

NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR INDUCTIVE STUDY OF PAUL'S LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS – INTRODUCTION

Ephesus, the capital of the Roman province of Asia, was on the south-western corner of what is now Turkey. It had once been a flourishing seaport but clearing forests and subsequent erosion silted up its harbour so that today it is 10 kms. from the sea. Even by Paul's time it had declined as a centre of trade. Instead it had become a popular tourist attraction built around the temple of Artemis, a fertility goddess. This cult went back to at least 1000BC, to the finding of a meteorite which was supposedly an image of the goddess. The meteorite was kept in the temple and silver copies were sold at inflated prices to the tourists. Thus the whole economy and life of the city were built around false teaching about their idol. It was therefore going to be a tough place in which to preach the Christian message.

Paul's first attempt to go to Ephesus was on his second missionary journey in Acts 16, but he was 'forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia.'(Acts 16:6) Instead he went on to Macedonia and then to Greece before laying the ground work for his future ministry in Ephesus by a brief visit after leaving Corinth. Paul had time just to introduce his message in the synagogue, but despite being asked to stay longer, he moved on, leaving his two secret agents, Aquila and Priscilla, behind to prepare for his return a year later.(Acts 18:18-21) An immediate fruit of their ministry was the meeting in the Ephesian synagogue with Apollos, a powerful Jewish preacher who had only half understood who Jesus was, until Aquila and Priscilla filled in the gaps in his understanding.(Acts 18:24-28)

At last in Acts 19 Paul was able to begin in earnest his three years of work in Ephesus, the longest time he spent anywhere on his journeys. Difficult though his task was, it could be regarded as the most fruitful part of Paul's ministry. His work began with a group of former disciples of John the Baptist who had not yet heard that the One John promised had actually come, died on the cross so that sin could be forgiven, and risen from the dead so that He could come and live within people as His Holy Spirit. It was a simple matter to lead those who had already repented years before to receive Jesus Christ into their lives. By speaking in other tongues they shared in the miracle of Pentecost as the Spirit entered their lives. This group would form the nucleus of the Ephesian Bible school.(Acts 19:1-7)

The next stop was the synagogue to which Paul had been asked to return. For three months he 'reasoned and persuaded them about the kingdom of God' showing, as always with the Jews, that the Christ the Old Testament spoke of was Jesus of Nazareth. Truth divided the synagogue between those with hard hearts who rejected and criticised and those with open hearts who believed and followed.(Acts 19:8,9)

Rather than provoke open conflict between Jews and Christians in a heathen city, Paul withdrew with his two groups of students to a neutral venue, the hall of Tyrannus. There for the next two years he taught them daily with such effect that the whole population of all races in the province of Asia, which included cities such as Colossae,(Col.1:7; 4:12) Laodicea,(Rev.3:14-22) and all the other cities of Rev.2 and 3, heard the truth concerning life in Christ. Paul's students were so excited about what they discovered in the word that they had to go home and pass on to their families and neighbours what they had

learned for themselves. So far as we know, Paul never visited these cities. He did not need to because his students were such effective ambassadors.(Acts 19:9,10)

Quietly what was happening for the little group in the classroom began to have an impact on the city. God chose, as He sometimes does among those who have believed another god, to do miracles of healing through Paul to show how much more powerful He was. Demons being cast out produced attempts at imitation by unbelievers with humorous consequences. Spontaneously the vast facade of Satanic magic began to fall apart as people recognised that God was greater, and wanted to get rid of their old ways and beliefs in a huge public bonfire. The value of the books burned would be many millions of dollars in today's terms. None of this was the result of Paul's demands but simply of finding something so much better that there was no point in clinging to the past, as the gospel spread through the city.(Acts 19:11-20)

At some stage during his stay in Ephesus Paul found time to write his most difficult letter.(I Cor:16:8) Just as Paul was preparing to move on there came an explosion from the businessmen of Ephesus who had profited from the tourist trade surrounding Artemis. Their pockets were threatened. If no-one wanted their silver idols anymore they would go bankrupt. They stirred up a mob who found a couple of Christian hostages who narrowly escaped with their lives.(Acts 19:23-41)

Paul made one more brief visit to Miletus, the port of Ephesus, where he met with the elders of the Ephesian church to remind them of the principles of his ministry which he hoped they would continue to follow.(Acts 20:15-38) Though he never returned himself, Paul encouraged others like Timothy,(I Tim.1:3) and Tychicus,(II Tim.4:12) to extend the work there.

The result of all this faithful ministry was a healthy church. When Paul wrote his letter to Ephesus from prison in Rome some five years later this was the only church he did not need to correct. He could concentrate on building on the solid foundation which had been laid. So if you are excited about your relationship with Christ and want to grow, this is a great book for you!

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION ON CHAPTER ONE.

1. How did Paul describe himself and those who would receive this letter? What can we learn from what he says about himself and them? With what two words did he sum up his message? How are these ideas developed later in the book?(1:1,2)
2. What according to verse 3 has God blessed us with? Where is all this blessing to be found? List separately every blessing which is 'in Christ', 'in Him' or 'in the Beloved' described in this section. Give a simple explanation of each blessing. What do we have to do to receive such blessing?(1:3-14)
3. What two things had Paul heard about the Ephesian Christians? What was the keynote of his prayer for them? What did he pray they would come to know even more than before? What would happen if we prayed like this for others?(1:15-19)
4. How did God demonstrate His power after the death of His Son? How does this affect us? What is our relationship with Him as the church? How is the importance of this going to be developed in chapter 4?(1:20-23)