

Glad Tidings

“And we bring you good tidings of the promise made unto the fathers...” (Acts 13:32)

Vol. XXX

November 15, 2020

No. 46

Pillar and Ground of the Truth

By (Jerry Fite)

Pliny, the first century Roman writer offers details of the temple of Diana in Ephesus. Diana, the Roman name of the Greek goddess, Artemis, was honored with a glorious temple of 127 pillars of stone supporting a cedar roof whose interior was open to the sky. There were eight rows of pillars, each rising 60 feet high in front and back of the temple. The same length columns boxed the temple from the sides with the appearance of glorious strength.

In 1863, an English engineer in Turkey became interested in finding the exact location of the ancient temple. Mr. J.T. Wood began his trial and error search by discovering the remains of the walls of the ancient city. He then was able to uncover the large Ephesian amphitheater in which he found some inscriptions revealing the practice of bringing gold and silver images dedicated to Diana from the temple to the theater and returning them to the temple after the special public gatherings. He traced the ancient roads from two gates that he knew led to the temple. On the last day of 1869 He discovered the marble floor of the ancient temple outside the ancient city walls some 20 feet below the ground. The temple measured 425 feet long and 220 feet wide built upon at least three previous foundations.

Wood’s discovery offers evidence consistent with Luke’s recording of events in first century Ephesus: “*For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made shrines of Diana, brought no little business unto the craftsmen*” (Acts 19:24). When Paul in preaching of the one true God was accused of making “*the temple of the great goddess of no account,*” a great uproar ensued and Paul’s accusers “*rushed with one accord into the theatre*” where they seized Paul’s two companions, “*Gaius and Aristarchus.*” (Acts 19:27, 29). The ancient theatre, temple, goddess Diana and silver shrines certainly were in play in Mr. Wood’s modern era discovery.

Paul, addressing Timothy who was in Ephesus, writes: “*These things write I unto thee, hoping to come to thee shortly; but if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how men ought to behave themselves in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth*” (I Timothy 3:15). Though “pillar architecture” was prevalent throughout the Greco/Roman world, many commentators connect Paul’s description of the church to the backdrop of the numerous pillars of Diana’s temple. Regardless of motive, the understanding of “support” was certainly communicated with Paul’s inspired description.

By definition, the “church” is comprised of “called out” people who have answered the “gospel call” through “obedience of faith” (I Corinthians 1:2, 2 Thessalonians 2:14, Romans 1:5, 16:26). Paul is metaphorically describing the people of God in Christ as the house of God which is the support of the truth. But in what sense is the church the support of the truth?

The New Testament Scriptures make it clear that the church is not the “originator” of truth for it is the “product” of God’s revealed truth. Jesus is the “the truth” which was revealed through the “Spirit of truth” (John 14:6, 16:13). Jesus is “the foundation of the church” (I Corinthians 3:11). The church was the “result” of the truth of Christ being preached, not the “foundational source” of truth (cf. Acts 2:41, 47).

Therefore, how is the church the strong support of the truth? God’s people support the truth by obeying the truth of the Gospel (I Peter 1:22), proclaiming its truth (Matthew 28:18-20) and defending the Gospel as revealed (Philippians 1:16). All authority is with Christ, not the church. But the “called out” people of God support Christ’s truth by “holding forth the word of life” to a dark world in sin (Philippians 2:15-16). Are you standing up strong as pillar of the Truth?