

## THE CHURCH AT EPHEBUS

Ephesus was a key town, and Paul the strategist had his eye on it for the 2nd missionary journey; but God, through the Holy Spirit, had other plans, and directed Paul to Europe. (Acts 16) Paul did get to Ephesus, though just for a short while on his way home. Paul, accompanied by his 'fellow workers' Priscilla and Aquila, spent his time preaching in the Jewish synagogue. (Acts 18:18-19) The response was good - the Jews were interested and wanted to hear more, but Paul was unable to stay. Leaving Priscilla and Aquila in Ephesus, Paul returned to Antioch.

The next stage in the birth of the church at Ephesus was the arrival of Apollos. He was a Jewish believer who was an eloquent man, well versed in the Scriptures. (Acts 18:24) He spent time in the synagogue teaching that Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah. (Acts 18:28) The result was that 12 people believed.

When Paul arrived on the 3rd missionary journey he came in contact with these 12 and, finding them lacking in some areas, baptized them and they were filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 19:5-6).

Paul continued his custom of starting in the synagogue. He preached there for 3 months, pleading and arguing about the Kingdom of God, (Acts 19:8) but the usual happened: opposition arose among the Jews, and he withdrew. He then spent each day in the hall of Tyrannus, and preached the Gospel to the Gentiles.

Very little is known about the 3 years Paul spent in Ephesus, but the book of Acts does give some clues. It seems that Paul spent the mornings in tent making, or some other work to support himself, (Acts 20:34), and the rest of the day teaching in the hall of Tyrannus, or in the homes of the believers (Acts 20:20). His teaching was very comprehensive. He was able to say to the elders, when he met them at Miletus, "I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27); and "for three years I did not cease night and day to admonish everyone with tears" (Acts 20:31). He taught with the fear of God, teaching everything needed; but there were tears when correction was given.

His time in Ephesus was plagued with problems from the Jews. (Acts 20:19, 1 Cor 16:9) It seems that after the 3 months in the synagogue, the Jews started planning persecutions for Paul. None of these are recorded in Acts, but what is recorded is the amazing way the power of God was released, and the tangible effect this had on the kingdom of darkness.

"God," Luke says, "did extraordinary miracles by the hand of Paul." People were delivered of demons and physically healed even by handkerchiefs or aprons, (Acts 19:11), and people who were involved in the occult were saved and openly repented. They burned their books and divulged their practices. The value of the books burned was about 3 million US dollars. It is easy to understand why the word of God grew (Acts 19:20) when sums of this kind are involved; likewise when the Jewish exorcists were overpowered by one man, compared with the power of the Holy Spirit through Paul. Stories like these travel fast! (Acts 19:13-17)

The incident that Luke gives most space to is revealing, because it shows just how much the power of God and the Gospel affected the city and the surrounding area. So many were being saved that the sale of miniature idols (Artemis) was noticeably affected. (Acts 19:24ff). Demetrius called a trade union meeting and spoke out. The meeting became heated, and turned into "no little disturbance", so that the city was "filled with confusion" (v29). It was after this incident that Paul left for Macedonia. It is not recorded that Paul ever returned to Ephesus. He did not expect to ever go there again. (Acts 20:25,28) He did however meet the elders at Miletus, on his way back from the 3rd missionary journey. He reminded them of his example and teaching, and challenged them with their duties (Acts 20:19, 21, 26-28,31-35). He also warned them about what he knew would happen: "Fierce wolves will come in

among you, not sparing the flock, and from among your own selves will arise men speaking perverse things to draw away the disciples after them.” (Acts 20:29-30) Paul knew false teachers would be seeking to destroy the church, and predicted that they would come from within as well as outside the church. This is significant when we consider the letters to Timothy.

### **OTHER REFERENCES TO THE CHURCH AT EPHEBUS**

The first letter of Peter was written to the Christians in Asia, among others, and also possibly the second letter. 1 John is believed to have been written to this area also.

The book of Revelation includes the church at Ephesus (2:1-7). At this time the church seemed to be doing well. There was work, toil and patient endurance. They were exposing and rejecting false teachers, and not growing weary. It does seem that their love had grown cold, and needed to be rekindled; repentance is called for. One point in the church’s favor was that they hated the work of the Nicolaitans. Little is known from Scripture about this group, but church history (Irenaers) states that they were a group of people who lived in “unrestricted indulgence.”

Church tradition holds that the Apostle John lived in Ephesus as the elder during his latter years, until his death. Then Onesimus, as in Philemon, became the leading elder.