

Ephesus

Studies

In

Ephesians

Lesson 02

Ephesians chap.1; vs.1.

Read : Acts 18:18-21; 19:1-20:1; 20:17-38.

Ephesus is located on the western shores of Asia Minor. (Today, Ephesus is modern day Izmir in Turkey). Ephesus was chosen by the early Ionian colonists from Athens as the site for their colony. (The Ionians were a brilliant race of people who gave birth to a long roll of distinguished men of letters, science and art.) The history of Ephesus goes back to approximately 1044 B.C. and to the Athenian king, Androclus.

Ephesus became a part of the Roman Empire in 133 B.C. It rebelled in 88 B.C. but was finally subdued in 41 B.C. by Mark Anthony. Under the Romans, Ephesus was used as a proconsul's seat. And because of its location and influence it was recognized as the first city of the province of Asia. During the reign of Caesar Augustus, Ephesus began to flourish. It continued to expand until the Goths sacked the city and burned the temple in the last half of the 3 A.D. The lowest estimate for the population of Ephesus in the first century was two hundred and fifty thousand.

When Paul preached in Ephesus, it was still the great commercial center of Western Asia, ranking with Antioch & Alexandria as the three greatest trading centers in the eastern Mediterranean. Ephesus' prosperity had a lot to do with her geographic location. At her extensive docks one would have found ships from every maritime nation of that day.

Ephesus prided herself on being the commercial, religious and cultural metropolis of the Roman province of Asia. She was the hub for communication throughout the province. It was said that all roads led from Ephesus. Under Roman rule Ephesus enjoyed the status of a free city. It had an assembly and council of its own and a governor (proconsul). *Acts 19:38* makes reference to the proconsuls in court session. The town clerk referred to in *Acts 19:35* was the keeper of the records and an official of great influence and responsibility. Some would regard him as the city's leading official or bureaucrat.

One of the great architectural wonders in Ephesus was the great theater. (*Acts 19:29*). The great protest that erupted against Paul, at the instigation of Demetrius, ended up in the theater. This theater was the largest Greek theater in Asia Minor and reputed to be able to seat 50,000 spectators. Northeast of the theater was the stadium where races were run and wild beast fights were staged. Paul made reference to this in *1Cor.15:32*. Paul was using a real activity in

Ephesus to describe the intensity of the opposition he had to deal with in Ephesus while preaching the gospel there.

Religious Life.

The chief glory of Ephesus and its top attraction was its magnificent temple dedicated to its patron goddess. The Greeks called this goddess Artemis and the Romans called her Diana. The worship of Artemis began about 560 B.C. when Croesus, king of Lydia, captured Ephesus and dedicated it to Artemis. He also contributed lavishly to the building of a temple in her honor.

This temple was described as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. The temple was built on a platform that was about 425 feet by 240 feet and which had a flight of 14 steps. The temple itself was 343 feet by 164 feet. It had 117 columns about 60 feet in height and 36 of them were beautifully carved.

In the inner shrine was the image of the goddess, which they claimed fell from heaven. (cf. *Acts 19:35*). The statue of Artemis was probably at least in part constructed from a fallen meteorite. The statues of Artemis depicted her as a female deity with many breasts.

Artemis was a virgin goddess and all sexual behavior was banned from the temple. Prior to the Roman period, self-

emasculated priests presided over the cult. While the Artemis cult emphasized the virginity of the goddess, it did not promote celibacy. Artemis was seen as the protector of virgins, the one who prepared them for marriage and who assisted them in the birth of their children.

The Artemision was the central festival of Artemis worship. It was held in early spring and consisted of festivities that lasted a week, including dances and dramas that enacted the story of the goddess. The culmination of the festival was a solemn processional in which the image of the goddess was carried more than a mile from the theater to the temple.

This festival did a lot for the spread of the Artemis cult throughout Asia. Adherents from all the other cities would gather in Ephesus for this festival. Obviously during this time business would boom. Paul's preaching cut heavily into this period of profit making, hence the anger of the craftsmen. (cf. *Acts 19:23-28*). Several Artemision sites were established in the various cities. These sites and the cultic practices were patterned after the Ephesian model. Worshipers from the various cities were thus able to worship Artemis without having to travel to Ephesus except for the annual Artemision.

The followers of Artemis attributed to her unsurpassed cosmic power. They believed also that she had the power to resurrect the dead. A prayer has been found in which

worshipers pleaded with Artemis to raise a young man from the dead. The prayer reads, "O great Artemis of the Ephesians, help! Display your power upon this young man who has died. For all the Ephesians know, both men and women, ***that all things are governed by you***, and that great powers come to us through you. Give now to your servant what you are able to do in this regard. Raise up your servant." (*Note the emphasized statement*).

The power of the gospel Paul preached must be seen with this backdrop of the Artemis cult being entrenched and established in Ephesus and the rest of Asia Minor for hundreds of years. When the gospel came to Ephesus, it began to disrupt and overthrow a whole way of life and the prosperity associated with this life. Artemis was Ephesus and Ephesus was Artemis. It is no wonder that Demetrius and the guild of craftsmen reacted with such anger. Without Artemis, and the power and influence this cult wielded over the thousands of people, they saw that Ephesus would be no more, their way of life would be no more, and most importantly, their livelihood would come to an end.

In AD.262 the Goths destroyed the temple. It was never rebuilt because by that time the influence of Artemis had all but disappeared.

One other point worthy of note : apart from its religious emphasis, the temple was also used as a bank, accepting deposits and giving loans. Behind the sacred shrine was the “treasury”. This was no localized bank. This temple bank served Asia as the bank of Asia. One writer stated, “the temple was central to the civic pride and commercial well-being of the city.” Paul’s preaching was a threat to the religious, social, and commercial well-being of the city.

Magic In Ephesus.

The city of Ephesus bore the reputation for being something of a center for magical practices. One author said that of all the ancient Graeco-Roman cities, Ephesus was the most hospitable to magicians, sorcerers and charlatans of all sorts. Quite a large number of those who practiced magic were converted through Paul’s preaching, and as an expression of their new allegiance to the Lord Jesus, they gathered all their magical books together and burned them. (*Acts 19:18-20*). These books were very valuable. The estimated value was 50,000 drachmas. One drachma was a day’s wage. When you calculate the value, you would realize that these new converts had a multi-million dollar bonfire.

Magic was practiced in order to ward off evil spells and demons, for victory in sporting events, for protection from disasters, and for benefit by those who were getting married. Magic was also used to put curses on people.

Those who practiced magic believed that the spirit world exerted great influence over virtually every aspect of life. Fear of the demonic realm was a very important factor in the use of magic. In Ephesus, many devotedly religious people were involved with the practice of magic. Those who practice magic did not have to pray to the gods. They believed they had the power to command the gods.

This is the kind of cultural, social, civic, commercial and religious climate that Paul entered when he went to Ephesus to preach the gospel, a climate in which paganism permeated every aspect of life.

When Paul went to Ephesus, he was one man invading centuries of entrenched idolatries and mindsets permeated with and dominated by paganism. What hope could Paul have to break-through with the gospel in this setting? The gates of Hades in Ephesus could not prevail against the preaching of the gospel. (*Matt.16:18*). The God whom Paul was preaching and in whose Name he came to Ephesus, is the God “who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think.” (*Eph.3:20*). Unlike Artemis, He is indeed the God to whom all power belongs and who governs all things in heaven and on earth.

Paul’s Visit To Ephesus.

In *Acts 20:31* Paul said to the Ephesian elders, “for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one

with tears.” The key point to be noted here is that Paul spent three years in Ephesus.

Paul’s first visit to Ephesus took place at the end of his second missionary journey. (*Acts 18:18-21*). This was a brief visit. But Paul took the opportunity to preach in the synagogue. He turned down the request to stay longer because he was on his way to Jerusalem. Paul did make the promise, “I will return to you again, if God wills.” Paul left Priscilla & Aquila in Ephesus. They would meet Apollos and give him some theological help and training. (*Acts 18:24-28*).

Why was Paul in such a hurry to visit Jerusalem? We are not told. Paul landed in Caesarea, the port of Jerusalem and “went up and greeted the church.” Bear in mind that Jerusalem was on a mountain. Having greeted the church, Paul “went down to Antioch”, his home church and mission headquarters.

In *Acts 18:23* Paul began his third missionary journey. In *Acts 19:1* Paul is back in Ephesus. He spent three months preaching in the synagogue. (*vs.8*). When opposition arose, Paul move to the school of Tyrannus and spent two years there. (*vs.10*). This gives a total of two years & three months. Commentators believe that *vs.22* accounts for the missing nine months : “he himself stayed in Asia for a

while.” Commentators are of the view that the discord in the church of Corinth kept Paul in Ephesus.

In *Acts 20:13-38* Paul is in Miletus. We are told in *vs.16* that “Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus so that he would not have to spend time in Asia.” The reason for his decision is given in *vs.16*. So, while in Miletus, Paul sent for the elders of the churches in Ephesus. When they came he addressed them. Paul considered his farewell address to them. (see *vs.38*). But, as it turned out, after Paul was released from prison, he did visit Ephesus again. (*1Tim.1:3*).

Additional Notes.

1). Ephesians is a prison epistle, written by Paul during his first imprisonment in Rome. Four epistles (Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon, Philippians) are described as “prison epistles”. Three of them, Ephesians, Colossians & Philemon, were written at the same time and dispatched to their destinations. (*Eph.6:21-22; Col.4:7-9; Phile.1:10-12*).

Paul the prisoner : *Eph.3:1; 4:1*.

2). Date of writing the prison epistles : 61 – 63 A.D.

3). Brief chronology of Paul’s first imprisonment.

Acts 21:33 Arrest in Jerusalem.

Acts 23:23-35 Transferred to Caesarea.
Acts 24:37 Two years in Caesarea.
Acts 25:10-12 Appeal to Caesar.
Acts 27:1 Sent to Rome.

Paul's imprisonment conditions : house arrest (*Acts 28:16, 30*); a soldier guarding him (*vs.16*); considerable freedom (*vss.30-31*).

Assignment :

- 1). Read the book of Ephesians twice in the week ahead.
- 2). Memorize Eph.1:1-2.