

# A Witness to the Past

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[ 0 : 00 ] This morning and this evening I wish to deal with texts from the book of Revelation. The theme of the morning sermon being the book of Revelation, a witness to the past.

And this evening, the book of Revelation, a window to the future. Many church people neglect the book of Revelation.

They think that the book is too obscure, too difficult, that they will not begin to understand its pages. A few people in the church seem to concentrate only on the book of Revelation and neglect the other 65 books of the Bible.

I think that both these extremes ought to be avoided. The book of Revelation, the climax of the New Testament, certainly have some difficult passages in it.

But it also, as the word of God, is intended to guide and instruct us in Christian life and to open to us the glories of heaven.

[ 1 : 19 ] So this morning I would like to look at some passages from chapters 1 and 2 that bear testimony to this book as a witness to the past.

The past of the church as it was developed. The past as the early apostles taught and proclaimed the Gospels at various parts around the Mediterranean Sea.

A testimony and a witness to the struggle that emerged when persecutions arose against the church. Now, the scripture lesson that was read a moment ago tells us that this book was written by John.

Tradition tells us that this is the Apostle John who, in the days of the ministry of our Lord, was the youngest of the twelve apostles.

Perhaps in his early twenties, when he was called by Christ. We don't know exactly. But he, it seems, outlived all the other apostles.

[ 2 : 41 ] And in the nineties of the first century, when perhaps he would be in his eighties, he was, according to tradition, in charge of churches and congregations in the city of Ephesus of Asia Minor.

Today, that part of the ancient world is part of the country of Turkey today. Now, Ephesus was a central city, metropolitan center, cosmopolitan, with many different kinds of people living there. It was very proud in the fact that it had the Temple of Diana in that city. That temple was a magnificent piece of architecture.

In fact, it was called one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. A marvelous structure, enormous in its scope.

It covered an area double the size of an American football field. There were 100 stone pillars, each 60 feet high.

[ 4 : 00 ] The pillars at the two ends, 18 of them, of each side, had very beautiful carvings in the stone.

The pillars in the middle of this sanctuary were covered with very thin pieces, hammered gold that reflected.

A magnificent structure. A magnificent structure. Of course, it is ruined now. Pieces of it are in the British Museum.

But we know from ancient coins what it looked like, because many ancient coins were minted, showing the gable end of this enormous structure.

It drew many, many tourists to this place to look at this magnificent building dedicated to the pagan goddess Diana of the Romans, or Artemis of the Greeks.

[ 5 : 04 ] Well, the Christian Church was established at Ephesus in the 60s, when the Apostle Paul, on his third missionary journey, proclaimed the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And a number of people began to be attracted to membership in the Christian congregation in the city of Ephesus.

And as greater and greater numbers of people were attracted, so we're told in chapter 19 of the book of Acts, As this happened, the sale of small souvenirs made of silver, replicas of this ancient temple, the sales fell off.

And Alexander the silversmith and members of his guild became worried about their lack of business. And they said it's the Christian's fault.

Preaching the gospel means that people no longer are attracted to worship in the temple of Diana. So, a persecution was arranged, and Paul was dragged before the judgment seat.

[ 6 : 33 ] Well, we can read about this. In the book of Acts, chapters 19 and 20, Paul had spent a little over three years preaching the gospel in Ephesus.

Now, before he finally left, he had to leave at that time, but later he came back once again, and he met with the elders of the church of Ephesus, and he tells them, to the elders of the Christian church, take heed unto yourselves and to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.

And know this, that after my departure shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them.

What Paul was saying to the church leaders in the 60s did come to pass unhappily in the 90s of the first century.

In the 90s of the first century, the words that I read to you from the scripture lesson are words that are a witness to the Christian church at Ephesus at that time, at the end of the first century.

[ 8 : 12 ] Now the second generation of Christian believers are worshiping in Ephesus. The background of the message in the book of Revelation to that church is as follows.

Previously there had been persecution in local areas, in a city, in a countryside. But now in the 90s, a more widespread persecution emerged in the following way.

The emperor... ..