

**The Seven Churches of Revelation**  
**Revelation 1:10-2:7**  
**“Ephesus, The Loveless Church”**

**Introduction**

The word “*revelation*” (*apokalypsis* in the Greek) simply means to “make something’s true nature visible”. John, the Apostle of Jesus Christ, under the direction of The Spirit gave his last book this title because it was given to him that the true nature of Jesus should be revealed. You see, when Jesus walked the earth, His true self was disguised in part because He came in the flesh. People could only recognize Him as God, if the Holy Spirit enabled them to do so (**Matthew 16:17**). This is the reason why foolish men actually thought that they could kill Jesus in order to silence Him. Had they really been able to see Him for who He was, had His true nature been “revealed” to them, then they would have known that any attempt to do away with Him would have been an impossibility. In the book of Revelation, the “skin” is taken off of Jesus, quite literally, and we see Him for who He truly is. He is none other than The Great I AM. The Son of God who came to earth to give His life as a ransom for many (**Mark 10:45**).

The setting of the book is on the Isle of Patmos, a tiny rocky island off the coast of what is now modern day Turkey. John had been exiled there by the Romans some time around 95 A.D. for preaching The Gospel of Jesus Christ. John was the only original disciple left alive at this time. He would have been somewhere around 90 years old. The rest of his fellow disciples had all been martyred for their faith in Jesus, but God had kept John alive for He had one more book that needed to be written so that the Canon (measure or doctrine) of Scripture might be complete. God’s man is invincible until God says that his purpose has been completely fulfilled. You see, Jesus could still use John for His glory even at the ripe old age of ninety, even after the rest of the world had tried to exile him out of existence! Don’t forget, when you start to think that God could not possibly use someone like you, He still can. Just make yourself available to Him and watch and see what He will do!

John tells us that he was worshipping on “The Lord’s Day” (a common term used for Sunday in the first century churches **vs. 10**), when he heard **“a loud voice like a trumpet, which said: ‘Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea.’”** The Romans thought that they could silence John by sending him to a remote island. Church tradition says that they had even tried to kill him once but he wouldn’t die. God had one remaining task for old John before he called him home. He was going to reveal to The Church what Jesus was like when He wasn’t wearing the flesh of a man. His voice was like the blast of a trumpet and the sound of mighty rushing waters (**vs. 10,15**), and when John turned around to see him, he fell upon the ground like a dead man. The sight (revelation) of Jesus in His true form proved to be an overwhelming visage indeed, and John does His best to describe Him for us in human terms, albeit impossible to truly describe such Deity in the tongues of mere mortal men. Is it any wonder that John was terrified at what he saw?

Many people have a really tough time understanding the **book of Revelation**. One thing that I have learned is that it is an extraordinarily “Jewish” book. What I mean by this is the more you understand The Old Testament and The Jewish Law the more easily you will be able to interpret Revelation. For example, Christ appears here in **Chapter one** to John dressed in a flowing white robe with a golden breastplate about His chest. This is a reference to the garments worn by the Jewish High Priest upon The Day of Atonement. There are seven Jewish feast days that were ordained by The LORD. Four take place in the spring and three in the fall. The day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) is the sixth feast. It takes place in the fall of the year. Yom Kippur is the solemn feast, where the High Priest takes the blood of the sacrifice and enters the Holy of Holies to sprinkle its blood upon the mercy seat (top cover of The Ark of The Covenant) to “cover” the sins of Israel for another year. When Jesus died upon The Cross, He satisfied this Lawful requirement once and for all. This is why it says in Hebrews that once He had finished His atoning work, **“He SAT DOWN, at the right hand of The Father (Hebrews 10:12)”**. Jesus IS the ultimate High Priest! No longer would it be necessary for the sacrifice on the Day of Atonement to be made for the people. Jesus didn’t just “cover” our sins, He washed them away permanently. It was as if, for all those years, the sacrifices made on Yom Kippur were like paying the interest only on your credit card bill. You can keep your creditors off your back that way, but you’ll never be able to pay off the debt. Jesus came and died to pay our balance in full. That is why HE said “it is

finished” on The Cross. The Greek word used for *finished* (*tetelestai*) literally means “paid in full”. This is also why Jesus was able to “sit down” at the right hand of The Father after He died upon The Cross. His work as our High priest had been completed. All that is left for Him to do at this point is to care for His Church and to call into account those who have rejected His offer of salvation.

The Old Testament prophets spoke of a “day” that was to come and was foreshadowed by the feast of Yom Kippur. They called it “The Day of The LORD” (**Isaiah 2:12; 13:6,9; Ezekiel 13:5; 30:3; Joel 1:15; 2:1; 3:14; Zechariah 14:1; Malachi 4:5**; just to name a few.) The Day of The LORD is the time period that God will bring His final Judgement upon the earth. In Revelation, this “day” is actually a seven year period of time known as “The Tribulation”. When John sees Christ dressed as a High Priest for the day of atonement upon “The LORD’s Day”, he saw what any Jewish believer would see. He was witnessing the events that were about to take place when “The Day of The LORD” would come pass upon the earth! And what a dreadful time of tribulation that day would bring! He saw Jesus, not as the humble, suffering servant of the gospels, but rather, as the Judge and High Priest whose very word would cut the wicked to pieces like a sharp two edged sword (**vs. 16**). The time of grace would soon be drawing to a close and a time of judgment would follow. Jesus wanted John to warn His churches of the coming of The Day of The LORD. This was no time to become complacent. The time is short, and the Church of Jesus must be ready to meet Him when He is revealed (**Matthew 25:1-13**)! In this series, The Seven Churches of Revelation, we will look together at the WONDER of Jesus our High Priest, His WORK, and His WARNINGS to the seven Churches.

### **The Wonder Of The High Priest**

As we have stated earlier, the appearing of Jesus to John on the isle of Patmos was an awesome sight to behold. Dressed in spotless white with his face shining like the sun and his feet glowing like blazing brass, Jesus, the righteous judge, allowed John to see Him in His glory. His all seeing eyes piercing in to John’s very soul like flames of fire (**vs. 14**) no doubt terrified the poor old man beyond his wildest imagining. So many times we come to church and go through the motions of worship with Jesus himself in our midst, and we never even truly think about His presence among us. What would happen to our churches if we gathered together on The Lord’s Day and actually SAW The Lord? I doubt that it would be business as usual my friends. We would all fall upon our faces before Him just like John. I truly believe that each and every time that we walk into His sanctuary, we should be looking to “see” Him with this same kind of reverence and awe. Did you come to church today, because it is the “right thing to do”, or did you come to have an encounter with The Risen Christ? John was worshipping on The Lord’s day and got a little more than he bargained for! Why should we not come to church every Sunday expecting Christ to do more than we could ever ask or imagine (**Ephesians 3:20**)? Let us never forget to be in awe at The Wonder of our High Priest!

### **The Work of The High Priest**

When John turned to see Jesus, he saw this awesome gleaming vision of Him walking among seven golden lampstands (**vs. 1:12; 2:1**) holding seven stars in His right hand. We are told that the seven lamp stands were representative of the seven churches located in the Roman province of Asia (modern day Turkey), and that the seven stars represents the angels (messengers, pastors) of those churches (**vs. 20**). The word “*angelos*” in the Greek actually means “*messenger*” or “*envoy*”. In this particular context, Christ is referring to the “angels of the churches” as their Pastors. I’ll bet that you guys never once thought of me as your “little angel”, huh? Thats ok, I don’t think that Sandi thinks of me in that way either! But I digress. Jesus is seen here holding the pastors in His right hand as he walks among the seven churches.

The Lampstand is a very Jewish thing. To fully comprehend why Jesus sees His churches as lampstands, we need to do a little history lesson. When God first called His people (Israel) out of Egypt, he appointed Aaron, the brother of Moses, to be their very first High Priest. Well, as you can imagine, some of the folks didn’t like that one bit and accused Moses of nepotism. They thought that surely, someone else among them would be better qualified to serve as high Priest. So, they began to grumble

against Moses and against God. God instructed the people to lay their staffs upon the ground and the one that blossomed would be the one whose owner was truly called as The High Priest. All the men agreed, and of all the staffs that were placed before The LORD that day, it was Aaron's that began to blossom and flower. His staff was just a dead branch of an almond tree, but when God touched it, the branch sprang to life and produced blossoms and almonds. In other words, Aaron's dead staff came to life and BORE FRUIT! This settled the fact, once and for all, that Aaron had been chosen by God (**Numbers 17**).

Fast forward to the building of The Tabernacle. God instructed that a lampstand be constructed of pure gold, with one center stalk and six branches attached to it, three on each side. The candle stick was to have golden "almond blossoms" attached to the branches. This was a constant reminder of Aaron's staff and the calling and commission of Almighty God. Think for a moment about the construction of The Lampstand: A center stalk (trunk) with six branches attached to it, bearing fruit. Six is the number of man in The Bible. Man was created on the sixth day. So, let's think about this for a minute. A center stalk with six branches attached that bears fruit and represents the calling of God. What a perfect picture of THE CHURCH! Remember Jesus' words in John 15? **I AM The True Vine, and you are The BRANCHES, if any man abides in ME, he will bear MUCH FRUIT (John 15)**. You see, it is The Church who has been called by God Himself to be a kingdom of priests (**1 Peter 2:9; Revelation 5:10**).

In The Old Testament, it was the duty of the High Priest to keep the lampstand burning at all times (**Leviticus 24:3**). He did this by constantly trimming the wicks and filling the lampstand with special consecrated oil. Jesus, our High Priest, is constantly "walking amongst the churches" (**2:1**) pruning (trimming away the sin) and filling them with oil (The Holy Spirit) so that their flame never dies out! Our High Priest is here with us this morning, constantly evaluating how we are doing as his Church! He has the right to critique, encourage, prune, and or pass judgement upon us whenever He sees fit. We are one of HIS lampstands here in Greeneville, TN. As He walks through our church this morning, what words do you think that He would have to say about the job that we are doing here as a lampstand, placed here to light up the darkness?

### **The Warning Of The High Priest**

Jesus told John to send a message to the seven churches located in Asia Minor. The letter would have begun in Ephesus, which was the gateway city to the Roman province of Asia. Ephesus was located on the coast of the Aegean Sea, and though not the capital city, it was in most circles considered the most important. It was actually Roman law for any dignitaries visiting the province to begin their journey with a stop in Ephesus. The **Book of Revelation** would have been first sent to Ephesus, and then circulated in a clockwise route to all the cities housing the seven churches. This explains the order in which The LORD Jesus listed the churches in **verse 11**, and subsequently, He addresses His comments and corrections to them in the same order in **Chapters 2-3**.

Ephesus was famous for its massive temple to the goddess Artemis (Diana). The temple of Artemis was Ephesus' most prominent landmark, and a great deal of the cities economy centered around the worship of this Greek goddess of love and fertility. The Apostle Paul found out first hand when he started the church in Ephesus, how fired up the local merchants could get over any disparaging comments made in reference to their beloved Diana. His preaching that there was only One True God had caused a riot in Ephesus (**Acts 19:23-41**). Ephesus' paganism notwithstanding, the church that Paul had planted there had taken root and had flourished among its citizenry, even to the point there were many who had practiced the magic arts that had repented and turned to Christ, renouncing their sins and burning their scrolls of sorcery in full view of the public (**Acts 19:19-20**).

When it came to church pastors, no church ever had more qualified leadership. The Apostle Paul himself founded the church and later left it under the watchful care of Timothy. And, Church tradition also claims that John the apostle spent some time as the leader of the church as well. Can you imagine being a young pastor considering taking a position at the church of Ephesus? Talk about your hard acts to follow. I think that God would have to skywrite my calling to that church in the clouds before I'd have enough faith to take that job! I would hate to live my life under the constant scrutiny of church members saying, "Paul, Timothy, and John never did it that way!" Wow! Talk about being in a pressure cooker.

When Jesus addressed the congregation at Ephesus, He assured them that He was fully aware of their exceptional history. He said, **"I know your works and your perseverance (vs. 2:2)"**. The word He used there for *know* (*eido*) was "to have completed an intimate knowledge of". No one knows The Church better than Christ. He sees into the very hearts of each of us. He not only knows what we do, but the motivation behind why we do it. We may be able to fool others with false piety, but not Him. He has those **eyes like flames of fire (vs. 1:14)**. He can see it all.

He told the Ephesians that He knew their works (*extreme toil* in the Greek), and he saw their Perseverance. The word there for *perseverance* means literally to "remain under". Jesus knew fully well that being a Christian in a pagan city such as Ephesus was no easy task. The people of that church were under constant pressure to run and hide, to avoid public humiliation. But, the church of Ephesus had chosen to persevere, to "remain under" the pressures, rather than run away.

Jesus also commended the church for their knowledge of sound doctrine (**vs. 2**). They had been taught by the best teachers, and they knew full well how to spot a phony from a mile away! Paul, Timothy, and John had seen to that. As a result, you had to get up pretty early in the morning to fool those Ephesian believers. They had even shot down the teaching of The Nicolaitans, a false doctrine that had begun to permeate the first century church and taught that immorality was perfectly acceptable to God so long as one believed in Christ. You could sin all you want, according to the Nicolaitans. Just confess it the next day and go in grace. It was a perversion of scripture that Christ despised. No one is really sure where this false doctrine originated. Some of the early church fathers credit it to the deacon Nicolas in **Acts Chapter Six**, but nothing has been proven beyond a shadow of doubt. Whatever its source, Jesus commended the Ephesian Church for recognizing the falsehood for what it was and driving it from their midst. So far, so good, right? If we were to stop reading there, we might become convinced that the church at Ephesus was doing pretty good these sixty plus years after the death and resurrection of Christ. If it were not for that little three letter word... YET.

**"Yet, I have something against you: You have lost your first love" (vs. 2:4)**. I mean, everything ELSE He said was positive right? So just how much trouble could the church have possibly been in? Jesus tells them to REMEMBER, REPENT, and RETURN (**vs. 5**). Remember where they came from back when their faith was brand new. The church of Ephesus had once been KNOWN for its love and devotion to Christ and to one another (**Ephesians 1:15; 3:17-19; 6:23**). In fact, Paul himself had prayed that they would NEVER forget just how great was the LOVE of Christ. Listen to the words of his prayer found in **Ephesians 3**:

**I pray that out of His glorious riches, He may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in LOVE, may have power, together with all the LORD'S holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the LOVE of Christ."** **Ephesians 3:16-18**

You see, it does not matter how hard a church works, if it forgets that loving Christ and one another is the REASON we work! Paul says that we can do every amazing act of service that we can possibly think to do, but without LOVE, its just noise (**1 Corinthians 13:1-3**). So just how serious was Jesus about the Church of Ephesus making a change? He told them to get it fixed, or he would remove their lampstand from its place. In other words, Jesus said, "Remember, Repent, and Return or I will close down your church!" That sounds pretty serious to me. Jesus taught us that the greatest commandment was to love The LORD your God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. And the second greatest was to love your neighbor as yourself (**Luke 10:27**). These are the most important of all commandments. In fact, most of the entire Law of Moses can be summed up in these two commands. Jesus gave His life so that we could LOVE Him like that. Without that love, the church just becomes a powerless and dead religion just like all the rest. Christianity is predicated upon being in LOVE with Jesus Christ and loving others as a result. The LORD didn't care about what the church of Ephesus KNEW or even DID, nearly as much as He cared about how they LOVED. He told them to REMEMBER how they started, REPENT of what they had become, and RETURN to what they used to be (do the things you did at first - **vs.4**).

If Jesus were to walk into Freedom Greenville today (and trust me, He did), and if He were to take those piercing eyes of His and look into your very soul this morning, would He find love there? An undying unquenchable love for Him, as well as His people? He told us that the world would recognize us as His disciples, if we had love for one another (**John 13:35**). How is your love this morning? Have you grown cold in your love for Him? Are you just going through the motions? Do you remember how it was when you first surrendered your life to Him and the unspeakable joy that caused you to worship and adore Him? Have you never felt that way before? To belong to Christ is to be in love with Christ and to long to stay connected to Him. Doing "religious stuff" is not the same as being connected to The TRUE VINE. Jesus longs for this church to blossom. He longs to bring us from death to life, so that we can bear fruit just like Aaron's old walking stick. He wants us to LOVE Him, because He first loved us. Listen to the words of someone who truly loved Him this morning, The Apostle Peter:

**Though you do not see Him, you LOVE Him; and even though you do not see Him now, you believe in Him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls. 1 Peter 1:9**

Does that describe how you feel and is that why you are here today? It could be, if you will recommit yourself to fall in love with HIM all over again. Remember, Repent, and Return. I don't want to go through the motions. I don't want to go to church because I should. I want to LOVE Christ, and I want to LOVE His people. I want to be part of a lampstand that lights up the world for His glory. Who is with me?

And ALL of GOD'S people said... TRUTH!!!