

## Lesson 9: Overview of Ephesus and the Ephesian Church



The word Ephesus means “desirable”, and in many ways Ephesus was a highly desirable place to live. Ephesus was a center of travel and commerce, situated on the Aegean Sea on the Ionian coast at the mouth of the Cayster River. It was one of the greatest seaports and cities of the ancient world.

To give us some idea as to how long it had been settled, ancient Ephesus was re-built 3000 years ago on the site of Apasa by Attic and Ionian Greek colonists. (Today the Mediterranean coast is now a few miles away from the site, sediment having filled the plain, the river

and the harbor.) During the Classical Greek era, it was one of twelve cities that were members of the Ionian League. The city came under the control of the Roman Republic in 129 BC.

In 88 BC Ephesus welcomed Archelaus, a general of Mithridates, king of Pontus, when he conquered “Asia” (the Roman name for western Asia Minor). While in Ephesus, Mithridates ordered every Roman citizen in the province to be killed, which led to the Asiatic Vespers-- the slaughter of 80,000 Roman citizens in Asia (or any person who spoke with a Latin accent). Many Romans had lived in Ephesus, and statues and monuments of Roman citizens in Ephesus were also destroyed. When the Ephesians saw how badly the people of Chios had been treated by Zenobius, a general of Mithridates, they refused entry to his army. When Mithridates was defeated in the First Mithridatic War by the Roman consul Lucius Cornelius Sulla, Ephesus came back under Roman rule in 86 BC. Sulla imposed a huge indemnity, along with five years of back taxes, which left all Asian cities (including Ephesus) heavily in debt for a long time.

King Ptolemy XII Auletes of Egypt retired to Ephesus in 57 BC, passing his time in the sanctuary of the famous temple of Artemis (spoken of during the Ephesian silversmith “riots” in Acts) when the Roman Senate failed to restore him to his throne. Mark Antony was welcomed by Ephesus for periods when he was proconsul and in 33 BC with Cleopatra when he gathered his fleet of 800 ships before the battle of Actium with Octavius (who defeated Mark Antony). Clearly, Ephesus was a major city.

When Octavian, later known as “Augustus” became emperor in 27 BC, the most important change was when he made Ephesus the capital of proconsular Asia (which covered western Asia Minor) instead of Pergamum. Ephesus then entered an era of prosperity, becoming both the seat of the governor and a major center of commerce. According to Strabo, it was second in importance and size only to Rome.

Before the time of Christ, people could easily travel to the next town or virtually anywhere in the Mediterranean (Rome, Antioch, Palestine, Cyprus, Egypt, etc.) by ship. This was done by going to the port and making a few inquiries then negotiating a fee with the captain to travel where needed as a passenger. In the case of Ephesus, they could also travel one of three ancient roads: one went east towards Babylon via Laodicea; another to the north via Smyrna; and a third south to the Meander Valley.

### The Ephesian Church

The New Testament traces the full history of the church in Ephesus from its founding in Acts 18 to facing the rebuke of Jesus in Revelation 2:1-7. On Paul’s second missionary journey (A.D. 52), he visited Ephesus after leaving Corinth and evidently planted the church there (Acts 18:19).

On Paul’s third missionary journey (A.D. 54-56), Paul spent between two and three years teaching in the city (Acts 19:8-10). He spent his time addressing false doctrines and pagan practices. Paul’s teaching in the rented school of Tyrannus was so successful that those who practiced magic brought their books and burned them as an act of repentance (Acts 19:18-20). As the sale of silver idolatrous images began to fall off, the silversmiths

caused an uproar (Acts 19:26-41). Shortly after this dust-up was settled (in Paul's favor, the scripture records), Paul left for Macedonia. **It was during this stay in Ephesus that he wrote 1 Corinthians.**

Several months later (A.D. 57) Paul met with the Ephesian elders on the nearby island of Miletus and made his farewell address (Acts 20). Their mutual love is evident as these tenderhearted men weep over what God has done – and they know they will not see Paul again. As Luke records their conversation and prayer it is evident there is increasing maturity in the faith and great love between the apostle and these Godly men. The picture now is of a church that has reached spiritual maturity.

About a decade after the church had been started, Paul wrote the letter to the Ephesians commending their faith and love (A.D. 62). They appeared to be devout in their faith, well organized, and busy in the gospel. They had been growing, expanding and doing the will of God. Jews and Gentiles, from several ethnicities and nationalities, had come together to form “one new man” (2:15) and “one body” (2:16). Paul commends their sincerity in the final sentence of his letter: “Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ with incorruptible love” (Ephesians 6:24).

In Paul's first epistle to Timothy we begin to see some evidence of doctrinal drift: “As I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, remain on at Ephesus so that you may instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines, nor to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to mere speculation rather than furthering the administration of God which is by faith” (1 Timothy 1:3-4).<sup>9</sup>

Tradition says that Ephesus became the home of the Apostle John, which may or may not be true. John wrote three letters (1st, 2nd, and 3rd John), probably no later than the early A.D. 90s, and maybe from Ephesus.

False teachers had arisen throughout the late first century (Greek Gnostics) who claimed to have deeper knowledge of the things of God. They would have also most likely had some influence in Ephesus. The Gnostics claimed to have the “secret” to knowing Christ. In reality, they denied His bodily incarnation and His deity as well as many other heretical concepts. In a nutshell they taught: “You can do whatever you want in the body, as long as your spirit remains pure.” (Such drivel and “speculation” sounds like today, doesn't it?)

It was probably during the reign of Domitian<sup>10</sup> (81-96 A.D.) that John was banished to Patmos. He was released and died during the reign of Trajan according to Irenaeus (an early church historian). During this period the Lord (thru John) addresses “the seven churches of Asia” in the Revelation. His assessment of the Ephesian church (Revelation 2:1-7) compliments them on their good works but rebukes them for leaving their first love (Revelation 2:4). He commands *immediate* action – they need to repent, to remember their past excellence, and must go back to their first works. (Revelation 2:5).

The term “bondservant” will appear in this book. If you need a refresher as to what that meant in first century Rome, go back to the top of page 2 for a quick review.

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<sup>9</sup> Amen! Sounds just like today. Speculation beyond the word of God clearly states is not only dangerous, it quickly can turn into a slippery slope.

<sup>10</sup> I would tend to agree that it was probably Domitian, who believed and stressed people should follow the old Roman religion; he and his government actively opposed any who would not submit to this religion. Like many Romans, he was frustrated by early Christians, who would not pay homage to the Roman “deities”. The Romans never demanded that Christians and Jews give up their belief in God—just that they move God behind, or at least equal to, their own. This was complicated even more by emperor worship- a requirement, while paying taxes, to say that “Caesar is Lord”.

## Lesson 9 (Ephesian Church) Questions:

Please read Acts 18:19, Acts 19:1-20:1, and then answer the following questions:

1. Read Acts 18:18-21, Paul's first missionary trip to the city. Compare this to other cities where he evangelized.

### **Acts 19:1-10**

2. Paul returns to Ephesus; what does he find, and what does he teach the Ephesians?
3. How could this potentially apply today to those we are teaching the gospel who might say "I was already baptized (immersed) for the right reasons"?
4. Paul goes into the synagogue and speaks boldly- for how long and to what result?

### **Acts 19:11-20**

5. Why do you think the Holy Spirit caused these noteworthy miracles?
6. Describe what happened to the "itinerant Jewish exorcists".
7. The combination of these things caused what to occur in Ephesus?

### **Acts 19:21-2:21 (The Ephesian Riot)**

8. The scripture records that "there arose a great commotion about the Way" (which was obviously Satan's doing). What did their leader say he was learning not only about Paul, but about "the way"?
9. Describe one or two events of the ensuing "disturbance" that you find interesting.
10. Why would the disciples not allow Paul to defend themselves and the church?
11. The "Town Clerk" or "City Clerk" was the Chief Magistrate of Ephesus, and liaison between the Ephesian government and the Roman Provincial representatives. List the points he made to those present before "he dismissed the assembly". What was his implied threat?

## Acts 20:17-36

12. Briefly describe the meeting between Paul and the Ephesian elders.
  
13. What were Paul's warnings to these church leaders?

**Some repeat notes from the lesson materials above:** About a decade after the church had been started, Paul wrote the letter to the Ephesians commending their faith and love (A.D. 62). They appeared to be devout in their faith, well organized, and busy in the gospel. In Paul's first epistle to Timothy we begin to see some evidence of doctrinal drift on the part of some: "As I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, remain on at Ephesus so that you may instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines, nor to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to mere speculation rather than furthering the administration of God which is by faith" (1 Timothy 1:3-4).

Tradition says that Ephesus became the home of the Apostle John. Circumstances make it possible. Late in the first century, the false teaching of Gnosticism arose throughout the church, which was taught against in the Epistles of John and the Revelation of Jesus Christ.

No matter where John was living as he penned the Revelation, that book addresses "the seven churches of Asia". Christ's assessment of the Ephesian church is found in Revelation 2:1-7. Christ compliments them on their good works but rebukes them for leaving their first love (Revelation 2:4). He commands *immediate* action— they needed to repent, to remember their past excellence, and must go back to their first works.

Let's enjoy as we consider the Epistle to the Ephesians. It's a wonderful book.

## Lesson 10: Ephesians Chapter 1

Ephesians is roughly divided into two sections- chapters 1-3 and chapters 4-6. Read Ephesians chapter one in its entirety (it will help for context!) and answer the following for discussion:

1. Read verses 3-6. What does he mean by “every spiritual blessing”? What are your thoughts as to what the “heavenly places in Christ” might be? (Some translations call this “the heavenlies”.)
2. What does he mean by “we were chosen” and “having predestined us to adoption”? What false teaching has arisen from this teaching? Consider other scriptures that would oppose this teaching.
3. Read verses 7 & 8. Explain how his “wisdom and prudence” somehow redeemed us as described.
4. Read 9-11. What “mystery” do you think was revealed to us? Why do you suppose that God would have kept this a mystery? What’s powerful about God gathering “all things in Christ, both of which are in heaven and on earth- in Him”?
5. Again, we’re taught about a predestined inheritance- which verse 12 describes how? Thoughts?
6. Read 13-14. We trusted, and God sealed<sup>11</sup> and guaranteed<sup>12</sup> via the Holy Spirit. That “seal” or guarantor is a legal term still in use today that Paul used as an example to give us a better understanding. Try to draw the parallels between these legal terms we still use today and this teaching (guesses are allowed- this is a group discussion!)
7. Read 15-16. What did Paul hear? What had he, in turn, done for them? Are there any lessons for us both as saints and as those who pray for churches and for the individuals in these churches?
8. Read 17-19. The central thought of Paul’s prayer for them is found in these three verses. Describe them and explain why every Christian needs to understand these things.

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<sup>11</sup> A “seal” refers to the highest level of signature we use on legal documents. The next time you sign for a mortgage, car loan or any other major loan, look for the word “(Seal)” next to your signature. You are stating, legally, that you have read everything carefully and that you are placing your strongest personal guarantee that you will live by the terms of what you have signed up for. It’s an ancient legal term that carries great power when God would apply it.

<sup>12</sup> A “guarantor” of a loan is someone who “guarantees” the loan that someone else is making. Should that person default on the loan, the guarantor will be personally responsible for repaying for the loan. If the guarantor had property (such as real estate) that they were using as collateral, this collateral would be forfeited should the guarantor also default. Consider this as you think about how Christ and the Holy Spirit have “guaranteed” you.

9. Read 20-21. A slight shift in thought- Paul describes the “mighty power” that God demonstrated- a mighty power that clearly demonstrates much. **Just how much power and honor has/had God given Jesus?**
  
10. List another passage that you think further describes the power or authority of Chris so that we may discuss these other passages together in class.
  
11. Read 22-23. Explain, in modern English, what is meant by these two short verses.

## Lesson 11: Ephesians Chapter 2

*A study in spiritual life, grace, being brought near to God, peace, and spiritual citizenship.*

Read Ephesians chapter two in its entirety (it will help for context!) and answer the following for discussion:

### **Ephesians 2:1-10 (Spiritual life vs death; Grace through Faith)**

1. In verses 1-3, we are reminded that we have been brought back to life from either being spiritually dead or on the brink of spiritual death. What are we reminded about regarding our previous selves?
2. What do you think it means that we were “fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and by nature [??] children of wrath, just as the others”?
3. Verses 4-7 describe what God does when we turn to Him and to Jesus. What?
4. Verses 8-10 are often not fully understood, so also read James 2:18-22 for additional help in describing what’s being taught here. Perhaps include your thoughts on how God views our works, and (according to scripture) what “works” would include.

### **Ephesians 2:11-13 (Brought near by the blood of Christ)**

5. Think about this passage and what it must have meant to the two groups of gentile Thessalonians- those who had been visiting the synagogue and had been learning of the God of the Old Testament (yet would always be considered “outsiders” by the Jews) and a second group- the Ephesian gentiles who were converted without any (initial) exposure to the Old Testament. Discuss how perhaps you think either or both groups of Gentiles would have viewed their new relationship with God.

### **Ephesians 2:14-18 (Peace? How? Between whom?)**

6. It describes how Christ is our “peace”; what wall did He break, and what was the result?
7. Peace between whom? (Read carefully- this is deeper than the obvious.)
8. Jesus today preaches to those who are far off and those who are near. How?

## Ephesians 2:19-22 (Citizenship)

At the beginning of our study, and on page two, we discussed the following four BROAD social groups that made up people living in the empire, but the Romans, always looking for an advantage over others, divided these groups up into even more categories (see page two):

- **Roman citizens**, who made up a very small majority (6-8%), had rights that others did not have and did not have to pay taxes. These were either free-born (Patrician or Plebian) or purchased their citizenship for themselves and their heirs for “*a large sum of money*” (Acts 22:28). Most Roman citizens were merchants, farmers or workers. Some were aristocrats, politicians or senior Roman soldiers.
- **Freeborn** were local citizens of multiple nations that Rome had conquered, who paid substantial taxes and had some rights. They enjoyed “Pax Romana” (“Roman peace”) and were governed locally by Roman-appointed officials and protected by Rome. They were not citizens.
- **Bondservants** were (for any number of reasons) “bound” to their master for a period of time, often against their will, and were one step above being a slave. They made up a large segment of the population of the empire, and if they escaped were returned to their masters.
- **Slaves**, were taken in war (and the victors sold them as a part of their war booty), or because they had fallen deeply into debt and could not repay. The most “famous” Christian slave was Onesimus of the book of Philemon.

9. What would it mean to the people who read this book to no longer be considered a foreigner and stranger but to be a “fellow citizen” in the gospel of Christ?
10. About four years ago in a Sunday morning series of studies we were challenged to decide about our citizenship as Americans and our citizenship in heaven. Why the importance of that study?
11. Please describe a few other Old and New Testament passages about Jesus as the Chief Cornerstone.
12. “Jesus Christ Himself became the chief cornerstone, in which the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.” What do you think it means that we’re being built together for a dwelling place in God”?



## Lesson 12: Ephesians Chapter 3

***A study in the mystery in Christ from ages past, now revealed to mankind!***

Read Ephesians 3 in its entirety (it will help for context!) and answer the following for discussion:

### **Ephesians 3:1-7 and Acts 15:14-18 (The mystery of the ages—Jesus Christ- finally revealed!)**

1. Let's first go back to Acts 15 and the realization that the gospel was not just for Jews (and Samaritans), but (beginning with Cornelius and his household) was given to the Gentiles as well. Read Acts 15:14-18 (a quotation of Amos 9:11-12) and describe as to what level the Apostles realized that Gentile believers were now fully equal with Jewish believers and what that implied.
2. Find and list at least one other Old Testament passage in which God says that in the future He would have a relationship with all of mankind, or a relationship with the Gentiles.
3. Paul considers himself a "dispenser" (other translations call him a "steward") of the grace of God to be given THROUGH him to the Gentiles. What is the role of any sort of a steward?
4. Verses 3-7 speak of Gentiles being fellow heirs (identical to what we earlier studied in Galatians 4:1-3); perhaps re-state your thoughts about verses 6-7 and how this would truly be "a mystery revealed" to both Jews and Gentiles.
5. Go back in your mind to Paul speaking before the Jewish mob in Acts 21:37-Acts 22:29. Do you recall at what point the Jews stopped listening to him, tore their clothes and threw dust in the air? What are your thoughts on that?

### **Ephesians 3:8-13 (The purpose and teachings about the mystery of Christ)**

6. In Ephesians 3:8-9, Paul says he was directed to "preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery". Describe some of the "unsearchable riches" that His children enjoy.
7. The "fellowship in the mystery", which was first hidden but is now revealed, means different things to different groups. Can you think of any groups then and now where it would have been powerful to have had fellowship with other believers other than those "normally" associated with?
8. In 10-12 the "manifold" (or "many sided") wisdom is taught to the world "by the church"- but to whom? What do you think that may mean?
9. Why would knowing these things give us confidence and boldness?

10. In 3:13, he asks them not to lose heart about what specifically?

**Ephesians 3:14-20 (Our appreciation of the mystery of Christ)**

11. Paul prays for what? What does he point out about Christ?

12. How can we be rooted and grounded in love (3:17-20)? How should that happen?

13. Verses 20-21 should give us the highest amount of spiritual confidence. Why? (there are lots of ways we could take this conversation)

## Lesson 13: Ephesians Chapter 4

***“From doctrine (chapters 1-3) to duty (Chapters 4-6); from principles to practice!”***

Read Ephesians 4 in its entirety (it will help for context!) and answer the following for discussion:

### **Ephesians 4:1-6**

1. “Therefore” means “now that you’ve considered what I just said”. Why would Paul beseech them to walk worthy of their calling after the “therefore”?
2. Verses 2 and 3 are a complete thought and a command to members. Can you think of some situations where this command would be particularly appropriate?
3. Why would you suppose that the apostle would remind us about these “ones” after commanding us to live together in peace?

### **Ephesians 4:7-16**

4. In Jeremiah 29:11, God reminds them that He has “thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.” We read in verse 7 that “to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift” and in verse 8, we are given a quote from the 68<sup>th</sup> Psalm. What grace, what gifts, are being spoken of?
5. Clearly, the Psalmist is speaking of Christ’s ascent to heaven, and verses 9-10 are speaking of his descent to “the lower parts of the earth” (this will cause some discussion!) and his ascent to heaven after His death. What do you think that it means that “He led captivity captive”?
6. What five groups are listed? Which of these are still appropriate today, and why not the others?
7. In verses 12-15 he explains the purpose of these “appointments”. Could you perhaps explain in your own words?
8. With so many different doctrinal points of view today among “Christians”, how can there be “unity of the faith” as described here?
9. Verses 15-16 note that Christ is the one that joins, that controls. How?

### **Ephesians 4:17-24**

10. Verses 17-19 paint a rather grim picture, one that we see all about us today. *How do we get this way?*

a. We're given a contrast- who we are now. What is "the truth [that] is in Jesus"?

11. Let's talk about the beauty and peace that comes from being "a new man".

**Ephesians 4:25-32**

12. Can you think of examples of how we're tempted to lie from time to time?

13. What's the problem with anger? Can you think of other applicable teachings?

14. Rather than steal, what? And to what degree?

15. How about the words that come from our mouths?

16. What actions could we take that would grieve the Holy Spirit? Please Him?

## Lesson 14: Ephesians Chapter 5

### *Walk in love; walk in light; walk in wisdom; Wives & Husbands*

Read Ephesians chapter 5 in its entirety and then answer the following questions:

#### **Ephesians 5:1-7 (Walk in Love)**

1. In verses 1-2, explain how to be “imitators of God as dear children”.
2. Verses 3-5 describes six sins. List the sins, and let’s discuss how prevalent they are in our community. (Perhaps pick one that most people would call “a small sin”.)
3. What do “empty words” have to do with this discussion, and what’s the further warning?

#### **Ephesians 5:8-14 (Walk in Light)**

4. Let’s turn our thought to that of the gospel and of Christ, being “light.” When John’s father Zacharias prophesied in Luke 1:67-79, his prophesy included John’s role as “prophet of the Highest”. Read verses 76-79 and share your thoughts about the Messiah giving “light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death” both to people of the first century—and today.
5. Comment upon Matthew 4:12-17. Your teacher believes that the message of repentance by Jesus in verse 17 is directly related to this. If so, how?
6. What did Jesus have to say about our being light in Matthew 5:14-16?
7. Why must we “walk as children of light”? What happens to others when we do not?
8. “Goodness, righteousness and truth”. What are the results of these influence on the world?
9. How do we expose the unfruitful works of darkness?
10. The image of Christ awakening the spiritual dead is powerful. How does this work in real life?

#### **Ephesians 5:15-21 (Walk in Wisdom)**

11. What mental image comes to mind when you read “walk circumspectly”?

12. How do we go about redeeming the time? Can you think of any examples?
13. Rather than use alcohol, do what? (Oh, and what is “dissipation”, anyway?)
14. Much can be gleaned from this passage about singing, but why do many (including your teacher) apply this passage to our worship?
15. Giving thanks to God. Submitting to one another in the fear of God. How?

**Ephesians 5:22-33 (Wives and Husbands)**

16. Why is it that teaching about the relationship between husbands and wives annoys some people and causes many to ignore it? Is Paul, the man who said in I Corinthians 14:34-35 “*let your women keep silent in the churches*” a “woman hater” (as some today say)? Was he biased against women?
17. Why does the apostle compare Christ and the church to marriage?
18. Doesn't it seem redundant for husbands to be commanded to love their wives?
19. “Love your own wife as your own body.” “Let the wife see that she respects her husband.” Why would God command what (to many) is merely an emotion? A feeling?

## Lesson 15: Ephesians Chapter 6

### *Children and parents; bondservants and masters; the whole armor of God*

Read Ephesians 6 in its entirety and answer the following questions:

#### **Ephesians 6:1-4**

1. Verse 1 seems straight-forward enough (let's discuss, of course). Let's also discuss the promise.
2. In Matthew 15:1-6, Jesus uses this passage to rebuke them for not providing financial help for aged parents. Can you think of other ways that we neglect to honor our parents?
3. Verse 4 carries some powerful teaching. Let's discuss a few ways this could occur.

#### **Ephesians 6:5-9**

A first-century bondservant was someone who was bound. They were not (quite) slaves, but they were not free to leave their master until their service was complete (see page 2). In Romans 1:1, Paul calls himself "a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God."

4. In verses 5-8, bondservants were commanded to obey their masters- how and why?
5. Do you think this same teaching would apply to employees today? If so, how?
6. In verse 9, masters were also given commands, including not to threaten their servants. What, in practical terms, do you think this meant to the relationship?
7. Do you think that this same teaching would apply to employers today? If so, how?

#### **Ephesians 6:10-20**

8. In verses 10-13, we are reminded about the "might" of God and commanded to put on all the available armor. What does this teach about our fight against Satan and his followers?
9. What is, in your mind, "the evil day"?
10. List the defense "weapons" in our armor and describe their use.
11. Two offensive weapons are listed: the sword of the Spirit and prayer. How do these work?

12. "Prayer and supplication" refer to two aspects of prayer. "Prayer" refers to thanksgiving and praise, while "supplication" refers to what?
  
13. What were Paul's prayer requests?

**Ephesians 6:21-24**

14. Why was Paul sending Tychicus with his letter?
  
15. Looking back on this book, what do you think was Paul's relationship to each of them?