

EPHESIANS  
Introduction To The Letter: Message 1  
Sept. 6, 1998

I. INTRODUCTIONS

A. Introduction to the Letter

1. The City of Ephesus

The history of the city of Ephesus can be traced back to at least 1044 BC. That is three thousand years ago. So Ephesus would have existed as early as the time of king David. Ephesus was conquered by the Romans in 190 BC but was not fully subjugated to Roman rule until 41 BC by Mark Antony, lover of Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt and close associate of Julius Ceasar. During the rieg[n] of Ceasar Augustus Ephesus began to flourish. Ceasar Augustus is the man named in this familiar verse found in Luke 2:1: "And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Ceasar Augustus that all the world should be registered."

So in early Roman times Ephesus became a proud, rich and busy sea port. But this was not to last. I have wondered sometimes what happens at the ocean where rivers like our own Peace River enter. What happens to all the silt in the muddy waters that enter the ocean? Well it builds up and builds up until eventually the shoreline is increased. This happened in Ephesus until they could no longer clear the silt away enough for ships to dock. This had already happened to Miletus, a city not too far away and now happened to Ephesus. According to the ancient writer, Pliny, the sea used to wash up against the temple Diana. If that is correct, silting has moved the shoreline out four to five miles.

Ephesus has had a long and interesting history. It is situated just south of the Cayster River, the smallest of four rivers which run into the Aegean Sea from Asia Minor. It was situated

between two mountainous ridges running roughly northwest. Ephesus also lay at the intersection of two major overland routes.

Try to picture this city as I describe it. There, inside towering city walls is an area of about 1000 acres. Some of the streets are paved with marble. There is a large Agora or marketplace teeming with people. It is a rectangular area about 360 feet long. It is surrounded by pillared halls and various shops and rooms. In the middle of the open space you see a sun and water clock. On the western slope of Mt. Pion is the theatre mentioned in the book of Acts. As you picture this theatre you must think big for it seated about 24,000 people. A significant NT event took place here of which we will read later in the book of Acts. Come not to the marble street which leads to the theatre from the harbor. It is approximately 35 feet wide and about half a mile long. This street is flanked by colonades behind which are various shops and incredible buildings. At each end of this stree you see a monumental gateway.

As you walk through the city of Ephesus you see a huge stadium and an amphitheatre. Here various games were played and gladiator combats were held. If you had been in Ephesus at a certain season you would have seen men and animals in the arena, fighting to the death. The largest Roman amphitheatre apparently held between 45,000 and 50, 000 people. At the dedication of this colliseum in AD, 79, Encyclopedia Brittanica says, 2,000 gladiators and 230 animals were were billed to die. These contests between men and animals were horrific and most of the fighters were slaves and criminals. These combats might last up to 100 days. Now look at an interesting verse in 1 Corinthians 15:32. Two views might be argued from this verse: either he literally fought in the amphitheatre with the wild beasts or the phrase *wild beasts* speaks metaphorically of the human opposition he faced in Ephesus. Though the latter is the prevailing view it cannot be ruled out that Paul actually fought

with the wild beasts in Ephesus. But it is also true that the human opposition he received was great (2 Cor. 1:8-10).

Well, let's explore this city a little farther for it has a very interesting religious history as well. To the northeast of the city wall, about a mile away, was the temple of Diana of the Ephesians. Three shrines had been built here about 800 years earlier. Then in 550 BC the first temple was built here and dedicated in 430 BC. It was burned in 356 BC on the night in which Alexander the Great was born. Alexander the Great later offered to rebuild the temple at his own expense. This offer was politely refused since "it would not be fitting for one god to build a temple to another." It is said that the ladies of Ephesus sold their jewels to help provide funds to rebuild the temple. Kings from various countries presented columns for this temple and gifts came from all over the known world to rebuild the temple that stood in Paul's day.

Come with me to the temple. There you see a concrete platform 418 feet long and 234 feet wide. Now imagine the temple itself. It is 163 feet wide and 342 feet long. The roof is supported by huge Ionic columns. These columns are 60 feet tall and 6 feet in diameter. This temple is considered to be one of the seven wonders of the world.

In 1863, J.T. Wood began to look for this temple. He searched until 1873 all to no avail until. The Thompson Chain Reference Bible gives this bit of information on Wood's search. "Then one day while excavating in the theatre, he uncovered a Roman inscription which told how the images of Diana were carried from the temple to the theatre on each birthday of the goddess, and how the procession entered the city by the Magnesian Gate." After Wood found the temple he found what he thought was an altar. A later researcher, Hogarth, tapped on the supposed altar and discovered it was hollow. He broke it open and found a large collection of jewelry, coins and other objects of art. Many think this is a

foundation deposit or cornerstone collection placed there when the temple was constructed.

This temple is called the temple of Artemis but the Greeks renamed it the temple of Diana, the fertility goddess. This temple added significantly to the commercial importance of Ephesus. The whole Mediterranean world considered this temple as sacrosanct, or a holy place. Recently we traveled through southern Alberta. We were down in Montana. We had just come through Logan's Pass, one of the most beautiful passes through the Rocky Mountains. As we headed north into Canada I saw a sign saying we were so and so far from Cardston. I did not realize we would be passing through this place. I got out the camera because in this southern Alberta town is a temple that to the Mormon world is sacrosanct. We found the temple and I took pictures of Mormons taking pictures of others. I was quite sure that what they were taking pictures of was couples who had just gotten married for eternity. Well, this temple at Ephesus was a holy place to the entire Mediterranean world and somehow through this temple became the primary banking institution of Asia Minor. Also, during March and April (the time of the Jewish Passover) religious pilgrims came from all over to Ephesus for the festivals of Artemas. Silversmiths made fortunes on the silver miniatures of the temple of Diana.

## 2. Paul's visit to Ephesus (Acts 19)

The Jewish people had been made custodians of God's Word and though they had carefully guarded it from internal corruption they had not been faithful in disseminating it to the world. Then at the God appointed time Jeshuah Hamashiach came and gave His life for the world. He lived, died, was buried, was resurrected to life and ascended into heaven. John 3:16 tells us He died for the whole world, Jews and Gentiles. The book of Acts tells us of the conversion and making of the Apostle Paul. In Acts 13:2 we find the Holy Spirit saying to the elders of the Church of Ceasarea, "Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the word whereunto I have called them." This the

church did and they fasted and prayed and laid hands on Paul and Barnabas and sent them away. This resulted in Paul's three world changing missionary journeys.

Paul briefly visited Ephesus at the close of his second missionary journey (Acts 18:18-19). Then in Acts 19 we find Paul entering the spiritually dark world of the Ephesians. Here is Paul's own description from the book of Ephesians of the spiritual state of the Ephesians before he arrived there (2:1-3, 11-12).

Now Paul will step into the morally and spiritually dark world of the Ephesians and make a difference for Christ. Paul will not hang onto God's Word for himself only but hand it out freely to others, others who are totally lost in Satan's dominion. (Read Acts 19).

Paul spent 2 years at Ephesus and all that were in Asia heard the word from there (Acts 19:10). Paul is an interesting man. When he was in prison, chained to guards, the whole prison guard heard of Christ. When he was in Ephesus; the commercial, political and religious center of Western Asia, all of Asia heard the Gospel.

### 3. Paul's letter to the Ephesians

The New Testament may be divided into three parts just like the Old Testament. There is first the historical section; Matthew through Acts. Then there is the practical section; Romans through Jude. Then there is the prophetic section; Revelation. So the letter to the Ephesians falls into the practical section and you will find this letter extremely practical to every day Christian living. The practical section of the New Testament may be divided into General epistles and Pauline epistles. The epistles are letters written to various churches or individuals. Now the Pauline epistles contain four epistles called the prison epistles. These four epistles; Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon were written by Paul when he was in prison, most likely in Rome. That this is a prison epistle is

evident from Ephesians 3:1. This letter to the Ephesians was written around AD 61, only a few years after his stay in Ephesus.

This letter falls readily into two major parts, as do many of Paul's epistles. Paul usually has a doctrinal section first. That is what we have in chapters 1-3 in Ephesians. We will call this section, *The Wonderful Work of Salvation*. Paul also usually closes with a practical section and he does so in this letter in chapters 4-6. We will call this section, *The Worthy Walk of The Saved*.

With that we are ready to begin looking at the introduction of the letter found in 1:1-2.

CONCL: This book has been summarized in various ways. George R. Brunc (I'm not sure if this was his own summarization) said in a sermon that this epistle could be summarized as follows:

What we were by nature;  
What we are by grace;  
What we shall be in glory;  
And how the change takes place.

Prepare yourself for a long journey as we go through this letter. We are not going to simply go through this letter. We are going to look closely at the concepts taught and the meaning of words. We are going to seek to follow the flow of thought as it is revealed by the grammatical and syntactical structure of the letter. We will be enriched by learning to understand many different concepts and doctrines. I encourage you to take notes. Again, I will follow the big picture of the outline as we did in Genesis and if the Lord tarries and we are here and healthy, at the conclusion I will give you the whole outline.

A name of a commentator on the book of Ephesians you will often hear is D. Martin Lloyd Jones. His commentary on Ephesians is a 7 volume set and is actually the messages he preached on Ephesians. Though an ardent Calvinist, he is for the most part the most careful commentator on Ephesians I have read anywhere. Often when I study some topic, if I need a commentary I check to see if the topic or word occurs in Ephesians. If it does I can be sure that though

the word may only occur once in Ephesians it will get thorough treatment. Lloyd Jones says that Luther said of the book of Romans that it was 'the most important document in the New Testament, the Gospel in its purest expression.' Jones says he agrees with that but if Romans is the purest expression of the Gospel, Ephesians is the sublimest expression of the Gospel, meaning it is grand, noble, elevated or awe inspiring. Both Lloyd Jones and Oliver B. Greene say in their introductions to this epistle that they feel like Moses before the burning bush, that they ought to take off their shoes for this is holy ground. Oliver Greene says that the letter to the Ephesians is like the holy of holies of the Jewish temple.

Now I want to share with you how you might get the most out of these messages on this book of Ephesians. When I teach Bible Interpretation I teach that before you can even begin to accurately interpret the Bible one must experience certain things and have a right attitude. All the rules for Bible interpretation are useless if the experience and attitude of the interpreter is not in order. As to experience, to benefit the most from these messages you need to have experienced the new birth, salvation; you need to experience spiritual hunger, and you need to live a life of obedience to God. What you get out of these messages will be largely dependent on that. I have never in my life since I was born again done any preacher or Bible teacher the dishonor of sleeping during the communication of God's Word.

In order to get the most out of these messages the following attitudes will greatly enhance the spiritual benefits of these messages: an attitude of deep reverence for God, a prayerful attitude, an attitude of faith, an attitude of great respect for words and an attitude of humility. May God be honored in these messages with accuracy of preaching and a preacher that measure up to those qualifications and may He be pleased to bless this series and enrich our spiritual lives so that He will ultimately be glorified in and through us.