EPHESIANS

Class Study – Introduction

**EPHESUS:**

The province of Asia with its many splendid cities was one of the jewels on a belt of Roman lands encircling the Mediterranean Sea. (see map)

Ephesus was the most important city in western Asia Minor (now Turkey). No city in Asia was more famous or more populous. It ranked with Rome, Corinth, Antioch and Alexandra among the foremost urban centers of the empire.

It had a harbor that at that time opened into the Cayster River, which in turn emptied into the Aegean Sea. Because it was also at an intersection of major trade routes, Ephesus became a commercial center.

It sheltered the wildest collection of pagan priests, magicians, exorcists, cultists, religious prostitutes, and charlatans in the Roman Empire. Temple of the Roman goddess Diana (Greek *Artemis*) was made of marble. This temple was about four times the size of the Parthenon in Athens. This temple was the pride of Ephesus and one of the fabled Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, the city annually played host to hordes of pagan pilgrims from all over the East during the festival of Artemis in March-April.

These facts were not lost on Paul of Tarsus, and his mission strategy seems clear: win for Christ in Ephesus and he could win anywhere. Paul made Ephesus a center for evangelism for about three years. The church there apparently flourished for some time, but later needed the warning of Rev 2:1–7.

What might be some advantages and/or disadvantages in beginning ministry in this kind of setting? Explain.

Do we have something today in our world that allows us to reach many segments of the population?

**BEFORE:**

Acts 19:1-10

**While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus.** (see map)

*Meanwhile, after resting several months, Paul undertook yet a third mission expedition, once again taking the highway northwestward from Antioch, through the Cilician Gates, and onward to the churches he had founded in Galatia and Phryia. This was now the third time he had visited Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch in the interior regions of Asia Minor, which showed their importance to Paul. Perhaps it was for this reason that the die-hard Judizers made a last, determined effort to undermine his message in these churches shortly after he left them. When Paul learned of it, he promptly wrote his most impassioned Letter to the Galatians, skewering work-righteousness and affirming the doctrine of justification by faith alone.*

What might be some religious ideals that might compare to “Judaism”?

**There he found some disciples ﻿2﻿ and asked them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when﻿you believed?” They answered, “No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.” ﻿3﻿ So Paul asked, “Then what baptism did you receive?” “John’s baptism,” they replied. ﻿4﻿ Paul said, “John’s baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus.” ﻿5﻿ On hearing this, they were baptized into﻿ the name of the Lord Jesus. ﻿6﻿ When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. ﻿7﻿ There were about twelve men in all.**

*Luther: “This is the difference between the Baptism of Christ and that of John: John neither gives nor brings forgiveness of sin; he only points people to Him who does bestow it. In John’s Baptism forgiveness is promised; in Christ’s Baptism it is given. Thus John’s Baptism is no longer valid now.”*

*On the basis of further instruction by Paul (v. 4), these disciples received Christian Baptism, which removed any doubts about their status as Christians.*

*Recall the story of Philip in Samaria – Acts 8:4-8 and 14-17*

*Recall the story of Peter and Cornelius – Acts 10*

*Acts 10:45-48 45﻿ The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. ﻿46﻿ For they heard them speaking in tongues﻿a﻿ and praising God. Then Peter said, ﻿47﻿ “Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have.” ﻿48﻿ So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days.*

This outward show is not a part of our ministry today. Why do you think this outward showing of the Holy Spirit’s working was used in the instances of Acts 8 and 10?

**﻿8﻿ Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God. ﻿9﻿ But some of them became obstinate; they refused to believe and publicly maligned the Way. So Paul left them. He took the disciples with him and had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. ﻿10﻿ This went on for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord.**

*The lecture hall probably a school used regularly by Tyrannus, a philosopher or rhetorician. Instruction was probably given in the cooler, morning hours. One Greek manuscript adds that Paul did his instructing from 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. This would have been the hot time of the day, but the hall was available and the people were not at their regular work.*

What lesson(s) does Paul teach us in the above two paragraphs?

Acts 19:23-27

**23﻿ About that time there arose a great disturbance about the Way. ﻿24﻿ A silversmith named Demetrius, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought in no little business for the craftsmen. ﻿25﻿ He called them together, along with the workmen in related trades, and said: “Men, you know we receive a good income from this business. ﻿26﻿ And you see and hear how this fellow Paul has convinced and led astray large numbers of people here in Ephesus and in practically the whole province of Asia. He says that man-made gods are no gods at all. ﻿27﻿ There is danger not only that our trade will lose its good name, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be discredited, and the goddess herself, who is worshiped throughout the province of Asia and the world, will be robbed of her divine majesty.”**

What does to above paragraph show about perhaps the greatest hurdle to overcome when doing ministry?

Acts 20:17

**From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church.**

*The church at Ephesus was made up of a number of local churches or congregations. The elders were the leaders of those churches, men chosen for their mature judgment and spiritual knowledge. They were “overseers” and “shepherds”. That can only mean that they carried out the pastoral ministry in those churches.*

*Apollos, Timothy, Priscilla and Aquila were instrumental in forming a Christian community with a flourishing church years before John became bishop of the church in Ephesus (Acts 18:18-19).*

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**DURING:**

Unlike several of the other letters Paul wrote, Ephesians does not address any particular error or heresy. Paul wrote to expand the horizons of his readers, so that they might better understand the dimensions of God’s eternal purpose and grace. This would help them to appreciate the high goals God has for the church.

The first three chapters are about doctrine, especially an emphasis on the gospel. The last three chapters are lesson in living the faith.

Paul was a very intense person. He writes with that same zeal. Frequently he repeats things to make an important point.

Ephesians asks and answers the three big question of life: Who am I? Why am I here? Where am I going?

Ephesians was written by Paul about the same time he wrote Colossians, around A.D. 60, while he was imprisoned in Rome (Eph 3:1; 4:1; 6:20).

**AFTER:**

The churches in Revelationwere historical churches in Asia Minor. The messages to these churches are meant to apply to all Christians and Christian churches of all times.

Revelation 2:1-7

**“To the angel﻿ of the church in Ephesus write: These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands: ﻿2﻿ I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. ﻿3﻿ You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary. ﻿4﻿ Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love.**

*In their fight for the truth, however, these Christians seem to have become harsh and bitter and lost their first love (agape) which is always active and self-sacrificing vertically to God and horizontally to the neighbor.*

How can this happen among us today? How might we avoid this problem or at least minimize it?

**﻿5﻿ Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.**

*The lampstand is the symbol of God’s grace among his people. The threat to remove the lampstand warns us that when a congregation despises the gospel, God will eventually remove his means of grace from them.*

**﻿6﻿ But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. ﻿**

*A heretical sect within the church that had worked out a compromise with the pagan society. They apparently taught that spiritual liberty gave them sufficient leeway to practice idolatry and immorality (license for sensual sins).*

**7﻿ He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.**

What directive and comfort is found in verse 7 above?

Take a bus out of Izmir, on the western coast of Turkey in Asia, and after about an hour’s ride of some 35 miles southeast, plus a little walk, you reach the ruins of ancient Ephesus. Today it is a miserable village called Ayasalook. A traveler in the 1960’s found only three Christians there, and they were scarcely familiar with St. Paul and St. John.

What is the sad lesson from the above paragraph?