

BACKGROUND OF EPHESIANS

September 9, 1981

Tonight's opening of the introduction to the greatest revelation the Church has ever received, and the greatest treatise in the Bible, the Book of Ephesians. So we go to the background of Ephesians tonight. And the only way I know that the Corps will ever get all of this is you're just going to have to listen to the tape again and then make your notes (gotta take my coat off; it's too hot)...and then make your notes to help yourself on it so that you really get the background of Ephesians. The Research Department under Rev. Walter Cummins took all of the work that I did last year, which was just fantastically extensive and sort of capitulated, epitomized it, whatever it is; reduced it in size, what is that? Huh? condensed it and put the salient facts in. And I'm really grateful to Walter and the Research Department for doing this 'cause this will make it very simple for our people and very concise that should they take Ephesians and put it as one of the teachings in...uh, uh...what do you call it? The University of Life, I think this particular introduction may be the one they will utilize.

You see, in the first century, Ephesus was a major seaport on the west coast of Asia Minor, and that corresponds to our modern Turkey. So get yourself a map and look it up. And Ephesus was on one end of a major caravan, land route that linked inland Asia with the coast. It was also a major sea port linking Greece and Europe with the East. Hence, the established 300,000 inhabitants in New Testament times participated in much commerce and trade with travelers.

Now according to the historian, Pliny, in his work on *Natural History*, he states that the waters of the Aegean Sea used to wash up to the Temple of Diana. However, by New Testament times, Ephesus was one and one-half mile inland, yet still located on a natural harbor along the Cayster River. But it was one and one-half mile inland. In the days of Pliny's writing (talking about it), the waters came right up to the door (or flushed against the door) of the Temple of Diana.

It was a silting problem in the harbor and the river's mouth that gradually made access to the port more and more difficult. In the mid-second century B.C., a king tried to alleviate the problem by making the harbor's entrance narrower. And this failed and caused the sed...sediment to build up even more quickly.

Today, if you go on our Biblical research and teaching tour, and they go to Ephesus (which they do and don't, depends on), if you went there today you would find that the coastline is seven miles inland. The coastline today of Ephesus is seven miles west of the city of Ephesus. In New Testament times it was how much? a mile and a half. And in the times when Pliny wrote, it was up to the door of the Temple of Diana.

However in New Testament times, the harbor on the Cayster River was still accessible by ship and Ephesus was described as the largest emporium in Asia by Strabo, the historian. At that time, it had a magnis...magnificent superhighway road; 70 feet wide. And that whole road was lined with statues and columns. And it ran from the center of the city of Ephesus where the theatre was one and one-half miles to the coast on both sides.

In New Testament times Ephesus was the capital city of the Roman province of Asia. The word “Asia” of course in the New Testament does not con...correspond to the term “Asia Minor” which encompasses all of Turkey. Rather it refers to the Roman province, Corps, covering much of the western half of what is now Turkey. Asia was a senatorial province. And a senatorial province did not require the full time presence of Roman military troops. Asia was governed by a proconsul. It’s translated “deputies” in the King James Version of Acts 19:38. The Aramaic has it more accurately in the singular. And the proconsul was directly responsible...responsible to the consul in Rome. And the consul in Rome was of course responsible to the Senate at Rome.

This was a senatorial province; very important you remember that. What kind of province? {Senatorial}. Right. If it had been an imperial province like Palestine was (because Palestine was more antagonistic towards Rome)...an imperial province fell under the direct military rule of the Roman Emperor. And serving directly under the emperor in this capacity was the praetor (p-r-a-e-t-o-r) in Rome. Each of the imperial provinces was in turn ruled by a pro-praetor who reported to the praetor in Rome who was immediately responsible to the emperor. The proconsul in Ephesus governed the province...province. And the most important official of the city itself was the town’s clerk—Acts 19:35. It was he who had the clout. He’s the one who had the political influence. When he spoke the people salaamed; what’s that? They listened. And he was technically the secretary of the city. And he was the executive officer who published the decrees of the civic assembly. And he acted as a liaison officer between the local and provincial administrations. The provincial government would hold him responsible for any riots or any actions that endangered the Romans citizens—Acts 19:23-41.

The chiefs of Asia called asiarchs (a-s-i-a-r-c-h-s) of Acts 19:31 were the foremost men in the cities of the provinces from whose ranks were elected the high priests of Asia. Now these high priests, they were the heads of the empirical...imperial political religious organization of the province in the worship of Rome and of the emperors.

Now a little more history about Ephesus: the first known settlers in the Ephesian area were known as carians (c-a-r-i-a-n-s) or legeles (l-e-g-e-l-e-s), I suppose. Legeles could also be...I don’t know the pronunc...(l-e-g-e-l-e-s). “Legeles” I call it. And they worshipped a fertility goddess. In 1200 B.C. the Ionians from Athens colonized and settled there in Ephesus. And they brought with them their version of the fertility goddess called Artemis (a-r-t-e-m-i-s). That’s Greek. The Greek goddess Artemis is the Latin goddess Diana. The Roman or Latin is Diana. And this of course, Diana became a dominate factor in the cultural life of Ephesus. A temple would be erected to her, which had to be rebuilt several times as a result of war, burning and destruction. In 560 B.C. Ephesus was conquered by Croesus (c-r-o-e-s-u-s)...Croesus or Croesus, king of Lydia, which was an area near to Ephesus. Only three years later in 557 B.C. the Persians captured the city of Ephesus. The temple of Artemis (or Diana) was burned in the mid-fourth century B.C. But in 334 B.C. Alexander the Great captured Ephesus. And by the end of the fourth century the rebuilding of the temple to Diana was completed. And Corps, this was the temple that was standing in New Testament times; the one that was rebuilt by Alexander the Great.

In 281 B.C. Ephesus came under the control of the Seleucid kings. In 190 B.C. the kingdom of Pergamon began to reign over the city. And in 133rd...133 B.C. this kingdom was bequeathed to Rome. So Rome had it from the year 133rd...3 B.C. Thus in Paul’s day Ephesus was under Roman rule and it was the capital of the province of Asia.

Now in 286 A.D. the Goths destroyed the temple and the city. Although the city revived, it never recovered any of its great former splendor or influence. It was at a meeting of the church council at Ephesus in 431 A.D. where Mary was given the formalized status as the “Mother of God.” And the deterioration of Ephesus and Asia Minor continued rapidly after that under the Byzantine Empire.

Now in the six, seventh and eighth centuries A.D. the Moslem religion (Islam) expanded from Arabia into Palestine then on into Syria, Egypt, Spain and Persia. By the mid eighth century, this initial expansion of Islam was somewhat halted. However by 1054 A.D. Islam had gained control of much of the eastern part of Turkey, Asia Minor. But this did not include Ephesus, Constantinople and most of western Turkey. These areas continued under the Byzantine rule, although they were consistently molested by the hordes of Islam and troubled by them from the East. In 1071 A.D. a group of Moslems known as Seljuk Turks, gained control of much of western Turkey. Seljuk Turks is spelled s-e-l-j-u-k. Their defeat of the Byzantine armies was instrumental in influencing Christians in Rome and other parts of the West to initiate the original Crusades. Constantinople was not yet subjected by the Moslems, but it continued under constant threat of the military might of Islam. In 1090 A.D. the Seljuk Turks took Ephesus which by then was only a very small town. While the Moslems controlled Ephesus and its surroundings, the practice of Christianity in the area continued but it was not a dynamic Christianity. It was mostly infertile.

In the twelfth century A.D. a visitor to Ephesus reported that the church of St. John was in such a dilapidated state that squares from a Mosaic decoration fell upon the heads of the church leaders during the celebration of the liturgy. Maybe it kept them awake {audience laughter}; I don’t know. An Arab geographer also writing in the twelfth century described Ephesus as “a city in ruins.” Today it is only ruins. This almost makes me cry, Corps, to think that once this city of Ephesus had handed to them on a silver platter the greatest knowledge of God’s Word that the world has ever heard, and today: nothing.

The language I want to talk a little about: in New Testament times the dominating language of Ephesus and the province of Asia was Greek, although Latin was in governmental and some official use, especially in those governmental or official circles. However there was a very large population of Judeans of the diaspora. And the word “diaspora” means the dispersed, the dispersions. Those who had been dispersed, separated, pushed out...who were living in Ephesus and in other parts of Asia. (May I have a cup of coffee, please.) There were two major types of Judeans linguistically: the first group were the Hellenists; those who utilized Greek as their primary tongue, their vernacular. And they used this Septuagint version as their scriptures. Secondly, the Hebrews or those who utilized Aramaic as their primary tongue, their vernacular. They used Hebrew scriptures and they used the Aramaic Targums. (Thank you, honey.) Now the rivalry between these two groups was constantly intense; they were always fighting. Even in the early church as it’s recorded in Acts 6:1. Both the Hellenists and Hebrews lived in Ephesus and Asia, although most scholars have assumed that the Hellenist Judeans were dominant. However it is noteworthy that numerous dispersed Judeans were transported by Antiochus, a Seleucid king, from Mesopotamia to Asia and the nearby provinces well before the time of Paul. (Just like the Babylonians took the people of Samaria into Babylon and brought the Babylonian people into Samaria. Used to work that way—you capture a country, take the people over there, take other people from there and bring them over there. See? Just leave

enough there to make things interesting {audience laughter}.) These Judeans that were brought from the Mesopotamia area to Asia all spoke Aramaic, that was their mother tongue. Since Paul was a “Hebrew of the Hebrews,” Philippians 3:5, it is absolutely certain that Aramaic was Paul’s native or mother tongue. Recognizing this and the fact that the reading audience of the epistle to the Ephesians would include a notable portion of Aramaic speaking Judeans the epistle would have first been written in Aramaic. However since a majority of the rest of the reading audience spoke Greek, the epistle would have been put into Greek quite quickly.

Since the original Aramaic and Greek documents no longer exist, and changes have been copied into the later manuscripts, it is our absolute responsibility before God that we must examine every existing manuscript in both languages, both the Aramaic and the Greek, and diligently compare them to ascertain what the original said. And that is the year of the Corps. Although the Hellenist or Greek culture dominated, there were cultural influences from both East and West. And thus Ephesus was a mixture of Greek, Roman, Oriental culture but Greek would be the supreme one.

Now I want to talk a little about the religion of Ephesus. The whole dominate aspect of the culture in Ephesus was religiously oriented and controlled. The worship was primarily directed toward Art... Artemis, Diana. And she was always depicted as a god...goddess who had oodles of breasts, fertility goddess. Her temple was magnificent. As a matter of fact it was classified as one of the Seven Wonders of the World. (Maybe because she had so many breasts and never had a woman...had so many or something...made her a wonder or something; I don’t know.) It must have been absolutely exquisite artistically, gorgeously done. The temple of Diana of the Ephesians was four times the size of the Parthenon in Athens. And it was completely adorned with works of art. It contained an image of Diana which by legend had fallen from Jupiter in heaven, Acts 19:35. Even the evidence from ancient coins shows the goddess of the Ephesians was revered throughout the entire ancient world. Acts 19 includes an accurate description of the worship of Diana. The proudest title the people of Ephesus boasted was *neokoros* (that’s the Greek word n-e-o-k-o-r-o-s). *Neokoros*—that means servants of the goddess. And that word is translated “worshippers” in Acts 19:35; servants of the goddess. Translated “worshippers” in King James in Acts 19:35. The other noteworthy religion in Ephesus at tim...at the time of Paul was the Judean worship in the Synagogues and thirdly the official emperor Caesar worship. Diana of the Ephesians (or Diana worship), the Judean worship in the Synagogue and the worship of Caesar (the emperor).

Now a little bit about athletics. The athletic games that were so popular throughout the Hellenistic world, were also very much in vogue and very popular in Ephesus. The city had a vast, tremendous theatre; the largest theatre in Asia was in Ephesus, as well as the largest in all the ancient Greek world. And it reputed to seat 50,000 spectators. There was also a theatre gymnasium, a *palaestra* where athletic games took place. And it was during the reign of Nero, who reigned from 54 A.D. to 68 A.D. that a large stadium was built in Ephesus where the races were run, and where wild beasts would fight with each other or a man. And the stadium measured 750 feet by 90 feet. So the residence of Ephesus would certainly be familiar with all these athletic events. And they were known as the Olympics. And the Olympics had the foot races; they had the pan...uh...paton...pentathlon: including wrestling, the long jump, the discus, the javelin, and the foot race. And they had the *pankration* which would be wrestling, boxing, chariot races and the hoplite race (which

was a foot race) where the racers wore military armor. And Ephesus also had the less popular gladiatorial contest that was instituted by the Romans, where gladiators would fight against each other.

Now Christianity in Ephesus. It's first mentioned in God's Word, the word Ephesus in Acts 8...18. However the province of which it was the capitol, Asia, is mentioned long before. It's mentioned in Acts 2:9—men of Asia saw and heard the witness of Pentecost. In Acts 6:9—men of Asia saw and heard the witness of Stephen. In Acts 16:6-9—Paul and Silas and Timothy passed through Mysia, the northern part of the province but were instructed by revelation not to preach the word in Asia. And finally in Acts 18:19-21—Paul stopped briefly at Ephesus on his way by ship from Greece. He was traveling with Priscilla and Aquila. And while there Paul held forth the Word in the synagogue. He stirred up a great deal of interest, and he left Aquila and Priscilla behind while Paul went on to Caesarea.

In Acts 18:24-28 a golden tongued orator named Apollos came to Ephesus teaching diligently John's baptism. But Priscilla and Aquila increased Apollos understanding... Apollos' understanding and sent him on to Corinth to preach. Then Paul returned to Ephesus (according to Acts 19:1-21 to 20:41) and found certain disciples whom Apollos had instructed. Paul ministered to them and led them into the manifestation of holy spirit. Paul spent three months trying to convince those in the synagogue of Jesus Christ and the kingdom of God. Finally he took the disciples with him to the school of Tyrannus where he taught daily for two years resulting in the entire province of Asia hearing the Word of the Lord. It was at this time in Ephesus that Paul wrote 1 Corinthians. See 1 Corinthians 15:32, 16:8 and 16:19. Paul performed miracles and healings, cast out devil spirits, and organized an expensive bond fire {audience laughter} fueled by idols, black arts books and other materials related to satanic practices. The result was God's Word grew and prevailed.

At this time the union of the silversmiths who made idolatress items of worship for the temple of Diana stirred up the citizens of the town, of Ephesus, into a vicious mob against Paul and his cohorts. And the mob gathered in the large theater to shout praises to Diana and threatened violence against Paul. Finally the town clerk calmed down the crowd and dismissed them. And then Paul left Ephesus for Macedonia.

In Acts 20 Paul returns to the province of Asia with several trusted disciples including two natives of Asia, according to Acts 20:4. They bypassed Ephesus but the ship stopped a few miles south at Miletus. And from there Paul summoned the elders of the Ephesian church to come to meet him. And there it was that Paul implored them to remain faithful to the revelation that they had been taught. Then Paul left Miletus and arrived in Palestine. And then some unbelieving Judeans from Asia saw him in the temple in Jerusalem, and they inspired a riot against Paul which ended in Paul's arrest and imprisonment according to Acts 21:27 and Acts 24:18.

The next major occurrence and perhaps the greatest of it all in regard to Ephesus was the writing of the epistle that bears the title "Ephesians." Corps this epistle to the Ephesians, along with Philippians, Colossians and Philemon was written while Paul was in prison in Rome according to Acts 28. Now the final mention of Ephesus and Asia is in 2 Timothy which was written just shortly before Paul's death. In 2 Timothy 1:16-18 Paul formally remembers with thanksgiving an Ephesian believer who had come to Rome to comfort him during his imprisonment. In 2 Timothy 4:12 Paul sends faithful Tychicus to

Ephesus. The sad demise of Ephesus and the province of Asia is in 2 Timothy 1:15 where the Word of God says:

2 Timothy 1:15

...all they which are in Asia be turned away from me;...

While earlier all Asia had heard the Wor...the Word of the Lord under Paul's ministry, Acts 19.

Now at a time which is not specified in the Word of God or in history, the apostle Peter wrote two epistles arrest...addressed to the dispersed Judeans in the province of Asia: 1 Peter 1:1, 2 Peter 3:1, and Revelation 1:11 and Revelation 2:1 to 3:22.

According to church tradition, the apostle John lived in Ephesus in the later years of his life. The biblical evidence in this regard is in the book of Revelation which was written by John from an island near Ephesus called Patmos. In this treatise, he addressed believers who would live in Asia in a future administration, Revelation 1:9-11. In the late first or second century, the church at Ephesus also received a letter from Ignatius, a bishop of Antioch who was being taken to Rome for execution. And Ignatius lived 35-107 [A.D.]. And at this time Polycarp, 69-155 [A.D.], was the leading Asian church figure in Smyrna which was just a few miles north of Ephesus. And after he proclaimed that he had served Christ for 86 years and that he refused to recant, he died as a martyr. By the time of Ignatius and Polycarp, the truth of the doctrine of the Mystery had changed so considerably that there was very little great truth left, because they had introduced the Trinitarian ideas; they had introduced the sacrament...sacrament; they had introduced the doctrine of life after death. So in many respects I thank God that in 262 A.D. the gods destroyed the temple of Diana and they destroyed the city of Ephesus. But later on the city revived a little and the worship of Diana continued but Ephesus never recovered its former splendor or influence.

Now in 431 A.D. the consul of Ephesus was held there which is called the third general consul of the church; it was held in the great double church of St. Mary. At this consul, is where Nestorius was condemned...in Arab...Aramaic you know you have the Nestorian characters and the Jacobite. And it was at this consul that Nestorius was condemned and that the Virgin Mary was established as *theotokos* meaning "God-bearer" or "Mother of God." Nestorius...Nestorius' chief opponent, his arch enemy was Cyril (c-y-r-i-l) of Alexandria. Cyril of Alexandria at that time gained the support of the bishop of Ephesus to start the consul of before the arrival of the Syrian bishops of the Eastern Church; before they came in they started the consul. Had they waited the Eastern Church would probably have supported Nestorius, but they didn't wait. And that's why the proclamation of Mary's position was received with popular rejoicing in Ephesus. And of course it due in some measure to the continuing influence of the worship of Diana, the virgin goddess.

After the Arab conquest of Turkey in the eleventh century, the city of Ephesus declined even further. Then Christianity was replaced by the Moslem religion, Islam. And today there is not even a token of Christianity at the city of Ephesus. Ephesus is in absolute ruins. You know, after reaching the spiritual heights of Acts 19 and the great epistle or treatise bearing its name, Ephesus rejected the Word of God, and today it has disappeared among the sands of Turkey.

Now a little bit about Paul the writer. The Apostle Paul was born at Tarsus which was a major city of influence, in the Roman province of Cilicia. He was the son of a Pharisee. He was raised strictly as a Hebrew among Hebrews. Aramaic was his native or mother tongue, his vernacular. He was also born a free Roman citizen; his family having acquired full citizenship at Tarsus. At birth he was given the Hebrew name of Saul after Saul's... Israel's first king, who was an ancestor of his own tribe, Benjamin. In Hebrew Saul means "asked of God." His other name was translated Paul spelled p-a-u-l-o-s in Greek; *Paulos* in Greek and *Polos* (p-o-l-o-s) in Aramaic. This word *Polos* or *polos* [pronounces differently] is related to the Greek word *Paula* (p-a-u-l-a), which means rest, or pause. Paul and the Church certainly had rest after his conversion. Biblically, this name found use after Paul began reaching out with the Christian message to the Gentiles. Before that time, he was called Saul, but after that more and more and more they used the word Paul, the name Paul.

Paul's family moved from Tarsus to Jerusalem when Paul was still a youth, and in Jerusalem Paul was raised and educated at the feet of Gamaliel, the greatest of the greats of that time. Paul's training and position with the Judean leaders indicate that he was a member of the Sanhedrin after he was 30 years old, which means he had to have been married and the father of at least one child. And Paul was also the leader in the Judean persecution of the early Church. But in a dynamic confrontation with Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus, Paul was converted to Christianity and became not only its greatest spokesman but the man who received the abundance and the greatness of all revelations regarding the Church of the Mystery which had been kept secret in God from before the overthrow. Toward the end of his ministry and life he was arrested in Jerusalem, imprisoned, taken to Rome. And while in prison in Rome, Paul wrote the epistle to the Ephesians.

Now, what's the purpose of the epistle? Well, it's the apex of all Christian revelation. Doctrinally, Ephesians begins where Romans 8 terminates. Corps, to understand Ephesians you must first master the doctrines of Romans. And Ephesians is much more like a treatise, an expansion, than an epistle. The first three chapters of Ephesians deal with the believer's standing, the last three with the believer's state. This clearly indicates that you have to have a sound standing of doctrine in order to have a right practice or state as a believer.

If your doctrine is screwed up, your state will be screwed up. The key to the whole treatise of Ephesians is stated in Chapter 1, verse 3.

Ephesians 1:3:

Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath [past tense] blessed [past tense] us [the believers] with [every or] all spiritual blessings in [the heavenlies]...in Christ:

The location is in the heavenlies in Christ.

And God's purpose in Christ Jesus was that God made Christ, was what God made Christ to be for the believers and what God made the believers to be in Christ.

The foundation of all blessing is in the purpose of God in call...in calling us before the foundation, or before the overthrow, of the world solely by God's grace and of His mercy. The will of God is the primary and only source of all blessing, Corps. And it's the work of Christ that is the media whereby God made all spiritual blessings available to us. And Corps, it's the holy spirit power in us to live the will of God with Christ in us dynamically,

to be more than conquerors, and to have more than an abundant life. God willed it because God intensely desired it to the end that God could almost taste it. To have sons and daughters who would love Him, not because they were coerced or forced to, but in reciprocation or response to the great love wherewith He loved in Christ Jesus that by the freedom of their will they would accept him as their lord and savior and walk with the power of God in the freedom of Christ Jesus to be a credit to God who so loved that He gave. May God in His mercy and grace grant that the Corps may be in that category.

Having an understanding of God's divine purpose and blessings given in Ephesians, you should more fully appreciate the hope as given in the third and final doctrinal treatise to the Church, namely the Book of Thessalonians.

There are certain key words in Ephesians that help to depict the central and major focus of God's great blessing of the believer in Christ. I believe I will hold that until next week. And we'll open with that next week and I'll give you those key words of Ephesians, then we will move into Ephesians 1:1.