

Class Notes on Ephesians -- Appendix number one

WHERE DID THE EPHESIAN LETTER ORIGINATE?

It has been argued by some that the letter we know as "Ephesians" was not written **to** Ephesus, but **from** there -- that it was not written from Rome as is commonly believed. Is this possible, and is it of any importance to know the answer to this question? Let us consider the arguments and look at some Scriptures.

One of the arguments against the Ephesian letter being written from Rome is that Paul was not really in a prison there, but in his own hired house. How, then, could he refer to himself as an ambassador in bonds (literally "in a chain")? they ask.

That he was in his own hired house seems to be an argument **FOR** the letter being written from Rome. Roman prisons were not the clean, lighted and ventilated places we know today. They did not have visiting hours, a library, and free time each day, as American prisons often do. To write an epistle with the exalted character of Ephesians under the conditions of a Roman prison (in Ephesus) would be very difficult (though not impossible -- for Second Timothy was evidently so written). Paul was in prison in Caesarea for two full years, yet no epistles come to us out of this prison. But in Rome (at this time) he could be in a lighted room, and he could have men in to take his dictation. He would not have his attention diverted from the weighty subjects in hand by rats nibbling at his toes, or the smell of unremoved filth, which were standard in most prisons of the day. He could have access to any books which he may have needed, and the materials for writing would have been ready to his hand.

"But when he wrote Ephesians he was in chains!" we are reminded.

Very well, let us consider this objection. Which prisoner would be the most likely to have a chain on him -- the one who is safely within stone walls and iron doors, or the one who is in his own hired house? The answer to that is obvious. Happily we are not left without positive proof. From the time Paul arrived in Rome he was in his own house, as Acts 28:16 reveals. However this verse also tells us that he was "with a soldier that kept him." Was he chained to the soldier? Read Acts 28:20. "- I am bound with this chain -." The word for chain is exactly the same one used in Eph. 6:20. So much for that argument!

Ephesians does not stand alone. The evidence seems to be overwhelming that Ephesians was written at about the same time as Colossians. Not only the close similarity of thought between the books; not only that they were delivered by the same man, Tychicus (Eph. 6:21; Col. 4:7); but also the cross references seem to demand this. If Eph. 3:3, 4 refers to the epistle to the Colossians (at least a possibility), and if Col. 4:16 refers to the epistle to the Ephesians, then they had to be written at about the same time.

Colossians would have been written first, with the plan to follow it immediately with another letter that he can refer to in Colossians, even though it is not yet written. (I might write to my son first, and tell him to send his letter on to his sister, asking him to also read the letter I have written to her. Then, having finished his letter, I would write to my daughter the letter which I have just referred to, mailing them together.) There seems to be no reason to suspect that these letters were not written at the same time. This being so, we can investigate Colossians as well as Ephesians for evidence of where Paul was when he wrote.

Now let us review Paul's stay in Ephesus. We know more about this three year period than any other time in one place in all of his ministry.

First of all, review that period as Paul looks back on it in Acts twenty. Covering the

FULL PERIOD of three years, he says in Acts 20:31, "- by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one of you night and day with tears." How could he warn every one of them night and day if he were confined in a prison? He relates how he carried out this ministry in verse twenty. He warned them publicly and from house to house, and he did not cease this activity for the space of three years. We must believe him.

But let us go back to his ministry as described in Acts nineteen. This three years is divided by Luke into three periods. First there were three months during which he went into the synagogue and spoke boldly -- disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God (Acts 19:8). No prison term here. The second period is an extended ministry in the school of Tyrannus where he disputed daily, "and this continued by the space of two years" (Acts 19:9, 10). No imprisonment here either. As a matter of fact, when this period is enlarged upon in Acts 19:11 - 20, we find it was a time of real revival. Now that leaves us nine months out of the three years to account for. "After these things were ended [the things happening during the two years] ... he sent into Macedonia ... Timothy" (Acts 19:21, 22). During the last nine months there was indeed a reaction against the message -- but no mention of an imprisonment.

I realize there were imprisonments which are not recorded in Acts (2 Cor. 11:23). At this time Paul has already been working among the Gentiles for fifteen years, and much of what happened during those years is not recorded. However when the record of this last nine months in Ephesus is being given in such detail, and when the very subject of Acts 19:23 - 41 is the antagonism against the message and ministry of Paul, it seems incredible that an imprisonment long enough for Paul to compose and write two major epistles could pass unnoticed!

However, even if he was in prison during this time, he could not have written Colossians at least, for Colossians begins, "Paul ... and Timothy our brother." But Timothy has already been sent away, and is not in Ephesus at this time. While Colossians does not directly make reference to Paul as being in prison, it does indicate that the folks at Colossae know he was in some kind of trouble and needed to be comforted (Col. 4:7 - 9).

Col. 4:9, when taken with the book of Philemon, seems to show conclusively that Philemon was also written at this time. In that book Paul is a prisoner of Jesus Christ. Philemon is also sent from both Paul and Timothy. So Philemon was written from prison at a time when Timothy was with Paul. This means that if it was written from Ephesus, he had to have been in prison while he says he was in the synagogue every Sabbath, or in the school of Tyrannus every day.

There is another line of reasoning which needs to be taken into account, not only because it is a very real proof of the impossibility of Ephesians being written from Ephesus, but also because it points up the very real importance of this issue. This line of reasoning has to do with the doctrinal implications of the two views.

At first glance the idea of Ephesians being written from Ephesus appears to be a perfect answer to the teaching that the "joint Body" didn't begin until Acts twenty eight. However, we don't have to twist Scripture in order to find an answer for that. Actually, if we hold this view (Ephesians being written from Ephesus), we end up losing the very foundation for much of our understanding of Pauline truth. Let's take it step by step.

First of all, First Corinthians was written from Ephesus (1 Cor. 15:5 - 8). Now let's compare First Corinthians with Ephesians and see what we are up against if they were both written at about the same time.

Baptism was still being practiced in First Corinthians (1 Cor. 1:13 - 16), yet in Ephesians we are told there is ONE baptism. If he could write to one church and acknowledge that

baptism is still being practiced among them and, within a year or two, address another church and assure them there is **one** baptism, then "one baptism" is no proof at all that water baptism is not for this age.

Paul lists the gifted men who were set in the church in both Corinthians and Ephesians (1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11), but the lists are not the same. If he can write to one church giving them rules for how to speak in tongues, and admit to speaking in tongues himself, then turn right around and write to another church giving them a list of ministries which leaves out the tongues and other miraculous gifts, then the Pentecostals are correct: tongues may not be right for one church, but for another one they are "in." Look at 1 Cor. 13:10. If "that which is perfect" (or "complete") is the completion of the revelation for this Age of Grace, then when did it come? In Ephesians and Colossians, written only a year or two later? or in Ephesians and Colossians, written after Jerusalem had been given her last chance, after Paul had had over two years in prison to meditate and receive revelations from the Lord, after the message had at last been taken to the heart of Gentiledom and Paul has said for the last time, "Lo, we turn to the Gentiles"??

If Ephesians and Colossians were written in the middle of the book of Acts, we have a greatly weakened answer for the Baptists and their doctrine of baptism, and for the Pentecostals regarding the miraculous sign gifts.

The omission of Timothy in the opening verses of Ephesians (if he was with Paul at the time, as seems likely from the opening verses of Colossians and Philemon) is understandable on the same basis as the omission of most other personal references in this epistle. It seems to have been written to some certain church (not Ephesus necessarily), but written in such a way that it could be copied and sent to other churches for their use -- a sort of "round robin" epistle..

Also, in Col. 4:14, we find Luke with Paul. However the indications in Acts are that Luke was not with Paul when he was at Ephesus. Compare the "he" in Acts 18:23, 27; 20:2, 3 and the "Paul" in 19:1 with "we" and "us" in 20:5, 6. However Luke was with Paul in Rome ("and when WE came to Rome --") Acts 28:16.

Evidence that Paul was in prison at Ephesus or that he wrote Ephesians from there appears to be completely lacking -- the evidence points the other way.

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