

STUDY GUIDE 15

Revelation 2:1-11

Study warm-up: Describe the most helpful performance review or teacher input you have received.

OBSERVATION – Lord, help me to discover it!

This week we look at the first two letters to the churches of Revelation, written to Ephesus and Smyrna. The groundwork we establish this week will help us better understand all seven messages.

Before we consider the letters themselves, let's refresh our understanding of the region in the second half of the first century AD.



Figure 15-1

Ephesus was one of the largest cities in the Roman Empire and an important harbor, serving as a gateway to Asia. The Temple of Artemis (for the Greeks, Diana for the Romans) mentioned in Acts 19 was one of the seven Wonders of the Ancient World. It had over 120 columns and covered an area 425 feet by 220 feet. In Greek mythology Artemis was worshipped as goddess of the hunt, wildlife and nature. Artemis was held in such lofty regard that there was a month-long festival honoring her every spring. The Temple of Artemis was destroyed in the third century AD. A British expedition discovered the site in 1874. An excavation in 1904-05 of the site by English archaeologist David George Hogarth uncovered a few column fragments and sculptures. Today a single column assembled from fragments marks the location of the temple. A decorative column base from the temple is displayed in the British Museum.



Temple of Artemis location, Ephesus

Photo: Wikimedia Commons

Figure 15-2



Temple of Artemis Column Drum

British Museum, London

Photo: Wikimedia Commons

Figure 15-3

The theatre (Acts 19:29) had a capacity of about 25,000.



Ephesus Theater
Photo: Tim and Jan Cowles
Figure 15-4



Barb & Leroy Custer at Ephesus Theater
Photo: Tim and Jan Cowles
Figure 15-5

After Paul's years in Ephesus, he returned via Macedonia to Greece. On his return journey to Jerusalem he met once more with the elders from Ephesus.

3. Read about Paul's meeting with the elders in Acts 20:16-38.
- a. What did Paul emphasize that he had taught the Ephesians?

b. What did Paul warn them about?

4. Around six years later Paul wrote to the Ephesian church from a Roman prison. From Ephesians 1, list what believers have because they are *in Christ*.

Read Revelation 2:1-7.

5. At the end of this Study Guide there is a place to summarize the message to the church in Ephesus. Record the following on those pages. (Note that some messages may not have every element.)
- a. The description of Jesus
 - b. The church's commendation
 - c. The church's admonishment
 - d. Instructions/
 - e. warnings to the church
 - f. Consequences if the instructions are not followed
 - g. Promises
 - h. to the overcomer

Read Revelation 2:8-11.

6. At the end of this Study Guide there is a place to summarize the message to the church in Smyrna. Record the following on those pages. (Note that some messages may not have every element.)
- a. The description of Jesus
 - b. The church's commendation
 - c. The church's admonishment

- d. Instructions/warnings to the church
- e. Consequences if the instructions are not followed
- f. Promises to the overcomer

Smyrna was located about 40 miles north of Ephesus. Its name means *myrrh*, a resin available from a regional tree. Myrrh was produced from the resin. The resin was accessed by wounding the tree. You may recall that myrrh was one of the gifts the magi brought to Jesus after he was born. Myrrh was also an ingredient in anointing oil used for Jewish priests. Myrrh was also used in Jewish burial processes. John 19 records that Nicodemus brought myrrh and aloe to the Jesus' tomb and he and Joseph of Arimathea wrapped Jesus' body with linen and spices, according to Jewish custom.

Smyrna was mentioned to be a beautiful city in many ancient texts. The modern city of Izmir was built around the ruins of Smyrna.

The Apostle John disciplined Polycarp, who served as a regional bishop in Smyrna in the second century. Polycarp was martyred at the age of 86 for refusing to burn a pinch of incense and state, "Caesar is lord." (Jews were exempt from the requirement because the Roman Empire recognized Judaism as a legal religion with formal protections. By the time of Emperor Domitian's reign, Christianity was no longer viewed as a sect of Judaism.)



Smyrna ruins

Photo: Tim and Jan Cowles

Figure 15-6

INTERPRETATION – Lord, help me to understand it.

7. Describe the Ephesus church situation very briefly:

The church at Ephesus was strong in _____, but weak in _____.

8. The Bible supplies us significant information about the church at Ephesus. How do the description of Jesus, the church's earlier condition [from which they have fallen,] and the potential consequences relate to one another?

9. What one or two words describe the church at Smyrna?
10. How does Jesus' description in the church at Smyrna's message offer encouragement to that body?

APPLICATION – Lord, help me to live it!

11. With respect to following Christ, who (or what) is your first love and how do you plan to stay with your first love? (Be as specific as possible!)

12. What personal application about enduring persecution do you identify from the message to the church at Smyrna?

13. Review your summary sheets on the churches at Ephesus and Smyrna. Add any information that you wish.

FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION OR CONTEMPLATION:

- I) While the meaning of the name *Ephesus* is not known, there are two Greek words, *arestos* (desirable) and *epitrepo* (permitted,) that could be the name's origin. Do either of these words seem an appropriate descriptor of Ephesus?
- II) The Nicolaitans are mentioned in the message to the church at Ephesus. We learned a little about the Nicolaitans in Study Guide 1. Reviewing what we learned, what was there to hate about their deeds?
- III) What is meant by the *second death* in Revelation 2:11? Revelation 20:11-15 may help.

 *Cole Women's Bible Study Writing Team, 2024*

Additional Scripture for Study Guide 15

□ Acts 18:18-19:41

¹⁸ Now Paul, when he had remained many days longer, took leave of the brothers *and sisters* and sailed away to Syria, and Priscilla and Aquila were with him. Paul *first* had his hair cut at Cenchrea, for he was keeping a vow. ¹⁹ They came to Ephesus, and he left them there. Now he himself entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. ²⁰ When they asked him to stay for a longer time, he did not consent, ²¹ but took leave of them and said, "I will return to you again if God wills," and he set sail from Ephesus.

²² When he had landed in Caesarea, he went up *to Jerusalem* and greeted the church, and went down to Antioch.

²³ And after spending some time *there*, he left and passed successively through the Galatian region and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples.

²⁴ Now a Jew named Apollos, an Alexandrian by birth, an eloquent man, came to Ephesus; and he was proficient in the Scriptures. ²⁵ This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he was accurately speaking and teaching things about Jesus, being acquainted only with the baptism of John; ²⁶ and he began speaking boldly in the synagogue. But when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained

the way of God more accurately to him. ²⁷ And when he wanted to go across to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him; and when he had arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace, ²⁸ for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, demonstrating by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ.

19 Now it happened that while Apollos was in Corinth, Paul passed through the upper country and came to Ephesus, and found some disciples. ² He said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" And they *said* to him, "On the contrary, we have not even heard if there is a Holy Spirit." ³ And he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" And they said, "Into John's baptism." ⁴ Paul said, "John baptized with a baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus." ⁵ When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ⁶ And when Paul had laid hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them and they *began* speaking with tongues and prophesying. ⁷ There were about twelve men in all.

⁸ And he entered the synagogue and continued speaking out boldly for three months, having discussions and persuading *them* about the kingdom of God. ⁹ But when some were becoming hardened and disobedient, speaking evil of the Way before the people, he withdrew from them and took the disciples away *with*

him, and had discussions daily in the school of Tyrannus. ¹⁰ This took place for two years, so that all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.

¹¹ God was performing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, ¹² so that handkerchiefs or aprons were even carried from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out. ¹³ But also some of the Jewish exorcists, who went from place to place, attempted to use the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had the evil spirits, saying, "I order you in the name of Jesus whom Paul preaches!" ¹⁴ Now there were seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, doing this. ¹⁵ But the evil spirit responded and said to them, "I recognize Jesus, and I know of Paul, but who are you?" ¹⁶ And the man in whom was the evil spirit, pounced on them and subdued all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. ¹⁷ This became known to all who lived in Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks; and fear fell upon them all and the name of the Lord Jesus was being magnified. ¹⁸ Also many of those who had believed kept coming, confessing and disclosing their practices. ¹⁹ And many of those who practiced magic brought their books together and *began* burning *them* in the sight of everyone; and they added up the prices of the books and found *it to be* fifty thousand *pieces* of silver. ²⁰ So the word of the Lord was growing and prevailing mightily.

²¹ Now after these things were finished, Paul resolved in the Spirit to go to Jerusalem after he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, saying, "After I have been there, I must also see Rome." ²² And after he sent into Macedonia two of those who assisted him, Timothy and Erastus, he himself stayed in Asia for a while.

²³ About that time a major disturbance occurred in regard to the Way. ²⁴ For a man named Demetrius, a silversmith who made silver shrines of Artemis, was bringing considerable business to the craftsmen; ²⁵ he gathered these men together with the workmen of similar *trades*, and said, "Men, you know that our prosperity depends upon this business. ²⁶ You see and hear that not only in Ephesus, but in almost all of Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away a considerable number of people, saying that gods made by hands are not gods *at all*. ²⁷ Not only is there danger that this trade of ours will fall into disrepute, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be regarded as worthless, and that she whom all of Asia and the world worship will even be dethroned from her magnificence."

²⁸ When they heard *this* and were filled with rage, they *began* shouting, saying, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" ²⁹ The city was filled with the confusion, and they rushed together into the theater, dragging along Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul's Macedonian

traveling companions. ³⁰ And when Paul wanted to go into the assembly, the disciples would not let him. ³¹ Also some of the Asiarchs who were friends of his sent *word* to him and *repeatedly* urged him not to venture into the theater. ³² So then, some were shouting one thing and some another, for the assembly was in confusion and the majority did not know for what reason they had come together. ³³ Some of the crowd concluded *it was* Alexander, since the Jews had put him forward; and having motioned with his hand, Alexander was intending to make a defense to the assembly. ³⁴ But when they recognized that he was a Jew, a single outcry arose from them all as they shouted for about two hours, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!”

³⁵ After quieting the crowd, the town clerk *said, “Men of Ephesus, what person is there after all who does not know that the city of the Ephesians is guardian of the temple of the great Artemis and of the *image* which fell down from the sky? ³⁶ So, since these are undeniable *facts*, you ought to keep calm and to do nothing rash. ³⁷ For you have brought these men *here who are* neither temple robbers nor blasphemers of our goddess. ³⁸ So then, if Demetrius and the craftsmen who are with him have a complaint against anyone, the courts are in session and proconsuls are *available*; have them bring charges against one another. ³⁹ But if you want anything beyond this, it shall be settled in the lawful assembly. ⁴⁰ For indeed, we are in danger of being accused of a riot in

connection with today's *events*, since there is no *real* reason *for it*, and in this connection we will be unable to account for this disorderly gathering.”⁴¹ After saying this he dismissed the assembly.

□ Ephesians 1

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God,

To the saints who are at Ephesus and *who are* faithful in Christ Jesus: ² Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

³ Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ, ⁴ just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love ⁵ He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, ⁶ to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. ⁷ In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace ⁸ which He lavished on us. In all wisdom and insight ⁹ He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him ¹⁰ with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, *that is*, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth. In

Him ¹¹ also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, ¹² to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory. ¹³ In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, ¹⁴ who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of *God's own* possession, to the praise of His glory.

¹⁵ For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which *exists* among you and your love for all the saints, ¹⁶ do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of *you* in my prayers; ¹⁷ that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. ¹⁸ *I pray that* the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹ and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. *These are* in accordance with the working of the strength of His might ²⁰ which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly *places*, ²¹ far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. ²² And He put

all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, ²³ which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

□ **Revelation 20:11-15**

¹¹ Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. ¹² And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is *the book* of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. ¹³ And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one *of them* according to their deeds. ¹⁴ Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. ¹⁵ And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.



Ephesus

pithy description

name meaning (if available)

Jesus' description (a)

Church's Commendation (b)

Church's Admonishment (c)

Instructions/Warnings (d)

Consequences (e)

Promise to Overcomers (f)

Personal Application

***The one who has an ear, let him hear
what the Spirit says to the churches.***

Smyrna

pithy description

name meaning (if available)

Jesus' description (a)

Church's Commendation (b)

Church's Admonishment (c)

Instructions/Warnings (d)

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