

BACKGROUND PAPER ON THE CITY OF EPHESUS

EPHESUS THE CITY

Ephesus was an important city in the pre-Roman and Roman world and much of its significance was due to the temple of Diana that was located there. I have been to the ruins of Ephesus on two separate occasions and it was by all appearances a magnificent city. The outdoor amphitheater there is still in use and can seat 25,000 people, so the Ephesians were no simple, rural people. In fact, the population in Ephesus at the time of Paul is estimated to have been 250,000 people. Ephesus also housed one of the world's great libraries and scholars from around the Roman Empire came to study in Ephesus.

For a more thorough picture, I quote below from the ***International Standard Bible Encyclopedia***:

In 560 BC it came into the possession of the Lydians; 3 years later, in 557, it was taken by the Persians; and during the following years the Greeks and Persians were constantly disputing for its possession. Finally, Alexander the Great took it; and at his death it fell to Lysimachus, who gave it the name of Arsinoe, from his second wife. Upon the death of Attalus II (Philadelphus), king of Pergamos, it was bequeathed to the Roman Empire; and in 190, when the Roman province of Asia was formed, it became a part of it. Ephesus and Pergamos, the capital of Asia, were the two great rival cities of the province.

Though Pergamos was the center of the Roman religion and of the government, Ephesus was the more accessible, the commercial center and the home of the native goddess Diana; and because of its wealth and situation it gradually became the chief city of the province. It is to the temple of Diana, however, that its great wealth and prominence are largely due. Like the city, it dates from the time of the Amazons, yet what the early temple was like we now have no means of knowing, and of its history we know little excepting that it was seven times destroyed by fire and rebuilt, each time on a scale larger and grander than before.

The wealthy king Croesus supplied it with many of its stone columns, and the pilgrims from all the oriental world brought it of their wealth. In time the temple possessed valuable lands; it controlled the fisheries; its priests were the bankers of its enormous revenues. Because of its strength the people stored there their money for safe-keeping; and it became to the ancient world practically all that the Bank of England is to the modern world.

In 356 BC, on the very night when Alexander the Great was born, it was burned; and when he grew to manhood he offered to rebuild it at his

own expense if his name might be inscribed upon its portals. This the priests of Ephesus were unwilling to permit, and they politely rejected his offer by saying that it was not fitting for one god to build a temple to another. The wealthy Ephesians themselves undertook its reconstruction, and 220 years passed before its final completion.

Not only was the temple of Diana a place of worship, and a treasure-house, but it was also a museum in which the best statuary and most beautiful paintings were preserved. Among the paintings was one by the famous Apelles, a native of Ephesus, representing Alexander the Great hurling a thunderbolt. It was also a sanctuary for the criminal, a kind of city of refuge, for none might be arrested for any crime whatever when within a bowshot of its walls.

There sprang up, therefore, about the temple a village in which the thieves and murderers and other criminals made their homes. Not only did the temple bring vast numbers of pilgrims to the city, as does the Kaaba at Mecca at the present time, but it employed hosts of people apart from the priests and priestesses; among them were the large number of artisans who manufactured images of the goddess Diana, or shrines to sell to the visiting strangers.

Such was Ephesus when Paul on his second missionary journey (Acts 18:19-21) first visited the city, and when, on his third journey (Acts 19:8-10; 20:31), he remained there for two years preaching in the synagogue (Acts 19:8,10), in the school of Tyrannus (Acts 19:9) and in private houses (Acts 20:20). Though Paul was probably not the first to bring Christianity to Ephesus, for Jews had long lived there (Acts 2:9; 6:9), he was the first to make progress against the worship of Diana.

As the fame of his teachings was carried by the pilgrims to their distant homes, his influence extended to every part of Asia Minor. In time the pilgrims, with decreasing faith in Diana, came in fewer numbers; the sales of the shrines of the goddess fell off; Diana of the Ephesians was no longer great; a Christian church was founded there and flourished, and one of its first leaders was the apostle John. (Tradition also has it that Timothy was martyred in Ephesus as he confronted crowds coming home from a Mardi Gras-type celebration—JS).

Finally in 262 AD, when the temple of Diana was again burned, its influence had so far departed that it was never again rebuilt. Diana was dead. Ephesus became a Christian city, and in 341 AD a council of the Christian church was held there. The city itself soon lost its importance and decreased in population. The sculptured stones of its great buildings, which were no longer in use and were falling to ruins, were carried away to Italy, and especially to Constantinople for the great church of Saint

Sophia. In 1308 the Turks took possession of the little that remained of the city, and deported or murdered its inhabitants. The Cayster River, overflowing its banks, gradually covered with its muddy deposit the spot where the temple of Diana had once stood, and at last its very site was forgotten.

EPHESUS THE CHURCH

Let's take a look at the ten passages that make some reference to Ephesus in the New Testament. I will not attempt to make any comments on these passages, but you should look them up, read them and make your own notes, whether you are involved in personal or group study:

1. They arrived at **Ephesus**, where Paul left Priscilla and Aquila. He himself went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. When they asked him to spend more time with them, he declined. But as he left, he promised, "I will come back if it is God's will." Then he set sail from **Ephesus**. When he landed at Caesarea, he went up and greeted the church and then went down to Antioch. After spending some time in Antioch, Paul set out from there and traveled from place to place throughout the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples. Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to **Ephesus**. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures (Acts 18:19-24).
2. While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at **Ephesus**. There he found some disciples (Acts 19:1).
3. 1 While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at **Ephesus**. There he found some disciples
2 and asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" They answered, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit."
3 So Paul asked, "Then what baptism did you receive?" "John's baptism," they replied.
4 Paul said, "John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus."
5 On hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus.
6 When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied.
7 There were about twelve men in all.
8 Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God.

9 But some of them became obstinate; they refused to believe and publicly maligned the Way. So Paul left them. He took the disciples with him and had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus.

10 This went on for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord.

11 God did extraordinary miracles through Paul,
12 so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them.

13 Some Jews who went around driving out evil spirits tried to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who were demon-possessed. They would say, "In the name of Jesus, whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out."

14 Seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this.
15 [One day] the evil spirit answered them, "Jesus I know, and I know about Paul, but who are you?"

16 Then the man who had the evil spirit jumped on them and overpowered them all. He gave them such a beating that they ran out of the house naked and bleeding.

17 When this became known to the Jews and Greeks living in **Ephesus**, they were all seized with fear, and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honor.

18 Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed their evil deeds.

19 A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly. When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to fifty thousand drachmas.

20 In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power.

21 After all this had happened, Paul decided to go to Jerusalem, passing through Macedonia and Achaia. "After I have been there," he said, "I must visit Rome also."

22 He sent two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, to Macedonia, while he stayed in the province of Asia a little longer.

23 About that time there arose a great disturbance about the Way.

24 A silversmith named Demetrius, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought in no little business for the craftsmen.

25 He called them together, along with the workmen in related trades, and said: "Men, you know we receive a good income from this business.
26 And you see and hear how this fellow Paul has convinced and led astray large numbers of people here in **Ephesus** and in practically the whole province of Asia. He says that man-made gods are no gods at all.
27 There is danger not only that our trade will lose its good name, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be discredited, and the goddess herself, who is worshiped throughout the province of Asia and the world, will be robbed of her divine majesty."

- 28 When they heard this, they were furious and began shouting: "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!"
- 29 Soon the whole city was in an uproar. The people seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul's traveling companions from Macedonia, and rushed as one man into the theater.
- 30 Paul wanted to appear before the crowd, but the disciples would not let him.
- 31 Even some of the officials of the province, friends of Paul, sent him a message begging him not to venture into the theater.
- 32 The assembly was in confusion: Some were shouting one thing, some another. Most of the people did not even know why they were there.
- 33 The Jews pushed Alexander to the front, and some of the crowd shouted instructions to him. He motioned for silence in order to make a defense before the people.
- 34 But when they realized he was a Jew, they all shouted in unison for about two hours: "Great is Artemis of the **Ephesians!**"
- 35 The city clerk quieted the crowd and said: "Men of **Ephesus**, doesn't all the world know that the city of **Ephesus** is the guardian of the temple of the great Artemis and of her image, which fell from heaven?
- 36 Therefore, since these facts are undeniable, you ought to be quiet and not do anything rash.
- 37 You have brought these men here, though they have neither robbed temples nor blasphemed our goddess.
- 38 If, then, Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen have a grievance against anybody, the courts are open and there are proconsuls. They can press charges.
- 39 If there is anything further you want to bring up, it must be settled in a legal assembly.
- 40 As it is, we are in danger of being charged with rioting because of today's events. In that case we would not be able to account for this commotion, since there is no reason for it."
- 41 After he had said this, he dismissed the assembly (Acts 19:1-41).

4. Paul had decided to sail past **Ephesus** to avoid spending time in the province of Asia, for he was in a hurry to reach Jerusalem, if possible, by the day of Pentecost. From Miletus, Paul sent to **Ephesus** for the elders of the church (Acts 20:16-17).

5. If I fought wild beasts in **Ephesus** for merely human reasons, what have I gained? If the dead are not raised, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die" (1 Corinthians 15:32).

6. But I will stay on at **Ephesus** until Pentecost (1 Corinthians 16:8).

7. As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in **Ephesus** so that you may command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer (1 Timothy 1:3).

8. May the Lord grant that he will find mercy from the Lord on that day! You know very well in how many ways he helped me in **Ephesus** (2 Timothy 1:18).

9. I sent Tychicus to **Ephesus** (2 Timothy 4:12).

10. 1 "To the angel of the church in **Ephesus** write: These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands:

2 I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false.

3 You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.

4 Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love.

5 Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.

6 But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

7 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

8 "To the angel of the church in Smyrna write: These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again.

9 I know your afflictions and your poverty-- yet you are rich! I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

10 Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.

11 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death (Revelation 2:1-11).

THE EPISTLE TO THE EPHESIANS

Paul's epistle to the Ephesians is generally considered one of his prison epistles, written during his imprisonment that is described in Acts 28:30. It was during this "down time" that Paul began to address the issues of the Church as a separate entity from Judaism in letters to the cities that he had visited. He is also

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believed to have written Colossians, Philippians and Philemon during this time. It is generally believed that Ephesians was written around 60 A.D.

Ephesians and Colossians are said to be “sister epistles,” for 78 of the 155 verses in Ephesians are also found in Colossians. This would seem to point to their being written at about the same time. The Ephesian themes can also be found in their seed form in Luke, Acts, 1 Peter and some of John’s writings. This should not surprise us, for Paul had contact with all these men, and all probably developed their own “theology” as they studied the other’s teachings.