

Introduction To The Book Of Ephesians

The letter to the Ephesian church is recognized as one of Paul's prison epistles, written during the two years he was in his first imprisonment in Rome (Acts 28:30). At least two other letters were written at the same time; his letter to the Colossians and his personal letter to Philemon. The date usually regarded as the time these three books were written was about A.D. 62.

The church in Ephesus was begun by Paul. As he concluded his second journey, he left Corinth (where he had spent at least 18 months) and traveled to Ephesus. While both Timothy and Silas had been with him in Corinth; there is no mention of these traveling with him to Ephesus (although that does not remove the possibility they may have) but two dear friends did travel there with him: Prisca and Aquilla. The evidence indicates that couple remained in Ephesus after Paul's departure for Syria (Acts 18:18). Paul preached in the synagogue and Jews there were somewhat receptive to his teaching, asking him to remain longer. He declined, however, promising he would return, if the Lord permitted such (Acts 18:19f).

During Paul's absence, a man of notable ability came to Ephesus and also taught in the synagogue, Apollos by name (Acts 18:24-26). Prisca and Aquilla, who obviously continued to worship in the synagogue on the Sabbath, heard him. They recognized both his ability and deficiency of knowledge for while he taught "*accurately the things of Jesus,*" he knew only the baptism of John. Prisca and Aquilla "*took him unto them*" correcting the things he yet did not know, and recommended him to the Corinthian brethren (Acts 18:25-28). There was, then, a nucleus of brethren awaiting Paul who "*having passed through the upper country came to Ephesus*" (Acts 19:1). Prisca and Aquilla of course; "*the brethren*" who recommended Apollos to the Corinthians (Acts 18:27), and twelve men whose status was left to Paul's arriving, when, if, he should return! Paul's labors began in earnest once he arrived in Ephesus. One of the first orders of business awaiting him was the question of what to do about the twelve men who, like Apollos, know only John's baptism (Acts 19:3). We would logically conclude that since Apollos had preached here and knew only John's baptism, that these men were ones he had taught and baptized. Such is a logical conclusion, but not a necessary one. However they came to know about John's baptism, whether either through teaching of Apollos or some undetermined source, they soon realized they needed to be baptized again, and so they were (Acts 19:4-6).

For three months Paul taught and persuaded men in the synagogue about Jesus Christ. Obviously he made many converts, but as so often happens,

resistance stiffened against his teaching and Paul found it necessary to separate the disciples (Acts 20:29-30). Then he taught in the school of Tyrannus; whether Paul taught in order to sustain himself, and those with him, or whether the "school" allowed him opportunity to evangelize is not precisely certain. But, the number of disciples multiplied greatly in the city. And as God had done previously, so now he permitted great signs and miracles to be wrought through Paul's hands so that people from the whole region brought their sick and "*carried away from his body handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out*" (Acts 19:12). Needless to say, the name of Jesus was greatly magnified. Here also certain Jewish exorcists sought to imitate Paul, thinking there was some magical power in the phrase "*in the name of Jesus.*" To their chagrin and embarrassment, they learned they had neither part nor lot in the matter (Acts 19:13-16)! This incident in which the man in whom the evil spirit dwelt, leaped about these "exorcists" and both the exorcists fled from the house, naked and wounded. This showed that their magical acts were absolutely of no value so brethren who had practiced such magical arts or read about them, brought their books together and burned them, confessing their deeds. The books were worth 50,000 pieces of silver (Acts 19:18f)!

Paul's stay in Ephesus came to an abrupt end through the efforts of a business man named Demetrius. This man was a silversmith, who stirred up those of the same trade against Paul because, said he, our trade is endangered (Acts 19:23ff). All those tradesmen provoked the whole city to cry out for the space of two hours "*Great is Diana of the Ephesians*" (Acts 19:34). After the uproar ceased, Paul left the city, bound for Greece. (Acts 20:1f).

A few months later Paul passed near Ephesus and called the elders of the church to meet him at Miletus (Acts 20:17). He gave them many sober warnings and exhortations. Although Paul did not expect that he would ever see these beloved brethren again, he apparently did for at some point in his travels he had left Timothy there with instructions to "*charge certain men not to teach a different doctrine*" (1 Tim. 1:3). The Ephesian and Colossian letters are very similar: teach on much the same material, yet the theme of these books are radically different. The theme of the Ephesian letter is "The Glorious Church" while the Colossian letter has "The Preeminence of Christ" as its theme. Both are grand themes, written by a grand apostle! The articles which will follow, (if the Lord will) will be devoted to the study of Paul's development of his theme, "The Glorious Church."

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