

# Ephesians - God's Plan, Our Mission Together

## Digging Deeper - Who were the Ephesians?

The book of Acts includes an account of Paul's time in Ephesus, describing the remarkable beginning of this church, and giving us the historical background to this letter. As we will see, these dramatic events later came to be reflected in the themes of this letter.

## The City of Ephesus

The city's name is very interesting, reflecting its **spiritual reputation**.

It's likely that the name Ephesus came from "Artemis Ephesia". She was the goddess of all living things who ruled over all things in Greek theogeny. She was also called Diana.

The city hosted one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, **the Temple of Artemis**. Her temple was built around 7th century BC. Artemis was a Greek goddess Diana, the goddess of all living things, who ruled over all things in Greek theogeny. The Ephesians believed that Artemis-Diana was born in Ephesus. The temple served as a shrine, and statues of Diana were prominent throughout the city.

The ancient temple of Artemis was also an asylum/sanctuary. Criminals could flee there and be protected from prosecution. The temple brought in quite a healthy economy and the Apostle Paul was nearly torn to pieces in riot that was caused when he preached the gospel.

In addition to Artemis, there were present in the city many cults and mystery religions. The Imperial cult of emperor worship was present. In addition, all sorts of magic and mystery religions flourished in Ephesus.

There were many Jews in Ephesus, with synagogues, and Judaism being practiced.

As you are beginning to see, Ephesus was **pluralistic**. There was plurality of religious flourishing in Ephesus. Ephesus contained many people and many religions. It was a weird, thriving, spiritual city, much like Boston, and many cities today.

Economically, Ephesus was a prosperous harbor town of 250,000 with a vibrant trade route. It is located in Western Turkey. It was the provincial capital for Rome in Asia Minor.

## The Church at Ephesus

The house churches were there were started around A.D. 56 by the Apostle Paul and a husband/wife team of Priscilla and Aquilla (Acts 18 & 19). Paul was in Ephesus for three years and grew very close with the elders established there (Acts 20).

The churches in Ephesus is the background for several NT books such as: Acts, Ephesians, possibly Colossians, 1 Timothy, 1 John, and Revelation.

Against this pagan culture, the church at Ephesus thrived, the Ascended Christ affirmed three strengths about her in Revelation 2 - (1) **their toil**—literally, their work to the point of exhaustion. It was a busy and active church full of believers who served with diligence; (2) **their endurance**—they stood unswervingly in their loyalty to Christ even though they were assaulted by the pagan temples of Greek mythology and the Emperor worship of Rome; (3) **their orthodoxy**— the church could sniff out false doctrine in a heartbeat. They tested what was taught. They would have nothing to do with the evil lifestyles of false teachers. They stood up against the cult of the Nicolaitans (“victory” + “people”), a group who wanted compromise with the immorality of the idolatrous culture of Ephesus.<sup>1</sup>

Orthodoxy was perhaps their most stellar achievement.

### Digging Deeper<sup>2</sup>

1. Read Acts 19:1-20
2. Who did Paul preach too in Ephesus (vs. 8-10)
3. Contrast the message that Paul brought to Ephesus with the beliefs already held by some there (in vs. 1-6).

\* what happened to those who accepted the message preached?

\* how did people respond when they accepted the message?

4. Were there any other responses to the gospel being preached

\* vs. 9

\* vs. 13

\* vs. 17

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<sup>1</sup> Taken from Ephesus - the Loveless Church - Revelation 2:1-7 (internet)

<sup>2</sup> Taken from Ephesians: God's Big Plan for Christ's New People, by Thabiti Anyabwile (Good Book Company)

5. Read Acts 19:23-41

\* what was the reason for Demetrius opposition, and what does this tell us about the new Ephesian Christians?

6. What was the city clerk's verdict on Paul and his colleagues (vs. 37)

7. Paul spent 3 years in Ephesus (vs. 31). What was the most significant result of his time there?

8. Read Revelation 2:1-7 (written after death of Paul, AD 70+)

\* what were 3 strengths associated with the church(es) in Ephesus?

\* what was their greatest weakness?