

## Background to Ephesians via the Book of Acts

Ephesus was a city of about 250,000 people. It was the third largest city of the Roman empire (after Rome and Alexandria). Ephesus was a key city, important on both land and sea routes, a kind of communications hub. By the mid-first century A.D., its importance as a great port was waning because silt from the Cayster River was making the port less feasible.

### **1. Acts 18:18-22 – Paul's first contact at Ephesus (Autumn A.D. 52)**

On Paul's Second Missionary Journey he is on his way back from Corinth (he had been there for about 1.5 years), going to Caesarea, then to Antioch, but in the process he comes to Ephesus.

Paul goes to the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. They ask him to stay longer, but he declines. He says he will return "if God wills."

### **2. Acts 18:24-28 – Prelude to Paul's visit, Apollos teaches at Ephesus**

Luke has already set up the theme for Ephesus, but before Paul returns, Luke gives us more information about what is going on in Ephesus.

A Jew named Apollos, from Alexandria, comes to Ephesus. He was a gifted speaker and knew the Scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord and taught accurately about Jesus, but only knew John's baptism. Priscilla and Aquilla are there and they explain to him the way of God more accurately. Apollos desired to go to Achaia (Corinth, Greece) and the Christians at Ephesus wrote for a welcome for him there (the church there was the one founded by Paul. (One might wonder whether Apollos was a thorn in his side, Paul always seemed to be cleaning up after him, both here and in Corinth, e.g. 1 Cor. 1:12.). When Apollos came to Achaia he helped the Christians there and powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the Scriptures that the Christ was Jesus.

### **3. Acts 19:1-10 – Paul returns to Ephesus and teaches for 2+ years (overview) (Autumn A.D. 53- Spring 56)**

Paul returns to Ephesus via an inland route on his Third Missionary journey and stayed for 27 months. He asks some of the disciples if they received the Holy Spirit, but they said no. He asked them into what they were baptized. They said they received John's baptism. Paul then baptized them in the name of Jesus and laid hands on them. The Holy Spirit came on these men and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying.

For three months Paul spoke boldly in the synagogue about the kingdom of God, but after three months he withdrew because of the people's stubbornness and trouble that was arising. For two years after this he taught daily in the hall of Tyrannus. People all over Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.

During this visit Paul writes 1 Corinthians, around A.D. 53-54.

### **4. Acts 19:11-20 – Sons of Sceva heal in Jesus' name**

God did extraordinary miracles by Paul's hands. Itinerant Jewish exorcists undertook to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus to cast out evil spirits, but the evil spirits do not recognize these men (humorous). The demon possessed man attacked them. Fear fell upon them all. A number of people

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practiced magical arts brought their books together to burn them. The total worth of these books was 50,000 pieces of silver (Note: 50,000 silver pieces = 50,000 days of income!).

### **5. Acts 19:21-41 – Riot at Ephesus**

Paul resolved in the Spirit to go through Macedonia and Achaia and go to Jerusalem, desiring also to go to Rome. He sends ahead Timothy and Erastus while he stays in Ephesus a while longer.

Demetrius, a silversmith who made shrines of Artemis, grew unhappy that the Christians were hurting his business. He gathers together other workers in this field and incites them.

The Christians forbid Paul from going to the assembly. Alexander, a Jew, is about to speak to the crowd until they realize he's a Jew and they continue shouting.

Finally the town clerk says no one doubts that Ephesus is the city of Artemis, but that they should be calm so that they don't get in trouble with the Romans.

### **6. Acts 20:1 – Paul leaves to Macedonia (A.D. 56)**

Paul spends the winter months (A.D. 56-57 in Greece, probably at Corinth with his friend Gaius). He left to celebrate Pentecost (May 29, A.D. 57) in Jerusalem. He left from Corinth to Macedonia where he visited Philippi during the Feast of the Unleavened Bread (April 9-16, A.D. 57) and then he traveled to Asia Minor, finally coming to Miletus (a port city, south of Ephesus).

### **7. Acts 20:17-38 – Paul's message to Ephesians Elders (Spring A.D. 57)**

While at Miletus, Paul sends word for the elders of the church of Ephesus to come to him. He gives a final message to them, telling them that he is going to Jerusalem and won't be back again. He reminds them of how he lived when he was with them. He encourages the elders to keep watch after the flock in Ephesus. From there Paul departs to Jerusalem.

### **8. Acts 21:(1-26) 27-36 Paul's arrest in Jerusalem blamed on a Christian Ephesian Gentile**

Paul returns to Jerusalem for Pentecost. He reports to James and the elders how much God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry (In Acts 15:1-29 a council at Jerusalem agreed that the Gospel was for Gentiles too. They did not have to keep all the Jewish ceremonial laws to be Christians, but they were not supposed to abstain from meat sacrificed to idols, from blood, from what has been strangled and sexual immorality). They tell James that the Jews who are zealous for the Torah will be suspicious so Paul must take with him four men who are under vow and purify himself along with them so that the Jews will see that he too lives in obedience with the law.

When the seven days of the purification were almost completed, some Jews from Asia (possibly Ephesus) came and when they saw Paul in the Temple, they held on to him and told others he was teaching others against the Jews, the Law and the Temple and that he even brought Greeks into the Temple thereby defiling it. These Jews had noticed Trophimus the Ephesian (a fellow traveler with Paul, who is mentioned also in Acts 20:4 and 2 Tim. 4:20) in the city with Paul and assumed that Paul brought him into the Temple. As the people started beating Paul, the great turmoil caused Claudius Lysias, the tribune of the cohort, to come and arrest Paul to determine what he had done. The noise of the people was so great Paul had to be brought into the barracks.

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What follows is Paul's defense speech to the people (Acts 21:39-22:21) and his defense before the Jewish council (Acts 22:30-23:10). Eventually Paul is taken to Rome via Caesarea.

What is especially noteworthy about this section is that it is specifically Paul's ministry in Ephesus, where he was kicked out of the synagogue and yet remained for two years teaching both Jews and Gentiles, that ultimately led to his arrest in Jerusalem which brought him to Rome. Given that this is Paul's relationship with the Ephesians, what message do you think he might have for them in his epistle?