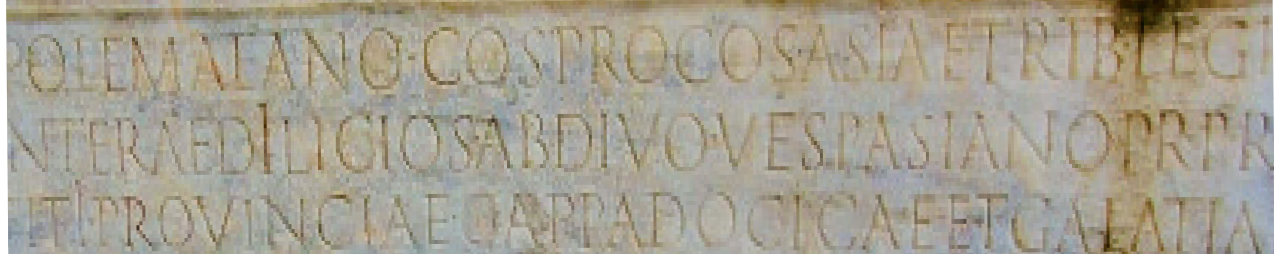




FOUNDATIONS

Lessons in Discipleship
from the New Testament Church



Study Guide



CENTER FOR
HOLY LANDS STUDIES

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Ephesus The Church That Lost Its Fire

Bible Text: Revelation 2:1-7

When life becomes hectic, stressful, tiring, or even mundane, do you long for a time of excitement or joy that you experienced in the past? Past experiences can be comfortable for us and can bring a certain level of pleasure. We express this in phrases like, “Remember the good old days,” “the glory years,” or “the golden age.”

Biblically, we find that there is a time and place for remembering miracles and events that the Lord has done so that we continue to give Him the glory and the praise,

“Do this in remembrance of me.” (Luke 22:19)

“This is a day [the day of Passover] to remember. Each year, from generation to generation, you must celebrate it as a special festival to the Lord. This is a law for all time.” (Exodus 12:14)

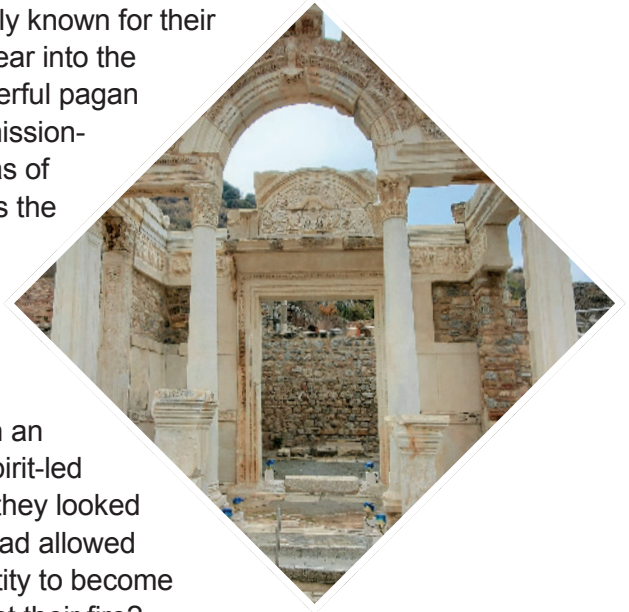
However, we must be careful when we recall past occurrences. When dwelling only on past actions and upholding them as if they are the peak of what can be experienced or accomplished, we can lose our passion and zeal. We must also focus on what God is still doing today and will do in the future.

We find that in Christ’s letter through the hand of John to the church of Ephesus in the closing days of the New Testament, such a reality had begun creeping into the mindset of the believers. There was seeping into the life of the believers a dangerous impression regarding the effectiveness of the church. They had lost their fire for their faith and the spread of the gospel.

WATCH THE CHURCH THAT LOST ITS FIRE VIDEO



After such a rich heritage, it would be no wonder why the Ephesian church might fall into a false belief that their “golden age” had come and gone. The apostle Paul was once their pastor. Neither Timothy nor any who followed has ever been as widely known for their influence. In those days, their power struck fear into the hearts of those who controlled the most powerful pagan temple complex in the ancient world. Their missionaries took the gospel all over the known areas of Asia and Europe to unreached areas such as the Lycus Valley and Achaëa. The fame of their actions and their identity had made them a dominant and desired church in the first century.



Yet, their failure to adapt and grow from such an experience and explosion of a passionate Spirit-led ministry diminished the Ephesian church as they looked back on who they were. What if the church had allowed their growth and passion for kindling an identity to become even more impactful. What if they had not lost their fire?

Instead, they became just like the Israelites of the Old Testament. After reminding the children of Israel of all that He had done for them in previous generations, parting the Red Sea and bringing them through the wilderness, God spoke through the prophet Isaiah and said to them, **“Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past.”** (Isaiah 43:18, New International Version)

For the people of Israel in the Old Testament, much of their identity was based on their forefathers’ relationship with God rather than their own. During the reign of kings like Jeroboam, Omri, Ahab, or Manasseh, the children of Israel failed to see their shortcomings. Their lives and actions did not reflect a people following God. They merely identified themselves as God’s chosen people based on the actions and beliefs of those who had gone before them. Because they did not continue to live out their faith and grow in love and devotion to God, they were eventually exiled from the land which God had given them.

Like the Israelites spoken in the Old Testament or the Early Church believers of Ephesus, we are not responsible for nor can we live off the glory of the actions of our forefathers. We are accountable for our own ministries, both physical and spiritual. Though it may impact us, their impact on the kingdom of God cannot be claimed by us unless we actively choose to continue in the work to which God has called us.

Although the world will look at the legacy of a church body in wonder and equate present spirituality with past spiritually, Galatians 6:4-5 says otherwise,

Pay careful attention to your own work, for then you will get the satisfaction of a job well done, and you won't need to compare yourself to anyone else. For we are each responsible for our own conduct.

In the specific instance of Isaiah 43:18, God's call to Israel was not to dwell on the magnificent events of their past. It was to protect them from making the mistake that they eventually chose to make.

Isaiah was soon to reveal how God's plan was far greater than the miracles that the children of Israel had already seen. Isaiah 53 proclaimed the coming of Christ and His sacrificial death for humanity that would save the world from its sin.

Likewise, for the church of Ephesus and for us as members of the New Testament church, we too have something far greater to look forward to! Christ has come and the Holy Spirit has been poured out,

I tell you the truth, anyone who believes in me will do the same works I have done, and even greater works because I am going to be with the Father." (John 14:12)



If we fail to remember these words, we run the risk of falling into a place of spiritual decline like the Ephesian church. When looking back on what was rather than what can be, we also miss out on the blessings of seeing the true potential that God has for our lives and those around us. The best is yet to come!

Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think. (Ephesians 3:20)

Although the Book of Revelation served as the final piece of Scripture regarding the famed church of Ephesus, their story and rich history did not end. In his message, Christ gave the church the remedy to fix what they had done. They were told to go back and be who they once were - a passionate people excited for what God was doing and what He was going to do.

The Book of Revelation primarily tells of Christ's return. At that point, and only that point, will our work of furthering His kingdom here on earth end.

We must always keep to the forefront of our spiritual vision that there is more to do, regardless of what has happened in the past. Like Paul, who saw God's wonders and miracles like individuals being raised from the grave (Acts 20:7-12), we must remind ourselves that there is still work to be done!

So let's not get tired of doing what is good. At just the right time we will reap a harvest of blessing if we don't give up. (Galatians 6:9)



DIG DEEPER



Wherever you go, there you are. Do you know that phrase? You alone are responsible for your beliefs and actions. Your decision to follow Christ is just that, your decision. Regardless of how great or how negative your heritage is, it cannot gain or reject your entrance into the kingdom of God. You are responsible for you.

As one who is responsible for your own faith, have you had moments when your faith has been stagnant, when it lost its fire? If so, when and how did you remedy the situation? How would you encourage others to stay strong in their faith?



DIG DEEPER

To whom are you accountable? Do you have people in your life who will tell you the truth? Do you have a person who will tell you things you may not want to hear, just as Christ said to the Ephesian church through John of Patmos? Who is this person for you? How have they helped you? Have you been this person for someone else?



DIG DEEPER

The church in Ephesus had lost its fire for God. They were slipping. Do you think Christ admonished them to punish them, or, to help them draw close to God for the sake of the church, and for the Kingdom?

At times, pride must go and acceptance of a godly word must enter into our lives. Be humble and aware enough that when from the Lord, or a person used by God, this word is, and will be, for your good and not for harm.

Do not grow tired of doing good. Do not grow weary in your joy for spreading the gospel. Do not give up. List ways that will help you maintain and increase your fire for the gospel and your relationship with God.

PERSONAL REFLECTION
