

Through The Bible

Session #48 – Ephesians

February 16, 2005



Overview of the locations of Paul's ministry.

The diagram to the left shows the different locations Paul wrote letters to. Remember that some of these writings are in question as to whether Paul wrote them or one of Paul's protégé's wrote them.



The map above shows Paul's sphere of ministry. Note Ephesus. Ephesus was the largest and most important trading port in the Roman province of Asia, situated at the mouth of the Cayster River on the shore of the Aegean. By New Testament times, it was in a state of decline, due to the silting of its harbor, and its control of trade in the region had diminished. Paul lived there for over two years during his third missionary journey, making it central to the evangelization of the entire province. The famous temple of Artemis was built at a sacred site of an ancient Anatolian fertility goddess, about 1.5 miles (2.5 km) northeast of the city; the magnificent structure ranked as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. It was widely represented on Roman coins, and was reputed to be four times the size of the Roman Parthenon. The great theater in Ephesus, into which the rioting mob carried Paul's traveling companions, had a capacity of about 24,000. (See photographs below). It remains largely intact to this day, at the end of the impressive marble boulevard that led from Mt. Pion to the ancient harbor, now several miles inland.



This is the partially restored theatre in Ephesus.



This is another picture of the theatre in Ephesus, now Modern day Turkey. The view is from the Arcadian way.



At left, you can see an artist's rendering of the Temple of Artemis. Here is some of the history of this structure.

Although the foundation of the temple dates back to the seventh century BC, the structure that earned a spot in the list of Wonders was built around 550 BC. Referred to as the great marble temple, or temple D, it was sponsored by the Lydian king Croesus and was designed by the Greek architect Chersiphron. The Temple was decorated with bronze statues sculpted by the most skilled artists of their time: Pheidias, Polycleitus, Kresilas, and Phradmon. The temple served as both a marketplace and a religious institution. For years, the sanctuary was visited by merchants, tourists, artisans, and kings who paid homage to the goddess by sharing their profits with her. Recent archeological excavations at the site revealed gifts from pilgrims including statuettes of Artemis made of gold and ivory... earrings, bracelets, and necklaces... artifacts from as far as Persia and India. On the night of July 21, 356 BC, a man named Herostratus burned the temple to ground in an attempt to immortalize his name, which he did indeed. Oddly enough, Alexander the Great was born the same night. The historian Plutarch later wrote that the goddess was "too busy taking care of the birth of Alexander to send help to her threatened temple". And when Alexander the Great conquered Asia Minor, he offered to rebuild the destroyed temple, but the Temple was not restored until after his death in 323 BC. The temple was eventually restored and is labeled "Temple E" by archeologists. When St Paul visited Ephesus to preach Christianity in the first century AD, he was confronted by the Artemis' cult who had no plans to abandon their goddess. And when the temple was again destroyed by the Goths in AD 262, the Ephesians vowed to rebuild. By the fourth century AD, most Ephesians had converted to Christianity and the temple lost its religious glamour. The final chapter came when in AD 401 the Temple of Artemis was torn down by St John Chrysostom. Ephesus was later deserted, and only in the late nineteenth century has the site been excavated. The digging revealed the temple's foundation and the road to the now swampy site. Attempts were recently made to rebuild the temple, but only a few columns have been re-erected.¹

¹ See <http://ce.eng.usf.edu/pharos/wonders/artemis.html>.

No part of the New Testament has a more contemporary relevance than the letter to the Ephesians.² Why?

- Teachings on the role of Christ in creation. Christ rules the entire universe and through Christ, God has a plan to embrace all nations.
- The letter faces the reality of evil. The church and the world are plagued by evil powers which must be resisted and overcome. See 2:1ff; 4:17ff.
- Ephesians gives us clues that once Paul was dead, the ministry would continue. Christian truth is never static, but always applicable to new situations.

Ephesus overview

- Roman capital of Asia Minor. It ranked with Rome, Alexandria, and Syrian Antioch as one of the greatest cities in the Roman Empire.
- Center of commerce and religious pilgrimage. Population estimates in the Roman period begin at around 250,000. When ancient writers would write of distances to different places, the point of origin is often Ephesus.
- Paul did not establish a church in Ephesus. It probably was established by Priscilla and Aquilla (Acts 19:1, 7; 20:16).
- Paul was probably in Ephesus from AD 54-AD 57. He taught first in the synagogue and then in the lecture hall of Tyrannus (Acts 18:24-20:1; 20:16-21:1).
- Paul was opposed in Ephesus by exorcists and by Demetrius. His opposition was probably connected to the Temple of Artemis (see above photo and description of the Temple of Artemis).

What was happening in the Church at this time?

- The Church was changing from being predominantly Jewish to Gentile. After AD 70 and the Temple's destruction, national Israel no longer an entity to be dealt with.
- Gnostic worldviews were gaining a foothold and the Church had to decide how to deal with Gnostic thought and influence. Basic to the Gnostic worldview was a dualism that drove a wedge between God and creation. Gnostic beliefs proposed that creation was alien to God. Men and women could also ignore moral obligations and indulge in bodily appetites without restraint. Equally bad was a Gnostic view that one should treat bodily instincts with contempt.
- The Ephesian church at this time was probably predominantly Gentile (2:11; 3:1) and because of their response to the Gospel, they are undergoing a radical transformation of their personal and social identity.

² Ralph P. Martin, *Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1991), p. 1.

Did Paul write Ephesians?

- Biblical scholars disagree over this question. The best Greek manuscripts don't contain the words, "in Ephesus" (1:1). For this reason, Ephesians is sometimes referred to as a "General Letter" – meaning it was meant for all churches and was supposed to be circulated around among them. Notice that there's no specific personal greeting at the beginning.
- Ephesians is the least personal of all of Paul's letters. The only person mentioned is Tychichus (6:21-22), who is also mentioned in Colossians and is the one who delivered the letter.
- Stylistically, Ephesians is closest to Colossians. Some phrases are almost identical in the two letters. For example, see: Eph. 1:4 = Col. 1:22; Eph. 1:15 = Col. 1:4; Eph. 2:13 = Col. 1:20; Eph. 4:2-3 = Col. 3:12-13; Eph. 6:21-22 = Col. 4:7-8.
- The Greek style of writing is different from the uncontested letters of Paul. The sentences are unusually long (1:3-14; 3:1-7). Approximately 90 words in Ephesians do not appear elsewhere in Pauline writings.
- Some have also suggested that Ephesians is more of a sermon than a pastoral letter.
- There's theological development in Ephesians.
 - In 1st Corinthians 7, Paul encourages marriage instead of sexual immorality but in Ephesians Paul speaks about marriage mirroring the relationship between Christ and the Church (5:24-30).
 - In Ephesians, the Church is always the universal Church...capital "C" Church. In other Pauline letters, the Church is a more local setting.
 - In Ephesians, the Church is built upon the apostles and prophets (2:20) but elsewhere, the emphasis is on the Church being built upon Christ.
 - The tensions between Jew and Gentile which are big issues in other Pauline letters seem somewhat resolved in Ephesians.
- Most likely Ephesians was written by a follower of Paul's who wrote the letter in Paul's name – this is not all that unusual for that time period.
- Many biblical scholars argue for Pauline authorship despite some evidence.
- Most common dating for the writing of Ephesians is the last third of the 1st century (AD 66-AD 100).

The letter's contents is fully Pauline

- The writer knows Colossians because many of the thoughts outlined in Colossians show up in Ephesians.
- Main theme: God plans on reconciling Jews and Gentiles through the death and resurrection of Jesus. The Church, with Christ at its head, is the means by which this reconciliation will take place. The grace of God has brought together a united church.

- Another view of main theme: Show the nature of the church and the Christian life to those who came to Christ from a pagan heritage and environment and to remind the Gentile Christians that Paul's theology of salvation history never disowned the Jewish background out of which the (now predominantly) Gentile church came.
- Paul's reason for writing: it seems that Gentile Christians, who were now streaming into the early church, were adopting an easygoing moral code based on a perverted misunderstanding of Paul's moral teachings (see Romans 6:1-2 for similar thoughts).
- Ephesians follows a Pauline format: Salutation (1:1-2) and blessing (6:23-24); letter framed and divided by prayer (1:1-23; 3:14-21; 6:23-24); chapters 1-3 present ideas and theology; chapters 4-6 follow with practice.

Outline of Ephesians

- I. Salutation, blessing, and prayer of thanksgiving (1:1-23)
- II. The Church in Jesus Christ (2:1-22)
 - A. The Individual in Christ (2:1-10)
 - B. The Community in Christ (2:11-22)
- III. The mystery of God's plan (3:1-21)
 - A. Paul's Ministry and the Plan (3:1-13)
 - B. Prayer and Doxology (3:14-21)
- IV. The Practical Instructions (4:1-6:20)
 - A. The Life Worthy of Christ's Calling (4:1-16)
 - B. The Old Life and the New (4:17-5:20)
 - C. The Christian Household (5:21-6:9)
 - D. The Armor of God (6:10-20)
- V. The Closing (6:21-24)