queen of Asia,” has become diminished.

The Promise to the Overcomer

Please write the promise to the overcomer here: **Revelation 2:7b**.

What does Jesus promise to those who overcome this obstacle of works before relationship?

Does this mean that unless I return to Jesus as my first love, I will lose my salvation (I will not eat of the tree of life?)

How do we overcome? Does obedience and discipline have anything to do with overcoming? Are not obedience and discipline works? Does the one who has ears to hear, and the will to obey, also overcome? Think hard on this last question. The one who overcomes is the one who listens and obeys. I want to be an overcomer. I get to be an overcomer by first listening and then obeying. How about you?

The relationship between Adam and God in the Garden, before Adam sinned, was as it was intended to be. Before Eve fell for the serpent’s lie, she and Adam actually lived in God’s presence continuously, unencumbered in their relationship with Him, walking and talking with Him every day. Before the fall, Adam and Eve were given access to all the trees in the garden except one, **the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They even had access to** the Tree of Everlasting Life. When Eve ate the fruit of the forbidden Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and gave some to her husband, Adam and Eve lost access to eat from the Tree of Eternal Life and also lost that intimate relationship they once had with God. Now, God offers all men access to eat of the Tree of Life through acceptance of His Son’s sacrifice on the cross, His blood spilt, for their salvation. This is from the last chapter of the last book in the Bible, the book of Revelation: “on either side of the river was the Tree of Life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. There will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it and His bond-servants will serve Him; they will see His face....” - **Revelation 22:2-4**. What started out perfect, went south, but now has come full circle in God’s redemptive plan.

It is interesting that there are inklings of the Tree of Life in other cultures. I will name just a few of them, here:⁴

- The homa-tree of the Persians, growing at the spring Arduisur which comes from the throne of God

⁴ Chuck Missler’s audio commentary on Revelation

- The halpasoma-tree of the Hindus, which furnished the water of immortality, the libation of the gods
- The tree of Assyria adorned by royal figures and guarded by genii, similar to the cherubim – cf. – see **Ezekiel 47:12**.

One final note concerning the story of redemption: this is a story of two trees. What were the two trees here?

Access to the Tree of Eternal Life was cut off from Mankind when Adam and Eve were kicked out of the Garden and two angels were placed at the entrance to the Garden to guard their access to the Tree of Life. As the story goes, if Adam and Eve, in their fallen state would have eaten of the Tree of Life, they would have remained in those fallen bodies for eternity. The second tree in the story of redemption is the tree that Jesus was crucified upon, the cross.

This letter is for the Ephesian church of the day of John, the rest of the seven churches in Asia, to every church that has ever existed anytime, including all the present churches, and is also for each of us in the Body today. So, what do you see in Jesus' admonition here that you and your church need to attend to? What do you see in your own life? Prayerfully consider these two questions and write your thoughts below:

What can you do to help your church (the Believers of your congregation) and your church as a whole?

Day 5 – Old Testament Concealed is in the New Testament Revealed.

I would really like you to cross-reference the verses of Revelation 2:1-7 with their counterpart in the Old Testament just like you did for chapter 1. Again, I want to encourage you to record your thoughts in the space provided. And again, this exercise will greatly enhance your understanding of that which was once concealed in the Old Testament is now revealed in the New Testament. In the Introduction to this study, I told you that we will be able to refer to the Hebrew text more completely by cross referencing the verses written originally in Greek in Revelation with those written (or mentioned) in Hebrew in the Tanakh. These are listed for you here:

Revelation 2:4 with Jeremiah 2:2,

Revelation 2:4 with Genesis 2:9, 3:22-24

For your last assignment for the Church of Ephesus, I would like you to go to your Appendix E and just spend time going over the seven letters to the seven churches. Every week as we make our way through another letter, go through that church on your chart again and write things down that you don't want to forget about that church and church letter. Look for those churches that have no condemnation and those who have no exhortation. Also, look for the churches that have nothing good said about them.