

Walk Through The New Testament

St. Matthew's Parish

Shirley and Church Streets

New Providence,

Bahamas

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Introduction to the Epistle to the Ephesians



The Romans took control of the city of Ephesus in 133 B.C. The city was the chief capital of the Roman Province of Asia Minor. It was known for its trade and its intellectual pursuits and its temple dedicated to the goddess Diana (Greek Artemis). It was the fourth greatest city behind Rome, Alexandria, and Antioch.

We are told in Acts of the Apostles 18:18-21 that Paul and his companions Aquila and Priscilla visited the city but we are not given the impression that many converts were won during this visit. Priscilla and Aquila stayed behind to establish the church in Ephesus while trying to clarify the gospel with an intelligent convert in the person of Apollos.

On Paul's return to Ephesus, Acts of the Apostles 19 indicates that he found some disciples who were not familiar with the Holy Spirit and simply received John's Baptism. Paul corrected this situation by baptizing them again in the name of the Lord Jesus and laying hands on them.

Ephesus and Asia were well known for the practice of magic and the work of the occult. In fact we see that handkerchiefs and aprons which were touched by Paul were carried away to be placed on the sick in order that they might be restored (Acts 19). Even some of the residents tried to use the name of Jesus whom Paul preached to cast out demons with tragic consequences. What is clear is that during this visit Paul made such an impact on them that many persons came and burned their magic books publicly.

The Purpose of Writing of the Epistle and Authorship

The Epistle to the Ephesians is not like Paul's epistles to the Corinthians where he had to correct certain practises; nor is it like the Epistle to the Galatians where he had to clear up a distortion of the gospel. Some have argued that because this epistle is not written like Paul's other Epistles, maybe he is NOT responsible for writing this Epistle. Some have argued that the epistle to the Ephesians should be considered a circular letter that was sent around to all the churches to clarify the gospel message and it did not necessarily have to come from Paul. What is clear is that some gentiles who may have been involved in the mystery religions of their day, or the Jews who were practising their religion may have asked the question why has God decided to send the message of the gospel now??? Was it along with the church and afterthought??? The Author lets us know in no uncertain terms that ***the Gospel and the Church of which Jews and Gentiles are a part of God's creation from the beginning through the Son in the power of the Holy Spirit, decreed from eternity and destined for eternity.*** The epistle can be divided into two; chapters 1-3 show how the church was foreordained by God and that through Christ Jews and Gentiles have become one in Him. The second part is

chapters 4-6 which is a working out of this practical truth in the community of faith.

1. Ephesians 1:1-23 What God foreordained for The Believers

- a. 1-2 The epistle is ascribed to St. Paul and is written to the church at Ephesus. The epistle really begins with a prayer that recognizes the faithfulness of the saints in the church at Ephesus. Like Paul's apostleship and authority which are derived from Christ, so the saints at Ephesus have gained what they have only through their connection "in Christ."

- b. 3-14 The author indicates that every spiritual blessing comes from heaven and therefore is greater than anything one could receive here on earth. The blessings are infinitely superior to anything that this world has to offer. ***What are these blessings???*** Firstly, the author tells his readers that before the universe was created, God chose, elected, picked them out in Christ, to be holy and blameless in his love. Secondly, in His eternal will, God chose to adopt them as His children through Jesus Christ and the grace that He has bestowed upon the believers. Thirdly, in Jesus they have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins and a rich outpouring of the grace of God in Christ Jesus. Fourthly, with all wisdom and insight God has made known to the believers the mystery of His will. ***And what was His will???*** To gather all things in His well Beloved Son Jesus Christ at the appropriate time. In short what the author is telling us is that everything that has happened is the result of God's eternal plan. He has made the first step in initiating our salvation. Everything has been by His timetable. The fifth blessing is that in Christ they have gained an inheritance-not by their making but by God. This blessing allows them to become the ones who will bring glory to God's name. The final blessing is that through faith they have received the Holy Spirit which is a down payment of what is yet to come.

- c. 15-23 During Paul's absence the church at Ephesus had shown signs of positive growth in not only their relationship with God but also with each other-much to the delight of the Apostle. In fact, we are told that it was to lead to constant thanksgiving and prayer on the apostle's part. Paul really wants them to know God as a result of what He has done, is doing and will do in their lives. When their spiritual discernment has been enlightened they will understand their hope in which they have been called; the richness of their inheritance with the saints and the greatness of the working power of God. This power has not only raised Jesus from the dead, but has placed Him in a position of authority to rule over everything for all times to come. Everything has been put under His feet; He is the head of the church; and His presence fills everything.

2. Ephesians 2:1-22 From Hostility to Peace

- a. 1-10 Paul now speaks about the former influences on their lives. They were spiritually dead through their sins and acts of disobedience; led astray by the prince of the air (Satan); and worse of all led by the passions and desires of the flesh. But God in His rich mercy and out of pure love changed all of that for their sake. While they were still dead, Christ made them alive and saved them and returned them to the course that God had chosen for them. It is by grace that they have been saved and not by works-it is the free unmerited gift of God. They are what God has made them, and whatever good works they achieve is what God prepared beforehand.

- b. 11-13 The gentiles who were aliens to the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants God made with Abraham were without hope and without God. But by the blood of Jesus they have been brought near to God.

- c. 14-18 Jesus becomes the source of their peace. He has broken down the dividing wall of the Laws, statutes and ordinances which separated the Jew from the Gentile by His death on the cross. In short, by His death Jesus abolish the law; in other words they were not under a system of law-keeping trying to justify themselves but they were now under grace. The message of peace had been preached by Paul and the others. Through Christ both Jew and gentile have access to the Spirit of God.

- d. 19-22 Being found in one Body, the gentiles were no longer strangers and aliens, but they belonged to one household with the Jews, the foundation being the preaching of the gospel which is nothing more than a fulfilment of the apostles and prophets. Christ Jesus remains the head cornerstone. Jesus not only holds the building together, He is the source of its growth. It is through Jesus that they become God's Temple-the dwelling place of God!!!