

MESSAGE NOTES
Revelation Unveiled-- Part 3 of 26
“Ephesus – A Cautionary Word”
Revelation 2:1-7

Introduction: Ephesus was the New York City of the Province of Asia Minor, an area we know of today as the nation of Turkey, or as they pronounce it in that country – Turkiye. It the capital city of Asia Minor and during Biblical times it was one of the largest and most important cities in the Mediterranean region. Historians and archaeologists estimate the city’s population was between 200,000 and 250,000 people, making it the fourth largest city in the Roman Empire behind Rome, Alexandria, and Antioch.

More recent scholarship regards these estimates as unrealistic given the population density it would take for that many people to fit into a small land area because of the mountain ranges, coastline and quarries which surrounded the city. But that is up for debate.

Whatever the population, Ephesus was a vital hub for commerce due to it being a port city on the Aegean Sea, and on a major road which was a significant trade route in the ancient world. Today, modern-day Ephesus is named Selcuk and it is no longer a port city, but is a couple miles inland because over the centuries the harbor was slowly silted in by the river and now it is a fertile plain used for farming.

In the Apostles Paul and John’s day when Revelation was written, Ephesus had:

Two Agoras – An agora in ancient cities was an open space which served as a meeting ground for various activities of the people living in the city. It served as a marketplace, and a hub for social, political and commercial activities. In Ephesus, there was a Commerce Agora with a marketplace close to the harbor, and there was a State Agora on the acropolis (the highest point of the city). It was surrounded by government buildings, and was also where the Domitian Temple was located.

The Great Theatre – The Great Theatre, with an estimated 25,000 seating capacity, is believed to be the largest in the ancient world. This open-air theatre was used initially for drama, but during later Roman times gladiatorial combats were also held on its stage.

The theatre was the site of the silversmith riot described in the Book of Acts, chapter 19. Ephesus was an important center for Early Christianity from the AD 50s. From AD 52–54, the Apostle Paul lived for three years in Ephesus, working with the congregation and organizing missionary activity into the outer regions of the country. The city was also associated with the Apostle John who followed Timothy as a pastor of the church in Ephesus and was the Bishop of the Asia Minor churches. John is said to have died of natural causes at Ephesus sometime after AD 98, during the reign of Trajan, thus becoming the only apostle who did not die as a martyr. His tomb is located in the former Basilica of St. John at Selçuk, a small town in the vicinity of Ephesus. Ephesus was one of the seven cities addressed in the Book of Revelation, indicating that the church at Ephesus was strong. It needed to be strong as Ephesus was the Neokoros (the Vatican or Worship Center) of Domitian worship, and it was also the Neokoros of Artemis Worship.

Temple of Artemis – The Temple of Artemis was one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. Pliny tells us that the magnificent structure took 120 years to build. When people came to Ephesus by land or by sea, the first thing they could see from a distance was the temple devoted to the worship of Artemis, a false goddess known to the Romans as Diana. Some Bible texts say Diana because the text is translated from the Latin tradition, but it is the same goddess and the Ephesians would have called her Artemis.

NOTE: See Handout on Artemis for more information about Artemis worship and Revelation 2.

This is the culture to which Jesus tells John in his vision what to write to the church at Ephesus. Jesus gives the 7 churches a State of the Church Report from God and tells each of the churches where they are doing well, and then where the warning lights are on.

As we study each of these reports over the next 7 weeks, we are going to draw some implications from them for our personal life and our church family. As we do this, I invite us to examine the state of our church and also the state of our own life.

In the 1st chapter of Revelation, we saw how John uses the events and symbols of the Roman Empire and relates them to Jesus as a deliberate parody to say Jesus, NOT the emperor is God, and Jesus is *The Almighty One* who has all power over the world and life.

He does the same here in chapters 2-3. When an emperor entered a region or sat in judgment, an imperial herald would announce the ruler's grand arrival and make formal imperial pronouncements. John explicitly uses this cultural imagery to exalt Jesus, not the emperor as the true King.

Roman decrees followed a very specific outline:

- **The Greeting & Identification:** Declaring the emperor's divine titles and authority.
- **The Commendation:** Acknowledging the city's positive deeds, loyalty, or economic contributions.
- **The Warning or Rebuff:** Confronting the city with what the emperor "had against them" (e.g., lack of order, civil failure).
- **The Reward and/or Threat:** Promising privileges for compliance or swift punishment for rebellion.

Jesus' format in the letters to the 7 churches is a direct appropriation of this exact Roman imperial address. It is meant to say that Jesus is the ultimate Emperor making a circuit through His cities, assessing their true spiritual loyalty.

REVELATION 2:1-7: After John's greeting and identifying that the letter is from Jesus, the letter continues with:

The Commendations: Revelation 2:1-3, 6

1. I know your deeds.
2. I know your hard work.
3. I know your perseverance.
4. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked (evil) people.
5. You have tested those who call themselves apostles but are not and have found them to be false.
6. You have persevered and endured hardships for my name and have not grown weary.
7. You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

Christians in Ephesus faced pressure to burn incense to false Gods whose statues were at the entrance to the City Market where they bought and sold what they needed to in order to survive financially and take care of their family. If they took their faith seriously, they said I cannot take my goods in there to sell because I don't acknowledge the emperor is God, and I don't acknowledge Artemis is God. But some Christians would cross their fingers behind their back and say, the Emperor thought he was God, but he wasn't; and Artemis is just a piece of stone that fell out of the sky.

These gods aren't real anyway so I will put some incense on the altar and who's going to know the difference? The Christians who did that in John's day were called Nicolaitans, Nicolaitans felt they could be a Christian and do what the culture did. The church in Ephesus is heartedly commended for taking a stand against that deception.

The Warning or Rebuff: Revelation 2:4

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

NLT: ⁴ *"But I have this complaint against you. You don't love me or each other as you did at first!"*

God is saying, Over the years you have abandoned that enthusiastic and authentic love for Christ and for others that used to characterize your life. A subtle and very serious erosion has occurred in your spiritual life as you have allowed the distractions and allurements of a busy culture to get in the way.

The Reward and/or Threat (The Course Correction): Revelation 2:5 & 7

- Remember from where you have fallen
- Repent
- Explanation of the Tree of Life and the Paradise of God

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

Revelation 2:7

NOTE: See Handout on Artemis for more information about Artemis worship and Revelation 2:7.

As we consider what Jesus is saying to us in his message to the church at Ephesus, and if we are going to live with Jesus as our first love, let's consider the format and meaning of Baptism in the early centuries as it was practiced in Ephesus.

NOTE: See Handout on Baptism...

Taking It Home

We encourage you to take a few minutes today and this week to process this morning's message. These questions are designed for discussion with your family, a friend, mentor, spouse, and small group. They are also useful for self-reflection.

1. What stands out to you in these passages from the Bible? From the message?
2. What is difficult for you to understand or accept in these passages from the Bible? From the message?
3. What is God saying in these passages and through what we heard in the message about Himself? About people? About you?
4. What examples are there to follow, commands to obey, or promises to stand on from these passages in the Bible, and from what we heard in the message?

MESSAGE NOTES

Revelation Unveiled-- Part 3 of 26

Ephesus: Explanation of Artemis and Revelation 2:7

Ephesus is the *Neokoros* – in other words, the Vatican or Worship Center – of Domitian worship, but it was also the *Neokoros* of Artemis Worship.

The Temple of Artemis was one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World and Pliny tells us that the magnificent structure took 120 years to build. Today, all that is left is one inconspicuous column, revealed during an archaeological excavation by the British Museum in the 1870s. When people came to Ephesus by land or by sea, the first thing they could see from a distance was the temple devoted to the worship of Artemis. Ephesus was the world center of the worship of Artemis, a false goddess known to the Romans as Diana. Some Bible texts say Diana because the text is translated from the Latin tradition, but it is the same goddess, and the Ephesians would have called her Artemis.

Artemis was worshipped as the goddess of fertility and the one who promised safety in childbirth if women would worship at her temple. It was attractive to people in a world where there was such a high mortality rate for women during childbirth. Paul in 1 Timothy 2:15 is saying to the women in Ephesus, don't go to Artemis for safety in childbirth but trust Jesus for safety in childbirth.

Her temple in Ephesus built was on an open enclosure about 3 ½ to 4 acres in size which was called the "Temenos". That enclosure has another word that was used to describe it and it is the word "Paradise". Temenos means sacred enclosure but the Persian word for it is paradise. So, the enclosure was called the Paradise of Artemis.

In that day if you were in that enclosure, it did not matter what crime you had committed, you were safe from the consequences of it. Your life was protected by Artemis and by international law. At one point, the Romans extended the Paradise to more than 2 square miles and the city experienced problems as a result.

The Roman philosophers said it turned Ephesus into the most ungodly and disgusting city because every criminal from petty thieves to murderers were in Ephesus as a result of so much of the city being the Temenos (Paradise) of Artemis.

Finally, Caesar Augustus made the area smaller because of all the problems. But even though the size of the sacred enclosure was decreased, if you were inside that paradise, you would be safe from the consequences of your crime.

Artemis is the goddess of fertility and that is why when they made a statue depicting her, she has many breasts. That was to symbolize that she is capable of nursing all of her adherents. Also, on the statue there are what some think are

many testicles and while I am not meaning to offend anybody by this, the reality is that the statue represented her being the supposed fertility goddess with reproductive power.

There were a lot of immoral practices that went on with the worship of this false goddess, and we will see more about that when we study the message from Jesus to the church at Sardis.

The temple of Artemis was also the place where some scholars think the concept of bank interest was developed. The priestesses of the temple said bring your money here as no one would dare rob this temple because Artemis would come after you and you would not have a next generation because there would be no fertility in your family. So, many people put their money in the temple, and the priestesses would loan it out to businesspeople and make interest. Then when you came to get your money back you would also get some interest which was considered a gift from Artemis. This led to the temple of Artemis becoming a huge banking center along with all of the immorality that went on there.

The birthday of Artemis was celebrated in May, and there was the great festival that began at the end of April. Some scholars think that as many as 1 million people came to Ephesus for that festival and parade, which we will talk about more when we read about Sardis.

Originally the worship of Artemis started as an outdoor cult, and it has a sacred tree that is part of the folklore of the religion. The story is that Artemis had a grandson named Addis, who wanted to be her lover, but she wouldn't accept him as that. He was so upset that he emasculated himself and the blood that fell sprang up in the form of a tree. So, Artemis was oftentimes worshiped with the symbol of a sacred tree that became sacred because of the blood.

ALSO, the worship of Artemis was originally practiced outdoors in the area called "Paradise", and people worshipped next to this tree that was called "The Tree of Life". People would come to the tree and speculation is that the tree ultimately stood outside the temple that was later built, or that the temple was built around it. Either way, the tree is called the tree of life which of course is a biblical concept in the Garden of Eden.

Explanation of the Tree of Life and the Paradise of God

"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God."
Revelation 2:7

To understand what John is saying, we need to know is that the Hebrew word for tree is "etz", and in the Bible the Hebrew word for life is "chaim". So, the tree of life is "etz chaim". (Perhaps you have heard the Hebrew expression, "To Life" which is "L'Chaim!"; pronounced leh-chai-yeem). But this tree of life ("etz chaim") is in the Garden of Eden where Adam and Eve are also living.

Of course, there is a sacred enclosure around it called the garden or "paradise", which is very intriguing as obviously the tree of life and Paradise in the Garden of Eden were created long before Artemis worship was developed because Artemis wasn't there at the beginning. So, the people who developed Artemis worship were copying the Garden of Eden image.

When the Old Testament was translated into Greek in 250 B.C., the translators had to decide what word to use for the word tree – "etz" – because in the Greek there are 2 words for tree. The common Greek word is "dendron". So, whenever the Old Testament uses the word "etz" such as in regard to a palm tree, fig tree, olive tree, the tree that Absalom gets his hair caught up in etc., the Greek word they used was "dendron".

However there a few places in the Old Testament where the Bible says that anyone who hangs on a tree is cursed. For some reason the translators translating the Hebrew Bible into Greek in 250 BC decided not to use the word "dendron" when the Bible said, cursed is anyone who hangs on the tree. Instead, they used the less common and somewhat odd Greek word for tree or wood – "xylon".

If you are following this, it means that in the New Testament, whenever the word tree is used, it is the Greek word "dendron". For example, when Zacchaeus climbs up the sycamore tree, the word for tree is "dendron". Every tree in the New Testament is called a "dendron", except for the 6 times when it says that Jesus was nailed to a cross. At those times, the writers of the New Testament books use the Greek word "xylon" – the word used to describe the cursed tree of the Old Testament.

When we get to the book of Revelation, never once does the Apostle John simply use the word for cross but rather five times, he mentions the "Tree of Life". We would expect that being a Jew, John would have used the Greek word

“dendron” to talk about “etz chaim”. But he does not. Instead, he uses the Greek word “xylon” – meaning that “The Tree of Life” in the book of Revelation is the tree to which Jesus was nailed. In other words, “The Tree of Life” is the cross where the blood of Jesus was spilled for you and me

Do you see what John is doing? John is using a wordplay because the people in Ephesus said the tree of life grows in the paradise of Artemis as a result of the blood of Addis when Artemis would not accept him as her lover. And John says, NO!! If you will repent and come back again to your First Love relationship with God and neighbor and each other, Jesus will give you the right to come and eat (in other words receive life) from the cross of life that grows in the paradise of – NOT Artemis – BUT God!

Furthermore, when John says in Revelation 2:7 that this “Tree of Life” grows in the “Paradise of God”, he is saying that it is through the life we receive in what Jesus did by shedding his blood in death on the cross for us, that we are saved from the consequences of our sin. Our eternal life is protected from judgement as one day we will live in the Paradise of God.

NOTE: This information was primarily compiled from resources by Ray Vander Laan. Other internet resources were also used.

MESSAGE NOTES
Revelation Unveiled-- Part 3 of 26
Ephesus: Explanation of Baptismal Practice

Baptism in the early church was significant when you consider the darkness that was so pervasive in that part of the world.

When a person said, I want to follow Jesus Christ, they would get baptized as that is the Great Commission, and that is what the church is supposed to do and what we are about as followers of Jesus. When a young believer in the early centuries of the church or a young convert or a Pagan convert says they are so attracted to the beauty of Jesus and who he is, and what he offers as the Kingdom of Heaven is breaking through the darkness of their life, and what was hopeless and dark is now bright and beautiful, then to be baptized is something very, very, significant. I don't think today we realize the significance that this was in the ancient world. When they said, I want to be converted and repent, and be baptized, it required a total life change. It sometimes meant the ostracization from your family, and a loss of your job and your world and everything familiar to you. So, people who want to be baptized went through a two month to one year process of learning about the faith.

If a person was Jewish and became a follower of Jesus, they already knew the text. They knew it well. They live by the text and they walk according to God's word, but they don't understand Jesus and how he fulfills everything in the Old Testament scriptures. Remember how on the road to Emmaus, Jesus came and explained himself according to the scriptures. Well, Jewish people have a relearning process too.

Also, if a person had been worshipping Pagan gods and goddesses, they did not have a background in the scriptures. So, while the Jewish people are already living a holy lifestyle where they are moral and aren't sleeping around and their lifestyle is not like the Pagan culture, the pagan's lifestyle is totally different from Jesus' way and they don't understand why you can't worship many gods and act immorally. They have a lot to learn and during those two months to a year these people are fully catechized into the doctrines of Jesus, and what salvation means, and what it means to walk worthily and live holy lives. Then for two months to a year, the Christians watched these people's lives until and they deem are they ready. Are they actually ready to take this step of being baptized? Because what it would mean to join this small little group of people who have decided to follow Jesus, is suffering and possibly death. So, are you ready?

This isn't just something a person did flippantly. It means they are willing to undergo the suffering Jesus went through. So baptistries are a sacred place for the church. These people have to guard the sanctity of what it means to be a follower of Jesus and what it means to live out and walk the walk of following Jesus. So, for two months to a year new followers of Jesus are trained, and people watch their lives to make sure they are ready. And it's not like a performance thing, but it's, are you actually ready to give up what you need to give up to follow Jesus in that culture?

To be baptized means my life for me is over. My life is now in Jesus. What I knew and what was important to me is now over, and what I have and am is all in Jesus. And that's what these people in the early church are saying. So, when a

candidate for baptism is ready, they have an amazing ceremony. The liturgy speaks to the weightiness and the significance of the decision that was made in the environment and culture in which they are living. They are going to have to count the cost.

When they are ready for the baptism process the candidate would start by facing West where the sun sets and the darkness begins to rise as they are reflecting their life in darkness of sin. They then turn to the East symbolizing the light and the life and the presence of Christ. And as they turned, they would say the Apostle's Creed. The origins of that creed go back to the first century church. By proclaiming the creed, they are putting a stake in the ground and saying exactly what they believe. So, they turn to the East and say the Apostle's Creed, and then they enter the water naked. By entering the water in that way, they are saying, I'm coming to you, God, with nothing in my hands. They are symbolizing a "death" to the old self and a restoration to humanity's original, sinless condition – comparing the newly baptized individual to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden before the Fall. Also, because the early church emphasized strict modesty, the practice required strict separation of the sexes. Women and men were baptized at different times or in separate areas, and sometimes women were baptized in total darkness by deaconesses.

Baptistry from the early centuries in Ephesus:



The follower of Jesus goes into the water naked and they are immersed 3 times in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. As they walked down into the water they are living in the name of the world but now in their baptism, they are living in the name of Jesus. Nothing in their physical appearance changes, but something changes very much in their identity. For example, I'm not so much David John McCowan anymore as my old life is gone. My life is over. I am dead to myself and alive in Christ as the Apostle Paul writes in Romans 6:1-14. Now I am baptized into the name of Jesus, and I belong to the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. So, what happens deep inside in this experience of baptism is that you still have all the layers of your career and family and your dreams and your hopes and your passions and your anxieties, but they now are given to Jesus when you are baptized. That becomes your identity.

So, people baptized started by facing the West – facing the darkness that is on the rise. Then they would face to the East and proclaim their beliefs by proclaiming the Apostle's Creed. They are immersed three times and walk up from the baptistry. They are wrapped in a white robe signifying the purity and holiness of living in Christ, and then they are given milk and honey because they have entered into the promised land. After the milk and honey they were given their first Eucharist and that is the first time they take the communion meal of the bread and the wine.

I don't know about you, but to me that's so profound! As early believers were catechized into fully understanding what they were doing, and as they got ready to take that step knowing that it might literally cost them everything, they are now saying my life is yours. All I am and all I have is yours, Jesus.



One more very cool thing about the baptistry space in Ephesus is that it is in an 8-sided room with 8 curved pillars. The number 8 is symbolic as numbers have meaning in the Hebrew and ancient world setting. For example, 3 is the number for God (the Trinity). 4 is the number for physical creation or 4 corners of the earth. 6 is the number for man who was created on the 6th day. 7 (3+4) is the number for fullness, totality, perfection such as the 7 days of creation. 8 is the number for new life and creation as mankind began living in the new creation on the 8th day. 10 (3+7) is the number for completeness, and 12 is the number for fullness and completeness with humanity in mind (12 Tribes of Israel and 12 Disciples). 40 is the number for waiting, testing, a trial period,

“Bad” numbers are attached to the demonic realm, or unbelievers, or suffering endured by believers. Fractions represent something partial, imperfect and unaccomplished. Numbers like $3\frac{1}{2}$ is a “bad” number as it represents half of perfection, and 42 represents suffering.

In regard to the baptismal room having 8 curved pillars, the number 8 has meaning as in 7 days God created the world and on the 8th day it's the first day of the new creation. Babies are circumcised on the 8th day. Eight people passed through the flood. On the 8th day Jesus rose from the dead. On the third day yes, BUT the seventh day was Saturday and then on Sunday he rises from the dead. So, on the eighth day, Jesus rises. Then eight days after that, Jesus appears to his apostles. 8 is the number of new beginnings and new creation and recreation where you are stepping into the old and it now becomes new. So, when they built these buildings for baptistries it was another symbol of what you were stepping into as you entered into the world as a new creation.

Martyriums in that world are also 8 sided as Jesus followers who die have stepped into the absolute new creation of living in the presence of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. So, 8 is a truly significant number. Think about it – Man's number is 6. What's the ultimate number of the ultimate evil man? – 666. In Greek and Hebrew, each letter of each word has been assigned a number. If you add up the numbers assigned to letters, it is symbolic. For example, 666 is the number of the ultimate man without God. Jesus' name in Greek comes up to 888. When we step into a relationship with Jesus, we step into what is brand new that God is recreating. No longer are we under the name of Adam, but we live in the name of Jesus

What my challenge to us is that when you and I remember our baptism at church by dipping our hand in the water and making the sign of the cross on our forehead, or when we are in water, let that become a special moment as we think about how the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are in our life and that Jesus is our foundation and anchor and we have a new identity promised to you and to me.