

As we **begin** ... looking at Paul's letter to the **Ephesians**.

We want to discover: **What** the Bible **says** ~ What it **means**,
& **How** it **applies** to our lives ... today.

Before we start on the letter itself. Listen to this quote from:
The Introduction to Ephesians, (in the new Living Translation.)

*‘Worship, can be described ...as a dialogue,
of revelation ... & response:*

*God speaks ... His word of abundant grace in Christ,
God's Church, responds ...echoing the grace of God:*

- *in word ... (through Prayer & Praise) &*
- *in deed ... (through a distinctive Christian lifestyle.)*

In a sense ... **worship ... is ‘a call to arms’**

Exhorting ‘the saints’ to put on **the full armour of God**
And live out their faith, in the world.

(Paul will describe this armour in Chapt. 6)

Let's begin ... by looking at three things:

‘**The Person**’ ~ that is the writer: ‘**Paul**’

‘**The Place**’ ~ the city of ‘**Ephesus**’ ~ &:

‘**The Story so far.**’ ~ (what's been happening)

1^{stly} ‘**The Person**’... what were **Paul's credentials** ?

What would his CV say ? ... We don't need to ‘**guess**’

Because, we can read what he's said about himself ...

He was born into a Jewish family.

He tells us this, in Phil.3.v5: NLT

For I was circumcised when I was eight days old,
having been born into a pure-blooded Jewish family
that's a branch ~ of the tribe of Benjamin.
So I am a real Jew ~ if ever there was one !
What's more ~ I was a member of the Pharisees,
who demand the strictest obedience to the Jewish law.

*We don't know anything about Paul's **mother**,
But we know **his father was a Pharisee**,
& that his **Sister's son** was living in Jerusalem,
When Paul was arrested ~ for preaching the Gospel there.
(Acts 23.v6 & v16, NIV)*

Paul was not born in Jerusalem... He says: (Acts 22.v3 NLT)

I am a Jew, born in Tarsus a city in Cilicia, and I was brought
up and educated here in Jerusalem ...under **Gamaliel**.
At his feet:
I learned to follow our Jewish laws & customs very carefully.
I became very zealous to honor God ... in everything I did.

Tarsus was an important city,
in present day south eastern Turkey.

We discover in current Jewish literature, that **Gamaliel**,
was hugely respected as a ... 'Doctor of the Law'
for his knowledge of the Old Testament,
and for his '**balanced application**' of it's principles.

Gamaliel was one ~ of only 7 scholars,
Named: as a 'Doctor of the Law'

When the early Apostles were brought before the Sanhedrin
and accused of ~ *preaching about 'Jesus'*
Just to stir up the people ~ against their leaders.

It was **Gamaliel** who restrained the Sanhedrin. (see Acts 5)
When Paul says ~ 'I sat at the feet of Gamaliel'
He's saying: '**I had the very best education possible**' !

Acts 22, tells us: ***Paul was Born a Roman Citizen:***
So the commander went over and asked Paul,
Tell me: *Are you* a Roman citizen ?
Yes, I certainly am," Paul replied.
I am, too ... the commander muttered ...
and it cost me plenty ! Paul replied:
But I am a citizen ~ by birth ! (Acts 22.vs 26-28)

Named '**Saul**' when he was born, (after Israel's first King)
He changed his name to **Paul** ~ when he became a Christian.
(So we'll use 'Paul' ~ to avoid confusion)

Paul had considerable ability with languages:
he would have learned to speak **Hebrew** at home
& probably some **Latin**, since his father was a Roman Citizen.
He would be taught in **Greek** ~ at school in Tarsus,
As **Greek**, was the **trade language**, throughout the Empire.

And he may have ~ learned a **local language**,
from the boys in the street ~ prior to being taken to Jerusalem,
to study with **Gamaliel** ~ when he was about 13 years old.

God chose ~ the best possible teacher,
to prepare **this young man** ~ to serve Him.

Paul thought he was going to be a theologian,
Among the Pharisees, and studied hard to be like Gamaliel.

But God ~ had other plans ... & this is still true ~ today.
God can take our training in one area ~ and **use it** in another.
In a way ... that we'd never have thought of !

Certainly, by the time Paul ... was around 30.
He was fluent in **Hebrew, Greek and Latin**.

This enabled him to speak freely to the local people
Wherever he travelled, on his missionary journeys.
Talking to Jews or Gentiles, or Roman officials ~ as needed.

2^{ndly} We come to the Place ~ the **City of Ephesus**.

It was one of the most important cities,
At the western end, of modern day Turkey,
within the area, that Rome called:
'Pro-consular Asia' ... because ... It was administered:
by a **Governor or 'Pro-Consul'**
on behalf of the Roman Emperor.

Ephesus, had been **occupied** as a city ~ since 1000 BC.
(That's back ... when 'Saul' ... **was** the first king of Israel)
Built beside the **Cayster river**, (5 kms inland, from the sea)
The river was slow flowing ~ & easily silted up.
So the **Persians**, the **Macedonians**, & the **Romans**,
had used slave labour, **to dredge the river, & create
a canal & pool**, for trading ships, to anchor & unload.

When Augustus ~ became the first Roman Emperor in (27 BC)
He made Ephesus ~ the capital of the whole region.

As the seat of local Government, & with a protected harbour,
its prosperity grew. Its population, by the time Paul was there
is estimated at about 150,000.

There were several other factors that made Ephesus famous:

1st Ephesus had an amphitheatre, which seated 25,000 people
It's stone seats cut into the hillside in a semi-circular shape
Provided natural acoustics, so a speaker could be heard by all.

2nd The Temple of the goddess **Artemis**, built around 550 BC.
Was one of the 7 wonders of the ancient world.
(Artemis was renamed ~ '**Diana**' ~ by the Romans)

3rd It had several **aqueducts** that provided: Water for the city,
Water for the Roman baths ... and one of them ... even
powered a saw mill ~ to cut marble into blocks for buildings.

Lastly: **The Story so far**, (what lead to the writing of this letter)

You'll find the story in . . . Acts ~ Chapters: 18,19,20

Near the end of Paul's 2nd missionary journey,
As he was travelling back to Antioch ~ by way of Jerusalem,
The ship called in at Ephesus, and Paul used the occasion,
To speak to the Jews, in the Synagogue there.

(Acts Ch.18, vs 19-21)

They asked him to stay longer, & continue teaching them,
But he couldn't stay just then,
as he had to arrive in Jerusalem ~ by a certain date.

We shouldn't gloss over this: The Jews in Ephesus,
Invited Paul to stay and explain the Gospel,
so he wasn't, trying to **force** his ideas on them.

Later, as he set out on his 3rd missionary journey (Acts 19.v1)
He chose to go overland ~ probably via Tarsus, as there was
A pass through the mountains ~ very close to Tarsus.
He went to encourage & teach ~ in the small churches.
that had sprung up ~ on his earlier journeys.
Until finally, he arrived at the most western city of **Ephesus**.

He preached to the Jews in the synagogue, for 3 whole months
But when some of them spoke out strongly against him,
He moved into the lecture hall of Tyrannus,
taking all the 'believers' with him.
At this new location:
He was able to preach **daily**, for the next 2 years.
Now **that** would have been an exciting Bible school to attend.

Many Jews were believing **that Jesus really was the Messiah** And Gentiles **also**, were accepting Jesus & rejecting the Idols of Greece & Rome. But ~ not only in Ephesus. These new Christians ~ began to reach out into surrounding areas as well.

Let's read about this ~ in Acts 19.vs23-29a. NLT + ch. 20.v1

Remember ~ Paul is now writing from Rome.
& it's some years ... since he lived, in Ephesus.

Let's start reading at: **Ch.3, vs.1.**

**I, Paul, am a prisoner of Christ Jesus
because of my preaching to you Gentiles.**

**Have you ever wondered ...
'Why God allowed Paul ~ to be imprisoned'?**

If Paul had been free, to visit these new Churches,
he wouldn't have **needed to write the letters**,
that make up a large part of our New Testament.

God knew ... that Paul's written ministry,
Would be **much more important**, than his spoken ministry.
Why? Well ~ here we are reading it ... 2000 years later.
&: It's been translated into more than 2500, other languages.

Let's read from the beginning: Ephesians chapter 1.vs 1-7
v1. Paul commences his letter in the usual way:
With the identity of **who** is writing:
'Paul, chosen by God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus.'

An ‘**Apostle**’ ... was not someone:
Who **chose** ... this occupation to follow,
But someone who **was chosen**, to take up the responsibility:
of being God’s **representative**.

The nearest modern equivalent, would be an ‘**Ambassador**.’
someone **chosen** to represent our country, in another country.

The ambassador is not there ~ to negotiate deals for himself !
Nor to express his personal opinions ...
But ... to spell out the viewpoint,
of the government, that he represents !

Since Paul is writing to his friends, in Ephesus.
Where he’s lived for nearly 3 years,
They knew each other well !

So he addresses them as:

**God’s holy people (or: ‘saints’) in Ephesus,
faithful followers of Christ Jesus.**

The Greek word for **Saints**, simply means ‘holy ones’
Paul has no problem, using this word.
Because he’s had many opportunities to teach them.

And he knows they’re not ‘**holy**’ because of their **good deeds**
but because God has ‘made them holy’
through the sacrifice of his Son.

So the letter is addressed to the people who are:
'holy and faithful' ~ 'in Ephesus ~ & ~ in Christ'

They have a physical location ~ in Ephesus.

But they also have a spiritual location ~ in Christ.

v2. Is a common greeting of Paul's, you'll find similar words
at the beginning, of Galatians and Philippians.

While both 'Grace & Peace' were greetings,

Widely used in letters ~ Paul qualifies them with:

from God our Father, and Jesus Christ our Lord.

Grace means: **God's gift** ~ his 'undeserved favour'

We didn't earn it ... By comparison, we do earn our wages,

They are deserved ... They're ours by right !

Peace means: The Peace **we have** with God,

because of: God's kindness to us ~ through His Son,

That is ~ 'our condemnation for sin is **removed,**

and we're adopted into His family.'

v3. says: Through Christ we're given **spiritual** blessings.

Not **worldly** blessings.

Like: a pile of gold ~ or great status on the political scene.

Our blessings in Christ ~ are uniquely Spiritual !

Someone may break in ~ and steal your 'gold'.

Someone may tell lies ~ and ruin your reputation.

But **no one** can steal ~ **God's blessing,** from you !

v 4, says: Long ago, even before he made the world,
God loved us, and chose us, in Christ,
to be holy and without fault in His eyes.

In God's great eternal "NOW"

He knew **where** and when ~ each of us would be born,
where we would live ~ if & who we would marry, & so on.

Paul says: God chose us in Christ, to be **holy**,
and without fault in His eyes.

If you ask the man in the street: "What does 'holy' mean ?

He'll probably say:

'Ah.h ... Something to do with religion' ?

Or he may be cynical ~ and say:

'If anyone *seems* to be ~ 'holy' ~ its probably not real.

'And he's just a goodie – goodie ...

A hypocrite' !

The Bible always uses the word '**holy**' for God himself,
Or ~ for someone or something, '**set apart**' for God's use.

But, the second word translated: in v4. '**without fault**'
can also be translated: ~ "**Unblemished**"

In OT times ~ for an animal to be brought in sacrifice to God,
It had to be faultless ~ that is ~ **it had to be ‘unblemished’**
God didn’t want the sickly, half dead ones,
Given to him as a present ... **That was no sacrificial gift !**

vs4 & 5. Also remind us, of God’s **unchanging character:**

**Long ago, even before He made the world,
God loved us, and chose us, in Christ.
His unchanging plan has always been
to **adopt** us into His own family.**

He knew in advance, that we would choose to follow the Lord.
And that his justice would be satisfied ~ through his Son.
So we could be declared justified, and ‘**unblemished.**’

In v4 we read: ***God loved us, and chose us ~ in Christ.***

He didn’t choose us ~ in **anger**, or in **revenge**,
not even in **mercy** ... he **chose us ... in Christ,**
The one who provided, our means of salvation !

Some people get very nervous, with the word ‘**Predestined**’
(Which occurs in some translations, in v5.)

When it simply means ‘**chosen in advance**’ or pre-determined
When someone writes a will ... They decide in advance,
Who will get what ... when they’re gone.

Sometimes their decisions, are **surprising** ~ or even **exciting** !
But, sometimes their decisions ~
made so long ago and never changed ...
don't really fit the situation any longer.
And then we feel **disgruntled** !

'If only they'd known ...how things would **change**,
They would've decided differently.'

Because God ~ has a **perfect knowledge** of the future,
He can make **perfect decisions** about us,
Even ... long before we're born.

And **what decision did He make** ?

That we'd **become** His **ADOPTED** sons and daughters !

The people living in Ephesus,
Knew about the Roman laws of adoption.
So Paul uses words ~ they're all familiar with.

The most common application of these Roman laws,
was when a "man of substance"
had no son ~ to be the heir of his wealth.

He would choose the son of a friend ... or even a servant,
and invite **them**, to become his '**adopted son**'.
And therefore his 'heir' !

If they accepted,
A legal document was drawn up and signed.
Once properly signed, and sealed.
It could not be ‘reversed or **undone.**’

Paul says ~ because **we’ve** been **chosen** by God ...
to be his **adopted** sons and daughters,
we’re also, **heirs** in His kingdom.

Next week ...

We’ll say something about why modern translations
of the Bible can be helpful.