

Ephesians

Lesson 1
Acts 19

Leader Guide

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Lesson 1

Acts 19

Establishing the Church of Ephesus

God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured, and the evil spirits left them. *Acts 19:11-12*

Introduction

Ephesus was an ancient Greek city-state located in western Turkey along a coastal Mediterranean trade route. The city had a harbor connected to the sea by a river that needed continuous dredging to remain open. Ephesus's location as a center for land and sea trade made it rich. The city constructed a temple to the goddess Artemis in 550BC that was nearly twice the size of the Parthenon in Greece and was one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. The temple was burned to the ground by an arsonist in 356 BC and was rebuilt to its previous grandeur. Alexander the Great offered to finance its completion in 334 BC.

Ephesus was named the Roman capital of Asia Minor (modern Turkey) in 129BC and remained a principal center for trade with a population and wealth rivaling Rome, Corinth, Antioch, and Alexandria. Romans built the famous amphitheater in AD 41-54. Emperor Nero expanded the amphitheater in AD 54-68 with a second story, and emperor Trajan completed it in AD 98-117 by adding a third story. The other monumental building in Ephesus is the Library of Celsus, built as a library and tomb for Roman proconsul Gaius Julius Celsus Polemaeanus in AD 135, after the time of Paul.

The city was sacked by the Goths in AD 263 and rebuilt. Inhabitants relocated from the city by AD 400 because the harbor silted in.

The ruins of Ephesus were declared a UNESCO world heritage site in 2015. The monumental library and amphitheater remain, but all that remains of the great Temple of Artemis is one partial pillar in the middle of a mosquito-infested marsh.

Paul traveled To Ephesus to establish a church in AD 52 to 54 when Ephesus had a population of 150,000 to 225,000 and was at its height of Roman wealth and pagan worship. Paul wrote his letter to the Ephesians ten years later while he was in prison in AD 60-62, at about the same time he wrote Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. Paul's letter to the Ephesians is in two major parts; chapters 1-3 are foundational church doctrines, and chapters 4-6 are practical applications of the Christian faith.

Paul wrote his letter to the Ephesians so that they might know the depth of God's love for them. Paul's purpose speaks to us just as it did to the Ephesians. God loves us so much that before he created the world, he made good and wonderful plans for us to be with him through eternity. His plan for us is to be united with him through faith in Christ, and he will work out his plan for us through his mercy and grace according to his purpose and will. God leaves nothing to chance to accomplish his purpose. He gives us the faith to believe in Christ and his Spirit to guarantee our eternal inheritance so that we will know Christ and be united with one another. Being united in Christ does not necessarily come easily. The Ephesian church was made up of Jews and Gentiles who formerly regarded each other with loathing, disgust, and intolerance. Christ called them to live a new life in unity and to put on love, patience, humility, and gentleness in all their dealings with each other.

In this first lesson, we will look at the Book of Acts to understand how God established the church in Ephesus through Paul and other disciples.

Read Acts 19:1-12, Establishing the Church in Ephesus.

¹ While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples ² and asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you 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 in 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.

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.

¹¹ God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, ¹² so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured, and the evil spirits left them.

¹³ Some Jews who went around driving out evil spirits tried to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who were demon-possessed. They would say, "In the name of the Jesus whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out." ¹⁴ Seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. ¹⁵ One day the evil spirit answered them, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know about, but who are you?" ¹⁶ Then the man who had the evil spirit jumped on them and overpowered them all. He gave them such a beating that they ran out of the house naked and bleeding.

¹⁷ When this became known to the Jews and Greeks living in Ephesus, they were all seized with fear, and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honor. ¹⁸ Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed what they had done. ¹⁹ A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly. When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to fifty thousand drachmas. ²⁰ In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power.

²¹ After all this had happened, Paul decided to go to Jerusalem, passing through Macedonia and Achaia. "After I have been there," he said, "I must visit Rome also." ²² He sent two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, to Macedonia, while he stayed in the province of Asia a little longer.

1. What part of the gospel message did Paul discover the believers in Ephesus lacked (verses 1-6)?

The Ephesians did not know about receiving the Holy Spirit through baptism.

2. How do we receive the Holy Spirit through baptism?

We receive the Holy Spirit through baptism through the water and the word when we are baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We also receive the Holy Spirit in baptism through faith. In the case of infant baptism, children are baptized in good Christian conscience because of the faith the church has that God will accomplish his work in the child's life and bring the child to faith, just as He does with adults.

3. How many people were baptized into Christ in Ephesus (verse 7)?

There were 12 men.

4. How long did Paul spend planting the church in Ephesus?

About two years.

5. What prompted Paul to stop preaching in the synagogue and start preaching in a Roman lecture hall (verses 8-9)?

Paul began his work in Ephesus by preaching to Jews in the synagogue, but they became obstinate, so he turned to the Gentiles.

6. Paul sought to preach in major cities and trade routes so the gospel message would be carried further into the world. What resulted from Paul's preaching in Ephesus for two years (verse 10)?

All the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord.

7. In verse 11, the spiritual gifts given to Paul are sometimes referred to as Apostolic gifts. What were some of the signs and wonders God used to establish the Church in Ephesus?

God gave Paul the ability to heal the sick, drive out evil spirits, and the ability to proclaim the gospel.

8. What resulted from unbelievers trying to invoke the name of Jesus to cast out demons (verses 13-16)?

The evil spirit confronted them, and the man with the evil spirit jumped on them and gave them such a beating that they ran out of the house naked and bleeding.

9. Discuss the role fear plays in faith. Refer to the following passages:
 - a. The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. Proverbs 9:10
 - b. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. 1 John 4:18

We might seek God out of fear. Fear could arise from a crisis beyond our control, or we might fear eternal punishment. After we learn of the depth of God's love for us, love drives out fear, and we see God as our perfect, loving Father who blesses us through all circumstances.

Acts 19:23-34, The Riot in Ephesus

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 a lot of business for the craftsmen there. ²⁵ He called them together, along with the workers in related trades, and said: "You know, my friends, that 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 gods made by human hands 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."

²⁸ When they heard this, they were furious and began shouting: "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" ²⁹ Soon the whole city was in an uproar. The people seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul's traveling companions from Macedonia, and all of them rushed into the theater together. ³⁰ Paul wanted to appear before the crowd, but the disciples would not let him. ³¹ Even some of the officials of the province, friends of Paul, sent him a message begging him not to venture into the theater.

³² The assembly was in confusion: Some were shouting one thing, some another. Most of the people did not even know why they were there. ³³ The Jews in the crowd pushed Alexander [an unreferenced person] to the front, and they shouted instructions to him. He motioned for silence in order to make a defense before the people. ³⁴ But when they realized he was a Jew, they all shouted in unison for about two hours: "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!"

10. What happened to the church in Ephesus from the baptism of the first 12 disciples to the time of the riot (verse 26)?

The church grew to the point that it threatened the idol worship of Artemis and the livelihood of those who made the idols.

11. What were some of the obstacles the early Christians faced in Ephesus?

Christians were a minority and seen as a threat to the livelihood and faith of people who worshiped idols and were in the majority. They were also persecuted by the Jewish minority, who believed Christians worshiped three gods rather than the one true God. Some Roman emperors also considered Christians a threat because they would not worship them. Paul would be put to death by the emperor Nero just a few years after writing his letter to the Ephesians.

12. We usually think of idols as small statues representing a god. Israel had a problem worshipping other gods throughout its history. Today, the problem isn't statues; it is a lack of seeking and worshipping God. The Bible also equates idolatry to greed and covetousness. Our idols are shown by what we love more than God and by what we seek for our security, significance, and fulfillment. These may be our love of self, our identity in our profession or family, our income, or the love of things and comfort (stuff). Discuss our idols - how we trust in things other than God for our security and identity.

Answers vary.

Closing, Psalm 115

¹ Not to us, LORD, not to us

but to your name be the glory,
because of your love and faithfulness.

² Why do the nations say, "Where is their God?"

³ Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him.

¹¹ You who fear him, trust in the LORD—he is their help and shield.

¹² The LORD remembers us and will bless us: He will bless his people Israel, he will bless the house of Aaron,

¹³ he will bless those who fear the LORD—small and great alike.

¹⁴ May the LORD cause you to flourish, both you and your children.

¹⁵ May you be blessed by the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth.

¹⁶ The highest heavens belong to the LORD, but the earth he has given to mankind.

¹⁷ It is not the dead who praise the LORD, those who go down to the place of silence;

¹⁸ it is we who extol the LORD, both now and forevermore.

Praise the LORD.