

THE CHURCHES OF CHRIST IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

LESSON ELEVEN = *The Church in Ephesus*

Bible Class Series by Ray Reynolds (3/13/11)

Introduction: Each of the congregations in the New Testament had unique features and characteristics. They all had qualities we can learn from and use to better our own congregations today. In this lesson we are going to consider the church in Ephesus. Let's study together

Discussion:

I. The Geography of Ephesus

The city of Ephesus was located on the eastern shore of the Aegean Sea. Specifically, it is on the Western coast of Asia at the mouth of the Cayster River. It was located on the eastern Roman road. The city had an enormous seaport in Paul's day.

II. The History of Ephesus

Ephesus was founded as an Attic-Ionian colony in the 10th century BC on the Ayasuluk Hill.

* The mythical founder of the city was a prince of Athens named Androklos.

Ephesus would later be one of the twelve cities of the Ionian League during the Classical Greek era.

In 88 BC Ephesus welcomed Archelaus, but 80,000 Roman citizens were slaughtered.

* However, Ephesus came back under the Roman rule in 86 BC.

When Augustus became emperor in 27 BC, he made Ephesus the capital of Asia instead of Pergamum.

* It became the seat of the governor, a growing metropolis and a major center of commerce.

In the Roman period, it was the second largest city of the Roman Empire; ranking behind Rome.

* Ephesus had a population of 250K+ in Paul's day, and 400K+ at the end of the 1st century BC.

The city was famous for the Temple of Artemis (**Acts 19:35**).

* This large shrine was completed around 550 BC and housed a meteorite bearing her image.

* It was considered one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.

The city also held the Library of Celsus, and its theatre, which could hold 25,000 spectators.

The largest gladiator graveyard has been discovered in Ephesus (May 2007).

The city went through cycles of construction and destruction.

Emperor Constantine I rebuilt much of the city and erected new public baths.

There were 4 major aqueducts supplying the entire city with clean drinking water.

The city was the site of several 5th century Christian Councils (Council of Ephesus).

III. The Beginning of the Church in Ephesus

The city was more diverse in religion than many other cities, but emperor worship, was commanded.

The Jews that lived in Ephesus maintained a large synagogue, but were heavily influenced by pagans.

Paul may have helped in the foundation of the church (**Acts 18**).

The people in this area were critical of those of "the Way" and persecuted them.

Paul supervised many other missionaries and works from this location.

IV. The Work of the Church in Ephesus

Ephesus was a very successful and thriving congregation.

Paul, John, Timothy, and Onesimus had successful ministries in this city.

* Timothy served the congregation for about 15 years.

Several women had successful ministries in the city of Ephesus.

* Pricilla, and her husband Aquila, are well-known for their work in this city.

* Jesus' mother Mary lived here and worshipped with this congregation.

* History also tells us that Mary Magdalene was a teacher here in Ephesus.

The fact that the letters are preserved from this congregation are evidence of their faithful work.

V. The Letters to the Church in Ephesus

The following outline could be used for Paul's letter: The following outline could be used for John's letter:

I. Our Wealth in Christ (1-3)

I. Commendation

II. Our Walk in Christ (4-6:9)

II. Criticism

III. Our Warfare With Christ (6:10-24)

III. Command

IV. Compensation

Anyone have a favorite verse from Ephesians they want to share?

VI. The Dilemmas of the Church in Ephesus

The misunderstanding of the Holy Spirit and the role of John the Baptist (**Acts 18-19**).

The Sons of Sceva caused some trouble (**Acts 19**).

Paganism and worldliness was hard to overcome in Ephesus.

The church needed to grasp the power of God and our place in Christ.

The church needed to understand unity and the Headship of Christ.

The church needed to understand the presence of the Lord in all relationships.

The church needed to comprehend the spiritual battle of a Christian.

The church need to focus more on spiritual needs.

VII. The Maturity of the Church in Ephesus

The congregation benefited from several letters in the New Testament

Jesus saw that the church could have a future.

* What Did Jesus Say?

Commendation: They rejected evil, they had perseverance and patience.

Criticism: They no longer loved Christ, they were no longer fervent.

Command: Repent and do the first works, He was coming quickly to remove their lamp.

Compensation: The tree of life.

* They simply had to repent or their candlestick would be removed.

The church struggled, but was a significant congregation for a few more centuries after John.

* Two decades after John's death, the church at Ephesus was still important enough to be addressed by a letter written by Bishop Ignatius of Antioch.

* The church had given their support for Ignatius, who was taken to Rome for execution.

Conclusion: God clearly blessed the church in Ephesus. We can see that history shows the wisdom and providence of God throughout the New Testament. We should trust Him to provide direction for the church today. It is my prayer that by studying about these wonderful congregations of the Lord's people that we will see our place in the kingdom. Next week we will begin our study of Smyrna.