

“Ephesians Overall Theme”

It is God's energizing action, through His Holy Spirit, in fulfilling His purpose with His earthly creation.

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF THE BOOK OF EPHESIANS

Ephesus was a jewel in the Roman province of Asia. In Paul's day, Asia comprised the western section of the peninsula of what later became known as Asia Minor. "Asia" in the days of the Roman Empire was not the expansive continent that it is today. It is essential to understand this point in order to bring into perspective the statement by Paul *"that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks"* (Acts 19:10). Asia was only one of seven provinces in that region that were under the dominion of Rome. And this, of course, was the reference point in the Book of Revelation when John referred to the "seven churches of Asia." At the present time Asia Minor is occupied by Turkey.

In Paul's day Ephesus was a beautiful and prosperous port city on the Aegean Sea. A magnificent street paved in marble ran from the harbor up to the center of the city. Lining the street were marble columns holding great torches that lighted the way. On either side were arcades whose facades were lined with mosaic tiles. At the top of the street one turned left to the Great Arena which had been the site of the uproar led by the silversmiths (Acts 19). The acoustics of the arena are such that one can whisper at the podium and be heard throughout the arena. If one continues north a few miles, one comes to the Grand Temple of Artemas (Diana) who was the goddess of Ephesus as well as of Asia. To the right of the street were the public buildings, including a grand library. All of this has been revealed through recent excavations.

Ephesus was also a great center of commerce with easy access to the Inland Empire as well as to the ports of the world via the Aegean Sea. One of the major drawing points of the city was the Great Temple of Diana. Great wealth was brought to the temple as a place of safe keeping and Ephesus became something of a world bank.

In later centuries Ephesus lost both its wealth and its goddess and its splendor. The rivers that converged on the harbor brought continuous deposits of silt which soon rendered the port completely inoperable. The ruins of Ephesus now sit about three miles from the coast. Furthermore, subsequent to Paul's ministry and perhaps as a contributing cause, the goddess Diana came into neglect and was no longer a drawing card to the wealth of the region. Recent excavations have uncovered the magnificence of its former glory.

The place of Ephesus in the expansion of Christianity was in a large measure due to the conquest of Alexander the Great in the 4th Century B.C. Alexander was the heir to the throne of Philip of Macedonia. After his father's death, Alexander began a massive campaign of conquest throughout the Greek peninsula and the Near East. Decimated by the war with Sparta (the Peloponnesian War), Athens was an easy mark for Alexander. He became fascinated with the Greek culture and determined to spread it throughout that part of the world. This was a period known as the Era of Hellenization, which was taken from the original name for Greece-Hellas. The Hellenic culture included the Greek language which became the major basis of communication throughout the Mediterranean basin, including Egypt, where Alexander established the city that bears his name. In fact, Greek-style city states had been established throughout the Near East. This Hellenization was an important factor in the early spread of Christianity. And, of course, koine (common) Greek was the language of the New Testament, as it was also the language of commerce throughout a good part of the known world at that time. It can well be said that the empires of Rome and of Alexander the Great were, to a large extent, the vehicles through which God spread the Gospel far and wide.

The city of Ephesus was an important part of this process. Here Paul ministered for three years and the message was spread throughout all of Asia. To such a city and such people, Paul wrote from Rome. It must be remembered that the names on these letters of Paul's are not merely book titles, but letters to real people in real places with real needs. In many respects, Ephesians is a great literary work, as we would expect of something inspired by the Holy Spirit. However it is not to be seen as a philosophical or literary masterpiece, but rather as a vital message with vital instructions to the people of God. It is not an ethereal guide through never-never land. It is not religious jargon from the ivory tower, known only by a select few who can ferret out arcane symbolisms. It is a pragmatic guide to all who care to follow Christ.

These words were written by Paul after some thirty years of revelations and rigorous experiences in living and fighting side by side with the risen Christ. The knowledge is there; the experience is there; the language is there; and Christ takes it and uses it to communicate to His people the eternal truths that will bring them through to glory.

It is well to remember also that the words of Paul were not intended to establish an order of religious perfectionism. They were intended to produce a people of God filled with His Spirit and living life day by day in the energy of that Spirit. Many books on the so-called "Christian walk" are really manuals for the producing of fleshly piety and religious fervor. Paul's letters are not such manuals of Christian perfection-they are guides for living life on the earth at peace with God and man and understanding the meaning of our relationship to Christ. All motivations to service and the caring consciousness of living with Christ are from the Holy Spirit within. Efforts on the part of Christian leaders to motivate believers are likely to produce an artificial religious piety and/or unnecessary guilt upon any failure.

Paul's first contact with Ephesus came on his second missionary journey. At that time he stopped briefly, but went on in order not to miss the feast of Pentecost at Jerusalem. However, on his third missionary journey he stayed in Ephesus for three years. There were at Ephesus two disciples-Aquila and Priscilla-whom Paul had met in Corinth and had worked with them in his trade of tent making. Later they had gone with Paul to Ephesus and stayed there while he went on to Jerusalem. Under Paul's ministry at Corinth, they had become well-informed and had obviously begun a work among the people of Ephesus, along with a Jew from Alexandria named Apollos. He was learned and eloquent, but knew only the baptism of John. Aquila and Priscilla then took him aside and showed him the true meaning of Christ. When Paul came to Ephesus he found a small group of disciples (about twelve) whom he gathered together to determine whether or not they had understood the coming and meaning of the Holy Spirit. They responded that they had not even so much as heard whether there be a Holy Spirit, but had been baptized with the baptism of John. Paul then explained to them about Christ and the coming of the Holy Spirit. And when he had laid hands on them, they received the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues and prophesied. It is very important to understand that the Holy Spirit, as given at Pentecost, was ministered to the various sectors of the country through the twelve Apostles. The reason it had to come through the Apostles was to prevent separate groups of people from rising up and claiming some special dispensation of the Holy Spirit, exclusive of the rest of the body. They had to be united, and the uniting had to come through the Apostles. The assumption that the Holy Spirit would always have to be administered through Apostles in the future, however, is not sustained in the rest of the New Testament.

This coming of the Holy Spirit at Ephesus was in keeping with Jesus' statement to His disciples as He was leaving them to ascend to glory. He said, *"Ye shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and in Samaria and unto the uttermost parts of the earth"* (Acts 1:8). The phrase—*"uttermost parts of the earth"*—should be translated "the extremities of the land." This is in keeping with the usage of that phrase by Jesus when He said that the Queen of Sheba *"had come from the uttermost parts of the earth."* . . . " Actually she came from the region of the Arabian peninsula which was at the extremity of the land. The use of the word "earth" both in Hebrew and Greek is properly translated by "land." As such it usually refers to the Mediterranean area including the boundaries of Asia Minor. Jesus' words to the disciples in Acts 1:8 were not so much a command as they were a statement of fact. Jerusalem and Judea were indeed immediately enlightened through the Apostles. Samaria came next through the ministry of Philip and now the extremities of the land would be carried out by Paul, whose ministry included all of Asia Minor. Ephesus was the ideal place to launch this ministry, since, as we have seen, its accessibility to the sea and the inland provinces had made it a great trade center, and thus a natural vehicle for the spread of the Gospel.

It is of singular importance to note that this original group in Ephesus that had received the initial coming of the Spirit was only twelve in number. It is reminiscent of the fact that Jesus left the entire building of His Church to His twelve disciples initially. As Jonathan, the close friend of David, had observed a thousand years earlier (in a battle context), *"it is nothing with the Lord to save by many or by few"* (I Samuel 14:6). One of the cardinal principles of Scripture, as summarized by Paul to the Corinthians, is that the Lord has always used the weak to confound the mighty (I Corinthians 1:27).

Paul remained in Ephesus for three years, teaching in the school of Tyrannus and in the homes of the disciples. And thus Ephesus became the foundation of a great ministry among the Gentiles of Asia. The narrative of Paul's work in Asia may be found in Acts 18-20. It is with this in mind that we now turn to the text itself and seek, as nearly as possible, to understand the true intent of Paul in the words that he uses.



Figure 1 - Artemas (Diana)



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Figure 2 - The Library at Ephesus



Figure 3 - The Library at Ephesus



Figure 4 - The Theatre at Ephesus



Figure 5 - The Theatre at Ephesus



Figure 6 - Ephesus Walkway Arcade

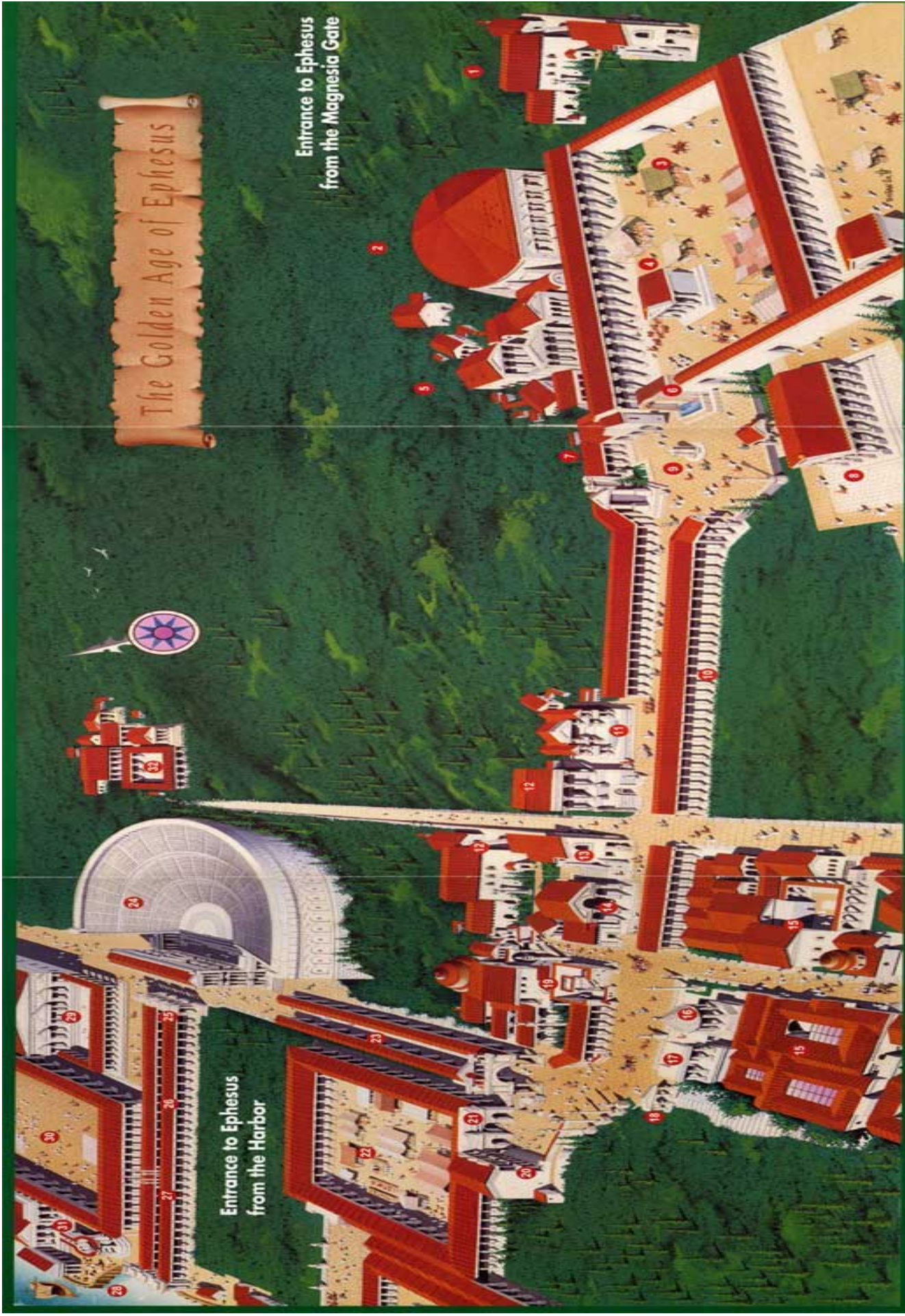


Figure 6 - Ephesus Walkway

The Golden Age of Ephesus

Entrance to Ephesus
from the Magnesia Gate

Entrance to Ephesus
from the Harbor



- LEGENDS:** 1-Varius Baths 2-Odeon 3-States Agora 4-Temple of Ius 5-Town Hall 6-Pollio Fountain 7-Mimius Monument 8-Domitian Temple 9-Domitian Square 10-Curetes Street 11-Trajan Fountain 12-Scholastica Baths 13-Jatrinae 14-Hadrian Temple 15-Palaces on the Slope 16-Octagonal Monument 17-Fountain 18-Hadrian Gate 19-Low House 20-Christus Library 21-Hazareus & Mithridates Gate 22-Commerical Agora 23-Marble Street 24-Great Theatre 25-Harbor Gate 26-Arcadian Avenue 27-Four Columns Monument 28-Ancient Port 29-Verubanus Sport Area 31-Harbor Baths 32-Byzantium Palace

Ephesians

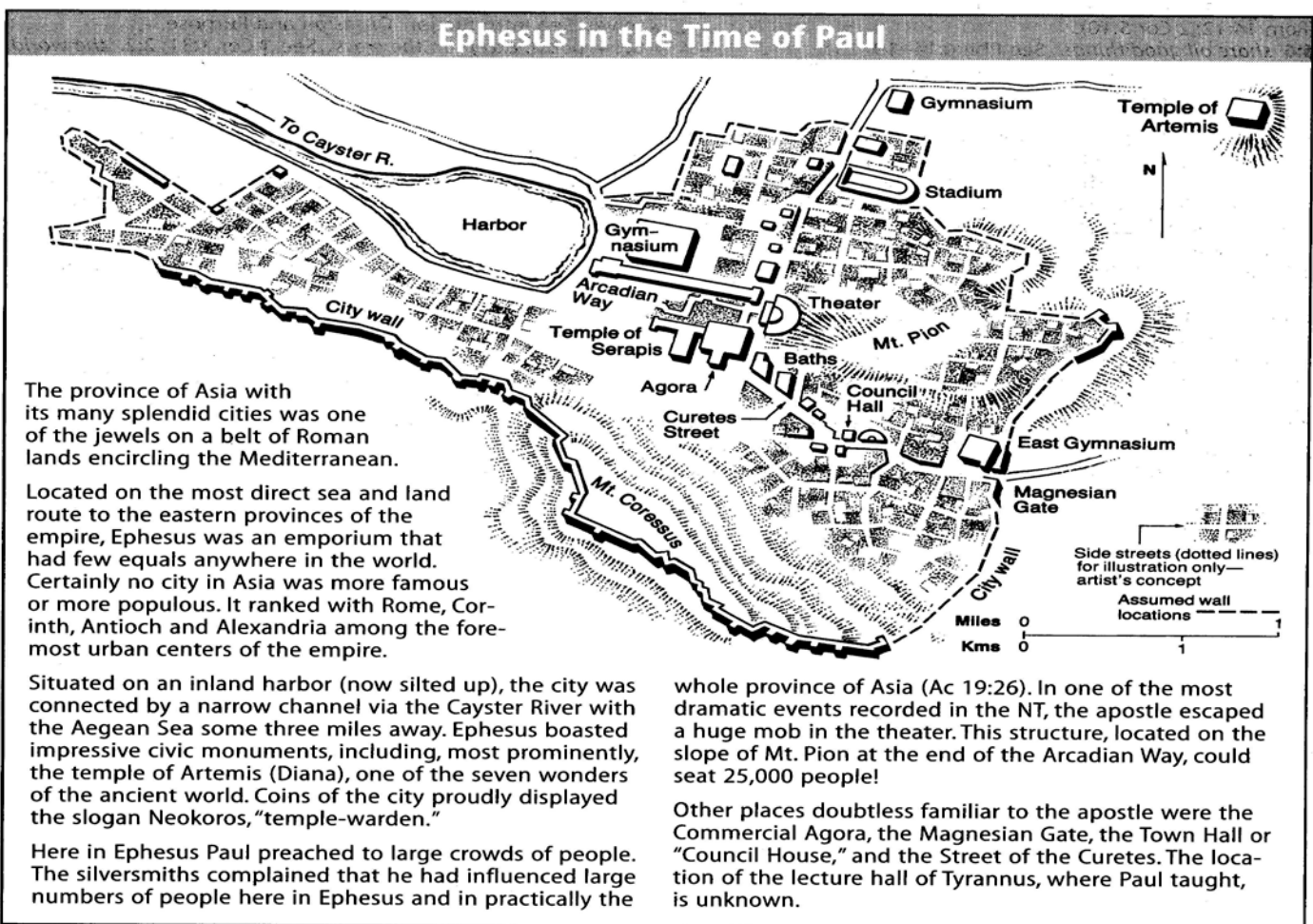
INTRODUCTION

Author, Date and Place of Writing

The author identifies himself as Paul (1:1; 3:1; cf. 3:7,13; 4:1; 6:19–20). Some have taken the absence of the usual personal greetings and the verbal similarity of many parts to Colossians, among other reasons, as grounds for doubting authorship by the apostle Paul. However, this was probably a circular letter, intended for other churches in addition to the one in Ephesus (see notes on 1:1,15; 6:21–23). Paul may have written it about the same time as Colossians, c. A.D. 60, while he was in prison at Rome (see 3:1; 4:1; 6:20).

The City of Ephesus

Ephesus was the most important city in western Asia Minor (now Turkey). It had a harbor that at that time opened into the Cayster River, which in turn emptied into the Aegean Sea. Because it was also at an inter-



section of major trade routes, Ephesus became a commercial center. It boasted a pagan temple dedicated to the Roman goddess Diana (Greek *Artemis*); cf. Acts 19:23–31. Paul made Ephesus a center for evangelism for about three years (see note on Acts 19:10), and the church there apparently flourished for some time, but later needed the warning of Rev 2:1–7.

Message

Unlike several of the other letters Paul wrote, Ephesians does not address any particular error or heresy. Paul wrote to expand the horizons of his readers, so that they might understand better the dimensions of God's eternal purpose and grace and come to appreciate the high goals God has for the church.

The letter opens with a sequence of statements about God's blessings, which are interspersed with a remarkable variety of expressions drawing attention to God's wisdom, forethought and purpose. Paul emphasizes that we have been saved, not only for our personal benefit, but also to bring praise and glory to God. The climax of God's purpose, in the "fullness of the times," is to bring all things in the universe together under Christ (1:10). It is crucially important that Christians realize this, so in 1:15–23 Paul prays for their understanding (a second prayer occurs in 3:14–21).

Having explained God's great goals for the church, Paul proceeds to show the steps toward their fulfillment. First, God has reconciled individuals to Himself as an act of grace (2:1–10). Second, God has reconciled these saved individuals to each other, Christ having broken down the barriers through His own death (2:11–22). But God has done something even beyond this: He has united these reconciled individuals in one body, the church. This is a "mystery" not fully known until it was revealed to Paul (3:1–6). Now Paul is able to state even more clearly what God has intended for the church, namely, that it be the means by which He displays His "manifold wisdom" to the "rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places" (3:7–13). It is clear through the repetition of "heavenly places" (1:3,20; 2:6; 3:10; 6:12) that Christian existence is not merely on an earthly plane. It receives its meaning and significance from heaven, where Christ is exalted at the right hand of God (1:20).

Nevertheless, that life is lived out on earth, where the practical daily life of the believer continues to work out the purposes of God. The ascended Lord gave "gifts" to the members of His church to enable them to minister to one another and so promote unity and maturity (4:1–16). The unity of the church under the headship of Christ foreshadows the uniting of "all things . . . in the heavens and things on the earth" under Christ (1:10). The new life of purity and mutual deference stands in contrast to the old way of life without Christ (4:17—6:9). Those who are "strong in the Lord" have victory over the evil one in the great spiritual conflict, especially through the power of prayer (6:10–20).

Outline

- I. Greetings (1:1–2)
- II. The Divine Purpose: The Glory and Headship of Christ (1:3–14)
- III. Prayer That Christians May Realize God's Purpose and Power (1:15–23)
- IV. Steps Toward the Fulfillment of God's Purpose (chs. 2–3)
 - A. Salvation of Individuals by Grace (2:1–10)
 - B. Reconciliation of Jew and Gentile through the Cross (2:11–18)
 - C. Uniting of Jew and Gentile in One Household (2:19–22)
 - D. Revelation of God's Wisdom through the Church (3:1–13)
 - E. Prayer for Deeper Experience of God's Fullness (3:14–21)
- V. Practical Ways to Fulfill God's Purpose in the Church (4:1—6:20)
 - A. Unity (4:1–6)
 - B. Maturity (4:7–16)
 - C. Renewal of Personal Life (4:17—5:20)
 - D. Deference in Personal Relationships (5:21—6:9)
 1. Principle (5:21)
 2. Husbands and wives (5:22–33)
 3. Children and parents (6:1–4)
 4. Slaves and masters (6:5–9)
 - E. Strength in the Spiritual Conflict (6:10–20)
- VI. Conclusion, Final Greetings and Benediction (6:21–24)

Map 11: PAUL'S MISSIONARY JOURNEYS

