

EPHESUS

The city itself; an ancient city with regard to origin, having been originally a Greek colony; located in what we today would refer to as *Asia Minor*; in Paul's day it was under the control of the Roman Empire; was the capital of that region of Asia; was heavily influenced by Greek culture, architecture, literature and arts. It was the site of one of the seven wonders of the ancient world – the temple of the fertility goddess *Artemis* or *Diana* as she is called in Scripture. The temple of Diana – not only a wonder of the world of that day; also a centre of commerce due to the worship system that revolved around Diana enriching multitudes, Acts 19: 24-27; but also a centre of the grossest immorality as were all citadels of heathen worship. Being such an importantly placed city it was also a hive of industry and trade with an immense and varied population.

CITY BECAME THE FOCUS OF PAUL'S EVANGELISM

One of the salient features of Paul's ministry is his gravitation toward the great cities of his day; showing his astuteness for he knew that when the Gospel triumphed in the large cities its influence would be felt far and wide. Thus, the congregation established at Ephesus became the third great centre of NT Christianity after Jerusalem and Antioch.

First visit would seem to have been very brief, Acts 18: 19-21 – this was at the end of his second missionary journey; and the language shows that he spent only a short time there, promising however to return in the will of the Lord, v.21b. He returned early in his 3<sup>rd</sup> journey; see 1 Cor 16: 8 & 9 for his description of the how he saw the potential for the Gospel in Ephesus. Initially he preached for 3 months in the synagogue, Acts 19: 8, but then withdrew the disciples due to the fierce opposition encountered, v.9; and note in v.10 the tremendous influence of the Ephesian work throughout all of Asia. Altogether, he spent 3 years at Ephesus preaching and establishing the church, Acts 20: 31; and note in vs.18-21 the manner in which he discharged his ministry. With respect to the opposition encountered at Ephesus, see also 1 Cor 15: 32.

To summarise the success of the Gospel in Ephesus: (1) multitudes were converted; (2) the influence of the Gospel spread far out from Ephesus; (3) such was the power of the Gospel that paganism was smitten a great blow, see Acts 19: 17-20 & 27; (4) a flourishing church was established – one of the ministers of which was Timothy, 1 Tim 1: 3; (5) but it was a church that came under the severe attack of Satan, Acts 20: 29-31, Eph 6: 10-19 dealing with the Christian armour and revealing that the Ephesians were in a battle & also 1 Timothy & Rev 2: 2 & 3 – heretics had been dealt with, yet the church eventually succumbed to another enemy: coldness, v.4.

LETTER TO THE EPHESIAN CHURCH

It was written while Paul was in prison, ch.4: 1 – believed to be his first imprisonment in Rome. But as an epistle it is a masterpiece of rich, deep & powerful truth. There are various pivotal expressions in it:

(a) In Christ and related terms; pointing to the great truth of union with Christ. In many ways this expression is the key to this epistle. No study or understanding of Ephesians will ever be successful without grasping this truth.

(b) Accepted in the Beloved – signifying that due to the believer's union with Christ all that Christ is as is signified by this title belongs to the believer. The term literally means "objects of grace in the Beloved" signifying that God looks on His people as He looks on Christ. An understanding of this concept is the key to living the Christian life – living it in the joy & victory of the Gospel.

(c) In heavenly places/in the heavenlies, ch.1: 3. The truth in this expression is that while the believer has to live out his life in this world, his peace & security are not to be found in the things that comprise this life, but rather in those things that belong to heaven. Such are promised to us in Christ & are reserved for us in heaven; and we are to feed our souls by faith on these heavenly blessings.

(d) Mystery, ch. 3: 3, "by revelation He made known unto me the mystery." The word "mystery" in the NT refers to that which, while it is unattainable to the unaided human mind, yet it is revealed by the Lord to His people. What the mystery is, is revealed in v.6 – it is the truth that all believers, Jews & Gentiles, are one body in Christ. There were many prophecies of this one NT body, but those prophecies did not make clear how the Gentiles would be brought into that body. Thus, the Jews thought that the Gentiles would be brought in by becoming Jewish proselytes – in other words, by becoming Jews essentially. But, here in Eph 3 Paul shows the fallacy of this thinking – he shows that the Gentiles are brought into the same body, become fellow-heirs & joint partakers of the Gospel promise but do not have to become Jews. Jews and Gentiles become one body in Christ.

This body includes the OT saints, proved by the terms *fellowheirs, of the same body, & joint-partakers of his promise*. But, the question is – with whom? Obviously those who received the promise in the OT era, such as Abraham & those both before and after him, Heb 11: 17. In essence this "mystery" is the mystery of the Church – and that is really the subject dealt with in the book of Ephesians. This epistle is pre-eminently the epistle that presents a wonderful portrayal of the Church in all her glory through her union with Christ.

OUTLINE OF THE EPISTLE

One writer gave the following outline: *sit, walk, & stand* – see ch.2: 6; 4: 1, 17 & 5: 2; 6: 11, 13, 14. Similar to this is the following:

1. The Wealth of the Believer, chs. 1-3
2. The Walk of the Believer, chs. 4-5
3. The Warfare of the Believer, ch. 6