

NOTES FOR EPHESUS EPISODE

In this episode we will be digging into the message to the Ephesian church in Revelation 2. There will be pictures and videos on location in the ruins of Ephesus combined with narration from here to fill in some historical information and read the scriptures.

Perhaps the ruins of the city are sort of an allegory or lesson for our times. The word of God endures after the buildings fall down and the believers are dead in Christ. Thousand of tourists come on the cruise ships or fly into nearby Izmir because the truth of the Word is still speaking.

At its peak, Ephesus was among the greatest of the 1st Century Christian communities. It had the greatest response to one of the longest teaching stints of the Apostle Paul. He was there 2 years and 3 months and the response was so great that all Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks Map

It was putting many of the “curious arts” out of business, witchcraft, enchantments, exorcism.

It was threatening the livelihood of those making the shrines for Diana (or Artemis) of the Ephesians.

This was really something because Ephesus was one of the 4 or 5 largest and most important cities in the Roman Empire. There was a population of 250-300k.

The Temple of Artemis was one of the 7 wonders of the ancient world.

This was not the Artemis I pictured from Greek Mythology, who was the maiden goddess of the hunt.

All that remains of the temple is one column and part of the floor. It was totally destroyed by either arson or the invasion of the Goths around 300 AD.

The Ephesian version of Artemis was a goddess of childbirth and fertility. The worship included sexual rites and temple prostitutes.

Many breasts and the “bee symbol” is incorporated as another representation of fertility.

The point is, that the city is about 300,000 people dedicated to the worship at this temple. The Christian community grew to be so influential that it became a threat to this and everybody knew who Paul. Of course he preached Christ but he became the person they identified with the gospel message. Slides on Demetrius and Exorcists
Even though all of this lies in ruins, the power of the Word of God lives and grows.

Paul is believed to have been executed at the order of Emperor Nero around 65 AD. I believe the evidence that John wrote Revelation about 95 AD. That would mean that very few of the Ephesian believers John wrote to, ever met or knew Paul first hand. A lot can happen in 30 years and here are some scriptures that tell us that it was not all good. The wrestling against principalities, powers and wicked spirits from on high had continued and probably intensified over that 30 years.

Acts 20:29 2 Tim 1:15

We can only guess how many Christians were in the community in Ephesus around 95 AD, but it could have been a few thousand.

Read and show slides of Rev 2:1-7

Angel = messenger. Probably the overseer or bishop of the church.

Christ holds these messengers in his right hand and he WALKS among the churches.

2:2 In each message to the 7 churches Christ says, “I know...” Here he knows their works, their holy living, their doctrinal fidelity. They know what not to like.

2:3 They had that God-given endurance. Why all this talk about works and not about grace? Grace has already been established in the entire NT.

Eph 2:8-10. We are created UNTO GOOD WORKS

That’s what Jesus Christ is focusing on here.

2:4 What does this mean? I ask myself because I don’t want it to happen to me. It was in the epistle to the Ephesians that we are told the breadth and length and depth and height of Christ’s love is fully in us. You can picture that as a church they had their standards of right behavior and the knowledge of what NOT to like, but love was not alive.

2:5 Fallen like the walls of Jericho, like the carcasses in the wilderness, but love never falls. As with each of the messages to the 7 churches, with the rebuke, the Lord Jesus invites repentance. Not a small problem—they need to REPENT He sees, He knows and He cares. Remember the 7 lamp stands are the 7 churches? The consequence of not repenting is their church will cease to be before the Lord Jesus. He will cease to WALK among them. We wonder are there churches today that are removed lamp stands where He is not walking in the midst.

It’s not that they need to be a little more loving, they need to REPENT from having fallen.

This is a big problem.

2:6 Slide on Irenaeus

“The Nicolaitanes are the followers of that Nicolas who was one of the seven first ordained to the diaconate by the apostles. They lead lives of unrestrained indulgence. The character of these men is very plainly pointed out in the Apocalypse of John, [when they are represented] as teaching that it is a matter of indifference to practise adultery, and to eat things sacrificed to idols.”

2:7 Tree of life obviously goes back to the garden. People lost that right—Jesus regained it. Victorious. KJV says “to him that overcometh”. Someone might say, “what about Christians who are not victorious—not overcomers? Since this is repeated to each of the 7 churches, we’ll come back to it in future episodes and look at it from different angles. I know people who say it’s all about grace and this can’t be to the church because it is works.

They do not want to hear this... may God have mercy.

The victory is to hold onto your faith... to never deny Christ. If you are among the redeemed you are bought with a price. He owns you. Does grace give you the right to deny him? Why would you want to consider it? This is not a threat, it is one of the Lord's many encouragement for us to Finish Faithful.

To summarize what the Lord Jesus is saying to the church at Ephesus and to us

- It is good to live a holy lifestyle in the midst of the ungodly world influences
- He commends their knowledge and discernment to reject false teaching
- He praises their faithful endurance amid all the opposition, pressure and even persecution in the spiritual battle.
- He rebukes the church's loss of the love they had at first.
- He invites them to repent
- He promises great reward to the overcomers who Finish Faithful.