

SCRIPTURAL, HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF THE BOOK OF EPHESIANS

It can't be stressed enough how important it is to have a proper understanding of the letter to the Church in Ephesus. In order to get this understanding, one must look at who Paul's audience was, what they already had been taught and why Paul says the things he does to them. It is also important to see what was written to this Church at Ephesus after Paul's letter, because we can see exactly what happened to the group and how they fared against the spiritual attacks that Paul warned them about. So let's set the context using the Scriptures-

Paul stopped by Ephesus for a short while to drop off Priscilla and Aquila. While there, he entered the synagogue to reason with the Jews. Those in Ephesus asked him to stay, but he couldn't. He then left for Caesarea. (Acts 18:18-22)

Paul came back to Ephesus and again went to the synagogues, speaking boldly and reasoning and persuading the Jews about the kingdom of God. However, some were becoming hardened and disobedient, so he withdrew from the synagogues and taught elsewhere. Paul stayed in Ephesus nearly three years, and during this time, "all who lived in Asia [Ephesus was the capital of Asia] heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks." "So the word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing." (Acts 19:1-20)

While in Ephesus, Paul sent Timothy and Erastus to Macedonia ahead of himself, for he planned on joining up with them shortly. But some disturbances arose at the temple of Artemis (one of the seven wonders of the ancient world) concerning Paul's teachings, for it was turning many away from pagan worship. [Paul's teaching was a disruption to all cultures and was not welcome in either the secular or religious circles.] (Acts 19:21-41) Paul left for Macedonia (Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, and Corinth), accompanied by Timothy. (Acts 20:1-5)

Paul sailed to Miletus. From Miletus he called the elders of Ephesus to himself to speak to them these words –

Acts 20:18-32

18 And when they had come to him, he said to them: "You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you, **19** "serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews; **20** "how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house, **21** testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.

26 "Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. **27** "For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God. **[HERE LIES THE WARNING!!!]** **28** "Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. **29** "For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. **30** "Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. **31** "Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.

32 "So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

Paul left Miletus and travelled through some other cities, until he ends up at his destination, Jerusalem. In Jerusalem he is arrested. Eventually he is imprisoned in Rome, and from there Paul writes his epistle to the Church at Ephesus (circa 60 – 62 AD). At this time, Paul is assured of the mature knowledge of the Church there, and he even goes so far as to call those he addresses in his letter, “the saints [who are] faithful in Christ Jesus.” He is confident of the way they are running their race, but there is still the necessity to warn them to be on their guard.

Paul is subsequently released from prison and travels again (but we do not have this historical account recorded in Acts). During these travels he is reunited with Timothy and they travel back to Ephesus. Paul leaves Ephesus, but asks Timothy to remain there. Sometime shortly thereafter from Macedonia, Paul writes his first letter to Timothy (circa 63 AD), and begins his epistle with these words—

1 Timothy 1:3-4

As I urged you when I went into Macedonia--remain in Ephesus that you may charge some that they teach no other doctrine, nor give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which cause disputes rather than godly edification which is in faith.

Then later in the letter he mentions this—

1 Timothy 4:1-2, 16

Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy...

16 Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things; for as you do this you will insure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you.

And then finally—

1 Timothy 6:20-21

O Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you, avoiding worldly and empty chatter and the opposing arguments of what is falsely called "knowledge"- which some have professed and thus gone astray from the faith.

About 4 years later, Paul ends up imprisoned in Rome again, and he writes a final letter to Timothy, who is still in Ephesus. Paul writes this—

2 Timothy 1:13-15

Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. Guard, through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to you. You are aware of the fact that all who are in Asia turned away from me, among whom are Phygelus and Hermogenes.

2 Timothy 4:1-5

I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires; and will turn away their ears from the truth,

and will turn aside to myths. But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

And then shortly thereafter, John is taken in the Spirit, into the Lord's Day, where he witnesses the Judgment Seat of Christ and hears these harsh words spoken specifically about the Church in Ephesus—

Revelation 2:4

But I have this against you, that you have left your first love.