

# Ephesians

## Lesson One

### Background to the Book of Ephesians

#### Part I

#### Introduction:

1. Ephesus was located on the western coast of Asia Minor, 100 miles west of Colossae.
2. The Temple of Artemis (one of the Seven Wonders) was located in Ephesus.
3. It was a wealthy and prosperous city.
4. It was also a “free” city; its citizens were allowed by Rome to govern themselves.
5. It was made up of Jews, Gentiles, pagans and mystics.

#### I. The Culture in Ephesus

- A. The government of Ephesus sheds some light on the events recorded in Acts 19:23-41.
  1. The town clerk was a liaison between Ephesus and Rome.
  2. It was in his best interest to make peace and seek for a “lawful assembly” for he would be held accountable by Rome for any riot.
  3. As long as the Ephesians governed themselves in a way that kept the peace, Rome would not interfere.
- B. The religion of Ephesus was centered upon the worship of the goddess Artemis (Diana) – literally, *αρτεμις εφεσιων*.
  1. There was a goddess named Artemis in Greek mythology.
  2. There was a goddess named Diana in Roman mythology.
  3. However, the Ephesian Artemis (Diana) was different from these.
  4. The Ephesian Artemis was the same as Cybele – the mother-goddess, goddess of fertility.
  5. Her worship consisted of frenzied dancing, ceremonial prostitution and even human sacrifice.
- C. Archaeologists have found at least 18 other gods and goddesses who were worshipped in Ephesus.
- D. Astrology also had a powerful religious presence in Ephesus.
- E. As a result of their religious practices and lack of ethical standards, sexual immorality of all types was prevalent in the city of Ephesus.
- F. There was also a Jewish influence in Ephesus.
  1. A Jewish synagogue was present (Acts 18:19-21; 19:8).
  2. However, as was often the case, the majority of the Jews rejected the Gospel of Christ (Acts 19:9-10).

#### II. The Confusion in Ephesus

- A. Paul’s first visit to Ephesus was brief, but he had opportunity to teach the Gospel to the Jews in that city (Acts 18:19-21).
- B. Following his departure, a Jewish man named Apollos came to the city and preached to the people (Acts 18:24-28).
  1. Apollos was a Jew who had accepted the preaching of John the Baptist.
  2. He was from the city of Alexandria in Egypt.
  3. He had been instructed in the doctrine of the Messiah and, apparently, knew that He was at hand.

4. He was fervent in spirit – meaning, of burning zeal toward the Lord.
  5. He taught diligently – literally, accurately or carefully.
- C. But, the teaching of Apollos was different from that which Paul had preached.
1. In spite of his noteworthy qualities, Apollos was still in error.
  2. He had been taught and converted to the teaching of John the Baptist and had not learned about death, burial and resurrection of the Christ.
  3. Consider how John's baptism was different from baptism in the Gospel.
    - a. John's baptism was for those in covenant with God (Matt. 3:9).
    - b. John's baptism was for those who confessed their sins (Matt. 3:6).
    - c. John's baptism was for those who repented of sins (Matthew 3:2, 8).
    - d. John's baptism was for the remission of sins (Mark 1:4).
    - e. John's baptism was to point men to Christ (Luke 3:15-16; John 20).
    - f. Gospel baptism is to enter covenant with God (Gal. 3:27; Heb. 10:29; 12:24).
    - g. Gospel baptism is for those who confess Christ (Acts 8:36-38).
    - h. Gospel baptism is for those who repent of sins (Acts 2:38).
    - i. Gospel baptism is for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38).
    - j. Gospel baptism is to unite men with Christ (Galatians 3:27).
  4. Since John's baptism looked forward to the Messiah, after Jesus shed His blood on the cross His New Testament came into force and John's baptism was no longer valid.
  5. Thus, Apollos was teaching error (albeit, unwittingly).
- D. So, Aquila and Priscilla corrected Apollos and educated him in the truth.
1. First, they heard him speaking boldly in the synagogue.
  2. Then, they took him unto themselves.
  3. Finally, they set forth (lit., exposed) the Truth of the Gospel before him.
- E. Following these events, Apollos became a great preacher of the Gospel.
1. He continued to travel and evangelize.
  2. He was supported and recommended by the brethren.
  3. He was a great help to the churches in Achaia (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:12; 3:5-6; 4:6; etc.).
  4. He powerfully argued and reasoned with the Jews.
  5. He did so in a public forum – a public debate.
  6. He proved from the Word of God that Jesus is the Christ.
- F. However, his previous mistakes had caused some confusion in the area around Ephesus (Acts 19:1-7).
1. Though it is not stated explicitly, the implication of this passage is that these men had been taught by Apollos.
  2. They had been baptized under John's baptism after the death of Jesus.
  3. Thus, they had heard, believed and obeyed the wrong doctrine.
  4. In order to be right with God, they had to hear believe and obey the Gospel of Christ.
  5. That is why they were baptized again – or, baptized correctly.
- G. It is important to notice from these passages how religious error is to be handled and corrected.

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Part II

Introduction:

1. Ephesus was a “free city” – wealthy and prosperous – and made up of Jews, Gentiles, pagans and mystics.
2. The culture in Ephesus was Roman, idolatrous, sensual and worldly.
3. The confusion in Ephesus resulted from the erroneous teaching of Apollos.

III. The Conversions in Ephesus

- A. Paul’s first visit to Ephesus was brief, but he had opportunity to teach the Gospel to the Jews in that city (Acts 18:19-21).
- B. Apollos followed him to Ephesus and did much good there after he was corrected in his doctrine (Acts 18:24-28).
- C. Eventually, Paul returned to the city and, for about three years, he worked to convert souls to Christ (Acts 19:10; 20:31).
- D. Some were converted from doctrinal error by teaching (Acts 19:1-7).
- E. Others were not converted in spite of plain Gospel preaching (Acts 19:8-9).
  1. On Paul’s previous visit to Ephesus, the Jews had desired him to stay.
  2. He could not stay any longer with them at that time, but assured them that he would return.
  3. Upon his return to Ephesus, Paul went back to the synagogue as he had promised he would do.
  4. This time, he had plenty of time to preach the Gospel – and, for three months, he did just that.
  5. On this occasion, after hearing more of Paul’s message, the Jews hardened their hearts and rejected the Gospel.
  6. Not only did they not believe the Gospel, but also they began to revile or speak evil of Christianity to the assembly.
  7. Thus, Paul separated the believers from the nonbelievers and left the synagogue.
- F. Others were converted by the evangelism of the disciples (Acts 19:10).
- G. Others were converted due to the working of special miracles (Acts 19:11-12).
  1. Magic in Ephesus...
    - a. Ephesus was a city steeped in magic and mysticism.
    - b. This was occult practice – the attempt to bend a supernatural power or person to one’s own will.
    - c. One practice was the use of the “Ephesian Grammata” – certain words that when spoken or written were believed to have the power to heal or cast out demons.
    - d. Thus, there was a need for a demonstration of true miraculous power that came from the God of Heaven.
  2. Notice that these were “special” miracles – extraordinary ones, unusual.
    - a. Literally, they were miracles that were not of chance.
    - b. Though many charlatans seek to employ this means of healing today, this is the only time we read of such in the New Testament.
    - c. Handkerchiefs were napkins used for wiping away sweat.
    - d. Aprons were a garment worn around the waist by craftsmen.

- e. Paul did manual work while at Ephesus (Acts 20:34) and would have used these items frequently.
- 3. God worked in this manner to prove His power (and, Paul's authority) was superior to the false powers of the Ephesian magicians.
- H. Some were converted from paganism and mysticism due to the actions of demons (Acts 19:13-20).
  - 1. Here we are introduced to the vagabond (or, wandering) Jews who also claimed to be exorcists.
    - a. The word exorcist means, "one that binds by an oath or spell."
    - b. Even though they were Jews, they were no better than the magicians of the Ephesians were (cf. Matthew 12:27; Luke 11:19; Acts 8:21; 13:8).
  - 2. These seven sons of Sceva attempted to use the name of Jesus as a spell for casting out demons.
  - 3. However, they soon learned an important lesson about true power and authority from God.
  - 4. When the demon possessed man mocked and attacked them, he proved to all that they were charlatans and frauds.
  - 5. At the same time, he also proved the authority of Paul and of Christ.
  - 6. Thus, a great reverence for God and His Son came into Ephesus.
  - 7. So convincing were God's miracles that there was a great change of heart among the practitioners of occult magic.
    - a. They confessed and openly exposed their fraudulent spells.
    - b. They collected and burned their books of black magic – at a value of around \$10,000.
  - 8. So, the Word of God continued to grow and prevail with great strength.
- I. And, some were converted from idolatry by the preaching of Truth (Acts 19:26).

#### IV. The Confrontation in Ephesus

- A. Paul's teaching and God's working in Ephesus had resulted in a great conversion of those who had practiced mysticism and black magic (19:11-20).
- B. These actions directly affected the false worship of the Ephesian goddess Artemis (Diana).
  - 1. If there were no gods in nature – rocks, trees, etc. – then, there was no goddess in the stone statue of Artemis.
  - 2. This threatened the worship of the Ephesians.
  - 3. Perhaps more importantly, it also affected their pocketbooks (19:26-27).  
{*The temple of Artemis also served as a banking institution.*}
- C. God had demonstrated that the "name of the Lord Jesus" was more powerful than any false god or magical spell (cf. Isaiah 40:18-20).
  - 1. Thus, there was no longer a need to visit the temples of idols.
  - 2. There was no need to purchase statues or icons.
  - 3. There was no need to buy magical incantations
- D. Thus, a confrontation soon arose between the two groups (Acts 19:21-41).
  - 1. Notice that it was "no small stir (disturbance)."
  - 2. Notice that Christianity is called "that way" – literally, a road.
- E. Idol worship is often associated with demonism and, therefore, incompatible with Christianity (cf. Psalm 106:36-38; 1 Corinthians 10:19-21).
- F. The worship of Artemis was central to the cultural, financial and spiritual life of Ephesus and, thus, had no room for Christianity.
- G. A confrontation finally came, but it ended peaceably.

Lesson One  
Background to the Book of Ephesians  
Part III

Introduction:

1. Ephesus was a “free city” – wealthy and prosperous – and made up of Jews, Gentiles, pagans and mystics.
2. The culture in Ephesus was Roman, idolatrous, sensual and worldly.
3. The confusion in Ephesus resulted from the erroneous teaching of Apollos.
4. The conversions came from the various efforts of various Christians in the city.
5. The confrontation came from those who worshipped the goddess Diana.

V. The Conversation in Ephesus

- A. Following the confrontation over the worship of Diana, Paul left Ephesus and traveled through Macedonia.
- B. On his way back to Jerusalem, he stopped at Miletus and met with the elders of the church at Ephesus.
- C. Their conversation is worthy of a closer look...
  1. Paul’s Carefulness (20:18-21)
    - a. He was the same from the first day to the last.
    - b. He humbly served through temptations and tears.
    - c. He taught the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.
  2. Paul’s Confidence (20:22-27)
    - a. He did not worry over his future.
    - b. He did not fear persecution.
    - c. He did not allow trials to swerve him from his course.
    - d. He did not let personal attachments hinder his work.
    - e. He did not regret his actions in Ephesus.
  3. Paul’s Caution (20:28-31)
    - a. He warned the elders to care for themselves.
    - b. He warned the elders to care for the church.
    - c. He warned the elders of the source and nature of their enemies.
    - d. He warned the elders with tears.
  4. Paul’s Counsel (20:32-35)
    - a. Stay with the Word of God.
    - b. Work with your own hands.
    - c. Give to those who are in need.
  5. Paul’s Comrades (20:36-38)
- D. What a great example Paul is to the church today!

VI. The Church in Ephesus

- A. Before he left Ephesus, never to see the members of that church again in the flesh, Paul gave warnings to the elders of the congregation (Acts 20:18-38).
  1. Paul reminded them of his love and devotion to the church (vs. 18-27).
  2. He warned them of dangers that threatened the church (vs. 28-31).
    - a. From their own lives and examples...
    - b. From enemies entering into the flock...
    - c. From the eldership itself...
  3. In so doing, he emphasized the importance of the Lord’s church.

4. Finally, he encouraged them in faithfulness to God's Word and work (vs. 32-38).
- B. About five years later (circa AD 60), from his prison cell in Rome Paul penned a letter back to this congregation.
- C. The book of Ephesians builds upon Paul's experiences, teachings and warnings in the city of Ephesus.
- D. **Chapter One** – Jesus the Christ: *The Head of the Church*
  1. Vs. 3 – He is the source of all spiritual blessings (not idols or occultism).
  2. Vs. 19-20 – He is the source of true power (not black magic, etc.).
  3. Vs. 21 – He is over all things (including false gods and demons).
  4. Vs. 22-23 – He has authority over the church.
- E. **Chapter Two** – Grace and Faith: *The Salvation of the Church*
  1. Vs. 1-3 – They had been dead under Satan's power.
  2. Vs. 4-7 – God's grace made them alive in heavenly places.
  3. Vs. 8-10 – Their faith motivated their good works of obedience.
  4. Vs. 11-22 – Thus, paganism was rejected and peace with God received.
- F. **Chapter Three** – Inspiration: *The Revelation of the Church*
  1. Vs. 1-7 – Paul's work of inspiration revealed the mystery of the church.
    - a. Occult-like belief systems are often called "mystery religions."
    - b. They seek enlightenment to the mysteries of the universe through occult practices.
    - c. Christianity is the revelation of the true mystery – God's plan of redemption for all mankind.
  2. Vs. 8-12 – The church is God's eternal purpose in Christ!
    - a. The church is the "unsearchable riches of Christ."
    - b. The church is the "fellowship of the mystery."
    - c. The church is the "manifold wisdom of God."
    - d. The church is the "eternal purpose" in Christ.
  3. Vs. 13-21 – It is the manifestation of God's love and the source of His glory.
- G. **Chapter Four** – Truth: *The Unity of the Church*
  1. Vs. 1-3 – Attitudes necessary for unity in the church
  2. Vs. 4-6 – Foundations necessary for unity in the church
  3. Vs. 7-12 – Miracles necessary for first establishing unity in the church
  4. Vs. 13-16 – Truth necessary for maintaining unity in the church
  5. Vs. 17-28 – Discipline necessary for sustaining unity in the church
- H. **Chapter Five** – Family: *The Purity of the Church*
  1. Vs. 1-21 – Christians are children of God and must live accordingly, in every aspect of life.
  2. Vs. 22 – 6:9 – The Household Code
- I. **Chapter Six** – Armor: *The Warfare of the Church*
  1. Vs. 10-17 – The Christian must dress for battle because he is always at war with the forces of evil.
    - a. His strength and power comes from the Lord.
    - b. His enemy is the devil and his deceitful devices.
    - c. His fight is not physical, but spiritual. *{It is a wrestling match of and for the soul.}*
  2. Vs. 18 – The Christian must never neglect the power of prayer.
  3. Vs. 19-24 – Once prepared for battle, the Christian must fight.
- J. How clear it should be to all Christians from the story of the church in Ephesus that God is more powerful than Satan and, by being in Christ, we are assured of victory!