

LESSON 5 – EPHESUS: LIFE IN THE EARLY CHURCH



Reading Assignment:

Bible Reading: Ephesians, Philippians, Philemon

Text Reading: Benware Chapters 17-20

Continue memorizing the order of the Books of the New Testament,
you will have to write them out in their order and correctly spelled as part of Lesson 6

In a survey course it is very difficult to cover all the epistles and to bring out their significance. We must leave this to the textbook and instead concentrate on specific areas of interest both to the student and to increasing our knowledge. Thus, this lesson will concentrate on a single epistle and seek to show how the writing of that epistle supports the concepts begun in the Old Testament and continues in the New Testament.

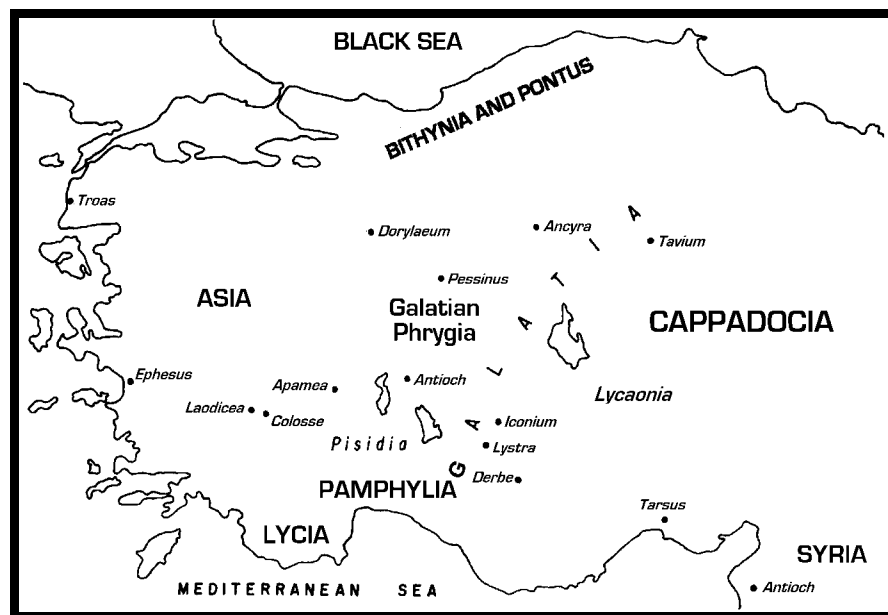
If you will recall, when we began our study, we noted that the creation and the purposes of God were far reaching. We could not just limit God's work and purposes to men. Remember, we had to find a theme or themes through the Bible that included the creation, man, and angelic beings. When Paul wrote to the Ephesians, he touched on several doctrinal areas covering both men and angels. As I have worked on a study of Ephesians I have noticed a general lack of mention of the angelic portion of the book. Additionally, there is a general ignoring of the addressees and their nationalistic background. In this study I would like to touch on these ignored areas and in doing so, show the ongoing continuity God has created within His Scriptures.

THE EPHESIANS

Ephesus was a Roman province of Asia near the mouth of the river, Cayster. It had an artificial port and was connected to all the major highways of Asia; thus, it was accessible by both land and sea. Nearby Pergamos was the governmental and Roman religious centre of Asia during Paul's day. Ephesus was the commercial centre and also, the centre of the worship of the goddess, Diana, in Asia. Because of the concentration of wealth, it became the chief city of the province. Thus, a letter to Ephesus was of major significance to the church of the province. The Jewish people who were residents of Ephesus had ancestral ties to Ephesus.

STOP READ: ACTS 2:9; 6:9

Ephesus was called “the first and greatest metropolis of Asia” in the times of the Romans.¹⁵



Ephesus was a cosmopolitan city having roots in both Oriental and Greek cultures. Ancient traditions made Ephesus the place where the “mother goddess of the earth was born.”¹⁶ With time, the ancient goddess took on Greek characteristics and became the Greek goddess, Artemis. Finally, the great temple to the now Roman, Diana, came into existence. The temple dated from 560 BC. Having been destroyed and rebuilt during its history, it survived until AD 263. It is considered one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.¹⁷

Thus, religion was a major element in Ephesian society and must be considered during a study of the Biblical events of that city. Paul’s first brief visit to this syncretistic Greek, Roman, and Jewish Ephesian society came during his 2nd missionary journey [Acts 18:19-21]. During Paul’s 3rd missionary journey, he remained for at least two years preaching in the Jewish synagogue [Acts 19:8,10].

Christianity was not unknown in Ephesus before Paul’s ministry. At Pentecost [Acts 2:9], Ephesian Jewish men heard Peter’s message. Further, we learn in Acts 19:1, that there were disciples of John the Baptists in Ephesus [Acts 19:1]. However, Paul’s task was to further enlighten John’s disciples and to directly confront the pagan

¹⁵ “Ephesus” *Easton’s Revised Bible Dictionary*. Online Bible.

¹⁶ “Ephesus” *ISBE*, volume 3.

¹⁷ “Seven Wonders of the World” Grolier Electronic Publishing, Inc.

beliefs of Ephesus, which he did when proclaimed the Scriptures and confronted the worship of Diana.

In summary, we must remember that Ephesus consisted of four primary groups of people from which the church would draw its members.

- The twelve Jewish disciples of John [Acts 19:7]
- Some students from the school of Tyrannus [v. 9]
- Former Diana worshipping Greeks
- Non-idol worshipping Jewish people [v. 10] - some of which may have heard Peter at Pentecost

Notice that just as Jesus, during the 40 days between resurrection and ascension, preached the kingdom of God, so too, Paul preached the same theme in Ephesus [v. 8]. Thus, this topic was of interest beyond just his Jewish hearers.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Since we know that the Jewish people never turned to idols after the Babylonian Captivity, we can assume that the Jewish people of Ephesus resisted Dianic worship and may have spoken out against it. This may account for the strong anti-Semitism in the city [Acts 12:34]. However, the early Gentile believers had come out of the pagan Dianic religion. Thus, there were tensions between these two backgrounds within the church. It was from these seeds, that God formed the Ephesian church.

One final background item must be noted. Ephesian tradition taught that Jupiter's coming down from heaven was linked with the city [Acts 19:35]. As a result of this tradition, there was strong interest in things of the heavens, magical powers, and angels. The practice of magical arts was so closely associated with Ephesus that books of magic recipes and incantations were often called "Ephesian books."¹⁸ Nearby Colosse also was heavily into angelic worship. Unlike Ephesus, Colosse was primarily Gentile, as was the church in that city. Paul's letter to the Colossians is similar to that to the Ephesians, however, the audience was of a significantly different background.

**STOP AND READ:
PAGE 348
OF YOUR TEXTBOOK**

¹⁸ Do You Believe In Magic? [Logos Library].

As you read the epistle of the Ephesians, you will want to note Paul's frequent allusions to the heavens and angels.

THE HEAVENLIES

Chapter 1 of Ephesians sets the stage for Paul's emphasis on the heavenlies and the angels in the book of Ephesians. Paul writes

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessing in heavenly places in Messiah.¹⁹

Ephesians 1:3

Then in Ephesians 1:20, 21 he speaks of the powers in the heavenlies.

Which He wrought in Messiah, when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come.

As Paul concludes Ephesians in Chapter 6, he tells the Ephesians that they battle not against flesh and blood, but against evil angels.

For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

Ephesians 6:12

Answering Life's Questions

In this portion of our study, I would like to consider a seldom observed and rarely discussed verse that lies "in between" these references to the heavenlies. This verse explains many questions we have in life. It may answer:

- "Lord, why did that happen to me, to our church . . ."
- "Lord, why am I going through this right now?"
- "Lord, why are you not answering my prayer now?"
- Why do "bad" things happen to good people?

We all know of instances where a Christian we know is involved in a tragedy. As we look at the circumstances, we find we have no answers to offer them. As a result, we find ourselves trying to "defend" God's actions.

Many years ago, a family called the Willis' had just such a tragedy. They were driving down a motorway in their van with their large family. Suddenly an 18" piece

¹⁹ In order to better understand how the Ephesians would have understood Paul, the Hebrew *Messiah* will be substituted for the Greek equivalent, *Christ*. It is held that the modern Christian only thinks of *Christ* as similar to a surname and as a consequence no longer sees the emphasis Paul placed on the position and mission of the Messiah.

of metal appeared directly ahead of them on the pavement. Unable to avoid it, they drove over it. As it passed under the car, it punctured the fuel tank and the car burst into flames. Only the husband and wife survived. Their children in the car were instantly killed. Willis was a good pastor in a solid Bible believing church.

QUESTION?

Why did God allow this to happen to this Godly family?

Stop and write some of your thoughts:

Have people been saved through it, yes, but not great numbers. Has it matured husband and wife, certainly. But why were these young promising lives cut short or were they? We must be very careful not to try to find reasons to defend God for allowing such a thing to happen. Also, we must not fall into the world's thinking and say it was just "bad luck," a coincidence of being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Now, I do not have an answer why God allowed this or any other tragedies, but I do know that God allows some things that happen for purposes beyond our own lives and beyond being used to teach or instruct other people. Something's happen that in a sense, have nothing to do with the person involved. That is, the person is God's instrument used by God for His purposes that go beyond the immediate life of that "instrument."

Let's turn to Ephesians 3:10 and see what may lie behind some events in Christian's lives.

*To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by [literally - **through**] the church the manifold wisdom of God.*

In order to understand this verse, we need to analyse certain terms in it.

PRINCIPALITIES AND POWERS

We must begin by determining what are *principalities and powers*?

STOP AND READ: EPHESIANS 6:12

What is contrasted to *principalities and powers*?

Paul contrasts *principalities and powers* with *flesh and blood*.

QUESTION?

What do you think are the opposite of flesh and blood?

Obviously, the only opposite could be angels. In Chapter 6, Paul is speaking of the evil angels, which are doing battle with God's people in the church at Ephesus.

In reading Ephesians we are reminded that God's purposes include the angelic world as well as mankind and the earth [recall Lesson 1 of HC-102/202]. We often forget that there are spiritual battles going on around us right now. In our busy world, we often centre our thoughts upon us, we forget that there is an unseen world of angels.

STOP AND READ: 2 KINGS 6:8-17

Remember Elisha? He and his servant were in the city that was surrounded by the King of Syria's forces. The servant was fearful, but Elisha was calm and said,

... they that be with us are more than they that be with them. 2 Kings 6:16

Elisha then prayed and the servant's eyes were opened and he saw . . .

the mountain was full of horse and chariots of fire round about Elisha. 2 Kings 6:17

Yes, there was still a great battle to come between Syria and God's people, but Elisha saw beyond the material and immediate and saw that angels were involved in God's purposes that day.

Just an aside, our society continues to spiral down morally and ethically in its life style. Marriage is minimised and "partners" are in. Schools teach that there is no

right or wrong as long as “we do not hurt someone else.” Everything is relative. If it fits the “hurts no one” criterion, then do it!

The reality is that God has standards and laws that are not relative. There is right and there is wrong. There is a moral and spiritual battle going on all around us. Some of it is visible and some hidden from our physical eyes. God has a myriad of angels working around us, which we never see. In that battle there are some angels who are for good and some are evil.

DEFINITION

What are “*principalities and powers*?” This word, *principalities*, speaks of the leaders or first rank in an organisation. In this passage, the first in the organisation is a specific group of angels within God’s holy angelic organisation. These are the ones with authority [powers] to rule. God has organised His angels into various levels. Ephesians 3:10 speaks of the highest class of angels in heaven.

In Ephesians 1:21, Paul purpose is to show how high Christ is above all created beings, thus, He is “*far above all principality*.”²⁰ That is, He is above even the highest ranking of angelic beings, the *principalities*. Based upon the New Testament references, there are five prime categories of angels [note no ranking is implied by the order of this listing].

- Thrones
- Principalities
- Authorities
- Powers
- Dominions²¹

STOP AND READ: EPHESIANS 3:10

We can now recognise that the *principalities and powers* are angelic beings. Remembering the cultural backgrounds of Ephesus and Colosse, we understand why these epistles speak so much about angels. Their readers would easily understand Paul’s comparison.

Clearly, in Paul’s doctrinal epistle of Ephesians we are “let into” some of the secrets of the creation. In this passage we note that these angels are righteous or holy

²⁰ William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, p. 174. Renald Showers, *Those Invisible Spirits Called Angels*, pp. 62,63.

²¹ See Romans 8:38, 1 Corinthians 15:24; Ephesians 1:21; 2:2; 3:10; 6:12; Colossians 1:16; 2:10, 15; 1 Peter 3:22 for sources.

angels and not the evil demonic ones. This is obvious from the fact that they are trying to understand God's wisdom and not battling Him as the evil ones of Ephesians 6.

*To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places **might be known** by the church the manifold wisdom of God.*

Some Grammar

In this verse Greek grammar offers us additional information. In the original, the verb "*might be made known* [gnwrisyn]" is at the start of the sentence immediately after the conjunction *ina*. Connected with it is the adverb, *now* [nun].

Thus the verse literally reads,

To the intent that, might be made known, now . . .

Paul is "shouting" that **now** is being made known, not in the past, not in the future, but right now is God's wisdom being made known. Put grammatically, the sentence may be pictured in its simplest way

<u>wisdom</u>		<u>is being made known</u>
<u>God's</u>		<u>now</u>

Despite Paul's "shouting," this verse it is almost entirely ignored in Bible commentaries.

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

Think about this, we only shout when we want someone's attention and want it that instant. Yet, when Paul "shouts" in this verse it is ignored.

When my daughter started to learn to drive, my son warned her that I shout sometimes as I teach driving. He "claimed" I shouted at him once while he was learning to drive. Now I never shout, I only "raise" my voice, slightly. Actually, he was about to take a turn too tight and the car might have drifted into a pothole at the edge of the pavement. I had to shout, I mean, "raise my voice" to protect the car. Typically we only shout when there is REAL danger.

Here Paul was "shouting" to catch our attention about angels and the church. Paul's point is that the angels are learning something now, something that they have never been able to learn before in history. Apparently, there never had been an opportunity or a means to teach some aspect of God before this moment in time.

We must look at the context in order to understand what is taught in this unique point in history. Paul says there has been a mystery hidden [vv. 3-5] until now. That mystery is . . .

That the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ by the Gospel.

Ephesians 3:6

THE MYSTERY NOW REVEALED

The mystery is that the Gentiles have been allowed “in” as fellow heirs of the promise in the Messiah. In the modern world, we forget that in Paul’s day, the Church was predominately Jewish. It is very important to remember the distinction between the Church and Israel.

From Creation to Abraham, God used various peoples of all backgrounds as His instruments.

From Adam to Abraham, God used **individuals** as His instruments.

From Abraham to Pentecost, He used the Jewish **nation** as His instrument.

From Pentecost to the catching up of the church just prior to the national awakening of Israel at the Feast of Trumpets, He uses His Bride, the **Church**.

From the Feast of Trumpets to the Return of Messiah, He will again use **national** Israel

...and then during the Millennium, God will use both the **Bride** and **Israel**.

Thus, from Abraham to Pentecost [Acts 2] God used Israel to reveal His Word to the world. Through His Word salvation was offered to all nations and men. God never excluded anyone from potential salvation. The Jewish people were His instrument to demonstrate to the world what Godly living was when one lived as God directed.

Thus, they were to proclaim Him and show the pagan world what God could do in the life of one who is His child. While as a nation they demonstrated both the good and bad of His children, they were His instruments to record, transmit, and preserve the Old Testament. Further, eleven Jewish men, along with a few others, completed the revelation by proclaiming the Gospel of the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, to the world.

If you have received Jesus Christ as your Saviour, you are part of a long chain of people proclaiming that Jesus the Messiah died for your sins and has paid your just penalty of Hell as dictated by a righteous God. You see that chain started with a

Jewish disciple speaking of a Jewish Messiah to another person. That person trusted Jesus as their Saviour and then they told someone else. It eventually came down to you.

You can trace your salvation back to a Jewish person who shared the truth of a Jewish Messiah. Most people do not realise that an estimated 1/3 of the Jewish priesthood of Paul's day trusted in the Messiah and began to pass on the good news to others [Acts 6:7]. But the nation as a whole, misled by the leadership, turned from Jesus Christ. The Temple was destroyed and the Jewish people have wandered for almost 2000 years awaiting a coming Feast of Remembrance [see our course JS-201 on the Feasts].

Pentecost Changed it All

Pentecost [Acts 2] was a major change in God's instrumentality. No longer would a nation be used to proclaim Him and to show Godly living. Instead God would use individuals, "called out ones," who would unite in worship freed from the old covenant and its laws. This group would be called the Church of true believers. At the Jewish Pilgrim feast day of Pentecost, a Jewish fisherman named Peter proclaimed the Gospel of a risen Messiah or Christ. From there Jewish pilgrims spread the truth to the world.

What was hidden was that God would now use a new instrument to proclaim His coming kingdom, the Church. Notice, the angels were to learn "*through*" the church.

Further, this "instrument" would consist not just of Jewish people and a few converts, but now would consist of two groups, former enemies made one through the Messiah. Two groups that hated each other came to love each other when Jesus became their Saviour [Ephesians 2:11-2:22]. Their proclamation would not be a new revelation, but rather a proclaiming the fulfilment of God's promises [Isaiah 49].

After the Apostolic Period, no further revelation would be given or needed. That phase of God's plan was completed and so this particular task of Israel was completed. No Temple in Jerusalem would manifest God to the world. Now indwelt with the Holy Spirit, individuals, Jewish and Gentile would be the "Temple" to the world.

Peter is an excellent example of the difficulty Jewish people of Paul's day had in accepting Gentiles into the group of believers. Peter did not want to accept "unleavened" Gentiles as holy instruments of the Lord. Yet the specific teaching of

the Feast of Pentecost was that **two** loaves of **unleavened** bread were now in the Temple and acceptable to God. Ephesians 2 and 3 explained that the Jewish believers were to accept the Gentiles as part of the church. Such was the mystery hidden until this unique point in history.

*Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Messiah, **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 fellow heirs**, and of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Messiah by the gospel:*

Ephesians 3:4-6

TEACHERS OF ANGELS

Returning now to the subject of teaching angels “*through*” the church. That which is taught is the “*manifold wisdom of God.*” It was a “varied” or “multicoloured” wisdom. God’s infinite wisdom [soqja - nominative, feminine, singular word], a unity with many facets, is beyond human comprehension. We can only catch glimpses of it through His word and actions. When God created man, the angels saw what had been done and began to learn more about God their Creator through mankind. Throughout the Old Testament they continued to learn about God, along with men.

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

Did you ever think of angels as being students? Solomon, the wisest man that ever lived, wrote what he learned in the book of Proverbs. Yet, Paul tells us that there was more to learn. The studying of God and learning of Him will continue throughout eternity [Revelation 21:22-27].

Both the unity of the wisdom of God and the “varied” [literally - many chromatic wisdom] aspect can best be understood when we think of light. When sun shines through a prism it breaks the light into many colours. We have all seen a rainbow, which is light going through water drop prisms. What you may not realise is that there is more than just visible light.

In 1898, a Polish woman scientist was studying the peculiar behaviour noted in some rocks. Prior to this time, man knew only visible light. Madame Curie’s brilliant work revealed previously unknown radium rays, X-rays, coming from the rocks. She received the Nobel Prize for her discovery that revolutionised medicine and science. We now know that these unknown rays and light are all electromagnetic waves that are part of a single electromagnetic spectrum. While their characteristics may seem different at first look, they are actually waves of varying frequency.

Until 1898, they were unknown waiting the right moment of discovery. Radium waves were a mystery of the scientific world and God's creation.

Renald Showers notes that Paul's statement of purpose here in Ephesians

. . . indicates that there were certain aspects of Gods wisdom which were totally unknown to the angels before the Church came into existence. Nothing prior to the Church had permitted the use of this facet of God's wisdom. The formation of the Church demanded the exercise and, therefore, the display of aspects of divine wisdom which God never before had operated or revealed because only this unique wisdom could bring about the peaceful, equal union of such confirmed, implacable enemies as Jews and Gentiles into one body.²²

The Church at Ephesus well demonstrated this truth and Paul wanted them to understand the part they played in this display.

The church, you and I, have angels watching us and learning from us, for we are teachers to the angels. Remember, Job taught and through the book of Job, still is teaching us how to handle trouble and how to display righteous living in adversity. Remember, Job was never told "why" by God. Yet we are told it was to demonstrate to Satan how a righteous man will trust in God, no matter what [Job 1:6-12]! Job taught Satan, a fallen **angel**.

WHAT CAN WE TEACH?

First and foremost, we can show that there is no enmity between believers regardless of their nationality, colour of skin, accent, sex, Jewish or Gentile. God is reaching out to all men. True Christian harmony comes only through God's salvation. Ecumenicalism fails to achieve this unity, for it does not include true believers. Unbelievers are at enmity with God [Romans 8:7, Ephesians 2:15, 16, James 4:4].

Secondly, we can show that in all circumstances we will stand for righteousness and look to eternity with God

For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many contribute to the glory of God. For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.

²² Renald E. Showers, *There Really is a Difference!* [Bellmawr, New Jersey: The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, Inc., 1997] p. 175.

2 Corinthians 4:15-16

Thirdly, angels are learning about salvation by seeing it happen in people

Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into.

1 Peter 1:12

Fourthly, when we resist temptation, we show His power working through us to make us holy and not styled after the world

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh; for the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds; casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.

2 Corinthians 10:3-5

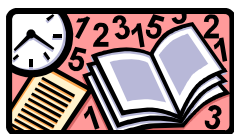
Fifthly, when we fail, God demonstrates His grace and mercy. When we minister to each other [1 Corinthians 12:26] we show His love resulting only through redeemed hearts.

And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.

We have a great responsibility as Christians, not just to the pagan world, but also to the angels of heaven watching over us. The angels can easily observe the pagan world and its behaviour. Show them something different; show them God in you as He changes you into a new creation and as you learn to discern good from evil.

But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their sense exercised [trained] to discern both good and evil.

Hebrews 5:14.



Homework Questions

Briefly write a paragraph on each of the following based upon your text reading, the Bible, and Lesson 5. Note: some of the questions are to prepare you for the next lesson by preparing you to think about the subjects. Your answer to these is based upon your discussion rather than a right or wrong answer.

LEVEL 2 & 3 – HC-104/204 COURSE*

1. List the four primary groups of people from which the Ephesian church drew its members. [10 points]
2. Discuss why the principalities and powers of Ephesians 6:12 are angels. [20 points]
3. What are the five prime categories of angels? [10 points]
4. Who were the “instruments” that God used in each of the following periods of time? [20 points]
 - Adam to Abraham
 - Abraham to Pentecost
 - Pentecost to the catching up of the church
 - From catching up of the church to the return of the Messiah
5. What is the “mystery” revealed in Ephesian 3:4-6? [20 points]
6. Who was Timothy? Using the Textbook, a Bible Dictionary, and your Bible, give a brief biography of Timothy. [20 points]

LEVEL 3 ONLY

Write a paper of minimum 125 words and maximum of 250 words on the subject of: “What can we teach angels based upon the materials in this lesson?”

LEVEL 2 AND 3

On your answer sheet indicate the

_____ % of the reading assignment completed:

_____ % of the Bible reading completed.

You may submit your homework answers either by mail or email. Email submissions may be sent either as an attachment or within the email. If sent as an attachment, they must be in Word, Word Perfect, or text format. If in doubt as to format contact us for further information. Send your homework answers to:

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