

# EPHESIANS .... an overview

## THE CITY OF EPHEBUS.

Ephesus was the capital of the Roman province of Asia Minor (modern day Turkey), which made it a major city in the Roman Empire. It was also a major trading center, which likewise made it a political and economic center. The city of Ephesus was also the undisputed religious center of Asia Minor. The city boasted of a huge temple that had been built to the goddess Artemis. Artemis was her Greek name while Diana was her Roman name. She was believed to be the daughter of Zeus and the twin sister of Apollo. She was the goddess of chastity, virginity, the hunt, the moon, and the natural environment. Her temple in Ephesus was considered to be one of the great wonders of the ancient world.

## THE CHURCH AT EPHEBUS.

Paul came to Ephesus for the first time very briefly on his 2<sup>nd</sup> missionary journey with the husband/wife team of Aquila and Priscilla. Paul sailed on from Ephesus, leaving Aquila and Priscilla behind.

### ***Ax 18:18-21***

A short time later, a gifted young preacher named Apollos came to Ephesus and began to preach the baptism of John. Aquila and Priscilla had him over for dinner one night and helped him come to a richer and deeper and more accurate understanding of the Gospel.

### ***Ax 18:24-26***

Later, in Ax 19, Paul returns to Ephesus and ends up staying there for about three years. Ax 19 records several miracles and open confrontations that took place while Paul was at Ephesus. A few years later, Paul's protégé Timothy would pastor the church at Ephesus, and then the aged Apostle John would spend his last years there.

The church at Ephesus was blessed with some of the finest preachers ever (including two Apostles!).

## THE EPISTLE TO THE EPHEBIANS.

### ★ **The author ....**

There is really no question that the Apostle Paul wrote this epistle. All external evidence supports Pauline authorship. Paul names himself twice as the author of this letter. ***1:1; 3:1***

### ★ **The recipients ....**

This letter seems to be a circular letter that was intended for several churches in the region of Asia Minor, with Ephesus being the largest and most prominent city in the area. There are several indications that this is the case. For example, the letter seems to be concerned with issues facing the church at large, rather than one specific local body. The letter does not deal with any specific problems in any given church but rather presents broad and universal truths. Nor does Paul mention any individuals by name, as was his custom in his epistles, even though he was there for three years.

In fact, the phrase "*at Ephesus*" is not found in some ancient manuscripts.

### ★ **The date ....**

This epistle is the first of what are commonly known as Paul's "Prison Epistles." This letter, along with Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon were all written during Paul's first imprisonment in Rome, which took place in the early 60's. Thus the letter was probably written in the early 60's. The letter to the Ephesians may have been written and sent at the same time that Colossians and Philemon were. This letter may even be the letter that Paul refers to in Col 4:16 "*.... my letter that's coming from Laodecia ....*"

★ **The theme ....**

As is true of most Biblical literature, there are several themes interwoven throughout the book. The overall theme of Ephesians is very broad. It presents God's eternal purpose in establishing His Church into one unified body under Christ as the Head. Jews and Gentiles alike are brought together into the Church under the Headship of the Lord Jesus Christ. The unity of the two groups into one is underscored by Paul's use of the verb and noun forms of Biblical love.

**QUOTE: HAROLD H. HOEHNER**

"... The theme of love needed to be stressed for the saints at Ephesus. This is in harmony with the contents of Ephesians, for the verb form of "love" (*agapaō*) is used 9 times in Ephesians, whereas Paul used it only 23 times in all his other letters. Paul used the noun (*agapē*, "love") 10 times in Ephesians compared with 65 times in his other epistles. Therefore, of the 107 times Paul used the verb or noun "love," 19 are in Ephesians. Thus more than one-sixth of his references to "love" appear in this small epistle to the Ephesians. This letter begins with love (Eph. 1:4, X) and ends with love (6:23-24)."

Hoehner, H. W. (1985). Ephesians. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 614). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

The sober footnote to this is found when the Lord Himself writes a letter to the Ephesian church about 35 years later.

**Rev 2:1-4**

The church was doctrinally solid, no doubt because of the great teachers that they had been blessed with, but they had lost their first "love."

★ **The structure ....**

Paul structures his letter to the Ephesians the same way that he structures most of his other letters: first he lays down the spiritual reality, the doctrinal truth that he wants the readers to know. Then he sets forth the responsibilities that are built on that truth. He describes the doctrine first, and then the duty. Or .... resources first, then responsibility.

Because of this pattern, most of Paul's epistles open with rich theological truths. The last part of the letters will be filled with very practical exhortations, as those truths are applied.

★ **The spiritual truths ....**

In keeping with the broad theme of the epistle, Paul presents several sweeping truths, which are true for the entire Church at large, and not just any particular local body:

- The work of the entire Trinity in salvation (1:3-14).
- A graphic before and after picture of redemption (2:1-10). This redemption of sinners is presented as the result of the same power that God exerted when He raised Christ from the dead and placed Him as head over all (1:18-23).
- Christ's headship over the Body, which is the Church (1:22-23; 4:15-16).
- The Church as the building and temple of God (2:21-22).
- The Mystery of Christ (3:1-21).
- Spiritual gifts & gifted men that are given to the Church, and the reason for them (4:7-16).
- The Church is presented as the Bride of Christ (5:23-32).
- There is an exhortation to let oneself be continuously under the control of the Holy Spirit. This will govern every relationship in our lives (5:18 - 6:9).
- The spiritual warfare in which we are involved as believers is described, along with our armor and protection (6:10-20).

Paul's epistles 22-24:1  
3:14-107 650

★ **The secondary themes ....**

Secondary themes in the book include the riches and the fullness of blessings in Christ. Paul writes of “the richness of God’s grace” and “the unsearchable riches of Christ.”

- The word “riches” is used 5x.
- The word “grace” is used 12x.
- The word “glory” is used 8x.
- The words “fulness” or “filled” are used 6x.

*Note:* This is a book about “fulness.” the believer is to mature to “the fulness of Christ” (4:13); we are to be filled with the Holy Spirit (5:18); we are ultimately to be filled to all the fulness of God Himself (3:19)!

- The key to all of this is bound up in the phrase “*in Christ*” which is used more than a dozen times in this letter.

*Note:* This theological concept is almost exclusively Pauline. This phrase (or its equivalent) is used more than 80x in the New Testament. All of the uses are by Paul, except for a couple by Peter. The idea is that at salvation, we believers are placed into an eternal and infinitely intimate relationship with our Savior. We are completely identified with Him, and everything that we are and everything that we have is bound up in the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the book of Ephesians, this phrase is used 15x. Fourteen of those uses are in the first three chapters, the doctrinal portion of the letter. As Paul lays down the doctrine which will determine our duty, he bases it upon the solid theological reality of our position in Christ.

OUTLINE FOR EPHESIANS.

GREETING — (1:1-2 )

- |   |            |
|---|------------|
| I. <u>The FOUNDATION of the CHURCH:</u> GOD’S REDEMPTIVE PLAN       | (1:3-23 )  |
| II. <u>The FORMATION of the CHURCH:</u> GOD’S REGENERATING POWER    | (CHAP2 )   |
| III. <u>The FORMULATOR of the CHURCH:</u> GOD’S REVELATORY PREACHER | (CHAP 3 )  |
| IV. <u>The FLESHING-OUT of the CHURCH:</u> GOD’S REDEEMED PEOPLE    | (4:1-6:9 ) |
| V. <u>The FIGHT of the CHURCH:</u> GOD’S REGIMENTED PROTECTION      | (6:10-20 ) |

CONCLUDING REMARKS — (6:21-24 )

