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The quest for the provenance or destination of Ephesians has been a debated matter more so in the last quarter of the twentieth and early twenty-first-century scholarship. This book, *Hierapolis in the Heavens*, contributes to the discussion with novel proposals that seek to establish the readership at Hierapolis. The 148-page book is a revised version of previously published essays in eight chapters. It features a twelve-page bibliography and three pages of author-subject indexes at the end. The reader is also furnished with images of archaeological evidence and maps at vantage points to illustrate and support the arguments. The main thesis, which was first put forward in a 1997 commentary on Ephesians (Epworth), is that Ephesians was written by a member of the Colossian church to the church in Hierapolis; the crux of this is presented in chapter 1. Subsequently, three chapters (2, 3, and 6) provide elaborate discussion on some allusions in the letter with two more chapters (4–5) devoted to numismatic evidence that substantiates the case for the Hierapolis destination. The last two chapters (7–8) digress from the proposal for Hierapolis readership to discuss other issues related to Ephesians.

The first chapter reviews previous scholarship on authorship and provenance and indicates that about 80 percent of modern commentators subscribe to Deutero-Pauline or post-Pauline authorship. Upon brief assessment of stylistic and semantic features and
Theological and conceptual differences against Pauline authorship, Kreitzer outlines the views for Deutero-Pauline authorship and the letter’s setting. The central thesis emerges from this platform to argue that the author was a member of the church in Colossae writing from Ephesus to encourage interchurch relationship in the Lycus Valley, with Hierapolis as its primary destination. Kreitzer indicates, “assuming for the moment that the epistle was intended for the church in Hierapolis, we can find an explanation for the curious references to Christ’s ‘descent into the lowest level’ (Eph. 4.9) and his ‘ascent far above the heavens’ (Eph. 4.10) within the geography of the city itself” (11). The use of “you” and “we” pronouns in the letter is understood to denote a discourse that aims at the mother church (Colossae)–daughter church (Hierapolis) relationship (29). Therefore, Ephesians is dated 75–80 C.E. and read as a letter for Gentile majority readership in Hierapolis.

The second chapter is one of three that see allusions in the text supporting a Hierapolis setting. The appearance of the word evangelists (plural) in 4:11 is taken to allude to the role of Epaphras and Philip as evangelists in Hierapolis. The author presents their profile and gives an account of their ministerial functions in the early church. He makes a compelling association with these two, whom he calls “undercover evangelists,” and the churches in the Lycus Valley (Colossae, Laodicea, Hierapolis). Kreitzer insists that the word “evangelists” in 4:11 in a list with other grace-gifts “is a deliberate insertion made by the writer of the letter, one that is intended to remind the congregation in Hierapolis not only of their own history in the Christian faith but also of their indebtedness to two persons in particular—Epaphras and Philip the evangelist” (30).

The second allusion to Hierapolis is located in 4:9–10, where the author contends that the decent-ascent Christology must be read in the light of a Plutonium in Hierapolis. He argues that the link with the underground cavern in the city is “the hermeneutical key” to unravel the setting of the letter. “The declaration in 4.9–10 that Christ descended into the underworld and ascended far above the heavens stands as a powerful expression of his conquering the forces of death and triumphantly claiming the city of Hierapolis as his own” (45). Apparently, the author of the letter’s familiarity with the region’s topography and religious practices lie at the background of 4:9–10.

The framework of a third allusion is laid in chapters 4 and 5, where a comprehensive account on the worship of Demeter/Cybele, the ruler of the underworld, in Hierapolis is given. Numismatic evidence (pottery, paintings, and coins) depicting the goddess and her link to the city are established and illustrated with pictorial images. Kreitzer admits, however, that a reference to an underworld was commonplace in the legends of Hades and gods of the underworld (59). Additional evidence in the form of marbles that link the
“ruler of the underworld” to Hierapolis are provided in support of the argument for Hierapolis readership (69–71).

The third inference to Hierapolis is found in Eph 5:4, 12 (ch. 6). An indictment on “crude language and shameful things done in secret” in 5:4, 12 are read as allusions to specific despicable cultic practices associated with the worship of Demeter/Cybele, a goddess worshiped in Hierapolis and elsewhere in the Greco-Roman world. The Homeric hymns, materials from the mystery cults, and the writings of Diodorus Siculus, Aristophanes, Clement of Alexandria, and Lucian are used to shed light on the association of Demeter with inappropriate speech and shameful acts.

Chapter 7 argues that the use of words such as “power,” “energy,” “standing,” and “stability” in Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon resonate with familiar thoughts and the earthquake motif in the Lycus Valley, a region prone to earthquakes. The architectural imagery “to build the body” of Christ, temple imagery, and the notion of the “household of God” in Ephesians are said to have as their backdrop the reconstruction in the aftermath of the great earthquake in 60 C.E. The images of temples on city coins are also understood to be supporting this reading. Apparently, Col 2:14 invokes “an image of cancellation of debt as a metaphor of forgiveness. Such an image of debt-cancellation may be a deliberate allusion to the tax relief granted by the Roman state following the earthquake of 60 CE” (105).

The last chapter takes a step away from issues relating to the Lycus Valley to examine an implied reference to Solomon in Ephesians. Here the narrative of the Deuteronomic Historian and the Chronicler depicting Solomon as an agent of peace/rest and one fitting to build the temple is seen at the background of the depiction of Christ in Eph 2:13–22: one who brings peace and is himself peace, who reconciles and builds the church (new temple). Kreitzer draws from Josephus, Philo, and the Testament of Solomon to establish a type of Solomon in the person and role of Christ. He reckons that “Ephesians is deliberately presenting Christ as New Solomon, thereby offering a new avenue of Christological expression in the process” (131).

It is useful to find these essays in a single volume. The work is ground-breaking in the way it informs the reader about Christianity in the Lycus Valley, with details from classical literature and numismatics that sheds light on the topography, religious practices, and the relationship between the churches. The author draws our attention to an important area in our study of the New Testament, namely, how insights from religious practices of the ancient world helped to shape or influence the writings and our understanding of the texts. On the setting of Ephesians, I find the “Hierapolis hypothesis” sparse, as much of its basis is derived from arguably subjective deductions. Kreitzer provides impressive data on
Christianity, topography, and religious culture of the Lycus Valley, but the link between that and Ephesians could only be established by debatable allusions in the text. The apparent allusions help to strengthen the case for those who argue for Hierapolis and Laodicean readership. The adherents for a “circular letter” would particularly find some useful insights and concrete data on topography and religious practices in that part of Asia Minor that may help the reading of the text.

Scholars may find the claim that general references (underworld, evangelists, etc.) point to specific places and people disputable. Moreover, to insist that indictment on detrimental speech and a call to desist from shameful acts are allusions to morality associated with specific religious events is unconvincing, since such expressions are common in Greco-Roman moral discourse. For example, the worship of the fertility goddess Demeter was widespread and by no means limited to Hierapolis. The concept of honor and shame was also an unwritten code of propriety, and a general indictment on shameful acts cannot be made to fit a specific event. Kreitzer acknowledges that the underworld motif was common (43, 59), so why should its appearance in 4:9–10 be a specific allusion to the Plutonium in Hierapolis? Philippians 2:10 has the underworld motif and implies a concept common not only in the legends and mystery religions but also in early Christianity.

In summary, this work is full of insights and concrete evidence and is a must read for students and scholars in the field. I commend the author for his creative use of religious material to bear on our understanding of Ephesians and the impressive account of Christianity in the Lycus Valley.