

Ephesus: New Humanity in a Chaotic World

Thomas Robinson, Cities of Hope 8, July 31, 2016

Ephesians 2:11-22

¹¹ Remember that at one time you – Gentiles in flesh, called ‘*uncircumcision*’ by what is called ‘*the circumcision*,’ which is made in flesh by hands – ¹² remember that you were at that time without a Messiah, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of the promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

¹³ But now in Messiah Jesus you who once were **far off** became **near** in the blood of the Messiah. ¹⁴ For he himself is our peace, who has **made us both one** and has broken down the dividing wall of separation, the **hostility, in his flesh** ¹⁵ by rendering powerless the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, in order that he may **create in himself one new human being** in place of the two, so making **peace**, ¹⁶ and may **reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross**, thereby killing the hostility.

¹⁷ And **he came and preached ‘peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near’** [Isa 57:19]. ¹⁸ For through him we both have **access in one Spirit to the Father**.

¹⁹ So then you are **no longer strangers and aliens**, but you are **fellow citizens** with the saints and members of the **household of God**, ²⁰ built on the foundation of **the apostles and prophets, Messiah Jesus** himself being ‘the cornerstone’ [Isa 28:16].

²¹ In him a whole structure, fitted together, is growing into a **holy temple in the Lord**.

²² In him you also are being built together into a **dwelling place for God in the Spirit**.

Acts 19:1, 8-10, 21-28 Ephesus becomes a center of Paul’s work.

¹ ... Paul passed through the inland country and came to Ephesus. ...

⁸ And he entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God. ⁹ But when some became stubborn and continued in unbelief, speaking evil of the Way before the crowd, he withdrew from them and took the disciples with him, reasoning daily in the hall of Tyrannus. ¹⁰ This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks. ...

Riots erupt over Paul as a threat to trade in shrines for Artemis of Ephesus.

²¹ Now after these events Paul resolved in the Spirit to pass through Macedonia and Achaia and go to Jerusalem, saying, “After I have been there, I must also see Rome.” ²² And having sent into Macedonia two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, he himself stayed in Asia for a while.

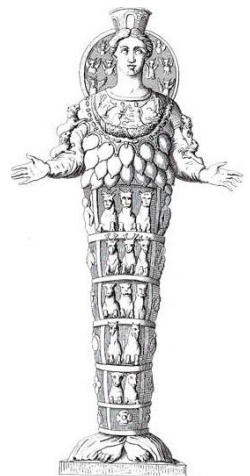
²³ About that time there arose no little disturbance concerning the Way. ²⁴ For a man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought no little business to the craftsmen. ²⁵ These he gathered together, with the workmen in similar trades, and said,

“Men, you know that from this business we have our wealth. ²⁶ And you see and hear that not only in Ephesus but in almost all of Asia this Paul has persuaded and turned away a great many people, saying that gods made with hands are not gods. ²⁷ And there is danger not only that this trade of ours may come into disrepute but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis may be counted as nothing, and that she may even be deposed from her magnificence, she whom all Asia and the world worship.”

²⁸ When they heard this they were enraged and were crying out, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!”

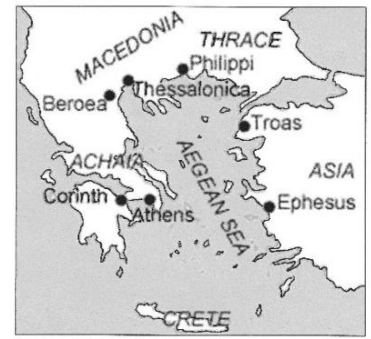
Galatians 3:27-29

²⁷ For as many of you as were baptized into Messiah have clothed yourselves with Messiah. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Messiah Jesus. ²⁹ And if you part of Messiah, then you are Abraham’s seed, heirs according to promise.



Adventures in Ephesus, Capital of Asia

With cities like Philippi, Corinth, and Ephesus, we have not only the Acts account of Paul's work but also letters from Paul to believers. Acts was probably written 15-20 yrs after Paul's death. People remembered amazing stories of Ephesus, maybe from Aquila & Priscilla and many others.



An old city (1000 bc), now Rome's provincial capital, famous for the huge temple of Artemis (strange, bound, many 'breasts,' meteorite?, pilgrims). Great city ruins; no ruins of Temple.

Acts 19 starts from A & P house church. Unusual disciples: Apollos, 12 who follow John's baptism. Synagogue conflict. The Hall of Tyrannus for 2 yrs. The message spreads, mission teams sent. Remarkable signs. Jewish traveling exorcists. Disciples who practiced magic. Paul was imprisoned. He wrote Galatians, Philippians, 1Corinthians. His life was in danger (Phi 1:12ff) and he 'fought with beasts' (1Cor 15:32). Paul plans to leave but riots stirred by Demetrius a silversmith. Paul's helpers are held hostage. A huge crowd fills the great theater with uproar. Finally quieted by town clerk.

The Word of the Cross and the Breaking of Barriers

Through the chaos Paul sees a miracle as people alienated from each other are brought together through the unexpected means of the event of Jesus' death & resurrection, as it is proclaimed. For Paul the obvious divide is between Jew and Gentile – ethnic, racial, political, religious, social. But all kinds of divides are being broken: class, slave/free, male/female, rich/poor, oppressed.

It is the power of what God had done in Jesus' crucifixion & resurrection revealing reality anew.

Thus to Corinth he stresses the 'word of cross' (1Cor 1:17ff); to Philippi, the hymn of cross (Phi 2).

Now he looks at the walls that divide people, different worlds, different gods, ages-old alienation.

But that is deception. As he told the Athenians, God made all peoples from one (Act 17:26).

In Jesus' cross was a new creation, he says. Not a starting over, but new creation within the messy ongoing story of humanity. Humans' relation to their creator was profoundly broken, manifested in violence, corruption, selfish power. God had worked through Abraham, Israel, giving Torah as guidance and promising an anointed king-Messiah, to embody that story. Gentiles were outside.

But the problem of alienation from God was universal. When the Messiah came he was a surprise.

Not a king to restore Israel's power, nor a spiritual manifestation, but a very ordinary human who was also the presence of God. He embodied Israel and also all humanity, and not just in its nobility, but in its limitation, vulnerable, oppressed, physical, suffering, death. He was all of us.

A New Humanity – A New Sanctuary

Paul says that the dark cross was also the light of new creation. The Torah did its work marking God's holiness and human brokenness. Now in Jesus' crucifixion, the story turns a corner. God and human are brought together as God in grace and self-giving love takes our sin and death to himself. All humans are affected whether they know it or not. In Jesus' flesh-&-blood body dying, the walls, the hostility, are destroyed. Reconciliation to God and to each other shine forth. All the distances are bridged. He himself is our peace. The reality of One God, one creation is visible.

In the chaos of the world, real communities become sanctuaries where that reality of reconciliation begins to be lived out, windows where God's reality shines through. Rome's empire could span many classes and ethnic groups and order them for control, but barriers were (are) always there.

Jesus' cross says the barriers are false. We commune as one body (still broken) across humanity.

Even Americans can be part of the prophets' story. One Trinity calls all creation to know it's one.