

The Ephesian Baptist Church: Her History, Theology, and Longevity

Dr. Thomas M. Strouse

THE CITY OF EPHEBUS

The city of Ephesus (Ἐφεσος = “desirable”) was not only the capital of Ionia but also a significant trade center near a harbor at the mouth of the Cayster River in western Asia Minor. The city was in a fertile valley with many roads connecting Ephesus with other important cities in Asia Minor. The city had a great amphitheater¹ and of course also housed the great temple of Roman goddess Diana. The *Artemesian* or Temple of Diana was a magnificent architectural construction dedicated to the Greek goddess counterpart Artemis, having been rebuilt beginning in 323 BC. John Turtle Wood, Fellow of the Royal Institute of British Architects, archeologist discoverer, stated, “The Temple of Artemis (Diana), whose splendour has almost become proverbial, tended chiefly to make Ephesus the most attractive and notable of all the cities of Asia Minor.”² Wood added specifics from his actual measurements:

The platform upon which the Temple was raised...the dimensions given by Pliny being 425 by 220 feet (Roman). The height of the pavement of the peristyle from the pavement beyond the platform was 9 feet 5½ inches. The height of each step was little more than 8 inches; fourteen steps, therefore, were needed to mount to the peristyle. The ‘tread’ of the steps was 19 inches. The Temple itself was 163 feet 9½ inches, and was octastyle, having eight columns in front; and dipteral, having two ranks of columns all round the cella. The columns of the peristyle were...55 feet 8¾ inches high, including the base.³

The temple was built for the worship of Diana, the Roman goddess of animals and fertility. Women invoked her aid with conception and delivery. She was identified with the Greek goddess Artemis and statues of her image appear to have multiple paps on the trunk of her body. Scripture revealed the testimony of the query of the town clerk who said, “*what man is there that knoweth not how that the city of the Ephesians is a worshipper of the great goddess Diana, and of the image which fell down from Jupiter?*” (Acts 19:35). Presumably this meteorite was idolized and given the name “*Diana*” from the Latin words *dium* (“sky”) and *dius* (“divine”). The demonic cult of Diana prevailed throughout the city of Ephesus wherein many worshipped the idolatrous images of Diana (cf. Acts 19:19 and 24).

¹Cf. “*If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth it me, if the dead rise not? let us eat and drink; for to morrow we die*” (I Cor. 15:32).

²The site of the *Artemesian* was discovered in 1869 by John Turtle Wood and described in great detail in his classic work entitled *Discoveries at Ephesus: Including the Site and Remains of the Great Temple of Diana* (Boston: James R. Osgood and Company, 1877), p. 4.

³Wood, *Discoveries at Ephesus: Including the Site and Remains of the Great Temple of Diana*, pp. 264-265.

THE EPHESIAN BAPTIST CHURCH

Of the numerous biblical churches in the New Testament (NT) Scriptures, certainly the assembly at Ephesus was one of the greatest. The Lord's first church was the one eventually located in Jerusalem. The membership of the assembly quickly grew to thousands and just as quickly shrank to the small and impoverished Jerusalem Baptist Church. The Gospel went to Antioch which housed the flourishing Antioch Baptist Church and energized her mission program to reach the Gentiles. From this evangelistic church went the church planting missionaries to Asia and Europe, establishing the Lord's biblical churches along the way. One church especially received attention from the Lord Who gave her three years of Paul's ministry and a handful of New Testament Scriptures including the *Epistle to the Ephesians*, *First and Second Timothy*, and the *Apocalypse of Jesus Christ*, and perhaps the *Gospel of John* and his *Three Epistles*. This church was the Ephesian Baptist Church established by Paul on his Second Missionary Journey about AD 52. The *Book of Acts* contributed about three chapters to her history (chapters 18, 19, and 20) to her history and theology. The Apostle Paul's letters to the church and to her pastor Timothy contributed a great deal of "Pauline theology" to the assembly, and the book of *Revelation* noted her historical longevity and spiritual condition.

The assembly had a history of existence for at least forty years. The Ephesian Baptist Assembly became the model for all biblical churches. Thus, the immense value of studying this significant Asian church helps modern churches have a pattern for doctrine and practice. Timothy received instruction from Paul, who demanded, saying, "*Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus*" (II Tim. 1:13). The word for "form" (*hupotuposin*) means a "pattern"⁴ or "sketch" concerning "sound" (*hugiainonton*) or healthy words. The words of Scripture need to be preached because they have heavenly authority. Too often American churches, whether emerging, fundamentalist, or even independent, have succumbed to the non-authoritative, western opinions and standards with the associated entrenched guilt and shame, and consequently forced man's "form" on those who would rather seek the biblical form of sound words. What was the position of the Ephesian Baptist Church on preaching, assembling, accountability, pastoral oversight, politics, government congeniality, church agility, size, money, or pastoral or personal hubris? Paul's words to Timothy and the Ephesian assembly are the outline for the biblical church. How may the Lord's assemblies stay within the lines of Paul's inspired outline?

GARDEN GNOSTICISM

The student of Scripture should recognize that the NT Scriptures were written against the backdrop of the Greco-Roman world and the pagan religion therein. The paganism of the first century consisted of various repackaged versions of the Lies of the Garden, or "*Garden Gnosticism*."

⁴The LORD has given a specific pattern for each place of worship. He used the noun תַּבְנִיִּת *tabniyth* (20x) for the "pattern" of the Tabernacle (Ex. 25:9, 40) and of the Temple (I Chr. 28:11). In fact, Jehovah showed David the divine pattern as the King affirmed, saying, "*All this, said David, the LORD made me understand in writing by his hand upon me, even all the works of this pattern*" (I Chr. 28:19).

Satan has not changed his sinister approach to mankind, now fallen with the adamic nature, which was successful and continues to plague the cursed world of humanity. Thus, Gnosticism, or better yet the biblically-revealed “*Garden Gnosticism*” was the religious background of the New Testament Scriptures against which the writers of the New Testament opposed not only the teaching but also the teachers. The following is a general description of the basic nature and tenets of Gnosticism:

We cannot discuss the various Gnostic systems, such as those of Valentinus and Basilides, but can only briefly indicate the teachings of Gnosticism in general. A trait of dualism runs through the whole system and manifests itself in the position that there are two original principles or gods, which are opposed to each other as higher and lower, or even as good and bad. The supreme or good God is an unfathomable abyss. He interposes between Himself and finite creatures a long chain of aeons or middle beings, emanations from the divine, which together constitute the Pleroma or fullness of the divine essence. It is only through these intermediate beings that the highest God can enter into various relations with created beings. The world is not created by the good God, but is the result of, probably, a fall in the Pleroma, and is the work of a subordinate, possibly a hostile, deity. This subordinate god, is called the Demiurge, is identified with the God of the Old Testament, and is described as an inferior, limited, passionate, and vengeful being. He is contrasted with the supreme God, the source of goodness, virtue, and truth, who revealed Himself in the Christ...in a phantasmal body, or as an earthly being, with whom a higher power or spirit temporarily associated himself.⁵

The Beginning of Garden Gnosticism

The biblical revelation of the devil’s deceptive doctrines reveals the asserted premise that the NT authors wrote against Gnosticism and repudiated various teachers and tenets which manifested in the church audiences. The beginning of Garden Gnosticism began with the perfect creature Lucifer and his pride. Paul warned about pastors, saying, “*Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil*” (I Tim. 3:6). Satan fell into condemnation because of the pride in his heart. Ezekiel said, “*Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee*” (Ezk. 28:15). He expressed his pride with the five “*I will*” declarations (Isa. 14:13-14). Satan tempted man in the Garden of Eden with his alternative pantheistic plan of “Garden Gnosticism,” offering Adam and Eve the tenets of “deathlessness” and “deification” (Gen. 3:3-4). He repudiated the LORD’s declaration of disobey and die and maintained that they would not die and that they would be “*as gods*” (not “as God”)⁶ or spirit deities. Since Satan was/is a “spirit entity” (= angel = cherub [Ezk. 28:16]) he denigrated the flesh and offered “incarnate spirits” escape from the flesh through numerous reincarnations. The ineffable and impersonal deity received the designation “the Unknown God” by the Greek philosophers at Athens (Acts 17:23). Two forms of “Garden Gnosticism” were prominent at Athens, namely “*the Epicureans, and of the Stoicks*” (Acts 17:18). The focus of Epicureanism was centered on pleasure in the flesh (“enjoy thyself”) whereas Stoicism encouraged self-denial in the flesh (“deny thyself”).

⁵Louis Berkhof, *The History of Christian Doctrines* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1975), p. 47-48.

⁶The construction *wehyiythem ce'lohiym yod'ey* (“*ye shall be as gods, knowing*”) with the following plural verb demands that the word *'elohiym* be plural (“gods”) and not singular (“God”).

Garden Gnosticism and God

The teaching of Garden Gnosticism concerning the Lord Jesus Christ denied his true Personhood. For instance, the Apostle John repudiated Adoptionism (that the “Christ Spirit” adopted Jesus at His baptism and left Him at the Cross), saying, “*Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son*” (I Jn. 2:2). Again, John denounced the error of Docetism (that Jesus Christ was a mere phantom and not an actual physical man), saying, “*And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world*” (I Jn. 4:3). Garden Gnosticism taught the appeal of works salvation through the pride of man who must move upward in the *pleroma* (“fulness”) with the help of the *aeons* (demons) to reach ultimately the realm of angels and then return to full spirit-deity. Paul countered this Greek philosophical heresy which came into the church at Colosse, saying, “*Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power*” (Col. 2:8-10). Christ is the only emanation of the Godhead and therefore He is the One and only *Pleroma* Who has established believers complete in Him. Christians do not need the help of teachers, swamis, or shamans for their salvation since He is the Head of all angelic beings, and Christians are complete in Him.

Garden Gnosticism in the New Testament

While denying the biblical teaching that “*God was manifested in the flesh*” (I Tim. 3:16)⁷ in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ, Gnosticism promoted the necessity of following Gnostic teachers such as Epicurus and Zeno of Citium for advancement in the *pleroma*. Paul warned about the “*endless genealogies*” (I Tim. 1:4; Tit. 3:9) of gurus up and down the *pleroma*. Basically, Epicurus taught that self-enjoyment of the evil flesh would not hinder advancement and consequently he promoted Epicureanism or Hedonism. Zeno on the other hand promoted self-denial which would indeed enhance one’s advancement and thus Stoicism. The mantra of the Stoicks was the denial of the physical, saying, “*Touch not; taste not; handle not*” (Col. 2:21). Further up the *pleroma* were the angels, and Paul warned, saying, “*Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind*” (Col. 2:18) and “*Which things have indeed a shew of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh*” (Col. 2:23). The Stoicks rejected the biblical truths of marriage and animal consummation with celibacy and veganism, respectively, and Paul soundly repudiated these demonic doctrines, saying, “*Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and*

⁷The Greek Critical Text betrays its preference for Gnostic-laced Greek manuscripts (Ⲡ and B) and reads ὁς ἐφανερώθη ἐν σαρκί *hos ephanerothe en sarki* (“**he who** was manifest in the flesh”), removing θεός *theos* from the text and omitting the essential truth that “**God was manifest in the flesh.**”

know the truth. For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer” (I Tim. 4:1-5). Nevertheless, the Apostle Paul asserted that there is a place for self-denial, affirming “*But refuse profane and old wives’ fables, and exercise thyself rather unto godliness. For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come*” (I Tim. 4:7-8). He revealed elsewhere about the “little profit in godly bodily exercise,” saying, “*Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontineny*” (I Cor. 7:5).

Since all varieties of Garden Gnosticism advocate that spirit-deity is locked in physical bodies and needs permanent release, ultimate deliverance is for only the spirit-deity and there is no salvation for the evil flesh. “Flesh is evil” is their mantra! This heresy lends itself to reincarnation. As the spirit-deity moves through various bodies in history the Hindu term *karma* becomes significant to teach that evil behaviour in past lives results in evil results in present life. The Lord’s disciples had to learn to reject the doctrine of bad karma, as they couched their question around this heresy, saying, “*And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?*” (Jn. 9:2). At least two of Paul’s churches denied the resurrection doctrine and promoted the alternative. Paul said to the Corinthian Baptist Church, saying, “*Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead?*” (I Cor. 15:12), and to the Ephesian Baptist Church, saying, “*And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus; Who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some*” (II Tim. 2:17-18). Not only did Garden Gnosticism permeate the pagan world, but it penetrated the Jewish world especially through the Sadducees of which Paul was aware. Luke recorded, saying, “*For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both*” (Acts 23:8; see also Mt. 22:23 *et al*). As well, in the context of Garden Gnosticism Paul gave warnings about “*Jewish fables*” (Tit. 1:14; I Tim. 1:4).

From the old nature of man evinces pride. It started with Satan and in his pride he wanted more (I Tim. 6:10) and fell because of pride. Proudful Lucifer appealed to the potential pride in untested Adam and Eve and discovered that they would seek knowledge without obedience to God. Thus began their effort to advance through knowledge to being “*as gods.*” The LORD stopped them short and condemned them as they tried their effort of covering in the presence of Jehovah. Through repentance and faith they received Jehovah’s blood-sacrifice covering and anticipated the fulfillment of the Seed Promise (Gen. 3:7, 15, 20-21). The ego of fallen man was ripe for Garden Gnosticism which offered to his pride superiority through knowledge and some sort of spiritual advancement. The proud heart seeks validation through externalism which manifests to others the desired superiority in advancement. Thus, this is the nature of all men, who have pride in the heart and have the desire to manifest their self-superiority in some external fashion. Pagan mankind opted for one of the multitude of repackaging schemes of Garden Gnosticism, including the Egyptian religion, the Canaanite religion, Assyrian religion, the Babylonian religion, the Medo-Persian religion, the Hindu religion, the Buddhism religion, and the mystery religions of the Greco-Roman world.

Garden Gnosticism and Biblical Churches

What is the relevance of Garden Gnosticism to NT churches in the first century or to American churches in the twenty-first century? What church would allow a full-blown Gnostic teacher promote this heresy? That is the whole point! Full-blown Gnosticism starts in the heart of pride of the church member and eventually blossoms into advanced spiritual pride! How does *apostasy* (literally “to stand from truth”) begin in one of the Lord’s assemblies? Apostasy did occur and still occurs because the NT did address apostasy specifically in the Jerusalem church, in the scattered churches, to which both James and Peter wrote, in the Corinthian and Ephesian churches, in the church that Jude addressed, and in the churches to which the Apostle John wrote his *Three Epistles* and the *Revelation of Jesus Christ*. James gave the formula to the biblically educated saints, saying to his church audience, “*Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom. But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work*” (Jam. 3:13-16). It starts in the hearts of pastors and people in the Lord’s assemblies. Both James and Peter wrote to the scattered Jerusalem Baptist Church members, saying, “*God resisteth the proud*” (Jam. 4:6 and I Pet. 5:5). Paul warned the Ephesian elders about pride (I Tim. 3:6) and predicted the some of the elders at Ephesus would apostatize, saying, “*For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them*” (Acts 20:29-30). Just as the Gnostics had their pride in the externals of teachers and in the “do’s and don’ts” as they advanced, so Christians are tempted and do manifest pride in their superiority over others.

It is striking that the Apostle Paul employed the social caste system of master/slave to challenge slaves about those over them socially (I Tim. 6:1-2), whereas elsewhere Paul challenged the masters (Eph. 6:9). The social caste system of the first century was ripe for Christians to manifest their pride of superiority as both the masters and slaves. For instance cautioned his audience, saying, “*My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons. For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool: Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts?*” (Jam. 2:1-4). In the context of I Tim. 6:1-2, the apostle challenged the Ephesian Church members about those in the assembly whose pride would manifest in this caste system and therefore must be refused. He said, “*If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself. But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out*” (I Tim. 6:3-7).

Having pride in the heart leads the Christian to the devious and dangerous development of the carnal walk in the flesh. Those that do not walk in the Spirit are puffed up in pride, focus on externalism,

and walk by sight and not by faith. Pride comes from the ego that has no self-reflection and therefore promotes the “better than thou” attitude in person, possessions, and places. The proud Christian, church member, and church, all tend towards separation over manmade Western standards and opinions concerning music, dress, facial hair, etc., rather than biblical truth, which tendency manifests profoundly in the American, Protestant, and Caucasian Fundamentalism of the twentieth century.

The pride of person manifests in the pastor, in the officer, or in the church member (at whatever level of sanctification) who projects the attitude of having arrived spiritually in the upper tier of this two tiered spirituality and is at the plateau of being incapable of sinning “really bad sins” like idolatry, fornication, malfeasance, sodomy, child pornography, murder (suicide, abortion), etc. Of course, how many pastors have been involved in these sins in fundamental and independent Baptist churches? The easy and unbiblical reaction is to declare that “*they were not saved.*” The pride of person also evinces with regard to gender, ethnicity, or occupation, and manifests either passively or actively. However, Paul revealed his struggle in the flesh and hence warned the churches in Rome. He averred, saying, “*For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not*” (Rom. 7:15-18). The pride of possession manifests in the wealthy American Christian who touts his possessions of house and personal property, of vehicles such as the multiple cars and big trucks, of real estate, of bank accounts, of church buildings, and of equipment, etc. The pride of places manifests in those of various geographical locations which claim with pride “we are not in the hood,” or “we are not in the city,” or “we are not in the country.” The pre-packaged American church model has high human standards which protect the good, moral people of the “perfect families,” and yet seldom deals with the proud heart of these within this model.

The church member who denies the potential and even the reality of the pride of a puffed up heart, “better than thou” attitude, is self-deceived and is in serious trouble. In Paul’s challenge to Timothy he listed nineteen sins of the heart of which he needed to preach against and from those which he needed to shun in the Ephesian Baptist Church, including the examples of Hymenaeus and Philetus (II Tim. 2:17) and possibly Phygellus and Hermogenes (II Tim. 1:15). This extensive list is for church members to self-reflect upon concerning the following: “*For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away. For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts*” (II Tim. 3:2-6). The Apostle Paul gave the biblical perspective about himself and his position, saying, “*I am become a fool in glorying; ye have compelled me: for I ought to have been commended of you: for in nothing am I behind the very chiefest apostles, though I be nothing*” (II Cor. 12:11).

Garden Gnosticism appeals to the pride of the heart of man to desire to advance in the *pleroma*. Pride in the Christian tends to give the desire to develop the smug “better than thou” attitude in the assembly. Again Paul challenged the Corinthian Baptist Church saying, “*For we commend not ourselves again unto you, but give you occasion to glory on our behalf, that ye may have somewhat to answer them*

which glory in appearance, and not in heart” (II Cor. 5:12). The Lord’s assemblies are made up of saved no-bodies as the apostle averred, saying, *“For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence”* (I Cor. 1:26-29). How do we measure up to the LORD’s perspective, Who said, *“Thus saith the LORD, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest? For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the LORD: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word”* (Isa. 66:1-2)? At the foot of the Cross we are all saved sinners who positionally have surrendered pride. *“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus”* (Gal. 3:28). Have we practically surrendered pride?

THE HISTORY OF THE EPHESIAN BAPTIST CHURCH

The Second and Third Missionary Journeys of Paul (Acts 18:19-21, 19:8-10)

Acts 18:19

And he came to Ephesus, and left them there: but he himself entered into the synagogue, and reasoned with the Jews.

Finally the Apostle Paul had freedom in the Spirit to minister in the great city of Ephesus which was the most important Greek city in Ionian Asia Minor (cf. 16:6-8). He along with Priscilla and Aquila left the port city of Cenchrea and sailed eastward across the Aegean Sea to the port of Ephesus. Luke gave the ongoing narrative, saying, *“And he came to Ephesus, and left them there”* (κατήντησε⁸ δὲ εἰς Ἔφεσον,⁹ καὶ κείνους¹⁰ κατέλιπεν¹¹ αὐτοῦ *katentese de eis Epheson, kakeinos katelipen autou*). The church-planting couple, which housed the initial meeting place for the infant Corinthian assembly, left their home, and found living quarters in Ephesus to continue their assembly, now constituted as the Ephesian Baptist Church (cf. Mt. 18:20).

⁸The *aorist* form comes from the verb καταντάω *katantao* (13x) which means “to come to” or “to arrive at.” Cf. 16:1.

⁹The proper noun Ἔφεσος *Ephesos* (16x) means “permitted” and was a nautical city of Asia Minor and the capital of Ionia. Its situate was on the Icarian Sea between Smyrna and Miletus.

¹⁰The demonstrative pronoun from καὶ κείνους *kakeinos* (23x) means “and them.” Cf. 5:37.

¹¹See 2:31 for the verb of the *aorist* form which means “to leave behind.”

With the Ephesian church started in the home of Aquila and Priscilla,¹² the apostle ventured out to the local meeting place of the Jews. The historian continued, saying, “*but he himself entered into the synagogue, and reasoned with the Jews*” (αὐτὸς δὲ εἰσελθὼν¹³ εἰς τὴν συναγωγὴν διελέχθη¹⁴ τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις *autos de eiselthon eis ten sunagogen dielechthe tois Ioudaiois*). Luke had already revealed that Paul’s manner of ministry was to go to the synagogue and preach Christ to Jews and God-fearers (see 17:2). His ministry was fruitful and Jews and Gentiles turned to the Lord Jesus and the infant church began to grow. The Ephesian Baptist Church became a strong assembly and received several canonical books of the NT, including the *Epistle to the Ephesians, I and II Timothy, the Apocalypse, and perhaps First, Second, and Third John*.

Acts 18:20-21

When they desired him to tarry longer time with them, he consented not; But bade them farewell, saying, I must by all means keep this feast that cometh in Jerusalem: but I will return again unto you, if God will. And he sailed from Ephesus.

Having finally reached Ephesus, he was not able to stay long. His new converts loved him and his gift of prophecy. Luke stated, saying, “*When they desired him to tarry longer time with them, he consented not*” (ἐρωτώντων¹⁵ δὲ αὐτῶν ἐπὶ πλείονα¹⁶ χρόνον μέναι¹⁷ παρ’ αὐτοῖς, οὐκ ἐπένευσεν¹⁸ *erotonton de auton epi pleiona chronon meinai par’ autois, ouk epeneusen*). As much as he loved them and wanted to be a blessing to them, he had other ministerial business in the will of God. The apostle refused their offer and left. Later, when the Apostle Paul met with the Ephesian church elders at Miletus, Luke recorded in detail his tearful departure (Acts 20:17-38).

No doubt Paul remembered this departure well, as he rehearsed the words to Luke, who wrote, saying, “*But bade them farewell, saying, I must by all means keep this feast that cometh in Jerusalem: but I will return again unto you, if God will. And he sailed from Ephesus*” (ἀλλ’ ἀπετάξατο¹⁹ αὐτοῖς εἰπὼν, Δεῖ με πάντως τὴν ἑορτὴν²⁰ τὴν ἐρχομένην²¹ ποιῆσαι²² εἰς Ἱεροσόλυμα·²³ πάλιν δὲ ἀνακάμψω²⁴ πρὸς

¹²How *apropos* for the Apostle Paul to refer to the qualification for the bishop to rule his own *house* as he ministers in the *house* of God (I Tim. 3:4-5, and 15)? Most churches in the first century started out as house churches.

¹³See 1:13 and 17:2.

¹⁴Cf. 17:2 for the verb of this *aorist* form.

¹⁵See 3:3 for the verb of this present participle.

¹⁶Cf. 1:3 for the adjective.

¹⁷The *aorist* infinitive from μένω *meno* (120x) means “to abide.”

¹⁸The *aorist* form comes from the Lukan *hapax legomena* verb ἐπινεύω *epineuo* which means literally “to nod in assent.”

¹⁹For the 2nd time Luke employed the *aorist* form of the verb ἀποτάσσω *apotasso* indicating that Paul said goodbye to his converts (cf. v. 18).

²⁰The articular noun ἑορτή *heorte* (27x) refers to “the feast” or “the holyday.”

²¹*Vide* v. 7.

ὕμᾱς, τοῦ Θεοῦ θέλοντος.²⁵ καὶ ἀνήχθη²⁶ ἀπὸ τῆς Ἐφέσου *all' apetaxato autois eipon, Dei me pantos ten hearten ten erchomenon poiesai eis Ierosoluma, palin de anakampso pros humas, tou Theou thelontes, kai anechthe apo tes Ephesou*).

Although perfected Jews could still attend the three annual holydays, Tabernacles, Passover, and Pentecost for witnessing, these feasts were no longer obligatory for Christian Jews or Christian Gentiles. Obviously when Paul was in Corinth for a year and a half, he did not participate in any of the three. Rather, He desired to be Jerusalem for the Passover (AD 52 or 53) to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the multitude of Jews gathered at the Temple. Apparently the apostle wanted to board a ship from Ephesus to Caesarea when the spring maritime shipping began, and then travel to Jerusalem for the spring feast. He trusted that it would be the will of God to return to Ephesus, which indeed it was (Acts 19:1 ff.)!

Acts 19:8

And he went into the synagogue, and spake boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God.

The apostle did not deviate from his biblical pattern of going to the Jews first and then the Gentiles. As an apostle helping the house church of Pastor Aquila and Priscilla, Paul was very active with the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Luke the writer continued, saying, “*And he went into the synagogue, and spake boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God*” (Εἰσελθὼν²⁷ δὲ εἰς τὴν συναγωγὴν ἐπαρρησιάζετο,²⁸ ἐπὶ μῆνας τρεῖς διαλεγόμενος²⁹ καὶ πείθων³⁰ τὰ περὶ τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ Θεοῦ³¹ *Eiselthon de eis ten sunagogen eparresiazeto, epi menas treis dialegomenos kai peithon to peri tes basileias tou Theou*).

²²See 9:6 for the *aorist* infinitive form.

²³The CT omitted the clause Δεῖ με πάντως τὴν ἑορτὴν τὴν ἐρχομένην ποιῆσαι εἰς Ἱεροσόλυμα *Dei me pantos ten hearten ten erchomenon poiesai eis Ierosoluma* (“*I must by all means keep this feast that cometh in Jerusalem*”).

²⁴The adverb πάλιν *palin* with the future form of the verb ἀνακάμπτω *anakampto* is a literary/linguistic redundancy for “assuredly,” as the *KJV* rendered it—“*I will return again.*” *Tyndale* gave the rendering as “*I will returne agayne*” in contrast to the *NIV* translation “*I will come back.*”

²⁵The expression τοῦ Θεοῦ θέλοντος *theou thelontes* (1x) is similar to ὁ Κύριος θελήσῃ *ho Kurios thelese* (Jam. 4:15). The *Vulgate* rendered the expression as *Deo volente*.

²⁶See 7:4 for the verb of this *aorist* form.

²⁷See 18:19 for the *aorist* participle form.

²⁸The imperfect form comes from the verb παρρησιάζομαι *parresiazomai* (9x) which means “to express with boldness.” The imperfect denoted that this was an ongoing practice. The verb is employed about Paul’s boldness 8x (Acts 9:27, 29; 13:46; 14:3; 19:8; 26:26; Eph. 6:20; and I Thes. 2:2) and Apollos’ boldness 1x (18:26). The forthright gifts of prophecy and teaching have this characteristic especially.

²⁹Cf. 18:19. The *KJV* followed the *Tyndale* rendering “disputynge.”

³⁰*Vide* 18:4.

As his biblical pattern was to give a “*word of exhortation*” in the synagogues, he preached Jesus as the Christ. He not only dialogued with the Jews, but disputed their objections and persuaded them about the need “to be born again.” Paul followed the Lord’s ministry of preaching “*the Kingdom of God*” message. The Lord Jesus said to the Jew Nicodemus and to all others, commanding, “*Ye must be born again*” (Jn. 3:7). There is an eschatological element to “*the Kingdom of God*” insofar as those that are “*born again*” will have a place in “*the Kingdom of Heaven*” (Millennium).

The three month stay of the apostle seemed relatively long considering his past struggles. He did have a cordial reception when he first visited Ephesus (18:19-21). Furthermore, the officials and citizens of Ephesus may not have had a proclivity toward the rumblings of the Jewish radicals.

Acts 19:9

But when divers were hardened, and believed not, but spake evil of that way before the multitude, he departed from them, and separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school of one Tyrannus.

Eventually the Jews showed their hatred toward Paul’s Gospel as they did at Thessalonica (17:5). The good doctor recorded the resistance of the Jews and the reaction of Paul, saying “*But when divers were hardened, and believed not, but spake evil of that way before the multitude*” (ὡς δέ τινες³² ἐσκληρύνοντο³³ καὶ ἠπίθουν,³⁴ κακολογοῦντες³⁵ τὴν ὁδὸν³⁶ ἐνώπιον τοῦ πλήθους *hos de tines esklerunonto kai eteithoun, kakologountes ten hodon enopion tou plethous*). The Bible teaches that all men harden their respective hearts either in faith or unbelief. For instance, Pharaoh “*hardened*” (ᾤϊσεν *chazaq*) his heart in unbelief (Ex. 7:22, *et al*). However, Joshua was encouraged to “*be strong*” (ᾤϊσεν *chazaq*) in faith (Josh. 1:6). Both men had something in their hearts which they hardened! In the case of

³¹The expression τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ Θεοῦ *tes basileias tou Theou* (10x) means contextually the realm of regeneration, as the Lord defined, saying, “*Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God*” (Jn. 3:3; cf. also v. 5). Cf. 1:3.

³²The indefinite pronoun τὶς *tis* occurs twice in the verse as “divers” and “one.” The *KJV* followed the *Tyndale* rendering “dyvers” and “one.” The *CT* omitted the second pronoun for “one.”

³³The imperfect form comes from the verb σκληρύνω *scleruno* (6x) which means “to make hard.” The imperfect form denoted their continued hardness. The cognate noun σκληρός *skleros* (cf. 9:5) is the source for “sclerosis” and is a medical term which means “abnormal hardening of body tissues.” No doubt physician Luke employed verb and noun in his practice.

³⁴The imperfect form comes from the verb ἀπειθέω *apeitheo* (cf. 14:2) which means “to disbelieve” or “to disobey.” The Jews had been hardening their hearts and disbelieving the truth.

³⁵The present participle form comes from the *tetrakis legomena* compound verb κακολογέω *kakologeo* (4x) which literally means “to speak evil” (Mt. 15:4; Mk. 7:10; and 9:39).

³⁶The articular noun construction τὴν ὁδὸν *ten hodon* (36x) means “*the way*” and it became a name for followers of Christ, “*the way, the truth, and the life*” (Jn. 14:6; cf. also Acts 22:4 and 24:14; cf also Acts 19:23 and 24:22).

these Jews they rejected the truth of the *Tanak* in unbelief and reviled the Christians “*of that way*” which followed the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul knew the potential violence of the maniacal Jews in the synagogue and then changed locations. It may be that the house church of Aquila and Priscilla had been too small to accommodate the Ephesian congregation, and so the assembly met in the empty synagogue on Sundays. James had alluded to the use of the synagogue building for Christian worship services, saying “*For if there come unto your assembly (συναγωγῆ) a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment*” (Jam. 2:2). But now the proximity of the Jews in time and distance forced the Apostle Paul to a new location. Luke reported about Paul, saying, “*he departed from them, and separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school of one Tyrannus*” (ἀποστὰς³⁷ ἀπ’ αὐτῶν ἀφώρισε³⁸ τοὺς μαθητάς, καθ’ ἡμέραν³⁹ διαλεγόμενος⁴⁰ ἐν τῇ σχολῇ⁴¹ Τυράννου⁴² τινός⁴³ *apostas ap’ auton aphorise tous mathetas, kath’ hemeran dialegomenos en te schole Turannou tinos*).

The apostle moved the assembly from one location to another, namely to the building that housed the school of Tyrannus.⁴⁴ Schools in ancient Greece were places for the leisure of learning from lecturers as attested by the Athenians, per Luke’s recognition, saying, “*For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing*” (17:21). Presumably Tyrannus was a lecturer who taught his disciples at certain times on certain days and then rented out the facility for use at other times. Paul wanted the Christians to be in a more conducive place for worship and instruction. Later Paul testified to the elders of the Ephesian assembly that he worked his trade for his expenses day and night (Acts 20:34) both publicly and privately (Acts 20:20, 31).

As Paul preached and taught daily to the church members and others, he received challenging questions and objections by the audiences. Whereas the believers listened to grow in truth, the dissenters

³⁷The *aorist* participle form comes from ἀφίστημι *aphistemi* (15x) which means “to desert” or “to withdraw [immediately]” (cf. 12:10).

³⁸The *aorist* form comes from the verb ἀφορίζω *aphorizo* (cf. 13:2) which means “to exclude” or “to separate.” Paul’s effort to withdraw and separate sounds literarily as an example of *hendiadys*.

³⁹The idiom καθ’ ἡμέραν *kath’ hemeran* (17x) means “daily” or “every day,” Sunday to Sunday!

⁴⁰See v. 8.

⁴¹The Lukan hapax noun σχολή *schole* (1x) comes from σχεῖν *schein* which means “rest” or “leisure.” Originally it meant “a place of leisure for learning.” Cf. the *Vulgate: scola*. See details about curricula, methods, and the “*schoolmaster*” in Kenneth J. Freeman, *Schools of Hellas. An Essay on the Practice and Theory of Ancient Greek Education from 600 to 300 BC* (London: MacMillan and Co., Ltd., 1908), pp. 29-98.

⁴²The proper name Τύραννος *Turannos* (1x) means “sovereign” or “tyrant.”

⁴³The indefinite pronoun τινός *tinος* is omitted in the CT. Presumably Luke employed the pronoun to indicate Tyrannus was one of many by the name.

⁴⁴What did this building which housed the Baptist assembly look like? Who knows and who cares! The Christians of the first century were not pre-occupied with their buildings of church services as were later Western Christians! In the early centuries of Christianity many assemblies were housed in homes or rented facilities to allow for the agility of the assembly to move in times of trouble or persecution. The necessity of having an assembly meeting place look like a “church” to attract Christians, appeals to the sight and is not biblical. The “church” is the assembly of baptized believers and not the building that houses them!

listened critically to thwart the truth. Obviously on Sundays the Apostle Paul held church services and preached the Gospel to the congregation for edification of the saints and conviction of the sinners.

Acts 19:10

And this continued by the space of two years; so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.

The Apostle Paul debated the Jews in the synagogue for three months and then evangelized from the new location of the school of Tyrannus for two years. Later, he affirmed that his total stay in Ephesus was three years (Acts 20:31), and therefore his Third Missionary Journey was from AD 52 to AD 55. Apparently Paul was the main teacher under Pastor Aquila until later when the apostle turned the pastoral ministry over to Timothy (I Tim. 1:2-3). With this exhausting Pauline ministry Luke gave the concise summation, saying, “*And this continued by the space of two years; so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greek*” (τοῦτο δὲ ἐγένετο⁴⁵ ἐπὶ ἔτη δύο,⁴⁶ ὥστε πάντας τοὺς κατοικοῦντας⁴⁷ τὴν Ἀσίαν⁴⁸ ἀκοῦσαι⁴⁹ τὸν λόγον⁵⁰ τοῦ Κυρίου Ἰησοῦ, Ἰουδαίους τε καὶ Ἑλληνας *touto de egeneto epi ete duo, hoste pantas tous katoikountas ten Asian akousai ton logon tou Kuriou Iesou, Ioudaious te kai Hellenas*).

The tremendous impact of the Ephesian Baptist Church is staggering. With the apostle’s initial contacts of Aquila and Priscilla, the twelve prophesying disciples, and other converts, he trained and utilized these prepared Christians for missionary and pastoral ministries. No doubt these students became qualified pastors in the congregations through Asia Minor. For instance, Epaphras was the pastor at Colosse (Col. 1:7) and was involved in the churches in Laodicea and Hierapolis (Col. 4:12-13). Tychicus and Trophimus were from Asia (Acts 20:4) and Philemon and Archippus were involved with church planting and pastoral work in and around Colosse (Phile. 1:1 and Col. 4:17). No doubt these Baptist preachers and church planters were responsible for establishing the churches in Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea (Rev. 1:11). Later, the Apostle Paul’s own testimony confirmed the vastness of this local church ministry throughout all of Asia, saying, “*The churches of Asia salute you. Aquila and Priscilla salute you much in the Lord, with the church that is in their house*” (I Cor. 16:19). The Apostle Paul put his whole being into the service of the Lord as God honored his human effort and gave him supernatural empowerment to achieve spiritual fruit.

⁴⁵See 1:19.

⁴⁶The temporal expression ἔτη δύο *ete duo* is a Lukan *hapax* meaning “two years.” The Mediterranean warm winds in the summer are called *Etesian* winds.

⁴⁷Cf. 9:22.

⁴⁸The proper noun Ἀσία Asia was a Roman province in western Asia Minor. See note on 2:9.

⁴⁹*Vide* 10:22 for the *aorist* infinitive form.

⁵⁰The τὸν λόγον *ton logon* or “word” included the “*Kingdom of God*” message (v. 8).

THE THEOLOGY OF THE EPHESIAN BAPTIST CHURCH

The Epistle to the Ephesians

The Apostle Paul to the Gentiles wrote to the Ephesian Baptist Church about AD 61, along with his prison Epistles to the Philippians, to the Colossians, and to Philemon, and gave the members additional truth concerning the theology about Christ and about church doctrine. He expounded on the Persons and works of the Triune God, writing the longest sentence in Greek literature about the Trinity (Eph. 1:3-14). He organized his treatise around the Father's choosing the believer (vv. 4-6), the Son's redeeming the believer (vv. 7-12), and the Spirit's sealing the believer (vv. 13-14). The sentence divided around the refrain "to the praise of his glory" (Eph. 1:6, 12, and 14).

Paul revealed to the Ephesian Baptist Church the divine mysteries received in the Arabian Desert (Gal. 1:17; see also I Cor. 11:23 ff.), including the equality of Gentiles with Jews, saying, "*Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel*" (Eph. 3:5-6). Although Isaiah prophesied of the salvation of the Gentiles (Isa. 42:6; 49:6) and David revealed that the Messiah would have a congregation, saying, "*I will declare thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee*" (Ps. 22:22), the equality of the Gentiles with Jews was not known. The Lord Jesus Christ did have an ἐκκλησία (Mt. 16:18) over which He was the pastor (Jn. 10:11, 14), and had the office of Apostles (Mt. 10:1,2), church discipline (Mt. 18:15-20), and the two church ordinances (Mt. 3:1-6; 26:26-30), as well as the Great Commission (Mt. 28:19-20).

The Apostle to the Gentiles disclosed the biblical leadership offices for first century churches, saying, "*And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ*" (Eph. 4:11-12).⁵¹ These were offices because they had specific qualifications. Certainly the rigid qualifications for apostle (Acts 1:21-22) and bishop (I Tim. 3:1-7; 5:17) were well known. The predictive element for the office of prophet had ceased with the final canonical revelation of Scripture (II Cor. 13:8-13). Timothy, in the office of bishop, received revelation that he was to "*do the work of an evangelist*" (II Tim. 4:5). The leadership offices of the first century churches taught the church members how to perfect the saints for the work of the ministry. After the first century, the members of the apostolate died off and biblical canon was completed, and consequently the only leadership office for the assembly was the office of bishop. The office of deacon (*diakonos* > "through the dust") was not listed because it was not and is not an office of leadership. The office of deacon was to serve, and primarily serve the widows in the assembly (Acts 6:1-7; I Tim. 3:8-13; 5:3-16).

⁵¹The Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Fundamentalist positions of "clergy and laity" posit that not all church members are called to "the ministry." However, all Christians are called to "the ministry" of serving in their respective assemblies!

The convert from Tarsus also gave the essence of the Christian life and ongoing personal “revival,”⁵² saying, “*And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God*” (Eph. 5:18-21). The church member has the daily responsibility of personal renewal, as Paul admonished, saying, “*That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness*” (Eph. 4:22-24). The daily “renewal” (so-called “revival”) occurs when the believer submits to the Spirit of God by putting off the old man and putting on the new man (with Christian armour [Eph. 6:10-18]). Evidence of Spirit-filling is a joyful heart, a thankful heart, and a submissive heart.

The First and Second Epistles to Timothy

The Apostle Paul had started the Ephesian Baptist Church (Acts 18:18-21), ministered in the assembly for three years (Acts 20:31), instructed the elders (Acts 20:17 ff.), and later installed Timothy as the pastor (I Tim. 1:3). He wrote the First Epistle to Timothy about AD 62 and the Second Epistle to Timothy about AD 65. Immediately, Paul warned Timothy of the presence of Garden Gnosticism in the Ephesian Baptist Church and named the culprits, “*Of whom is Hymenaeus and Alexander; whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme.*” (I Tim. 1:20). He expanded on the organization and administration of the assembly, dealing with the role of pray, men, and women in the church (I Tim. 2:1-15). After dealing with the qualifications for the offices of bishop and deacon, he presented the main truth in creation. The focal and central truth of the Lord’s churches, each which is “*the pillar and ground of the truth*” (I Tim. 3:15), must be upon the Person and Work of the Lord Jesus Christ, “*God was manifest in the flesh*” (I Tim. 3:16). Since the Gnostics held the “flesh is evil” doctrine, they promulgated the need to avoid marital flesh (celibacy) and animal flesh (veganism). Timothy must begin with himself and then with the Scripture to deal biblically with the prevalent Gnosticism (I Tim. 4:1-16). The assembly had the responsibility to the elderly and to widows (I Tim. 5:3-16). The honor, discipline, and ordination of the pastor was important, particularly to root out any Gnostic-leaning elder, as Paul had warned (I Tim. 5:17-25; Acts 20:29-30). Finally, Paul warned about the love of money and the Gnostics’ effort to merchandise the assembly members with Gnostic doctrine (I Tim. 6:1-21).

In the *Second Epistle to Timothy*, the Apostle Paul wanted Timothy to stir up his spiritual gift (perhaps “service” [cf. I Cor. 16:10; Phil. 2:22; II Tim. 4:11, 13]). He was to shepherd the Ephesian Baptist Church, guard against encroaching heretics, and bring Mark, the cloak, and the scriptures to Rome. Furthermore, Pastor Timothy needed to challenge Phygellus and Hermogenes for their lack of commitment to Paul (II Tim. 1:15), and discipline the heretics Hymenaeus and Philetus for their Gnostic

⁵²The expression “*revive*” refers to giving new life to something dead. The term never appears in the NT. The sons of Korah said about the spiritually dead nation, saying, “*Wilt thou not revive us again: that thy people may rejoice in thee?*” (Ps. 85:6). The spiritual “quickenings” of which David spoke referred to daily renewal from the word of God (Ps. 119:25, 37, 40, 88, 107, 149, 154, 156, and 159).

word games (II Tim. 2:16-18). The only help and hope that Timothy had in the rising Gnostic humanism was the Scripture, which was the “breath of God” words that he held in his hands (II Tim. 3:1-17). He was to preach these words to stave off the Garden Gnosticism which Satan wanted to bring in and destroy (II Tim. 4:1-8). Paul’s final words dealt with his disappointment in Demas (but no bitterness), the presence of some of his colleagues, his forgiving heart, and the status of some of the servants of the Lord. On the brink of his execution, Paul affirmed, “*I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith:*” (II Tim. 4:7).

The Revelation of Jesus Christ

The Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ⁵³ is the unveiling of divine disclosure. The Lord Jesus Christ inscripturated His final revelation to Christianity, and unfolded the culmination of His plan for heaven and earth. In spite of the Lord God’s clear purpose to “unveil” His purposes, several human responses occur. Some recoil from the somber details and refuse to examine the book, and thereby treat it as a closed book of dark sayings. Others, including cultists and professed Christians, eagerly jump into its contents and produce a bewildering array of bizarre and contradictory interpretations. Both responses must be disappointing to the Saviour, the apocalyptic Discloser.

The Apostle John, the human agent in the authorship of the Ἀποκάλυψις⁵⁴ and of his *First Epistle*, declared rather startlingly to his readership, saying, “*But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things*” (I Jn. 2:20). Herein is the key to understanding all Scripture with the spiritual ability to know absolutely (οἶδα)⁵⁵ all revelatory truth, even the *Book of Revelation*. John’s audience of church members had received the Gnostic teaching of heretics, and was in danger of falling under their influence. The Apostle countered this influence with the biblical reality that his flock had the indwelling of the “*anointing*” (i.e., Spirit of God), Who in turn would teach them the word of God (I Jn. 2:27). Those Christians then, who are walking in the agency of truth, “*the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth*” (I Tim. 3:15), submitting to their spiritual leadership (Eph. 4:11), possessing a copy of the preserved inspired Scriptures (Ps. 12:6-7; Mt. 24:35; II Tim. 3:16), and enjoying the indwelling of the Author of those Scriptures (I Cor. 6:19-20), have the potential of knowing all revelatory knowledge, even the biblical interpretation of *Revelation*. Since the Ἀποκάλυψις addressed seven independent Baptist⁵⁶ churches in Asia Minor, it is this audience which will know all things with regard to the

⁵³“*The Revelation of Jesus Christ.*” The *Vulgate* reads *Apocalypsis Iesu Christi*, Luther’s 1545 German reads *die Offenbarung Jesu Christi*, and the Spanish *Reina-Valera* 1909 reads *LA revelacion de Jesucristo*. Hereafter the transliteration will follow the standard spelling of Ἀποκάλυψις.

⁵⁴*Vide* arguments under Authorship.

⁵⁵In its 320x in the TR (Mt. 6:8 to Rev. 19:12), this perfect form οἶδα of the obsolete εἶδω used as a present, gives the sense of absolute assurance of divine truth, as Peter used it, saying, “**Knowing** that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shewed me” (II Pet. 1:14).

⁵⁶The Great Commission is the divine mandate to establish Baptist Churches (Mt. 28:19-20). Christianity started off with a great deal of Baptist activity in the Jordan (Mt. 3:5-11), Christ received John’s baptism along with His disciples (Mt. 3:13-17; Jn. 1:35 ff.), and the early churches practiced believers immersion (Acts 2:41 ff., 8:37; 18:8-11). These statements are not denominational party-line hype; they express the emphasis of NT Christianity which is replete throughout the whole NT (cf. Mk. 16:16)!

interpretation of *Revelation*. Biblical interpretation comes to those who meet the above qualifications, as they prayerfully study to show themselves “*approved unto God*” (II Tim. 2:15).

Although some may be critical of the somewhat dismissive attitude toward apocalyptic research done by world renowned scholars, the true Bible Teacher is the Lord Himself (cf. Ps. 119:102).⁵⁷ He leads the serious student into all biblical truth (Rom. 8:14; cf. Jn. 16:13), using the “received” texts of Scripture (cf. Jn. 17:8; Acts 2:41; 8:14; 11:1; 17:11; I Thes. 2:13), the Greek *Textus Receptus* (TR)⁵⁸ and the Hebrew *Masoretic Text* (MT), to unfold “*the unsearchable riches of Christ*” (cf. Eph. 3:8). Although there may be value in perusing the works of others in the *Book of Revelation* (although cf. Eccl. 12:12), truth is not established from a compilation of commentators, nor by a panel of eschatology experts. The simple truth behind the wide disparity of interpretive schemes and exegesis is that many writing on the Ἀποκάλυψις are not qualified.⁵⁹ Some do not possess the Spirit of God, some have not received by faith the Lord’s preserved words, and some are not members of New Testament (NT) assemblies, and therefore reject any gifted men under whom they may be enlightened. To summarize, the commentaries written by the erudite scholastics of Romanism, Protestantism, and para-church organizations, even among Baptists, have limited illumination on the interpretation of the Ἀποκάλυψις.⁶⁰

The Apostle John⁶¹ identified himself as the human agent who received the heavenly visions and the designated author who wrote in response to the divine command (cf. Rev. 1:19). His audience was “*the seven churches*”⁶² (ταῖς ἑπτὰ⁶³ ἐκκλησίαις)⁶⁴ in Asia.⁶⁵ The last message of the Lord Jesus Christ

⁵⁷This author has read extensively the wide spectrum of books dealing with introductory issues, such as the voluminous work of Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1970), pp. 931-984.

⁵⁸The text of the Received Bible Movement was so-named after the expression “the text received by all” (*textum...nunc ab omnibus receptum*) in 1633. This commentary employs the Scrivener Greek Text of 1894. F. J. A. Scrivener, *Scrivener’s Annotated Greek New Testament* (Collingswood, NJ: Dean Burgon Society Press, 1999 reprint), 656 pp. The late Greek text based on Gnostic-laced readings is popularly known as the Critical Text (CT), or *Novum Testamentum Graece*, Nestle-Aland 27th Edition (Stuttgart: Deutsch Bibelgesellschaft, 1993).

⁵⁹“Which view [Futurist, Historicist, Preterist, or Idealist] is the right one? Since there have been evangelicals who have held to each of the four views, the issue is not that of orthodoxy but of interpretation. In recent years many expositors have combined the stronger elements of the different views. The history of the interpretation of Revelation should teach us to be open to fresh approaches to it, even when this attitude goes contrary to the prevailing interpretations. Nothing short of the careful exegesis of the text uninhibited by prior dogmatic conclusions is required for the fullest understanding of the Apocalypse.” Alan B. Johnson, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Revelation*. Vol. 12, Hebrews - Revelation (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), p. 410. One should notice the total absence in Johnson’s query and answer of any spiritual qualifications necessary for the handling of God’s words (cf. Ezr. 7:10).

⁶⁰This author, having met the scriptural qualifications of an unshamed “*workman*” (cf. II Tim. 2:15), has prayerfully examined the voluminous apocalyptic material, and has found this statement verifiable. “*He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches*” (Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, and 22).

⁶¹The name comes from the compound words in Hebrew for Jehovah (*Jo*) and grace (*chen* = חֵן). Vide Rev. 1:2, 4, 9; 21:2; and 22:8.

⁶²This expression occurs four times in *Revelation* (1:4, 11, and 20[2x]).

⁶³*Hepta* (“*seven*”) occurs 85x in the NT with 52x in the Ἀποκάλυψις.

⁶⁴The *Tyndale* translation (1534) gave the sixteenth century rendering of ταῖς ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησίαις as “the .vii. congregacions.” Luther (1545) rendered the audience as *den sieben Gemeinden*. Cf. *septem ecclesiis* in the Latin *Vulgate*.

was to His NT immersionist assemblies or Baptist churches (cf. Mt. 28:19-20). Of the twenty-three times the Lord Himself employed ἐκκλησία,⁶⁶ He referred to it as a visible assembly of baptized believers in all references. In Matthew's Gospel, He promised to build up His assembly (Mt. 16:18),⁶⁷ which He did with church discipline (Mt. 18:16-18), and addressed this movement of NT churches with the Ἀποκάλυψις (cf. 2:1 *et al.*).⁶⁸ In *Revelation*, the Lord Jesus referred to either individual churches or to the seven churches twenty times (cf. Rev. 1:4, 11, 20[2x]; 2:1, 7, 8, 11, 12, 17, 18, 23, 29; 3:1, 6, 7, 13, 14, 22; 22:16).⁶⁹

Some characteristics of these churches are the following: 1) they were seven literal churches in Asia Minor, forming a semi-circle facing Patmos; 2) they were Baptist churches, being the product of the Great Commission (Mt. 28:19-20); and 3) they were typical churches representing NT churches in any age,⁷⁰ either remaining in or on the verge of losing "candlestick" status.

In verse four, using common epistolary protocol,⁷¹ John identified himself, and gave a greeting from God to his audience. The Apostle's prayer for "grace" (χάρις) and "peace" (εἰρήνη) shows a divine order.⁷² One must experience God's grace (Eph. 2:8) before experiencing God's peace (Rom. 5:1).

⁶⁵"Asia" occurs 19x and refers to most of modern day Turkey. The name comes from the Hebrew word for "fire" (עֵשׂ = 'ash) since it was the fiery orb that came up every morning from the east of Jerusalem.

⁶⁶The word ἐκκλησία occurs 115x in the TR. The CT omits it in Acts 2:47.

⁶⁷Thomas M. Strouse, *I Will Build My Church: The Doctrine and History of the Baptists* (Newington, CT: EBP, 2008), pp. 28-38.

⁶⁸If Christ believed in or taught about some sort of universal, invisible, mystical church/Body, now would have been the time to address it. He did not address "the saints of Asia" or "the Church of Asia" for good reason. His NT Scripture addresses His immersionist assemblies. If there were a mystical Body of Christ, why did He never refer to it? Did He build something He never addressed? Did He address something He never built? If there is no mystical church/Body, it is blasphemy to teach that Christ is the "Head" over something that does not exist! Even Morris recognizes this basic ecclesiological truth, stating, "Christ's message is to be conveyed to and through local churches, with real, visible members and activities, not to an invisible illusory body called 'the church universal'" (*The Revelation Record*, p. 36).

⁶⁹John MacArthur is typical of theologians who interject their eisegesis into the Ἀποκάλυψις with imprecise and unbiblical sentiments, such as the following for his definition of "Church." He states, "God's people, the universal body of believers as well as the local group of believers. The church is the 'body of Christ' (Rom. 12:5). This metaphor depicts the church not as an organization but as a living organism composed of mutually related and interdependent parts." John MacArthur, *Revelation, the Christian's Ultimate Victory* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007), p. 16. In the fundamentalist camp, David Cloud perpetuates the erroneous "fundamentalist" ecclesiology, stating, "The church of Jesus Christ [*sic*] will not be conquered by the world and will not die. In spite of apostasy and persecution, the Philadelphian church exists in the last days and is Raptured [*sic*]. Compare Matthew 16:18." David W. Cloud, *Revelation, Advanced Bible Study Series*, (Port Huron, MI: Way of Life Literature, 2007), p. 81; also pp. 199, 221.

⁷⁰This is not to say that John prophesied "seven church ages" to represent 2000 years of "Church" history (i.e., "the Laodicean Church Age"). There is no biblical warrant for this Catholic/Protestant interpretation, as the assignment of a church to a particular age is subjective, and destroys the doctrine of the imminent Return of Christ. This interpretation would have no meaningful benefit to the first century unless the meaning of "age" was extremely short, but then why call it an "age" if all ages could occur in any century?

⁷¹Cf. Thomas M. Strouse, *En Epheso: An Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians* (Newington, CT: EBP, 2009), pp. 37-39.

⁷²The "grace" and "peace" formula occurs in the introduction of 16 NT books (Romans, I and II Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, I and II Thessalonians, I and II Timothy, Titus, Philemon, I and II Peter, and II John). It is significant that the word "mercy" (ἐλεος) never appears in the *Apocalypse*.

The reference to both grace and peace (= שְׁלוֹמִים) suggests the bi-lingual nature of the church membership—Greek and Hebrew. The blessed greeting comes from the Triune God, as John sets apart the three members of the Godhead with the Greek preposition ἀπὸ (“from”) and a description of each.

First, John described the Father with the rare title (cf. Rev. 4:8; 11:17; 16:5), “*him which is, and which was, and which is to come*” (τοῦ ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος).⁷³ Using two Greek participles and one verb, John attempted to describe the infinite and eternal God with temporal terms. The first participle is the present participle ὢν of the εἶμι (“to be”) verb, denoting the ever-present nature of God, the Ἐγὼ εἶμι (“*I Am*”)⁷⁴ equivalent to *Jehovah* (יהוה).⁷⁵ Before the second and final participle, the Apostle inserted ἦν (“*was*”), the imperfect form of the εἶμι verb, and denoted the Lord’s eternal past.⁷⁶ The third word ἐρχόμενος is the present participle of ἔρχομαι, describing the future event of the Second Coming.⁷⁷

Second, the Apostle described the Holy Spirit⁷⁸ as “*the seven Spirits*”⁷⁹ (τῶν ἑπτὰ πνευμάτων). He probably alluded to Isa. 11:2 which states, “*And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD.*” This no doubt refers to the seven-fold perfections of the Spirit of God, as John treated the plural noun “*Spirits*” with the singular verb ἐστίν (“*is*”),⁸⁰ denoting the unity of the seven perfections. The seven-fold Spirit of God was before the throne (ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου⁸¹ αὐτοῦ) of God the Father, as the seven lamps (Rev. 4:5) or candlesticks (מְנוֹרֹת) in the Tabernacle (cf. Ex. 25:31-39; *vide* also Zech 4:2 ff.). The seven-fold Spirit was enlightening His audience by communicating the apocalyptic message to the seven churches, at least to those who had an ear to hear (e.g., Rev. 2:7 ff.).

⁷³Cf. this formula with Rev. 1:8; 4:8; 11:17; and 16:5.

⁷⁴Cf. Jn. 8:58. *Vide* also all of the “*I Am*” statements of Christ, such as “*I am the bread of life*” (Jn. 6:35 *et al*).

⁷⁵Cf. Ex. 6:3; 3:14. Also, see Thomas M. Strouse, *An Exegesis of Psalm 119* (Newington, CT: EBP, 2008), p. 94. Also, *vide* Thomas M. Strouse, “Scholarly Myths Perpetuated on Rejecting the Masoretic Text of the Old Testament.” *Emmanuel Baptist Theological Journal* 1 (Spring 2005): 37-61.

⁷⁶John used the same imperfect verb ἦν to teach that before the beginning of creation, the ὁ λόγος, was habitually and linearly existing (Jn. 1:1).

⁷⁷The literal rendering of the Hebrew אַחֲרָיִךְ (“*and with last*”) in Isa. 41:4 is “*the one coming after.*”

⁷⁸John never employed the expression “*Holy Spirit*” in his writings, and he only referred to “*the Holy Ghost*” five times (Jn. 1:33; 7:39; 14:26; 20:22; I Jn. 5:7).

⁷⁹This expression occurs also in Rev. 3:1; 4:5; and 5:6.

⁸⁰The *KJV* translators, following the Tyndale (1534) and Geneva (1560) Bibles, faced the conundrum of how to translate the expression, giving fidelity to the Greek (“*is*”) or to the English (“*are*”).

⁸¹Of the 61x θρόνος occurs in the NT, the author of *Revelation* used it 46x (Rev. 1:4-22:3).

THE LONGEVITY OF THE EPHESIAN BAPTIST CHURCH

Rev. 2:1-7

Date and Background of the Ephesian Assembly

The internal evidence favors the historical testimony of Irenaeus that John wrote at the close of Domitian's reign (about AD 95-96).⁸² The lines of argument for a late first century inscription of *Revelation*, in spite the recent liberal novelty of Robinson to date it prior to AD 70,⁸³ follow these points. 1) The Ephesian assembly needed some time to lose first love (Rev. 2:4), since Timothy was its overseer with access to *Ephesians* and *I and II Timothy*. 2) There is no evidence that the church in Smyrna (Rev. 2:8) existed in Paul's day. 3) The church at Sardis needed some time to develop a testimony of spirituality (Rev. 3:1). 4) The earthquake that devastated Laodicea in AD 60/61 would require sometime from which the city could recover, allowing it to flourish and the church to become rich and without need (Rev. 3:17). 5) Since the Nicolaitan heresy (Rev. 2:6) was not mentioned in Acts, it may have come at a later time. 6) Early wide-spread persecution towards Christianity came universally from the Jews (e.g., Acts 21:27-40) and only sporadically from the Romans (I Cor. 12:3) until the latter part of the first century (Rev. 2:10).

Rev. 2:1

Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks;

About forty years earlier the Apostle Paul had established the assembly at Ephesus and put Aquila and Priscilla in charge of it (Acts 18:18-28).⁸⁴ Later, Paul came back to the ἐκκλησία and moved it to a rented school building, attempting to reach all of Asia (Acts 19:9-10). The impact of the Ephesian assembly on the worship of Diana resulted in a near riot, and consequently Paul left for Macedonia (Acts 19:13-20:1). Later, on his trip to Jerusalem he stopped by Miletus and met with the elders of the Ephesian church (Acts 20:17-38). After exhorting them in their ecclesiological ministry, he left for Jerusalem (Acts 21:1 ff.). At some point the Apostle left Timothy at Ephesus and then wrote his two *Epistles* to his son in the faith (cf. I Tim. 1:3 *et al*). Tradition links the Apostle John to the Ephesian church, and he may have written his *Epistles* and *Gospel* to this church, as he wrote and sent *Revelation* to the church at Ephesus as the first of seven addressees (Rev. 2:1).

⁸²Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Apostolic Fathers with Irenaeus*, Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publ. House, 1981), p. 416.

⁸³John A. T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), pp. 229-230.

⁸⁴This Christian couple trained Apollos "more perfectly" (ἀκριβέστερον) in the latest Pauline theology through their theological school under the aegis of the Ephesian ἐκκλησία (Acts 18:24-28).

Ephesus (Ἔφεσος) was the opulent⁸⁵ capital and most significant city of the Roman Province in Asia, sitting at the mouth of the Cayster River, three miles from the western coast and opposite the island of Samos. It was easily accessible by land or sea, and the ideal location prompted Paul to say, “*for a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries*” (I Cor. 16:9). The city had an interesting history, including its total conflagration on the night that Alexander the Great was born. In time it was rebuilt by the wealthy Ephesians, and ultimately housed the Temple of Diana (the *Artemesion*),⁸⁶ the deity whose image “*fell down from Jupiter*” (Acts 19:35). The magnificent Temple was one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World and drew multitudes of devotees for worship and banking.⁸⁷ The foundation of the *Artemesion* was ten steps high, with one hundred and twenty-seven pillars, sixty feet high, forming a colonnade around its four hundred and twenty five feet length and two hundred and twenty feet width base.⁸⁸

The resurrected and glorified Lord Jesus Christ, Who began speaking in Rev. 1:17, now commanded John to write (γράψον) to the angel/pastor of the Ephesian assembly.⁸⁹ Using the formula Τάδε λέγει⁹⁰ (“*these things saith*”), the Lord revealed His authoritative revelation to the scribe of the Ἀποκάλυψις, the Apostle John. In His greeting to the church, the Lord focused on His present relationship with the ἐκκλησία, using two present participles. He is the One Who “*holdeth*” (ὁ κρατῶν) the seven stars and “*walketh*” (ὁ περιπατῶν) in the midst (ἐν μέσῳ⁹¹) of the seven candlesticks. His grip on the seven stars was strong and His presence in the seven candlesticks was perpetual, Christ revealed. The verb κρατέω, from which the first participle comes, means to grasp with power in order to hold one in custody, as Matthew employed it, saying, “*And consulted that they might take Jesus by subtilty, and kill him*” (Mt. 26:4; *vide* Rev. 20:2). It denotes the resurrection power which overcame death, Peter averred,

⁸⁵The wealth of Ephesus, and consequently of some church members, evinces from the *First Epistle to Timothy*, in which Paul gave exhortation concerning riches. For instance, the women church members *were not to dress immodestly by over-dressing* (i.e., excessive hairdos, inordinate jewelry, or lavish garb), and the wealthy were to invest in the storehouse of the local church (I Tim. 2:9 and 6:17-19, respectively).

⁸⁶“The Temple of Artemis (Diana), whose splendor has almost become proverbial, tended chiefly to make Ephesus the most attractive and notable of all the cities of Asia Minor.” John Tuttle Wood, *Discoveries at Ephesus: Including the Site and Remains of the Great Temple of Diana* (NY: Cornell University Library, 2009 reprint of 1885 edition), p. 4; cf. also pp. 147-285.

⁸⁷Assuming the protection of Artemis, devotees deposited their material wealth within the Temple. In like manner, the Lord’s assembly is the depository for spiritual wealth, i.e., the Scriptures. The ἐκκλησία has the responsibility both to defend and distribute this spiritual wealth. One should notice that the Apostle used several banking terms in I and II Tim. (cf. “*commit*” [I Tim. 1:18; cf. Lk. 12:48]; “*committed to thy trust*” [I Tim. 6:20; II Tim. 1:14]).

⁸⁸*En Epheso: An Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians*, p. 12. Paul had the biblical authority and audacity to claim that the little house church where Timothy ministered was “*the pillar and ground of the truth*” in Ephesus (I Tim. 3:15).

⁸⁹It’s doubtful that the angel/pastor of the Ephesian church was still Pastor Timothy (cf. I Tim. 1:3 and 3:15).

⁹⁰In the eight references to this Greek formula, it always refers to revelation spoken by deity (cf. Acts 21:11; Rev. 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, and 14).

⁹¹Cf. this adjective in ecclesiological passages such as Mt. 18:20; Heb. 2:12; and Rev. 1:13.

saying, “*Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it*” (Acts 2:24). Christ’s omnipotent resurrection power holds the pastor of each NT assembly. His presence in the assemblies was active and habitual, walking⁹² spiritually in their individual locales. John had seen the Lord walk supernaturally on the sea (cf. Jn. 6:19), and now he wrote that Christ walked spiritually in the NT congregations, showing His great care and concern for the immersed church members.

Rev. 2:2

I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars:

The Lord addressed the ἄγγελος of the congregation, and continued this pattern for the other churches by using singular pronouns and singular imbedded subjects in the verbs, holding the angel responsible for and a representative of the respective church’s behavior. For instance, Christ employed the second person singular pronoun σου (“*thy*”) three times, and the second person singular imbedded subject “*thou*” in the three verbs (“*thou canst not bear,*” “*thou hast tried,*” and “[*thou*] *hast found*”). Having greeted the angel, and described Himself, the Lord Jesus acknowledged His intimate understanding of the church’s situation. He declared, “*I know*” (οἶδα),⁹³ revealing Christ’s omniscience, especially in regard to His assemblies (cf. Rev. 2:9, 13, 19; 3:1, 8, and 15). The Lord God was cognizant about several truths in the Ephesian assembly, especially their behavior in service. The pastor along with the baptized church members, were zealous about “*works*” (τὰ ἔργα)⁹⁴ and “*labour*” (κόπον)⁹⁵ with “*patience*” (ὑπομονήν).⁹⁶ Later, the Ἀποκάλυψις gives the biblical distinction between τὸν κόπον and τὰ ἔργα, saying, “...*Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them*” (14:13). Labor is the toil that goes into accomplishing deeds. In similar manner, Paul had commended the Thessalonian assembly with the same attributes qualified as “*work of faith,*” “*labour of love,*” and “*patience of hope*” (I Thes. 1:3).

The pastor, as representative of the people, was not able to bear (οὐ δύνη βαστάσαι⁹⁷) those who had the character of “*evil*” (κακούς),⁹⁸ the Lord observed. The generic evil men, along with the false

⁹²Περιπατέω is the root of this present participle and the source for the noun “peripatetic.”

⁹³Οἶδα is the perfect form of εἶδω (“I see”) but is used as a present verb. It denotes the absolute knowledge of the omniscient God (cf. I Cor. 3:20; II Tim. 2:19; II Pet. 2:9), in contradistinction to γινώσκω (I know experientially [223x]) and ἐπίσταμαι (I know factually [14x]). For these latter two verbs, *vide* Acts 19:15: “*And the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but who are ye?*”

⁹⁴The noun occurs 176x in the TR.

⁹⁵Hard toil is the essence of this noun, occurring 19x.

⁹⁶This compound noun gives the literal sense of “abiding under” (32x). It occurs six other times in *Revelation*, or a total of seven, making it a *heptad legomena*, and alluding the patience of the saints (1:9; 2:2, 3, 19; 3:10; 13:10; and 14:12).

⁹⁷The present infinitive comes from βαστάζω, meaning “to bear up [one’s spiritual weakness]” (cf. Rom. 15:10).

apostles and Nicolaitans, received examination and excoriation from the church. Their collective enemies, no doubt, were from within rather than from without.

Specifically, the church “*tried*” (ἐπειράσω)⁹⁹ and “*found*” (εὑρεῖς)¹⁰⁰ the “*apostles*” (ἀποστόλους) as wanting. Using two *aorist* verbs, the Lord revealed that the Ephesians had tried the heretics, presumably following John’s earlier instruction, which states, saying, “*Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try*¹⁰¹ *the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world*” (I Jn. 4:1). These church members had the ability to discern spiritually the nature of the spirits behind religionists because they had the Spirit of God giving discernment through the Word of God in the Church of God (vv. 2-6; cf. I Tim. 3:15 and I Jn. 2:20). Although those with “*the spirit of error*” (I Jn. 4:6) “*say*” (φάσκοντας)¹⁰² they were messengers, the ἀποστόλους¹⁰³ were instead “*liars*” (ψευδοῖς),¹⁰⁴ Christ revealed. Affirming that they “*are*” (εἶναι), they “*are not*” (οὐκ εἰσί), the Lord declared, using the present tense of εἶμί about their claim, and then negating the present tense. Satan had mimicked the divinely-given office of apostle at Corinth and now at Ephesus, as Scripture reveals, saying, “*For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works*” (II Cor. 11:13-15). These pseudo-apostles were no doubt included in the domain of grievous wolves about which Paul warned the Ephesian elders (*vide* Acts 20:29-30). They were led by the father of lies (cf. Jn. 8:44), placing themselves in the tragic category of “*liars*,” which destiny shall be the lake of fire.¹⁰⁵ Apparently the Ephesian assembly exercised church discipline on the “*false apostles*” and removed them from the membership (cf. I Cor. 5:6-7; cf. also II Tim. 2:16-18).

Rev. 2:3

And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted.

The Lord Jesus Christ used four second-person, singular verbs (two of which occur in the previous verse along with the same accompanying noun [“*patience*”]) with three distinct tenses to give additional

⁹⁸Cf. 51x.

⁹⁹The Lord used the *aorist* form of πειράζω (39x) meaning to test one’s character. The Pharisees tested Christ (Mt. 16:1), God tests saints (I Cor. 10:13), and believers are to test themselves (II Cor. 13:5).

¹⁰⁰The root of this *aorist* verb is εὐρίσκω, which occurs 178x in the Greek NT.

¹⁰¹This verb is from the δοκιμάζω root.

¹⁰²This present participle form is from φάσκω, which root verb occurs three other times in the TR (Acts 24:9; 25:19; and Rom. 1:22).

¹⁰³The noun is employed in a general sense as “*messenger*” (II Cor. 8:23) and in a specific sense for the office of apostolate (Mt. 10:2 *et al.*). Paul described Christ as “*the Apostle*” (Heb. 3:1). About twenty men received this title for the technical office (cf. Acts 14:14 *et al.*). *Vide* Strouse, *En Epheso*, pp. 31-32.

¹⁰⁴This adjective is related to the noun ψεῦδος (“*lie*” [II Thes. 2:11]) and to the verb ψεύδομαι (“*I lie*” [Acts 5:3]).

¹⁰⁵Cf. Rev. 21:8; *vide* the other use of this *tris legomena* word in Acts 6:13.

encouragement to the Ephesian assembly through their leader. He averred that they “*hast borne*” (the *arist* ἐβάζεσθαι), “*hast* (the present ἔχεις) *patience*,” “*hast laboured*” (the perfect κεκοπίακας), and “*hast [not] fainted*” (the perfect κέκμηκας¹⁰⁶). In effect, Christ said about the Ephesians that they had borne the truth, were presently enduring with patience the Christian life, had labored and still were laboring, and had not fainted and still were not fainting. This double emphasis of commendation prepared for the Lord’s strong rebuke.

The Lord’s name is important to Him (cf. Ex. 3:14; 6:3),¹⁰⁷ and Christ commended the Ephesians for serving “*for my name’s sake*” (διὰ τὸ ὄνομά μου).¹⁰⁸ As obedient Christians,¹⁰⁹ or baptized disciples of Christ, they identified with the Lord Jesus Christ in spite of the predictions of persecution and the actual practice of persecution against them. For instance, Peter warned, saying, “*If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified*” (I Pet. 4:14). Also, the Roman government demanded allegiance to Caesar, and apparently had brought some official persecution to the Corinthian church several decades earlier, as Paul stated, saying, “*Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed: and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost*” (I Cor. 12:3; cf. also 7:26). The Ephesian ἐκκλησία seemed to have received well Pastor Timothy’s instruction and the Apostle John’s influence, since she had lasted through at least forty years of spiritual battle.

Rev. 2:4

Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.

The Ephesian church members’ strong stand against apostasy (Eph. 6:11, 13-14), albeit commendable, was not sufficient to keep them from leaving their first love, the Savior observed. With gentle, firm and graphic language, the Lord Jesus had analyzed and now condemned the angel-pastor and his assembly. Using the adversative conjunction ἀλλ’ (“*nevertheless*”), Christ chastened them gently, saying literally, “*but I have against you.*” He was firm in admonishing the angel-pastor and his congregation, citing their spiritual abandonment. They had “*left*” (ἀφῆκας) their “*first love*” (τὴν ἀγάπην...τὴν πρώτην [literally, “*the love, the first*”]),¹¹⁰ He remonstrated. The Scripture employed the ἀφίημι root of the *arist* verb elsewhere for “*putting away*” (i.e., divorce) in I Cor. 7:11-13. The personal affront is eminent in the Lord’s graphic words.

Although they still loved, the freshness of their love had dissolved, presumably through the second and third generation Christians at Ephesus. The Ephesian ἐκκλησία had been strong in love, both for

¹⁰⁶This *tris legomena* comes from κάμνω (*vide* Heb. 12:3 and Jam. 5:15).

¹⁰⁷Cf. Thomas M. Strouse, *An Exegesis of Psalm 119* (Newington, CT: EBP, 2008), p. 94.

¹⁰⁸The Greek expression occurs elsewhere five times, namely in Mt. 10:22; 24:9; Mk. 13:13; Lk. 21:17; and Jn. 15:21.

¹⁰⁹Χριστιανός occurs 3x in the Greek NT (Acts 11:26; 26:28; and I Pet. 4:16).

¹¹⁰The *Vulgate* reads *tuam primam reliquisti* and the 1909 *Reina Valera* reads *tu primer amor*.

Christ and toward one another, as the fourteen references to ἀγάπη/ἀγαπάω in the *Epistle* illustrate.¹¹¹ The Baptists at Ephesus knew and practiced the truth of Christ's words, saying, "*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself*" (Mt. 22:37-39).¹¹² After all, Paul reminded the Ephesian church, about ten years after he had started it, saying, "*Now the end of the commandment is charity (ἀγάπη) out of a pure heart*" (I Tim. 1:5). The quality and intensity of the church's first love somehow was lost through about forty years of spiritual battle.¹¹³

Rev. 2:5

Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.

With four verb tenses (present, perfect, aorist, and future) and two moods (indicative and subjunctive), the Lord Jesus Christ succinctly warned the Ephesian church about their present status, past behavior, and future prospects. Having accused them of their sin, He now gave them the response He expected, which response was the only remedy for restoration. Christ listed three imperatives for the three restorative steps, declaring their need to "*remember*" (μνημόνευε),¹¹⁴ to "*repent*" (μετανόησον),¹¹⁵ and to "*do*" (ποίησον).¹¹⁶ The imperatives were all in the second person singular, referring to the angel-pastor as the one with whom the process must begin (cf. I Tim. 4:16). The present imperative μνημόνευε gives the force of "continue to remember," while the two *aorist* imperatives connote the immediate urgency of single action "to repent and do," demonstrating immediate obedience through changed direction of behavior. They had "*fallen*" (ἐκπέπτωκας), He declared with the Greek perfect tense, connoting their past sin which had continuing results. The Ephesian church was in the fallen state of having left her first love. The immediate spiritual action of repentance¹¹⁷ with following behavior ("*do the first works*") was the only way to restore the assembly. He called them back to their "*first works*" (τὰ πρῶτα¹¹⁸ ἔργα) motivated by love for Christ and for Christians.

¹¹¹Eph. 1:4, 15; 2:4; 3:17, 19; 4:2, 15-16; 5:2, 25, 28, 33; and 6:23-24.

¹¹²The vertical love one has for the Lord Jesus Christ manifests in horizontal love for one another (cf. I Jn. 3:16).

¹¹³This should be a strong reminder that true spirituality is more than going through religious observances, and the lack thereof could cost a church the loss of candlestick status.

¹¹⁴Nineteen of the twenty-one times this verb appears in the NT, it is in the imperative conjugation.

¹¹⁵John never used this μετανόεω verb in his canonical writings, but Christ did in *Revelation* (12x). Several modern versions bring in their theological heresy undermining the biblical necessity of repentance. The Roman Catholic *Douay-Rheims* reads "do penance," and the Protestant *Young's Literal Translation* reads "reform."

¹¹⁶Cf. 1:6 *et al.*

¹¹⁷The *aorist* imperative μετανόησον comes from two compound words meaning "change" and "mind."

¹¹⁸One must notice the emphasis on the word "*first*" in these two verses (4-5).

If repentance,¹¹⁹ the proper response to the accusation of sin, would not occur, then the Lord would follow through with His threat. He used the conditional particle εἰ negated (μή) with the present deponent verb ἔρχομαι¹²⁰ (literally “I am coming”) to indicate, that as the coming One (Rev. 1:4, 7), He may come “*quickly*” (ταχύ)¹²¹ before the Rapture,¹²² in order to remove the church from candlestick status. Christ’s dire warning was that He would “*remove*” (κινήσω)¹²³ the Ephesian candlestick (λυχνίαν) from her place (ἐκ τοῦ τόπου¹²⁴ αὐτῆς¹²⁵).¹²⁶ In other words, the place-city of Ephesus would no longer have supernatural light because the ecclesiological presence of Christ would be gone (cf. Mt. 18:20; 28:20; Rev. 1:13). Although the personnel and physical remnants of the “church” might remain, the Saviour warned, He, as the light to the candlestick, would be absent. The candlestick would have no revelatory light, and Ephesus would experience spiritual blackout. “*Ichabod*” would be the biblical designation of the “church” as the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ would depart (cf. I Sam. 4:21; Ezk. 10:4, 18). The loving Savior concluded with His gentle but firm admonishment, “*except thou repent*” (ἐὰν μὴ μετανοήσῃς).¹²⁷ Ancient history indicates that the assembly did repent of her loss of love;¹²⁸ modern history indicates that the ecclesiological light in Ephesus was extinguished.

Rev. 2:6

But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

¹¹⁹Contrary to popular but unbiblical opinion, the Lord’s churches do not need “healing” when sin is prevalent, but they need **repentance!**

¹²⁰This present deponent indicative verb form occurs 3x with reference to the ἐκκλησία in *Revelation* (cf. 2:5, 16; 3:11). The present tense gives the connotation that Christ is ever ready to come, either to take away candlestick status or to bring Tribulation judgment on the world.

¹²¹20x in the TR.

¹²²There is no doubt that the Lord’s will has always been that every NT church would remain true until the consummation (cf. Mt. 28:20).

¹²³The root occurs 8x in the Greek NT, conveying the sense of removal, such as its first reference connotes (cf. Mt. 23:4).

¹²⁴This noun, occurring 92x, often refers to a geographical location, as in the current verse. Cf. the expression *de loco* in the *Vulgate*.

¹²⁵Some modern translations such as the *ASV*, *NIV*, and *NKJV* translated the feminine pronoun αὐτῆς as “its.” Presumably, the *KJV* translators rendered the feminine pronoun as “his” for theological purposes, connoting the masculine leadership of the assembly through the angel/pastor.

¹²⁶The Lord’s plan for this dispensation is to have churches in every locale around the world, ministering logistically to each locale, such as Ephesus, Smyrna, etc. His divine wisdom is superior to man’s invention of some sort of a universal church sentiment that is not only unbiblical but practically naïve and logistically unattainable.

¹²⁷The repetition of the necessity to repent, expressed in the subjunctive mood, focuses on the precise emphasis and absolute requirement of repentance.

¹²⁸Ignatius wrote to the Ephesian church early in the second century, saying, “For it was needful for me to have been admonished by you in faith, exhortation, patience, and long-suffering” (*Ephesians* 3.1; 6.2). A. Cleveland Coxe, Alexander Roberts, and James Donaldson, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to AD 325* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1981), pp. 50-52.

The Scripture, having emphasized what the Lord had (“*I have*” [ἔχω]), now emphasizes what the Ephesians “*hast*” (ἔχεις).¹²⁹ Although they had left their first love, they had not abandoned their perpetual hatred (“*hatest*”)¹³⁰ for “*the deeds of the Nicolaitans*” (τὰ ἔργα τῶν Νικολαϊτῶν), the Lord lovingly observed. The Lord God of the Bible is the God of perfect love and perfect hate.¹³¹ He loves the sinner while he is alive, but hates the sinner in death, and demonstrates His hatred by casting the unsaved sinner into hell. For instance, David said, saying, “*The foolish shall not stand in thy sight: thou **hatest** all workers of iniquity*” (Ps. 5:5), and “*God judgeth the righteous, and God **is angry** with the wicked every day*” (7:11).¹³²

In the midst of His condemnatory warning, the Lord commended the Ephesian church for not wavering concerning “*the Nicolaitans*” (τῶν Νικολαϊτῶν). As the Lord Jesus Christ hated¹³³ their deeds, so did the Ephesians. The Nicolaitans may have been followers of “*Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch*” (Acts 6:5), although he was a godly man whereas the Nicolaitans were identified with evil. Etymologically, the noun is a compound of νικᾶω (conqueror)¹³⁴ and λαός (people) suggesting “people conqueror.” This may have been a movement prompted by individuals such as Diotrophes, whose departure from John and subsequent control over a church (cf. III Jn. 1:9-11), was a manifestation of the perpetual temptation within religion—the domination of people. Contextually, the deeds and the doctrine of the Nicolaitans seemed to have been related to the idolatry and immorality of the Balaamites¹³⁵ (cf. Rev. 2:14-15). The church members at Ephesus hated the deeds of the Nicolaitans, whereas some in the church at Pergamos embraced the doctrine of these heretics.

Rev. 2:7

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.

¹²⁹Scripture also parallels the contrastive ἀλλὰ in verse 4 (“*Nevertheless*”) with ἀλλὰ of verse 6 (“*but*”).

¹³⁰The form comes from the verb μισέω (42x), which root occurs 5x in the Ἀποκάλυψις (2:6[2x], 15; 17:16; 18:2).

¹³¹The Bible teaches that the Lord God hates all evil, as various verses detail specific forms of evil (cf. Dt. 12:31, 16:22; Prov. 6:16; Isa. 61:8; Amos 6:8; Zech. 8:17; Mal. 2:16; *et al*).

¹³²Christ was angry with the religious leaders of His day, as Mark revealed, saying, “*And when he had looked round about on them with **anger**, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts, he saith unto the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it out: and his hand was restored whole as the other*” (Mk. 3:5).

¹³³With the crassis construction καὶ γὰρ (combining καί [“*also*”] and ἐγώ [“*I*”]) coupled to the verb μισῶ, the Lord emphasized His divine agreement with the assembly (cf. Mt. 16:19).

¹³⁴Cf. the reference to the Antichrist: “*And I saw, and behold a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth **conquering**, and **to conquer***” (Rev. 6:2).

¹³⁵Balaam may mean “not of the people” (b-l/-m) or even “lord of the people” (b-˘-l/-m).

Using the *hepta legomena* expression “*He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches*”¹³⁶ (ὁ ἔχων¹³⁷ οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ Πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις), Christ focused on the personal and intimate divine communication, not merely to the angel-pastor, but to every NT assembly member. To the one with the “*ear*” (οὖς),¹³⁸ the Lord exhorted, as if the listener were cocking his head and extending one ear to hear the words.¹³⁹ Having an ear, that is, being spiritually in tune with the Lord’s words (cf. Jn. 10:27; I Cor. 2:13), was one of several requirements to receive divine apocalyptic communication. Certainly, another requirement was to be a member of one of Christ’s churches, since the Spirit is continually speaking (cf. the present active indicative verb λέγει [“*saith*”])¹⁴⁰ to the seven Baptist churches in Asia Minor.¹⁴¹ Of course, another requirement was to have God’s revelatory truth, the Words of Christ (cf. Jn. 12:48).

Following His exhortation, the Lord gave His promise to every overcomer, “*to him that overcometh*” (Τῷ νικῶντι).¹⁴² Apparently the Lord punned on the proper noun Nicolaitans (τῶν Νικολαϊτῶν), promising victory to each one who *overcame* “the people *overcomers*.” Of course, He was the first to overcome, as John revealed, saying, “*These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world*” (Jn. 16:33). The Apostle John elaborated on the doctrine of overcoming, teaching that it was both a position and a practice, saying, “*for whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith*” (I Jn. 5:4). To the Bible writers, behavior was the manifestation of faith, as James stated, saying, “*But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?*” (Jam. 2:20). Those who have the position of overcoming will indeed overcome,¹⁴³ and shall enjoy eating “*of the tree of life*”¹⁴⁴ (τοῦ ξύλου¹⁴⁵ τῆς ζωῆς). “*To eat*” (φαγεῖν)¹⁴⁶ of this tree is the

¹³⁶The Greek is identical in all seven passages to the churches, and there is no textual variant in the CT. Irrefragably, these are the very inspired and preserved words of the Lord Jesus Christ. Cf. the similar expression directed to those with “*ears*” (Mk. 4:9).

¹³⁷The masculine singular participle from ἔχω denotes that the men of the seven churches need to be the examples in hearing and doing the Lord’s truth (*vide* I Cor. 11:3; Eph. 5:23; I Tim. 2:11-12).

¹³⁸The noun occurs 37x in the NT, 8x in *Revelation*, including 13:9. The plural form is ὠτᾶ.

¹³⁹Nehemiah wanted the LORD to lean in with one ear and hear his request. Cf. “*Let thine ear now be attentive, and thine eyes open, that thou mayest hear the prayer of thy servant, which I pray before thee now, day and night, for the children of Israel thy servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against thee: both I and my father’s house have sinned*” (Neh. 1:6).

¹⁴⁰The masculine singular active participle ἔχων corroborates this perpetual challenge. Cf. Heb. 3:7.

¹⁴¹Imprecise theologians regularly miss what the Scripture is saying, and falsely interpret that the audience is “the Church.” For instance, Hendrickson avers, saying, “...the message is for **the universal church** of all ages and places...” p. 118.

¹⁴²This is the masculine active singular participle from νικάω (John used it 24x out of its 28x in the TR). The use of the masculine gender suggests that men ought to take the lead in the church and family in the practice of overcoming.

¹⁴³Paul gave the spiritual weaponry in the Christian’s armor to overcome the world, the flesh, and the Devil (cf. Eph. 6:11-18).

¹⁴⁴This expression occurs in *Genesis* (2:9; 3:22, 24), *Proverbs* (3:18; 11:30; 13:19; 15:4) and *Revelation* (2:7; 22:2, 14).

expression that connects the reader with the original potential Adam had in the Garden of Eden (cf. Gen. 2:9, 16-17). However, Adam's sin of eating of "*the tree of the knowledge of good and evil*" brought the curse upon him and all his progeny (cf. Gen. 3:17-19).¹⁴⁷ Only Christ's redemptive work will restore man to permanent and perpetual eternal life (cf. Rom. 5:18-21). Whereas man has been barred from paradise and the tree of life, the Lord promised that overcomers would once again have access to the heavenly Garden and to the tree of life. This tree is in the "*paradise of God*" (παράδεισου τοῦ θεοῦ), the Redeemer revealed. The root noun παράδεισος occurs two other times in the NT, namely in Lk. 23:43 and II Cor. 12:4. The LXX used παράδεισος for "the Garden of Eden" in numerous places (cf. Gen. 2:8 ff.), and the Vulgate rendered the same as *paradisum*. The Lord is the One Who will give access to the tree of life¹⁴⁸ which will bestride the river flowing from the throne of God, Christ revealed (Rev. 22:1-4). The longevity of the Ephesian Baptist Church lasted for over forty years, and yet her future longevity depended upon the pastor and the people.

CONCLUSION

The Ephesian Baptist Church was a significant New Testament assembly. The Lord began His assembly during His lifetime and it eventually located in Jerusalem. Christianity spread and the church at Antioch became a great sending church, evangelizing Jews and Gentiles. Church planter Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, started and pastored the Ephesian Baptist Church, to which he wrote the *Epistle to the Ephesians* and the *First and Second Epistles to Timothy*. The Apostle John wrote the *Apocalypse of Jesus Christ* to the forty-year old church at Ephesus. The Ephesian Baptist Church had several overseers, beginning with Aquila, then Paul, and then Timothy. In spite of the satanic effort to destroy the assembly from within through Garden Gnosticism, the church prevailed for over forty years by holding fast "*the form of sound words*" (II Tim. 1:13). The Lord Jesus Christ blessed the assembly and gave biblical revelation of her history, theology, and longevity for all biblical assemblies to follow! How do our churches fit the divine pattern!

Finis

¹⁴⁵ξύλου occurs 19x in the NT, six of which appear in the Ἀποκάλυψις (2:7; 18:12[2x]; 22:2[2x], and 14).

¹⁴⁶This infinitive comes from the ἐσθίω verb. The "eating" motif runs through the Bible: man may eat of all trees (Gen. 2:16); man may not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:17); the serpent will eat dust (Gen. 3:14; Isa. 65:25); man will eat from the cursed land (Gen. 3:17); man was evicted from the Garden so he could not eat of the tree of life (Gen. 3:22); Christ commanded all to eat of the Bread of Life (Jn. 6:51); and overcomers will eat of the tree of life (Rev. 2:7).

¹⁴⁷The tree initially represented man's blessing and God's bounty (Gen. 2:16 ff.). Then it became a test, and once Adam failed the test it became man's refuge (Gen. 3:8 ff.). This necessitated that Christ became a curse for man by hanging on the tree (cf. Dt. 21:22; Gal. 3:13), and all that look to this tree in faith will eat of the tree of life (Rev. 2:7).

¹⁴⁸The anarthrous "tree of life" may be a generic expression for many "trees" of life lining either side of the river, or one huge tree of life (cf. Rev. 22:2; Ezk. 47:12).