

# I. Lesson 1: Introduction and Background – Acts 19&20

September 5/6, 2007

Stuart chapter 1

**Aim:** To introduce the book of Ephesians.

## A. Paul's Second & Third Missionary Journey

### 1. Second Missionary Journey – c. 49-52 AD (Acts 15:36-18:22)

Antioch (15:36), Syria/Cilicia (Acts 15:41), Derbe/Lystra (Acts 16:1), Phrygia/Galatia (Acts 16:6), Mysia/Troas (Acts 16:7), Samothrace/Neapolis (Acts 16:11), Philippi (Acts 16:12), Amphipolis/Apollonia (Acts 17:1), Thessalonica (Acts 17:1), Berea (Acts 17:10), Athens (Acts 17:15), Corinth (Acts 18:1), Cenchrea (Acts 18:18), **Ephesus** (Acts 18:19), Caesarea/Antioch (Acts 18:22).

### 2. Third Missionary Journey – c. 53-57 AD (Acts 18:23-21:16)

#### a) Destinations

Galatia/Phrygia (18:23), **Ephesus** (19:1), Macedonia (20:1), Greece (20:2), Macedonia (20:3), Berea, Thessalonica, Derbe (20:4), Philippi (20:6), Troas (20:6), Assos (20:13), Mitylene (20:14), Chios, Samos, Trogyllium, Miletus (20:15), **Ephesian elders in Miletus** (20:17), Cos, Rhodes, Patara (21:1), Tyre (21:3), Ptolemais (21:7), Caesarea (21:8), Jerusalem (21:15)

#### b) Companions

Timothy & Erastus – sent ahead from Ephesus to Macedonia (19:22); Gaius & Aristarchus – Macedonians (19:29); Sopater of Berea, Aristarchus & Secundus of Thessalonica, Gaius of Derbe, Timothy, Tychicus, and Trophimus of Asia, and Dr. Luke – “we” (20:4-6)

## B. The City of Ephesus

### 1. Location

- Asia Minor (modern Turkey) near Aegean Sea, on the Cayster River and considered the “Gateway to Asia.” Ephesus had an important port and was also on the main overland caravan route, giving it a strategic military and commercial location.
- One of the seven churches of Asia Minor from Revelation 1-3: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea

### 2. Characteristics

- Although not the capital, Ephesus was the first city of the Roman province of Proconsular Asia. In Paul's day, the population of Ephesus was around 250,000.
- Ephesus was an international trading city, and a cosmopolitan community. It was an ethnic melting pot of Greek and Roman, Jew and Gentile. It was the political and economic center for a large, prosperous region. It was a famous center of the arts and a haven for poets, philosophers, artists, and orators.

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- Ephesus was famous for its great temple, a shrine to the goddess Diana (or Artemis in Greek). The temple of Diana was one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. It was 425 feet long by 220 feet wide. Architecturally it was composed of 127 white marble columns, each 62 feet high. The temple was four times the size of the Parthenon in Athens. It was opulently decorated with ornate carvings and priceless paintings. Because the temple was a depository for huge amounts of treasure, it was, in effect, the bank of Asia. It's chief attraction, however, was an image of Diana said to have fallen directly from heaven to earth (Acts 19:35). The temple was so popular among pagans that Ephesus emerged as the religious center of all Asia.
- The temple of Diana had close links to local commerce and it was also a tourist center. The temple cult involved worship of Diana as fertility goddess and as goddess of the woods and hunt. The temple was served by hundreds of priestesses of Diana, who were temple prostitutes. In addition to the Diana cult, Ephesus was also known as a worship center for the emperor Augustus and a center of magic, spiritism, and occult arts and practices.
- A stadium or theater was built near the temple of Diana during the reign of Nero (54-68 AD), coinciding with Paul's visit between 53-56 AD. The stadium had a seating capacity of about 25,000 and was the largest of all Greek open-air theaters. This stadium was the scene of the riot described in Acts 19:21-41.

### C. Paul's Ministry in Ephesus (Acts 19&20)

#### 1. Prelude (Acts 18:18-28)

##### *a) Brief Visit of Ephesus on 2<sup>nd</sup> Journey (Acts 18:18-23)*

At the end of his second missionary journey, Paul stopped briefly in Ephesus and reasoned with the Jews in their synagogue. Although they asked him to stay longer, he refused, because he was returning to Jerusalem to keep "the coming feast" (likely feast of tabernacles), although he promised to return. His traveling companions Priscilla and Aquila remained behind in Ephesus.

##### *b) The Ministry of Apollos in Ephesus (Acts 18:24-28)*

Apollos, a Jew from Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was eloquent and mighty in the Scriptures, fervent in Spirit, and an accurate teacher. He began to teach boldly in the synagogue. However, he was not fully taught, since he himself only knew the baptism of John. Therefore Aquila and Priscilla privately tutored him more accurately and completely in the faith. Apollos then went on to Achaia and vigorously debated the Jews, declaring from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ.

#### 2. Paul Comes to Ephesus (Acts 19:1-10)

While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul comes to Ephesus, where he finds twelve of the disciples of Apollos. They were ignorant of the Holy Spirit and had only received the baptism of John. Paul instructs them fully, and they received baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus. When Paul laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them and they spoke in tongues and prophesied.

Paul spent three months reasoning, persuading, and speaking boldly in the Jewish synagogue. However, the Jews eventually hardened their hearts, and so Paul withdrew from them and began

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teaching daily in the Gentile school of Tyrannus. Paul taught there for two years, and the word of the Lord Jesus spread to all the Jews and Greeks in the region of Asia.

### **3. Paul's Miracles in Ephesus (Acts 19:11-20)**

God worked unusual miracles through Paul, healing sick people by touching their aprons and handkerchiefs, and by exorcising evil spirits. False teachers began to imitate Paul's exorcisms, calling on the name of the Lord Jesus. One evil spirit responded, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but who are you?" The man with the evil spirit then proceeded to severely beat up those trying to exorcise the spirit. When this news spread, fear fell on the Jews and Greeks, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. As a result, many practitioners of the occult repented and believed, and burned their magic books, worth \$500,000. So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed.

### **4. The Riot at Ephesus (Acts 19:21-41)**

A certain silversmith, named Demetrius, called together a meeting of the local artisans. They made their money by making shrines and idols which were sold to worshipers of the goddess Diana in the great temple in Ephesus. Because of the success of Paul's ministry in Ephesus, Demetrius realized that he and his fellow artisans were in danger of economic ruin. So they began a riot, crying out "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!" Soon the whole city was filled into an uproar, and a great multitude of people gathered in the Roman theater, although most of them didn't even know why they were there.

Several of Paul's companions had been seized and although Paul wanted to go in and rescue them, the disciples would not risk it. A Jew named Alexander tried to reason with the crowd, but when they found out he was a Jew, they chanted for two hours straight, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!" Finally, the city clerk was able to quiet down the crowd and reason with them before dismissing them.

### **5. Paul's Departure from Ephesus (Acts 20:1)**

After the riot, Paul gathered the Ephesian disciples, embraced them, and departed for Macedonia. In total, Paul had spent three years in Ephesus (20:31).

### **6. Paul's Exhortation to the Ephesian Elders (Acts 20:17-38)**

After sojourning in Macedonia and Greece, Paul began his return journey. But in his haste to return to Jerusalem by the Day of Pentecost, he bypassed Ephesus, instead landing 30 miles further south along the coast of Asia in Miletus. However, Paul sent a message to Ephesus, and the Ephesian elders came to Miletus to receive Paul's exhortation.

In moving words, Paul defends his ministry, encourages and exhorts the elders to stand firm in the faith which they learned from Paul, and says goodbye to them, since Paul realizes he will not ever see them again in this life. Paul and the elders embraced, kissed, and wept together at this emotional farewell.

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### D. The Book of Ephesians

#### 1. Date

The letter indicates that Paul was a prisoner at the time of its composition (3:1, 4:1, 6:20). The Book of Acts speaks of two lengthy periods of Paul's imprisonment. One was in Caesarea (Acts 24:27), and the other was in Rome (Acts 28:30). Both lasted two years, which would have allowed Paul sufficient time to receive information about believers in various churches and correspond with them. The most likely dating of the letter is during his Roman imprisonment, sometime between A.D. 60 and 63. The letter to the Ephesians was written at about the same time as Philemon and Colossians, and most likely, immediately after Colossians. Both letters appear to have been sent by way of Tychicus, who visited Paul.

#### 2. Similarities to Colossians

There are more numerous and more sustained similarities between Ephesians and Colossians than between any other two New Testament letters. With varying degrees of similarity, 75 of the 155 verses in Ephesians are found in Colossians. The plan and argument of the letters are similar. Both begin with a doctrinal section that shows forth the glory of Christ and the grandeur of His purpose; both proceed to apply this to personal life, and both move on to similar exhortations concerning human relationships. Within this framework, there are whole sections that are very much alike.

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Ephesians</b>	<b>Colossians</b>
Redemption as "the forgiveness of sins"	1:7	1:14
The word of the truth of the gospel	1:13	1:5
Heard of your faith in Christ and love for the saints	1:15	1:4
Do not cease to give thanks and pray	1:16	1:9
Principalities and powers	1:21; 3:10; 6:12	1:16; 2:10; 2:15
The fullness of God or of Christ	1:23; 3:19; 4:13	1:19; 2:9
"Sons of disobedience"; "in which you once walked"	2:2	3:6-7
Alienation from God or from His people	2:12; 4:18	1:21
I became a minister	3:7	1:23; 1:25
Mystery hidden from the ages	3:9	1:26
Being rooted in Christ or in His love	3:17	2:7
Walk worthy	4:1	1:10
Forbearing one another	4:2	3:13
Joints of the body knitted together; increase of the body	4:16	2:19
Put away anger, wrath, malice	4:31	3:8
Old man, new man	4:22-24	3:9-10

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Forgiving one another even as the Lord has forgiven	4:32	3:13
Covetousness defined as idolatry	5:5	3:5
Redeeming the time	5:16	4:5
Psalms, hymns, spiritual songs	5:19	3:16
Giving thanks to the Father in the name of the Son	5:20	3:17
Wives submit to your husbands	5:22	3:18
Husbands love your wives	5:25	3:19
Children obey your parents	6:1	3:20
Fathers, do not provoke your children	6:4	3:21
Bondservants, obey your masters	6:5	3:22
The giving of ‘eye-service’ as ‘men-pleasers’	6:6	3:22
Masters – you have a Master in heaven	6:9	4:1
No partiality with God	6:9	3:25
Prayer request to speak the mystery boldly while in chains	6:18-20	4:3-4
Tychicus sent to make all things known to you	6:21-22	4:7-8

The parallels are so extensive and detailed that they cannot be explained as stemming from the common language of the early church. There is manifestly a special connection between the two letters. The traditional view to explain the similarities is that Paul wrote the two letters at about the same time. He wrote the letter to the Colossians to meet a particular situation and danger in the church at Colossae. Then with his mind still working over the theme of the greatness and glory of Christ, but moving on to consider the place of the church in the purpose of God, he wrote Ephesians.

### 3. Textual Criticism

There are several interesting discussion points about Paul as the author of this epistle and also if the Ephesians were the original recipients of the letter.

#### a) Vocabulary

There are an unusually large number of incidents of what are called *hapax legomena*, a technical term that refers to words which occur only once in the body of a person's total literary output. In other words, if we catalogue all the known letters of Paul, construct a vocabulary list of his language, and count of the number of times he uses each word, we discover that there were certain words which occur only once in all his writings. In Ephesians there are 42 of these words, which is quite a lot. If Paul did write it, how can we account for this?

The style of Ephesians is more formal than other of Paul's letters, which may account for a slightly different vocabulary. Further, the tone of Ephesians is so contemplative at points, that it sounds more like a prayer than a letter, more like a doxology than a sermon. Such a style demands its own vocabulary. In addition, many of these *hapax legomena* belong to the very

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specific descriptions of the Christian armor in 6:10-17. Frankly, it is arrogant to assume that the apostle Paul's knowledge, linguistic skills, and vocabulary were so limited that he did not have the capacity to write a letter in which he uses over forty words that he does not use elsewhere.

### b) *"In Ephesus"?*

There is a mystery as to whether or not this epistle was ever intended for the Ephesian church in particular. In 1:1, the book is addressed: "To the saints who are in Ephesus." However, in three of the oldest and most important ancient manuscripts of this book, the phrase "in Ephesus" is missing. These manuscripts are the Chester Beatty papyrus of about 200 A.D., and the fourth-century codices Sinaiticus and Vaticanus. Although the majority of New Testament manuscripts do contain this phrase, these three oldest and most reliable manuscripts don't. So it is possible that the designated destination was never part of the original epistle.

### c) *Impersonal Nature of Ephesians*

Another question mark about the original audience of this epistle is its impersonal nature. Normally, whenever Paul writes back to churches where he knows individuals personally, he gives personal greetings to his dear brothers and sisters who are still alive in those congregations. That kind of personal communication is glaringly absent from Ephesians. This is particularly striking, in view of the close relationships Paul undoubtedly made while in Ephesus for three continuous years, and the very emotional farewell between him and the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:36-38.

This lack of personal communication does not necessarily prohibit the possibility that the original destination was the Ephesian congregation, but it provides added support for the idea that perhaps this letter was not originally destined specifically for the congregation at Ephesus.

### d) *Laodicea*

In the second century, the heretic Marcion referred to Ephesians as the letter of Paul to the Laodiceans, thereby suggesting that his copy contained the word "Laodicea" for "Ephesus" in 1:1. It is interesting to note that at the end of Colossians (which is closely linked to Ephesians as described above), Paul tells the Colossians to send their letter to Laodicea to be read there, and that they "likewise read the letter from Laodicea" (Col. 4:16). Some have argued that Ephesians was actually this Laodicean letter and that the two churches were to exchange them. Although plausible, it does not explain why we have no extant manuscripts that say "Laodicea" and only those that say "Ephesus."

### e) *A Circular Letter*

The questions about Paul's formal style, absence of personal communication, and whether or not it was intended for Ephesus can be answered by viewing this letter as a "circular." Rather than writing a specific message to a particular congregation concerning a definite problem that had arisen, Paul wrote an epistle that he intended would be circulated to all the churches in Asia Minor. Thus, there are no personal greetings or specific problems to address. Rather, Paul's letter is a general communication to the churches of Asia, and to the church of God in all ages.

It may well be that the letter was intended first for Ephesus, but then was to be read in other churches as well. Perhaps Tychicus, after he delivered the letter to Ephesus, would then carry the same letter to other churches, substituting the name of each local congregation in the opening salutation. The letter is associated with the Ephesian church because it was the first recipient, or

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because Ephesus was the chief city of the region. Certainly, from the earliest centuries, Christians identified this letter as Paul's epistle to the Ephesians.

### 4. Occasion of Writing

Thus, to reconstruct the timeline, while Paul was imprisoned in Rome, he wrote Colossians to meet special difficulties and dangers in the church of Colossae. In that church there arose a form of false teaching that relegated Christ to a secondary position among the hierarchies of principalities and powers. In this scheme of the universe, Christ was not supreme, and His redemptive work was partial and incomplete. Paul wrote Colossians to combat this heresy.

Then, as he thought over and expressed the truth of the person of Christ, he was led on in his meditation to dwell on God's purpose in Christ as it is to be worked out in the church. He thought not just of Colossae, but of all the churches, especially those in the Roman province of Asia. He saw how they needed to be given a vision of the greatness of their calling and of the importance of the life and unity of the church as the body of Christ. So, shortly after he wrote Colossians, he wrote Ephesians.

Colossians 4:15-16 refers to a letter not written to Laodicea, but which would reach Colossae 'from Laodicea.' In other words, it seems that this letter, which he speaks of as written at the same time as Colossians, was in the nature of a circular letter. It is very probable that the letter to which Colossians 4:15-16 refers is Ephesians. The likelihood is increased if we consider that as the church of Colossae preserved the little letter to Philemon, they would surely be anxious to preserve this general letter sent to the churches of the area.

So, Paul sent Tychicus off as a bearer of two letters and also of the personal letter to Philemon. Tychicus would have received explicit instructions concerning the churches of Asia to which he should take it. No one name was put in the address of our letter; the messenger could put in the relevant name at each place. In the years that followed several of the churches might have been found in possession of a copy. Perhaps only that in Ephesus had a name in it, and as Ephesus was the most famous church, the letter would be copied most frequently from there, and so come to be named as we have it, 'The letter of Paul to the Ephesians.'

### 5. Content

James Boice calls Ephesians: "A mini-course in theology, centered on the church." Widely praised among Paul's letters, Ephesians is both profound and simple. If Ephesians is profound, it is so not for the mysterious nature of its unfathomable deep secrets, but for the clear way it presents the most basic Christian truths. There is nothing in Ephesians that is not taught elsewhere. One writer found 27 distinct doctrines in Ephesians, running from God the Father, Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the Trinity through the will of God, the world and creation, the unseen world, angels, evil powers, and the devil to the church, the communion of saints, the sacraments, and the Christian ministry. Not one of these doctrines is unique to Ephesians. They are just *basic Christianity*.

The focus of all these other doctrines in Ephesians is the church as God's new society, so in a sense the book links these truths of Christianity to us, God's people. In other words, it is practical. We are told who we are, how we came to be as we are, what we shall be, and what we must do in light of that destiny.

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Ephesians is like a sermon on the greatest and widest theme possible for a Christian sermon – the eternal purpose of God which He is fulfilling through His Son Jesus Christ, and working out in and through the church. Chapters 1-3 are principally the doctrinal elaboration of this great theme, and chapters 4-6 teach what should be the practical consequences of it for human life and relationships.

Ephesians is about the church. But the place it begins is with the work of the divine Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—bringing it into being. This is what the first chapter is about. It tells of the Father's work in choosing and predestining certain individuals to become his sons and daughters through the work of Christ, and this before the foundation of the world. It tells of the Son's work of redeeming these elect people by His death on the cross, by which they receive the forgiveness of sins. And it tells of the Spirit's work in drawing these elect people to Christ and sealing them as a guarantee of their ultimate deliverance from sin's power. All to the praise of God's glory! The chapter ends with a prayer for the church, that it might achieve its full potential in glorifying Christ, under whose feet God has placed all things. And that's only the first chapter!

This is good biblical ecclesiology, a doctrine of the church that begins with God and His work and ends, as all things eventually will end, with God's glory. After this, the next chapter begins to look at the formation of the church from the viewpoint of the individual, who was dead in transgressions and sins but who has been made spiritually alive by God and brought into the new company of those who have been likewise regenerated. So, even in this chapter, though Paul is now looking at the church from man's viewpoint, the emphasis is still on God and His work. It is God who calls us to faith, God who regenerates, and God who glorifies. This orientation carries on throughout the rest of the letter as Paul explores how the church is to function, how Christians are to live, and how the believer's spiritual warfare is to be fought.

As a community of believers, the church represents a new society created by God. This new society exists only because of the shed blood of Christ. God chooses the church as a new community to be His earthly dwelling in which and from which His Holy Spirit would operate. The letter to the Ephesians stresses that God works through those whom He has chosen by grace. Believers, individually and corporately, were created for the purpose of good works (2:10).

As a new community created in Christ Jesus, believers are made part of God's reconciling work in the universe. If God's purpose is to sum up all things in Christ (1:10) and use His church in the process, the church must be the prime example of reconciliation—hence, the reconciliation of Jew and Gentile into one body (2:16). There is no better way to unveil a new society than by bonding together Jew and Gentile into one new entity (2:15). Only through Christ could this occur.

If the church is to be effective, men must see her conforming to the purposes and precepts of God. If she is to proclaim the gospel of reconciliation, nonbelievers must see a community of reconciled people. For this reason, Paul admonishes his readers and sets down practical requirements for living a life unified in Christ. The community of believers must illustrate in real life the new work done by God. The church accomplishes this by demonstrating unity, not divisiveness, in the body of Christ, as well as purity and love (4:1-3).

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### E. Outline of Ephesians

#### I. Salutation (1:1-2)

#### II. The Establishment of the Church (1:3-3:21)

- A. The Work of the Trinity (1:3-14)
  - 1. Chosen by the Father (1:3-6)
  - 2. Redeemed by the Son (1:7-10)
  - 3. Sealed by the Spirit (1:11-14)
- B. First Prayer for the Church (1:15-23)
  - 1. Paul's Prayer (1:15-21)
  - 2. Paul's Doxology (1:22-23)
- C. The Church of Jesus Christ (2:1-3:13)
  - 1. As Individuals (2:1-10)
    - a. Dead in the Past (2:1-3)
    - b. Made Alive in the Present (2:4-6)
    - c. Glorified in the Future (2:7)
    - d. Saved by Grace (2:8-10)
  - 2. As Jews and Gentiles Reconciled Together (2:11-3:13)
    - a. Gentiles Brought Near (2:11-13)
    - b. Jews & Gentiles at Peace (2:14-18)
    - c. Gentiles Built into God's Temple (2:19-22)
    - d. The Mystery – Gentiles Are Fellow Heirs (3:1-7)
    - e. The Mystery Fulfills God's Eternal Purpose (3:8-13)
- D. Second Prayer for the Church (3:14-21)
  - 1. Paul's Prayer (3:14-19)
  - 2. Paul's Doxology (3:20-21)

#### III. The Life of the Church (4:1-6:20)

- A. Walk in Unity (4:1-4:32)
  - 1. The Unity of the Church (4:1-6)
  - 2. The Gifts of the Church for Unity (4:7-16)
  - 3. The New Man (4:17-32)
    - a. Do Not Walk as the Pagans (4:17-24)
    - b. Walk as Christians in Unity (4:25-32)
- B. Walk in Love (5:1-7)
- C. Walk in Light (5:8-14)
- D. Walk in Wisdom (5:15-21)
- E. Walk in Right Relationships (5:22-6:9)
  - 1. Wives (5:22-24)
  - 2. Husbands (5:25-33)
  - 3. Children & Parents (6:1-4)
  - 4. Servants & Masters (6:5-9)
- F. Walk in Power (6:10-20)
  - 1. The Armor of God (6:10-17)
  - 2. Prayer (6:18-20)

#### IV. Final Greetings (6:21-24)

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### F. Application & Discussion Questions

- *Because Ephesians was a circular letter, it is a universal letter written to every church. Before you begin your personal study of Ephesians, write “Covenant PCA – Houston, TX” in the appropriate place in verse 1, and then read everything in the letter as the explicit word of God to you and your fellowship.*
- *What can we as members of Covenant PCA in Houston, TX learn from the church of Ephesus?*
- *Discuss the following: The temple of Diana in Ephesus was once one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. Today it no longer exists. Diana was no so great after all. However, this word of God, written by Paul, written to the Ephesians and the other churches of Asia, still stands. “The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever” (Is. 40:8).*

For next time: Read Ephesians 1:1-14 and Stuart chapter 2.