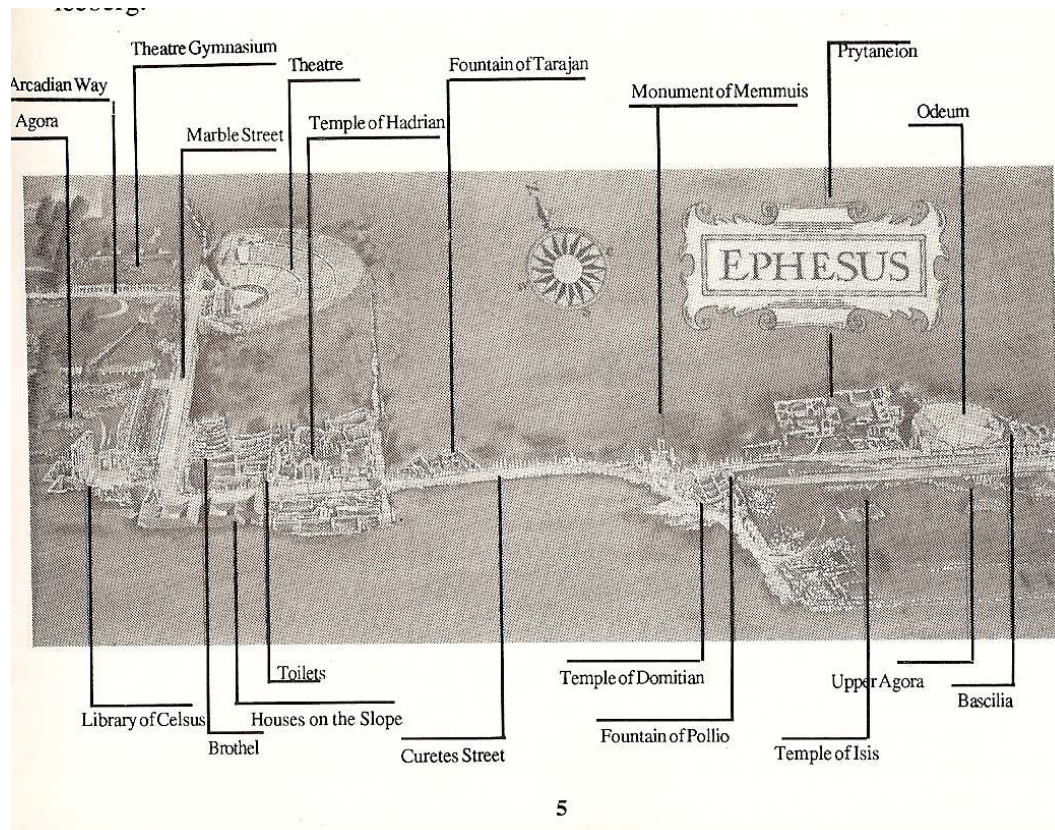


The Church at Ephesus

Introduction and History

The photo below of Ephesus today shows only one quarter of the size it was 2000 years ago. The rest still has to be excavated. At this time about 250,000 people lived here which was a very large population if compared with London in the third century of just 30,000.



Although Pergamum was the official capital of the province of Asia, Ephesus was the greatest city. It claimed the title, "The first and greatest metropolis of Asia." During Biblical times it possessed the greatest harbour in the country. It lay at the entrance of the Cayster River and valley. All roads were centred on the city and passed through some of the other towns that contained the churches.

It was rightly called the gateway of Asia. It was laid down by statute that when the Roman proconsul came to take up his office he must embark at Ephesus and enter his province through Ephesus. Later when Christians were sent to Rome to be executed Ignatius one of the Early Church Fathers called this main road the Highway of the Martyrs.

Ephesus was called a free city. This meant that within its boundaries it was self-governing. It was exempted from ever having Roman soldiers garrisoned. It was also an assize town where Roman governors held court there.

Temple of Artemis

The city had the honour of holding one of the seven wonders of the ancient world with the temple of Artemis (Dianna) the many breasted god. Her temple was outside the city and



was magnificent in structure. Originally build from the plans of Chersiphron from Crete and his son Metagenes during the first half of the 6th Century B.C. About two hundred years later a mentally ill man called Herostratos burned the temple down so he could have his name recorded in history. It was destroyed on the night Alexander the Great was born (356 B.C.). The new temple was built and made grander. It was four hundred and twenty-five feet long and one hundred and twenty-five feet wide. It had one hundred and twenty columns sixty feet high and thirty six of them were gilded and inlaid.

The Greek goddess Artemis, in Greek mythology, one of the principal goddesses, counterpart of the Roman goddess Diana. She was the daughter of the god Zeus and Leto and the twin sister of the god Apollo. She was chief hunter to the gods and goddess of hunting and of wild animals, especially bears. Artemis was also the goddess of childbirth, of

nature, and of the harvest. As the moon goddess, she was sometimes identified with the goddesses Selene and Hecate.

Although traditionally the friend and protector of youth, especially young women, Artemis prevented the Greeks from sailing to Troy during the Trojan War until they sacrificed a maiden to her. According to some accounts, just before the sacrifice, she rescued the victim, Iphigenia. Like Apollo, Artemis was armed with a bow and arrows, which she often used to punish mortals who angered her. In other legends, she is praised for giving young women who died in childbirth a swift and painless death. One of the functions of Artemis was to grant fertility to barren women. One of the many statues of Artemis is found the museum at Ephesus, alongside is one of them.



The Temple of Artemis

In the second century the temple was again destroyed this time by an earthquake but local records show that the influence of Christianity was so great that the temple remained a ruin which can be seen as such today.

Other Landmarks

What most readers will identify with is the theatre (below) where Paul was restrained from going there when a riot ensued caused by Demetrius a silversmith who was losing trade as the whole city seemed to be turning to Christ and throwing away charms and icons. (See Acts 19),



The marble coast road leading to the harbour can be seen. However, the sea is now several miles away.

Founder of the Ephesian Church

Although the Apostle John is forever connected with the Churches of Revelation it was likely that Paul was the one who founded this Church. He later had help from Timothy, Apollos, Priscilla and Aquila. It is possible that Luke also accompanied Paul on some of the journeys. John came to Ephesus later together with the Virgin Mary.

The Third Council of the Church at Ephesus 431A.D.

Ephesus played a very important part in the development of the Christian church in 431 A.D. when The Council of Ephesus was held in the Church of St. Mary in Ephesus, in 431 under Emperor Theodosius II, grandson of Theodosius the Great. Approximately 200 Bishops were present. The proceedings were conducted in a heated atmosphere of confrontation and recriminations. It was the Third Ecumenical Council. It was chiefly concerned with Nestorianism.

Nestorianism emphasized the dual natures of Christ. Patriarch Nestorius taught that Mary, the mother of Jesus gave birth to the incarnate Christ, not the divine Logos who existed before Mary and indeed before time itself. Consequently, Mary should be called *Christotokos*, Greek for the "Mother of Christ" and not Theotokos, Greek for the "Mother of God." This was essentially a Christological controversy.

Its literal English translations of *Theotokos* include "God-bearer" and "the one who gives birth to God"; less literal translations include "Mother of God Incarnate" and "Mother of

God". Over the centuries the connotations of this decision are divided the Christian Church. The principal question is, "Can a human being give birth to God who has existed before all time?"

Other titles began to be given to the Virgin Mary in Ephesus. In fact the Christian Church began to do what the Roman Empire did when taking over a country. They allowed the foreign gods to be worshiped as before but they gave them all Roman names. Therefore Artemis became Diana.

Many of Diana's titles were taken, and declared to be the titles of Mary, including; "Queen of Heaven", "Divine Virgin", and "Mother of All". Ephesus was chosen for Mary's installation to add legitimacy to the church's claim that Mary, not Diana, was "the Mother of God", the "Mother of All." Over the years Mary's veneration has continued and doctrines about her have developed up to this present day. Included are The perpetual virginity of Mary, a doctrine of Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Oriental Orthodox Christianity affirms Mary's "real and perpetual virginity even in the act of giving birth to the Son of God made Man."⁽¹⁾ Thus Mary was ever-Virgin (Greek *ἀειπάρθενος*) for the remainder of her life, her hymen remaining intact making Jesus her only biological son. When Scripture indicates that Mary had other children (See Mat 13:55).

The latest development in the veneration of Mary was in 1950 when Pop Pius XII announced that "having completed the course of her earthly life was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory." This means that Mary was transported into Heaven with her body and soul united. The feast day recognizing Mary's passage into Heaven is celebrated as The Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary by Roman Catholics. She also became the New Eve to balance with Jesus who is the Second Adam.



These are the ruins of the Church of St. Mary where the third Ecumenical Council of the Church took place in 431 A.D.



The building above is believed to be the first church dedicated to the Virgin Mary Called Mary's house. It can be found in Ephesus where local custom says that the Virgin Mary came to live at Ephesus with the Apostle John

The Tomb of the Apostle John

The Church at Ephesus had a tomb made for the Apostle John. At first the Church was a wooden building. However, in the 4th century the Emperor Justinian built the basilica and indicated the place of John's body. This is seen in the left hand photograph below. While there with my party we met up with forty Koran pastors and although only one could speak English we sang together "Praise God from whom all blessings flow" in our different languages followed by "Amazing Grace." When we turned round we found at least fifty tourists with heads bowed listening to us worship. This was a very special moment and many tears fell that day. The presence of the Lord was powerfully felt by all.



The cross like indentation in the floor of this church shows the baptismal tank where believers were baptised by total immersion. Interestingly the square holes either side were for the priests to stands while a person was in the water so that the priests themselves were kept dry.

The Text of the Letter to the Ephesians

Rev 2:1-7

"To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, 'These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands: 2 'I know your works, your labour, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; 3 and you have persevered and have patience, and have laboured for my name's sake and have not become weary. 4 Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. 5 Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place — unless you repent. 6 but this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. 7 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.'"

General Introduction

Morris gives us a helpful introduction to how the author planned each message to the Churches.

1. Greeting. "To the angel of the church that is in...."
2. A title of the risen Christ, usually taken from the description in chapter 1.
3. A section headed 'I know' introducing praise for what is good and in the church's record (not in the case of Laodicea).
4. Criticism of the church in the case of Laodicea).
5. A criticism of the church (not in the case of Smyrna or Philadelphia).
6. An exhortation beginning. 'He that has an ear -
7. A promise beginning with something like 'to him that overcomes will I give -'.

In the four last letters the order of 6 and 7 are reversed.

A further pattern can be discerned in the sevenfold arrangement. Churches 1 and 7 are in grave danger, churches 2 and 6 are in excellent shape, while churches 3, 4 and 5 are middling, neither very good nor very bad.¹

Verse 1

Revelation 2:1

"To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, 'These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands:

There are several interpretations to who is the angel in each Church. One view is that there are angels guarding each church. Jesus said that he would build his church not man. In this context it is plausible that he has the assistance of heavenly beings to carry out this task. Other commentators believe that each letter is addressed to the senior minister or elder.

The seven stars in Christ's right hand refer to the Churches. How secure they are being held in his right hand. The right hand is normally the predominate hand. The Lord sees the Churches as so important that he holds them as a priority. This also means that if we let him he has taken control over the Churches and he is more than willing to direct them if

¹ L. Morris, Revelation, Inter-Varsity Press Leicester (1983) p.58

they are to listen to what the Spirit is saying to the Church. How many leaders are doing that rather than chasing or developing 'my ministry?' Barclay makes an important point that if Christ is holding all the Churches in his hand why are Christians opposing each other?

The Lamp stands are also the Churches. This time it suggests that the Holy Spirit is the influence over the Churches. Zechariah had a vision of lampstands which illustrates this Revelation text.

"Now the angel who talked with me came back and wakened me, as a man who is wakened out of his sleep. 2 And he said to me, "What do you see?" So I said, "I am looking, and there is a lampstand of solid gold with a bowl on top of it, and on the stand seven lamps with seven pipes to the seven lamps. 3 Two olive trees are by it, one at the right of the bowl and the other at its left." 4 So I answered and spoke to the angel who talked with me, saying, "What are these, my lord?" 5 Then the angel who talked with me answered and said to me, "Do you not know what these are?" And I said, "No, my lord." 6 So he answered and said to me: "This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: 'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' Says the Lord of hosts" Zech 4:1-6

The one bowl represents God the Holy Spirit. Two olive trees provide the oil dripping constantly into the large bowl. One could speculate that they are the other two parts of the Trinity. The seven pipes run down to seven lamps. The lamps are totally dependent upon the one bowl. At any time the pipe running to a bowl could get blocked. Many churches I have visited have had blocked pipes. They no longer hear from God. The Holy Spirit is absent from the congregation but they do not know it. It happens so slowly as the bright light begins to reduce in its effectiveness. The oil of course is the Holy Spirit as shown in verse 6 above.

Verse 2

"I know your works, your labour, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars;"

The Risen Christ begins to give his personal message to the Ephesian Church.

"I know your works, your labour and your patience.' This is a good recommendation to any church. One does not often see the words works, labour and patience in mission statements. They are far more grandiose but often less effective! It is comforting to know that the Lord proves his watchfulness over the Church by keeping a log on every church.

He also approves of the Ephesian elders identifying those who are evil. Yet in many congregations it is possible to have evil people amongst us and do nothing about it. It could be holding to false doctrine but it may also be gossiping, backbiting, disputes with others in the congregation. A good pastoral team will identify these problems and deal with them head on and both teach and practice holiness as a personal and church life-style.

The Ephesians are also to be congratulated on identifying false apostles. There is much that is questionable in some worldwide ministries that appear on the media. It is more subtle than that. It is the visiting preacher who over time introduces strange interpretations to texts. It could be transferred members who come from a different doctrinal understanding and begin to inculcate dissent among certain parts of the congregation. All need careful handling but they must be corrected. There are those who come into the congregation to deliberately cause division. It has been known for attractive women to enter a big church with the sole purpose to seduce the leadership. This happened once in a church of my knowledge that was part of a coven of witches. The Holy

Spirit can give discernment to the oversight and allow such practices to be exposed and dealt with.

Verse 3

and you have persevered and have patience, and have laboured for my name's sake and have not become weary.

These are fine attributes to the Christian character. They have dealt successfully with false prophets trying to pervert the truths of the Gospel yet there could be inculcated among the leaders and the people a weariness that produces a fatigue which prevents the church from going ahead in God and conquering fresh territories for God. The sinfulness that surrounded them was significant. It was said that at the Temple of Artemis there were one hundred sacred prostitutes. There were brothels provided for the sailors as they came off the ships. A sign has been preserved in Ephesus pointing the way to such a place.

Among all the sin and opposition they have persevered with patience and have laboured in the Lord. This comment 'have not become weary' is unusual the Greek word *kamnoo* only appearing three times in the New Testament. 'Lest ye be wearied, and faint," Heb 12:3; "The prayer of faith shall save the sick," James 5:15; and in the passage before us. It means properly to become weary and faint from toil, etc.; and the idea here is that they had not become so wearied out as to give over from exhaustion.

Verse 4

Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love.

This reaction over time to the formation of a Church is common. Established denominations created as a result of a revival eventually lose the fervour and enthusiasm that drove them onto greater endeavours. It is a little like falling in love with someone for the first time. A man will walk miles to see his new girlfriend. Weather will not stop him seeing her. He is even willing to fall out of relationship with his family that may not approve of the relationship. Now married he questions if he or she should make a cup of tea for each other. It would be difficult to recreate the first feelings of that newly found love but what should happen is the same actions should be performed because that love has matured. Therefore it is not trying to rekindle the emotion that goes round running a new church but performing as if the experience is new. It is still giving the same honour to each other. It is still burning with desire to see the lost won to Christ. It is still using the same energy to perform the works that we once did because our love for the Lord has matured. New church denominations suffer from the same malaise. Formed out of a sense of the original group have lost their first love of the Lord. With great enthusiasm the new grouping forges ahead. It is estimated that within thirty years a new church or denomination begins to settle and lose its initial impetus and settles for less than the best.

Verse 5

Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place — unless you repent.

A Church can look on the outside to be doing well. The congregation is larger than normal. Its worship is beautiful and it's preaching well thought out and inspiring. The people are

friendly towards strangers. They feed the poor and visit the sick. It does not take long however, when talking to the older member, to hear comments like 'Oh, you should have been here ten years ago, God was moving in a powerful way among the people.' It is so easy to settle down and accept the level we are at now. The real sin is settling down. That is true in a marriage, other relationships and church. A couple that does not continually work at their relationship will see it die. A church that settles will have built in to its structure the seeds of its own destruction. I was once asked to survey a successful church of about 750 members. At the highest point of its success I denoted seeds of destruction already present. About five years later that church had shrunk to barely 200 and never regained its standing in the city. So even a growing prosperous church can leave its first love.

I would suggest that a church needs to review carefully with its people every year what it has achieved and more importantly what it had not achieved. To prepare new plans for the coming year and aim for something bigger than before. Of course having prayed it into being knowing that it is the Lord's will and timing. So even by the world's standards our church may be successful yet the Lord is saying repent. Change the way you think and go back to the time of your first works. What was your motivation then? Nothing more than to please the Lord and do his works. Are we sure we are still doing His works and not our own. Have we forgotten that the Lord is building His church? Have we taken over from the Lord? If so he is not with us.

The warning is that the Lord will take the lamp stand away. Yes the very local church he created will be removed. It is a sobering thought that all but one of these churches eventually failed. The only church to keep a witness throughout the ages was Smyrna.

Verse 6

"But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate."

God not only loves but he hates. In this case note particularly that he hates the deeds not necessarily the person. It is suggested that the Nicolaitans were followers of one of the seven deacons found in Acts 6:5. There are several theories in commentaries to what this grouping was and what they taught but in fact little is known about them. It seems they were linked to the eating of meat previously offered to idols. A similar thing is found in Pergamum. An important aspect is that they were within the church not outside it. It behoves all leaders to continually be on the look out for false teachers. People's hearts are easily won over by charismatic preachers.

Verse 7

Revelation 2:7

"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God."

The letter ends with the same admonishment as to all the other churches. It is essential that the Church listen to what the Spirit is saying to them. Otherwise ritual and formality takes over from the spontaneity of the moving of the Holy Spirit. The saying is true "Don't bless what I am doing Lord but let me be where you are blessing."

The believers at Ephesus are offered two things as a reward for obeying the Spirit, namely. 'The tree of life' and 'Paradise'. The Tree of Life paid an important part in the Garden of

Eden. It was the temptation to eat of its fruit which caused the Fall of Man. In Jewish thought the tree came to figure for that which gave man life. (See Prov 3:18; 11:30; 13:12 and 15:4). Eventually the Tree of Life will be found in heaven and its leaves will heal the nations (Rev 22:2).

The word Paradise Gk *paradeisos* appears only three times in the New Testament; Luke 23:43; 2 Cor 12:4; Rev 2:7. It occurs often in the Septuagint, as the translation of the word garden; Gen 2:8-10,15-16; 3:1-3,8,16,23-24; 13:10; Num 24:6; Isa 51:3; Ezek 28:13; 31:8-9; Joel 2:3. And also Isa 1:30; Jer 29:5; and of the word *pardeec* in Neh 2:8; Eccl 2:5; Song 4:13. It is a word which had its origin in the language of eastern Asia, and which has been adopted in the Greek, the Roman, and other western languages. In Sanskrit the word "paradesha" means a land elevated and cultivated; in Armenian, "pardes" denotes a garden around the house planted with trees, shrubs, grass for use and ornament. In Persia, the word denotes the pleasure gardens and parks with wild animals around the country residences of the monarchs and princes. Hence, it denotes in general a garden of pleasure; and in the New Testament is applied to the abodes of the blessed after death, the dwelling-place of God and of happy spirits; or to heaven as a place of blessedness. Some have supposed that Paul in 2 Cor 12:3 (NIV) by the word "paradise" means to describe a different place from that denoted by the phrase "the third heaven;" but there is no good reason for this supposition. The only difference is that this word implies the idea of a place of blessedness; but the same place is undoubtedly referred to.