

Church of Ephesus Overview

The city of Ephesus is located in modern day Turkey.

The Roman Empire made the city of Ephesus a provincial capital and it hosted around 250,000 residents—the third largest city in the Roman empire.

Ephesus was known as a city of size, wealth, and power. The major economies of the city were rooted in trade and idol worship. The temple of Artemis (goddess Diana), located in the heart of the city, was prized as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. From the ocean ports to the theater to the stadium to the library, Ephesus had so much to offer its inhabitants and visitors. Ephesus was a major cultural center in the ancient world.

And the old city of Ephesus is the city that teaches us more about the church than any other city.

1

The church at Ephesus was established 15-20 years after the death of Jesus. (circa 50 AD) Paul visited the city on his second missionary journey through the ancient world (Acts 18:19).

After planting the church in Ephesus, Paul put a couple named Priscilla and Aquila in charge of the church. Later, a man named Apollos joined the leadership team as the main teacher of the local churches in Ephesus.

Years later, Paul returned to the city of Ephesus on his third missionary journey and stayed in the city for three years, which was the longest time Paul spent with any of his church plants (Acts 19:8-10).

Paul was eventually forced out of the city when the silversmith union staged a riot (Acts 19:26-41). The reason for this is that the gospel was impacting the sale of trinkets devoted to the goddess Diana.

Paul wrote the letter of Ephesians while he was in prison in Rome. He appointed his protégé, Timothy, to pastor the church in Ephesus. Later, the apostle John took up the pastorate from Timothy and pastored the church for many years until he was forced into exile on Patmos.

2

We know more about the church in Ephesus than any other church in the Bible. Seven of the New Testament letters were either written to or about the church in Ephesus, including Ephesians, first and second Timothy, first, second, and third John, and Revelation.

The preaching team in Ephesus was legendarily deep. Paul, Apollos, Timothy, and John all pastored the church in different seasons.

They were a well-taught church. Their theology was so sound that they could measure anyone against the truth and expose error. In the words of Peter: "They could give a reason to any man who asked for the hope that was in them."

When evil men of all types moved into the church at Ephesus, they were exposed.

3

Ephesus was a Who's Who of early Christians

Paul (2 BC-64 AD) established the church and returned to Ephesus multiple times

Aquila and Priscilla: Paul's co-laborers who nurtured the church

Apollos: A teacher who joined the leadership team

John: Lived in Ephesus and is said to be buried there (99 AD). So Mary, the mother of Jesus, is likely buried there as well

Timothy: Pastored and eventually died in Ephesus after protesting the licentiousness of a festival to the goddess Diana (tradition 97 AD)

4

Paul's Farewell to the Ephesians Acts 20:17-38

¹⁷ From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church. ¹⁸ When they arrived, he said to them: "You know how I lived the whole time I was with you, from the first day I came into the province of Asia. ¹⁹ I served the Lord with great humility and with tears and in the midst of severe testing by the plots of my Jewish opponents. ²⁰ You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house. ²¹ I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus.

²² "And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. ²³ I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. ²⁴ However, I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the good news of God's grace.

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²⁵ "Now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about preaching the kingdom will ever see me again. ²⁶ Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of any of you. ²⁷ For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God. ²⁸ Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God,^[a] which he bought with his own blood. ²⁹ I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. ³⁰ Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. ³¹ So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.

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³² “Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. ³³ I have not coveted anyone’s silver or gold or clothing. ³⁴ You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. ³⁵ In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’ ”

³⁶ When Paul had finished speaking, he knelt down with all of them and prayed. ³⁷ They all wept as they embraced him and kissed him. ³⁸ What grieved them most was his statement that they would never see his face again. Then they accompanied him to the ship.

7

Revelation 2:1-7 (circa 96 AD)

¹ Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks; ² I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: ³ And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted.

⁴ Nevertheless I have [somewhat] against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. ⁵ Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent. ⁶ But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate. ⁷ He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.

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