

Ephesians - Acts 19 - Introduction and Overview

January 12, 2014

Good morning. Welcome to 2014. With the new year, we are starting a new series at Faith Church called, “Who Am I?” This is a study of the book of Ephesians.

When you look in the mirror, what do you see? Most of us see ourselves as failures, losers or pretty insignificant. In the book of Ephesians we will learn that because of Jesus, that isn’t what God sees when he looks at us. If you are someone who struggles with depression or self-esteem, this series will be very important for you so I urge you to join us for each week of this study as we learn who we are through Jesus.

If you are new, my name is Kurt. I am one of the pastors. Faith Church is a regional church with campuses in Spencer and Spirit Lake. Pastor Jordan, of the Spencer campus, and I study together each week in preparation so we teach similar material across all our campuses on the weekend. I encourage you to pay the Spencer campus a visit this winter. When you do, know you won’t miss a beat in our series.

Before we open the book of Ephesians, I want to take this first week to introduce you to the city of Ephesus. This is the city to which Paul wrote the letter of Ephesians. To accomplish this goal, I have a two-part message. First, I want to show you around the city of Ephesus with some pictures and acquaint you with the feel of the city. Second, we will turn to Acts 19 and look at how Paul, the first missionary to the city, planted the church. Combining the background of

the city with the history of how the Gospel came to it will give us the background we need to begin the letter next week.

Background on the city of Ephesus

Paul wrote the letter of Ephesians when he was in prison in Rome somewhere between the years 60-62 A.D. Paul knew the city well and spent three years in the city telling people about Jesus. That was two times longer than he spent anywhere else. Why did he spend so much time in this city? Let's find out.

Ephesus was a port city. If you look on the map, you can see Ephesus was on the sea. Goods from Rome and the western part of the Roman Empire came into Ephesus and were taken by



land to the cities of the east. Whatever was manufactured in the eastern cities of Asia Minor was loaded on boats in Ephesus and shipped to Rome. Everything went through Ephesus. It was such an important city that all the mileage to the cities of the interior were measured from Ephesus because everybody traveled through the city.

Ephesus was a large city. It was the fourth-largest city in the Roman empire with 250,000 people. That is not large by today's standards but in the

ancient world, that was big. It is a city with roughly the population of Des Moines in an area the size of Spencer.

The city boasted an excellent harbor. It also had a great river to ship goods by barge. It also enjoyed a good road system.

Ephesus was a wealthy city. I told you the city had excellent roads. A number of its streets were paved in marble. Archaeological digs of the city tell us it wasn't uncommon for citizens to have ornate inlaid floors where they cemented valuable gems into their floors. You know a city is rich when people put gems in their floors so they can step on them.

Ephesus was a sports-crazed city. They had great athletic facilities and a full-size sports area. They held multiple prestigious athletic events in the city every year including the Pan-Ionian games. The people loved their sports, just like we do.



Ephesus was an intellectual city. The city was the home of a huge library. That was uncommon in the ancient world. While the library I show in the photo was built slightly after the letter to the Ephesians was written, the size of the library shows you they had plenty of scrolls because they needed to build something this big to house them. Ephesus also boasted of a large medical school that specialized in optometry.

Ephesus was a highly spiritual city. People flowing through the city brought their religions to Ephesus. Archaeologists tell us there were at least 50 different deities worshipped in Ephesus, some of the gods of the distant land of Egypt were worshipped in the city. This shows you the multi-cultural flavor of the city.

While Ephesus was a melting pot of religions, there was one deity that dominated the landscape.



Ephesus was the home of the goddess Artemis. The Romans called her Diana. Her temple dominated the city's horizon. It was huge: 425-by-200 feet by 60-feet tall. That makes it four times bigger than the Parthenon in Athens. If you went to Yankee stadium and measured from home plate to the bleachers for a major league home run, that isn't 425 feet. The temple of Artemis is huge. In addition, it is marble. There are 127 marble pillars on the outside just short of 60 feet tall. Unlike the artists rendition in the photo, pillars were covered in gold and studded with jewels, each supposedly a gift from a king.

Have you heard of the seven wonders of the ancient world? The temple of Artemis is one of them. It is mind-bogglingly beautiful. The city hosted a month-long celebration each year to Artemis for people from around the world. It was similar in size to the way we celebrate Christmas.

Since Artemis was such a popular deity, I began wondering what made her so popular. Artemis is the goddess of fertility and protection. She is a goddess covered with breasts so I will not show you what she looks like. The

scholars are divided on exactly what took place in the worship of Artemis. We do know this. Artemis was a female deity. She had lots of breasts and a fancy hairdo. She was incredibly popular. Archaeologists have discovered a secret underground passage that went from the library to the temple. Apparently the guys told their wives they wanted to hit the books but they had something else in mind. Given Artemis' popularity and lustful femininity, many scholars believe her worship was sexual in nature. If they are wrong, the archaeologists discovered the city had a large brothel just down the road from the temple. Either way you put the pieces together, Ephesus was a sexually-charged city.

In addition, the temple of Artemis was also the local bank. In the ancient world the place to keep your money safe was the temple because nobody dared rob one. If you did, you incurred the wrath of the deity and everyone who worshipped at the temple put you on their hit lists. If you wanted a mortgage or a loan for a new car in the city of Ephesus, you went to the temple of Artemis.

One additional key quality of Ephesus is that it was world-famous for its practice of the occult, witchcraft, black magic, white magic, divination, seances and the ancient version of ouija board. It was a city heavily involved in the occult.

In short, Ephesus was the leading sex-crazed, demon-worshipping city for the multi-cultural filthy rich in the ancient world. For those of you who think America is a post-Christian country, you haven't seen anything until you lived in Ephesus. Let's turn to Acts 19 and find how the Gospel came to the city.

Acts 19

A dozen clueless men — now for the rest of the story

And it happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the inland country and came to Ephesus. There he found some disciples. And he said to them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” And they said, “No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.” And he said, “Into what then were you baptized?” They said, “Into John’s baptism.” And Paul said, “John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus.” On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying. There were about twelve men in all. Acts 19:1–7 (ESV)

Paul pulled into town and he found himself alone. He was only the Christian in the city. Thankfully he found 12 guys. Who were these guys? I don’t know. Apparently they were baptized by John the Baptist at one of his wilderness revival meetings just outside of Jerusalem years 20 years before this. They repented of their sins but didn’t get the rest of the story. They repented of their sins but didn’t hear about Jesus or trust in him. Paul gave them the rest of the story. “Have you heard of the Holy Spirit?” Of course, they hadn’t heard of Christ or the Holy Spirit. These guys moved from repenting of their sins under John the Baptist to trusting in Jesus to forgive their sins and they are born again. The Holy Spirit came into their lives and made them new people. They had a dramatic born-again experience where they started prophesying and speaking in tongues. There was supernatural evidence that something supernatural just took place in their lives. They were completely changed when they got the Jesus part of the story. Just like that, Paul had 12 on his team.

As I thought about this, I realized these guys are a good picture of many people in our community. Many people have part of the gospel picture but they

don't have all of the gospel picture. I talk to people all the time who know that church involves repenting of sin. Jesus is in the mix someplace but they don't have the whole story. They don't know that God sent his son because he loves us. Jesus died in our places for all our sins. We ask him to forgive our sins and be in charge of our lives, and we are supernaturally born again. The Holy Spirit comes into our lives and changes us. Until that point, just like the dozen clueless guys in Ephesus, people are stuck in spiritual limbo when they only have part of the story.

How many people do we sit next to at football games or basketball games and we know they have a church background but we don't talk to them about Jesus. I challenge us to press it, just a bit. Ask them what it means to be a Christian. Do they talk about Jesus? Do they talk about him being in charge of their lives and forgiving their sins because God loves them? You will be surprised how many people don't have all of the story. Until people have the full story, they are stuck in spiritual limbo. Their lives will not be changed until somebody, that should be us, gives them the rest of the story. We are called to be personal versions of Paul of Tarsus and Paul Harvey and give them the rest of the story.

Obstinate Jews — rejecting the story doesn't mean the end of the story

And he entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God. But when some became stubborn and continued in unbelief, speaking evil of the Way before the congregation, he withdrew from them and took the disciples with him, reasoning daily in the hall of Tyrannus. This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks. Acts 19:8–10 (ESV)

Paul adopted his usual strategy, which is to start with the Jews. He went to the synagogue and started showing from the Old Testament that Jesus is the Christ. No doubt, he went through some of the same texts in Isaiah we just went studied at Christmas. I am sure he showed them some of the same Psalms about Jesus that we studied two Christmases ago. These Jews should be the first to grab on to Jesus. They know their Old Testament probably better than we know ours. Even though Paul reasoned clearly and convincingly from the Bible and he had the evidence of a dozen men whose lives were supernaturally changed so they prophesied and spoke in tongues, the Jews refused to change. That is one thing churches don't do well: Change.

After three months of trying to convince them about Jesus, Paul tossed in the towel. He decided to start his own little ministry in this huge pagan city. He rented a room at the lecture hall of Tyrannus. Tyrannus was apparently a philosopher. I assume nobody liked his lectures so he went broke. Now he had an empty lecture hall he had to pay taxes on. Paul offered to rent it from him, and he started preaching. Some texts tells us he preached from 11 a.m.-4 p.m. almost every day. Paul became incredibly popular.

As a result, all the residents of Asia heard the Word of the Lord. That sentence is exciting. It gives us great detail about what happened in and around Ephesus. Everyone in a city of a quarter million people heard about Jesus within three years. That is without the Internet or television. Not only that, but it was not just Ephesus that heard but it was all of Asia. It was the whole region of what

is now modern day Turkey that heard about Jesus from Paul preaching in an average-size lecture hall.

How did Paul change everything in just three years? How did the news of Jesus spread? People! People came to hear his sermons about Jesus, and they became Christians. They were born again, and they couldn't help but talk about it and tell all their friends. When they traveled on business to the cities around Asia, they told everyone they met about how their lives were changed by Jesus. This was how the message spread. People were excited about what God had done in their lives and they couldn't help but share their testimonies. It is friends telling friends what Jesus did and how they heard about it from Paul, so people started showing up and things happened.

Now we get into some of the fun details.

Seven sons of Sceva — an exorcism fail blog

And God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, so that even handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were carried away to the sick, and their diseases left them and the evil spirits came out of them. Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists undertook to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, "I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims." Seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva were doing this. But the evil spirit answered them, "Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?" And the man in whom was the evil spirit leaped on them, mastered all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. And this became known to all the residents of Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks. And fear fell upon them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was extolled. Also many of those who were now believers came, confessing and divulging their practices. And a number of those who had practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted the value of them and found it came to fifty thousand pieces of silver. So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily. Acts 19:11–20 (ESV)

God was doing some extraordinary miracles through the hands of Paul. For the last two and a half months I have suffered with a cold. I filled many tissues. Trust me, I have never had anyone go through my garbage looking for used tissues to heal people and cast out demons. It hasn't happened to me, but it happened to Paul. I love the way God was breaking the gospel into this city. He was doing it with incredible supernatural power in a city that thought it had the corner on the supernatural market.

When you have a pagan city with demonic worship, you have a fair amount of demon possession. The seven sons of Sceva saw a business opportunity. Here was a city with a bunch of demon-possessed people running around town. Let's open up a business. These guys were the original Ghost Busters. I don't know if they drove an old ambulance, but they were ghost busters. They heard about Paul and people's lives changing by this guy Jesus. They heard about Paul's old tissues being used to drive out demons so they figured they should at least use the name of Jesus and Paul in their exorcisms. It could only help business.

So the ghost busters tried whipping out the name of Jesus during an exorcism, and we have a major fail blog for Youtube. The demon answers from inside the man, "Jesus I know. Paul I know. I am not messing with Jesus or Paul, but who the heck are you?"

UFC cage fighting is not a new thing. Here we have the original cage fight. It is seven sons of Sceva in one corner of the house and the demon-possessed guy in the other corner. You have to picture this. The demon-

possessed guy tore off their clothes, got them on the floor and beat them to a pulp. There were no gloves to soften the blows. There was no referee to call the fight. Picture seven naked guys after getting their faces beaten so hard they looked like hamburger. They had their hands in the air, and they were all screaming like a junior high school girl. After they left, the possessed guy was standing at the door saying, “Jesus I am afraid of. Paul I won’t mess with, but seven on one with you guys, is a piece of cake.”

You can understand why that kind of news traveled fast. People started realizing a new game was in town. This Jesus thing was not like all the other demonic religions they had in the neighborhood. Jesus was not just another power or another religion. Jesus was the son of God and he was pushing around the spiritual powers out there. They were afraid of him! This is a big theme in the book of Ephesians. Jesus is not just part of the spiritual world, he is over the spiritual world.

In our society, just like Ephesus, people think Jesus is one of many ways to God. He is just another deity to add to the shelf. In Ephesians it comes screaming out of the book that Jesus is over every spiritual power out there. You are not dealing with a second-rate demon or angel. You are talking about God, and everything bows to Jesus.

What happened in Ephesus was a seismic shift in people’s faith. For quite some time people were following Jesus, but they kept their books on black magic and casting spells. They kept celebrating the regular holidays to Artemis, the fertility goddess, because, after all, you have to keep your bases covered. Then

people were realizing that when you come to Christ, you get rid of all that other stuff in your life. You go all in for Jesus. There are no half-baked Christians. Either Jesus is Lord of all or he is not Lord at all. People started repenting of their old lifestyles.

These guys had a massive book burning party to get rid of their books on how to cast spells on their friends and neighbors. The value of what was burned was approximately \$6 million dollars. That was a pricey book burning party.

There is a lesson in this. When you come to Jesus, you will soon realize God is calling you to have a bonfire. When you come to Jesus, there are things in your life God calls you to burn and leave behind. You need to get rid of them. For some of us, this will be hard because we put a lot of time and money into our old lives, but if you are going to follow Jesus, it needs to go. For some of you that is pornography that you have hidden under your bed. It is a paid account you have on your computer for access to things you know you shouldn't look at. For some of you it is your movie collection. I have a friend who has a massive movie collection. Most of it leaves me embarrassed to look at the covers. If he comes to Christ, God will call him to have a burning party. You can't really sell the movies. You can't give them to somebody else to pollute his or her mind. There is no point in keeping it. The only option is burn it. What is God calling you to burn?

Demetrius — the union, goddess worship and financial loss

Now after these events Paul resolved in the Spirit to pass through Macedonia and Achaia and go to Jerusalem, saying, "After I have been there, I must also see Rome." And having sent into Macedonia two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, he himself stayed in Asia for a while. About that time there arose no little

disturbance concerning the Way. For a man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought no little business to the craftsmen. These he gathered together, with the workmen in similar trades, and said, "Men, you know that from this business we have our wealth. And you see and hear that not only in Ephesus but in almost all of Asia this Paul has persuaded and turned away a great many people, saying that gods made with hands are not gods. And there is danger not only that this trade of ours may come into disrepute but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis may be counted as nothing, and that she may even be deposed from her magnificence, she whom all Asia and the world worship." When they heard this they were enraged and were crying out, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" So the city was filled with the confusion, and they rushed together into the theater, dragging with them Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians who were Paul's companions in travel. But when Paul wished to go in among the crowd, the disciples would not let him. And even some of the Asiarchs, who were friends of his, sent to him and were urging him not to venture into the theater. Now some cried out one thing, some another, for the assembly was in confusion, and most of them did not know why they had come together. Some of the crowd prompted Alexander, whom the Jews had put forward. And Alexander, motioning with his hand, wanted to make a defense to the crowd. But when they recognized that he was a Jew, for about two hours they all cried out with one voice, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" And when the town clerk had quieted the crowd, he said, "Men of Ephesus, who is there who does not know that the city of the Ephesians is temple keeper of the great Artemis, and of the sacred stone that fell from the sky? Seeing then that these things cannot be denied, you ought to be quiet and do nothing rash. For you have brought these men here who are neither sacrilegious nor blasphemers of our goddess. If therefore Demetrius and the craftsmen with him have a complaint against anyone, the courts are open, and there are proconsuls. Let them bring charges against one another. But if you seek anything further, it shall be settled in the regular assembly. For we really are in danger of being charged with rioting today, since there is no cause that we can give to justify this commotion." And when he had said these things, he dismissed the assembly. Acts 19:21–41 (ESV)

Paul was about ready to head out of town. After three years in this ultra-pagan, demonic, sexual city everybody had heard the gospel. There was massive repentance. People were leaving the occult and burning their demonic books. Lives were changed. The church was rockin' the city. Paul was ready to start another revolution in a city near you.

Before he headed out of town, there was a city-wide uprising against the Christians. Demetrius and his buddies from the union ran the souvenir stands

outside the temple of Artemis. They were going broke. Nobody was buying their silver trinkets. Nobody was going to Artemis' temple. Everybody was going to church. Demetrius' family was hungry because people were rejecting paganism and sex worship for Jesus, which I find incredibly exciting.

I love Demetrius' rallying cry, "Paul is persuading people that gods made with hands are really not gods at all." What do you mean? They couldn't make God? These guys probably couldn't even make breakfast without burning the toast, yet they claimed they could make God. You have to love the humor in the Bible.

These guys took their financial loss and turned it into a spiritual issue. They claimed there was danger that the temple of the great goddess Artemis could be counted as nothing. I love this. Was business over at the fertility goddess really that bad because so many people were now going to church? This was a worldwide fertility religion taking a serious hit from Jesus in only three years in the fourth-largest city of the Roman Empire. It gets even better. Then Demetrius moved from making it a financial issue to a spiritual issue to a national issue. They claimed that so many people were now going to church and Artemis was so neglected that Ephesus would lose its place of prominence in the world. I love this!

Demetrius and his union brothers got everybody into the theater where they started screaming, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians." Let me show you this



theatre. The theatre in Ephesus was huge. It seated 24,500 people. The theatre was full. It was like one of those massive stadium events where the crowd is shouting back and forth, “We love Artemis, yes we do. We love Artemis how about you?” Everybody was there. People didn’t even know why they were there. It was an excuse to get off of work so they were for it.

It was a complete mob scene. Paul was thrilled — 25,000 people in an auditorium, what a perfect opportunity to preach! Everybody was begging him not to because they knew Paul would not mince his words.

For two hours these guys were doing the wave in the theatre and chanting for Artemis. They were only quieted down by the town clerk who warned them that if they didn’t take a chill pill, Rome would do something nasty. You didn’t want the Roman army to show up. It really ruined your day.

Conclusion

When we think about the city of Ephesus, we need to think of it as a highly pagan city, a city filled with prostitution, witchcraft, and demonology. We need to think of it as a powerful city and a wealthy city. Ephesus was a multicultural city with all kinds of religious ideas from around the world. It was a very lost city.

It was also a place that was completely transformed by the good news of Jesus in only three short years. It was so transformed that the union workers making souvenirs for the temple of Artemis were going out of business.

Here is what I want each of us to remember when we think of Ephesus.
Christians can flourish and the church can grow in a dark pagan culture.

I hear people talking all the time about America entering a post-Christian era. I hear the church is dead. I hear about Christians losing their ground in society and losing their hope. I agree that our country is rapidly becoming more pagan. My hope was never in our culture, it is in the power of the gospel to change lives. The gospel that Paul preached in Ephesus is just as powerful today as it was then. It will still transform lives now, just like it used to. That is where we find our hope.

As you begin this series in Ephesians, I am asking you get into the Word of God. Some of you took Pastor Jordan's challenge to read through the Bible in a year. For many of us, that is a high bar we are not sure we can reach. My challenge to you is a low bar all of us can attain. Read the book of Ephesians. For the next four weeks, read through the book of Ephesians eight times. The book of Ephesians only has six chapters. Read through it two times a week. I recommend you read one chapter per day on Monday through Saturday and on Sunday read the entire book. Simply reading the book of Ephesians will begin to release in your life the same powerful work of the Holy Spirit that transformed the city of Ephesus so many years ago.



Dr. Kurt Trucksess is ordained in the EFCA. He enjoys reading, writing, time with his family and wrestling with his sons. His favorite topics of study are ancient rhetoric and preaching. Feel free to contact him at ktruck@gmail.com or visit his web at www.christ2Rculture.com

© Dr. Kurt Trucksess. You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce and distribute this material in any format provided that: (1) you credit the author, (2) any modifications are clearly marked, (3) you do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction, (4) you include the web site address (<http://www.christ2Rculture.com>) on the copied resource.



