

# THE LETTER OF PAUL TO THE EPHESIANS

## PART 1: INTRO: APOCALYPSE NOW!

Please turn in your bibles to the book of Ephesians.

This morning we are going to begin a study through the book of Ephesians. It has been a while since we have done a verse by verse study through a whole book, therefore I figured it was time – and this correlates with some studies I’m doing.

Today we will go through the background and the overall context of the book as well as the structure of the book, which is actually a letter. One of the greatest things that a professor has ever done for me was when one of my NT professors made us read each book we were studying all the way through in one sitting – even Romans and Revelation. Your homework is to do the same thing. Go home and read through the whole letter in one sitting. Then do it the next day and the next. You will be amazed how much easier it is to follow what Paul is saying and track with his themes and logic. That is some of the best advice I can give you.

Paul wrote this letter to the church somewhere around 62 AD, while imprisoned in Rome (see **Eph. 3:1; 4:1; 6:20; Acts 28**). It is thought that this letter may be a circular letter that was passed to the churches in the region – namely those listed in Revelation.

Ephesus was a large port city in what we now refer to as Western Turkey (see map).

The city of Ephesus was a rich one – a hub of trade and home to the temple of Artemis, a huge attraction for pilgrimages which was a financial boon for the area, (see Acts 19:19) and would later be home to temples dedicated to Caesar and Sarapis. It was pagan to the core. Ephesus had a fascination with magic and the occult. This explains why in the latter part of his letter, Paul makes sure to speak about the malevolent unseen powers and how they are the real enemy and not the people often seen to be the enemy. This goes back to the theme of unity.

Unlike many of Paul’s letters, there doesn’t seem to be any urgent crisis being the reason for the writing of the letter. Most of the time Paul’s letters are for the purpose of putting out fires within the church to which the letter is addressed. But here, we don’t see that. In this letter Paul is addressing the unity of believers in Christ, how believers should then live in the church, world and home. This theme of unity seeps into all aspects of life.

The book has 6 chapters. It is easily divided into two sections. The first 3 chapters are Paul’s summation of the gospel and how it works through God’s plan from the beginning. Chapters 4-6 then go on to show us that how the plan of God and the unity that comes from it are then to be worked out in our practical daily lives. It has been said by one scholar, that Ephesians is a

community's guide for comprehending and responding to the apocalypse of the crucified and risen king of the cosmos.

You may have noticed the word, "apocalypse" in this statement. If I were to ask the average person on the street or even the average person in the church what that word meant, I would most likely hear something to the effect of, "the end of the world" or "final judgment." That is what the word has come to mean colloquially, but that is not what it means in the bible or the dictionary.

602. **ἀποκάλυψις apokalupsis**, *ap-ok-al'-oop-sis*; from 601; disclosure: — appearing, coming, lighten, manifestation, be revealed, revelation, to uncover.

Paul uses this word, translated as "revelation" two times in Ephesians, specifically.

**Eph. 1:17 that <sup>p</sup>the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, <sup>q</sup>may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him,**

**Eph. 3:3 <sup>s</sup>how the mystery was made known to me <sup>t</sup>by revelation, <sup>u</sup>as I have written briefly.**

He then uses another form of the same Greek word which is translated, "revealed".

**Eph. 3:5 which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.**

601. **ἀποκαλύπτω apokalupto**, *ap-ok-al'-oop'-to*; from 575 and 2572; to take off the cover, i.e. disclose: — reveal.

The point is that Paul says he had an apocalypse. We see how that word is defined. It doesn't mean, "the end of the world" or a cataclysmic event. Even when we read the book of Revelation, it means the unveiling of Jesus Christ. That should affect what we should expect to get out of the book.

In describing his apocalypse. We are told of the event in Acts 9. Paul then tells the story himself in Acts 22 and 26.

**Acts 9:1-6; 22:6-7; 26: 13-18**

In each instance we read that Paul saw a bright light and heard a voice. The bright light aligns with what we mean when we say, "A light came on in my head." Or we see a light bulb over someone's head in a cartoon. Paul's apocalypse allowed him to see the place where the heavens and earth overlap. An apocalypse is the bond between Heaven and Earth becomes visible to a person. Think of the story of Jacob's pillar in Genesis 28, where he had the dream of

the angels ascending and descending a ladder to Heaven. This is also the kind of imagery we get in the tabernacle and the temple, where God resides, yet it is here on Earth.

As we read Ephesians, we see that it is this apocalypse that Paul is sharing with those in Ephesus, (and others as the letter is believed to be circular).

What is this apocalypse? Paul tells us in verses 9 and 10.

***Ephesians 1:9,10***

***making known<sup>3</sup> to us the mystery of his will, <sup>n</sup>according to his purpose, which he <sup>w</sup>set forth in Christ <sup>10</sup> as a plan for <sup>x</sup>the fullness of time, <sup>y</sup>to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.***

In these verses Paul gives us a summation of what his apocalypse. He says that what he learned was the plan of God from the beginning. And what was that plan? It was to unite all things in Him, (Jesus), in heaven and earth. That is the summation and end result of the plan of God – the gospel.

As we read through the letter to the Ephesians, and remember that it is a letter, we can see that the first 3 chapters of the letter are Paul explaining what it means that everything be unified in Jesus. If we are paying attention, we will see the theme of unity throughout the book – especially the second half of the book, (chapters 4-3). As Paul explains his apocalypse – what it meant, and how it is to be applied and lived by the believer, (what it means to be an imager and to live a kingdom life, as Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount) he then expands this theme of unity from that of the body of Christ, to marriage, to the relationship between parents and children and then into the relationship between a master and his slave.

As we are reading, we will Paul use, “we” and “you”. This is soooo important. The “we” means Israel. The “you” means Gentile believers. If we pay attention, this is crystal clear and helps to show us what Paul means when he speaks of the mystery to which he has had an apocalypse.

**Acts 9:1 But Saul, <sup>b</sup>still <sup>c</sup>breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to <sup>d</sup>the high priest <sup>2</sup> and asked him for letters <sup>e</sup>to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to <sup>f</sup>the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. <sup>3</sup> <sup>g</sup>Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. <sup>4</sup> And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting <sup>h</sup>me?” <sup>5</sup> And he said, “Who are you, Lord?” And he said, “I am Jesus, <sup>h</sup>whom you are persecuting. <sup>6</sup> But <sup>i</sup>rise and enter the city, and you will be told <sup>j</sup>what you are to do.” <sup>7</sup> <sup>k</sup>The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, <sup>l</sup>hearing the voice but seeing no one. <sup>8</sup> Saul rose from the ground, and although his eyes were opened, <sup>m</sup>he saw nothing. So they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. <sup>9</sup> And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.**

**Acts 9:10** Now there was a disciple at Damascus named <sup>n</sup>Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, “Ananias.” And he said, <sup>o</sup>“Here I am, Lord.” <sup>11</sup> And the Lord said to him, “Rise and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man <sup>p</sup>of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying, <sup>12</sup> and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and <sup>q</sup>lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight.” <sup>13</sup> But Ananias answered, “Lord, I have heard from many about this man, <sup>r</sup>how much evil he has done to <sup>s</sup>your <sup>t</sup>saints at Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup> And here he has authority from “the chief priests to bind all who <sup>v</sup>call on your name.” <sup>15</sup> But the Lord said to him, “Go, for <sup>w</sup>he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name <sup>x</sup>before the Gentiles and <sup>y</sup>kings and the children of Israel. <sup>16</sup> For <sup>z</sup>I will show him how much <sup>a</sup>he must suffer <sup>b</sup>for the sake of my name.” <sup>17</sup> So <sup>c</sup>Ananias departed and entered the house. And <sup>d</sup>laying his hands on him he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and <sup>e</sup>be filled with the Holy Spirit.” <sup>18</sup> And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and <sup>f</sup>he regained his sight. Then <sup>g</sup>he rose and was baptized; <sup>19</sup> and <sup>h</sup>taking food, he was strengthened.

For <sup>i</sup>some days he was with the disciples at Damascus.

**20** And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, <sup>j</sup>“He is the Son of God.”  
**21** And all who heard him were amazed and said, “Is not this the man who <sup>k</sup>made havoc <sup>l</sup>in Jerusalem of those who called upon this name? And has he not come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests?” **22** But Saul <sup>m</sup>increased all the more in strength, and <sup>n</sup>confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving <sup>o</sup>that Jesus was the Christ.

## READ THE WHOLE BOOK

So, what are we to learn from Paul’s apocalypse? We will dive into the details as we go. But as for today, we need to pay attention to Paul’s apocalypse because of the effect it had on him. It totally changed his life. God spoke to him and when Paul responded, the Spirit worked in him to change him from the inside out. Note that I didn’t just say, “saved him”. The evidence of a changed life is a changed life. Paul was completely turned around.

Now, it didn’t happen overnight. His salvation happened instantly, but we read that after he had his sight restored, he then spent time with the apostles in Damascus. This was Paul learning from them – and teaching them also. You see, when God “revealed” these things to Paul - He, God, was revealing his plan of the ages to a man who had already studied the OT. Paul was a well-read and well-educated man – both in the study of the Tanakh, (OT) as well as the Hellenistic way of oration, logic and argumentation. He was a man with his feet in two worlds. This is why he was chosen to reach out to the Gentiles. Can you imagine Peter trying to minister to the men in Athens or anywhere else in the Gentile world? Paul was the one who was qualified. So, God poured His Spirit into a man who already had a great deal of knowledge of the subject. However, though he knew the text and the facts, he hadn’t been able to put things

together. But after God touched him and gave him that apocalypse, Paul was a changed man – a man who couldn't stop telling others what he had learned AND experienced!

What Paul is doing in this letter, (a letter in which we don't read of any drama), is he is sharing his apocalypse. He is attempting to bring them into his apocalypse. He wants them to also have an apocalypse – to know the plan of the ages.

We should seek to understand the revelation of Jesus – His plan, and then through the Spirit change our lives and share it with others so that they can also have the same apocalypse.