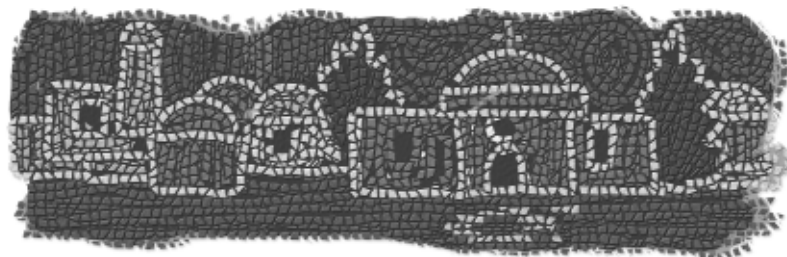


# The Church at Ephesus<sup>1</sup>



## SABBATH—SEPTEMBER 24

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY:** Acts 19; Acts 20:17-38.

**MEMORY VERSE:** “The word of the Lord spread everywhere. It became more and more powerful” (Acts 19:20, NlrV).

**THE CHURCH OF EPHESUS WAS LUCKY** to have Paul working for them. Imagine Paul as your pastor. What a blessing! The church needed Paul. The church had many enemies. Some enemies were the same as wild beasts (1 Corinthians 15:32).

This explains why Paul was close to the Ephesian church. It also explains why Paul's ministry<sup>2</sup> was long and difficult. But when Paul left Ephesus, he left with the satisfaction that would make any pastor jealous: “I haven't [have not] let anyone keep me from telling you everything God wants you to do” (Acts 20:27, NlrV).

Among the members of the Ephesian church were Aquila and Priscilla, Apollos, Timothy, and Jesus' disciple John. Each of them had an important part in the building of this church. It was one of the finest churches of the first century. What can we learn as we study this interesting church?

**A LOOK AT THIS WEEK'S LESSON:** What kind of culture did Paul face in Ephesus? What really caused his enemies to attack him? Who were Aquila and Priscilla? What was the secret of Apollos's power? What was the important message of Paul's farewell speech to the Ephesians?

\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 1.

<sup>1</sup>Ephesus—a city on what is now the western coast of Turkey.

<sup>2</sup>ministry—work for God.

**SUNDAY—SEPTEMBER 25****EPHESUS: THE STRUGGLE  
BETWEEN JESUS AND DIANA  
(Acts 19:24-29).**

Ephesus was located on the western coast of Asia Minor, near the Aegean Sea. The city was at the top of its glory in the first and second centuries A.D. It was the fourth-largest city of the Roman Empire. It was the capital of Asia Minor. Ephesus had a rich history of wealth, philosophy,<sup>3</sup> and Roman law.



The most interesting place in Ephesus was the temple of Diana. She was the goddess of fertility<sup>4</sup> who “all Asia and the world” worshiped (Acts 19:27). She was known as Artemis to the Greeks and Diana to the Romans. Diana had many followers who practiced magic and astrology.<sup>5</sup> The worship of the idol Diana also brought to Ephesus many visitors. Diana’s temple was built of mar-

ble. It was lined with gold. The temple measured 425 by 230 feet. The statue of Diana was in the center of the temple’s sanctuary. During Paul’s time, Diana’s temple was one of the seven wonders of the world. Ephesus’ trade, industry, and economy depended on the huge crowds that came to worship Diana.



The temple of Diana.

Paul came to Ephesus and said that gods like Diana were not really gods (Acts 19:24-26).

**What really made the people  
angry against the truth? Acts 19:24-  
28.**

The struggle between Jesus and Diana is as old as the struggle between Jesus and Satan. This struggle is not always about what is right and wrong. It is not always about who offers the good life and who does not.

<sup>3</sup>philosophy—the study of human wisdom.

<sup>4</sup>fertility—when the ground is able to grow a lot of food; being able to have children.

<sup>5</sup>astrology—some people believe the movement of the stars and planets affect what will happen to a person. The study of this is called astrology.

The struggle is a choice between what is now and what is eternal.<sup>6</sup> It is between the emotional and the spiritual. It is between the pleasures of life and salvation from sin.

At Ephesus, Jesus and Satan were at war. Paul was on Jesus' side. Demetrius was on Satan's side. Whose side are you on?

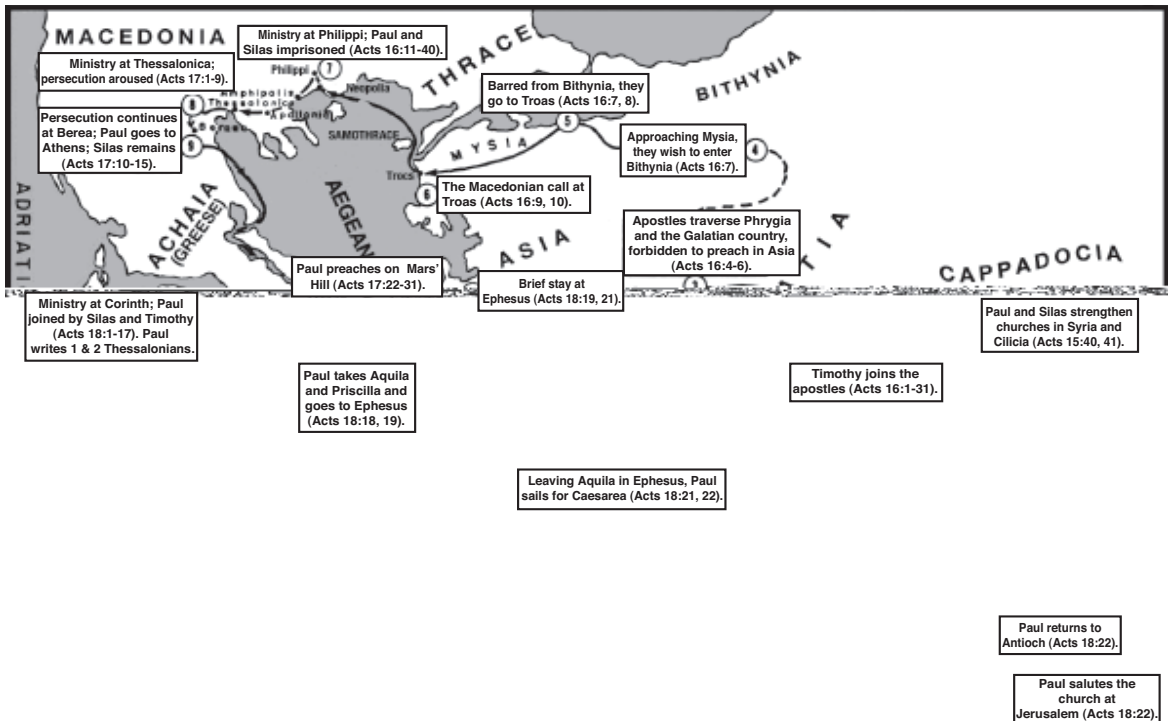
**Read again Acts 19:24-27. Paul's enemies were concerned about their livelihood (Acts 19:25). But they wanted Diana's worshipers to think they were interested in their religion (Acts 19:27). How do we sometimes make people think we are interested in Jesus when we really are more interested in something else?**

**MONDAY—SEPTEMBER 26**

**EPHESUS: AQUILA AND PRISCILLA (Acts 18:24-28).**

Paul's first visit to Ephesus was short. At the close of his second missionary journey, Paul was traveling from Corinth to Antioch on the way to Jerusalem. While in Corinth, he met Aquila and Priscilla. Paul and Aquila and Priscilla were the same in many ways. They all were Jews who had accepted Jesus as the Messiah. They all traveled a lot: Paul traveled on mission trips; Aquila and Priscilla traveled on business trips. They all were escapees: Aquila and Priscilla had escaped from Rome; Paul had escaped from many cities. They all

Paul's second missionary journey.



<sup>6</sup>eternal—forever; without beginning or end; lasting forever.

were tentmakers.

Paul, Aquila, and Priscilla made a good team for preaching the gospel. After witnessing<sup>7</sup> in Corinth, they went to Ephesus (Acts 18:19). In Ephesus, Paul preached his first sermon to Jews in the local synagogue (church). The Jews were so impressed that they asked him to stay longer. Paul said No. But he promised, “ ‘If God wants me to . . . I will come back’ ” (Acts 18:21, NIV). Paul must have known that the church at Ephesus could become a great Christian center. So he left Aquila and Priscilla behind. Aquila and Priscilla were helpful in building up the church in Ephesus. Later, Paul wrote 1 Corinthians from Ephesus (A.D. 57). In 1 Corinthians he sends the Corinthian church greetings from Priscilla and Aquila and the church that met in their house (1 Corinthians 16:19). Aquila, Priscilla, and the church at Ephesus have given us a good example of team ministry.

**Read the following verses that talk about Aquila and Priscilla. What can you learn from these verses about the character we need for Christian life and ministry? Acts 18:1-3, 18, 19; Acts 18:24-28; Romans 16:3, 4; 1 Corinthians 16:19.**

Aquila and Priscilla were a blessing to the church at Ephesus and to the early missionary movement. This is

because they brought Apollos to the full knowledge of truth (Acts 18:26). As a result, the early church gained an excellent, educated, and fearless preacher in Apollos.

**Read again Romans 16:3, 4. How many people would you be willing to risk your life for? Why would you put your life in danger? What do your answers tell you about yourself?**

## **TUESDAY—SEPTEMBER 27**

### **APOLLOS AT EPHESUS**

**(Acts 18:24-28).**

**Apollos was a Jew. But he was named after a Greek god. What is the important message for us in this fact? (Also read Daniel 1:7.)**

Before Paul began his full-time work in Ephesus, Apollos had preached to the church there. Apollos was a brilliant speaker from Alexandria. Alexandria was the second most important city in the Roman Empire. Apollos was educated in philosophy and writing. He knew the Bible well (Acts 18:24). But what is education without true belief? And what is true belief without a desire to encourage others toward what one believes in?

**Read the story about Apollos in Acts 18:24-28. What things show**

<sup>7</sup>witnessing—teaching people about God and living a Christian life.

**why he was such a powerful preacher?**

Aquila and Priscilla noticed a weakness in Apollos's message. "He only knew about John's baptism" (Acts 18:25, NIV). He did not know about Jesus' baptism. The Baptist himself knew the difference. His baptism was of water. Jesus' baptism was of the "Holy Spirit and fire" (Matthew 3:11, NKJV). It is not enough to go through the baptism of water. This baptism in itself has no saving power. It is only a symbol of something greater. John spoke of repentance<sup>8</sup> from sin. Repentance was only the first step in the gospel. The gospel calls us to repent, to believe in Jesus' death and resurrection<sup>9</sup> and to be completely changed by the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Apollos did not know about the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Aquila and Priscilla "invited him to their home. There they gave him a better understanding of the way of God" (Acts 18:26, NIV).

In the beginning, the church at Ephesus had an educated speaker preaching the Bible. The church also was responsible for turning this speaker into a true disciple of Jesus.

**Apollos had many gifts. But he also was able to understand his weakness and to change. Why is being open to change so important for any Christian? When was the last time someone tried to help you**

**change? What did you do? How can you learn to change without getting angry?**

### **WEDNESDAY—SEPTEMBER 28**

#### **PAUL AT EPHESUS (Acts 19:1-20).**

During Paul's third missionary journey, he kept his promise to return to Ephesus (Acts 18:21). He spent about three years there, preaching and establishing a strong church. "So all the Jews and Greeks who lived in Asia Minor heard the word of the Lord" (Acts 19:10, NIV). Note the words "Jews and Greeks." The church at Ephesus was a mixed church group. The Epistle (Letter) to the Ephesians explains so much about the joy and unity of this mixed group.

Paul's ministry in Ephesus began well. He taught the full truth to some of the believers who already were there. For example, some believers had the baptism of John, but not the baptism of Jesus. They had not even "heard that there is a Holy Spirit" (Acts 19:1-3, NIV). So Paul gave them more truth that they quickly accepted.

**But not everyone agreed with Paul's preaching. Even such a famous preacher as Paul could not reach all hearts. How did Paul answer his enemies? Why do you think he did what he did? Acts 19:8, 9.**

<sup>8</sup>repentance—being sorry for your sins and turning away from your sins.

<sup>9</sup>resurrection—coming back to life after dying.

Some people who heard Paul were stubborn. But both Greeks and Jews all over Asia heard Paul's message. Paul taught and preached every day over two years. And God did "unusual miracles" through him (Acts 19:11, NKJV).

The results of Paul's preaching and healing work were wonderful. Many people believed, confessed their sins, and turned from their past ways of magic and sorcery.<sup>10</sup> The world of the evil spirits was destroyed. And the city had a bonfire of books that preached religious lies (Acts 19:18, 19). Most important of all, the "word of the Lord spread everywhere. It became more and more powerful" (Acts 19:20, NIV). The Jews and the Greeks "held the name of the Lord Jesus in high honor" (Acts 19:17, NIV). But many other people in Ephesus were worried that great belief in Diana would be weakened (Acts 19:27).

**Read again Acts 19:18, 19. What did their new faith cost these people? What has your faith cost you? Look inside your heart. What do you need to throw into the bonfire?**

### **THURSDAY—SEPTEMBER 29**

#### **THE DEEP INFLUENCE OF PAUL'S MINISTRY (Acts 20:17-38).**

Paul served in Ephesus for three years. Then he left for Macedonia,

Greece, and Troas. He also planned his return trip to Jerusalem. This trip included a stop in Miletus, some thirty miles from Ephesus. Paul called the Ephesian church elders to Miletus for a time of fellowship. Of all the churches Paul established and visited, Ephesus was very close and special to him. Paul's deep love for the church in Ephesus is shown in his farewell speech (Acts 20:18-35).

**Note the following parts of Paul's ministry. Then give a reason why each part is important to anyone's ministry:**

1. Paul lived what he preached (Acts 20:18).
2. Paul worked with heartfelt sincerity (Acts 20:19).
3. Paul spoke the truth in public and in private talks (Acts 20:20).
4. Paul had the same message for both Jews and Greeks. That message was to have faith in Jesus (Acts 20:21).
5. In Paul's life, service came first (Acts 20:24-26).
6. Paul preached everything God wanted the people to know (Acts 20:27).
7. Paul gave to other people the responsibility for taking care of the church. He also warned of the dangers in ministry (Acts 20:28-31).
8. Paul believed that Christ's blood purchased the church (Acts 20:28).
9. Paul believed in supporting himself (Acts 20:33-35).

<sup>10</sup>sorcery—magic people do because evil spirits control them; witchcraft.



Paul supported himself by making tents.

Paul left the Ephesian church under the care of good leaders (Acts 20:17). Paul also chose Timothy to work in Ephesus. Paul told Timothy “not to teach things that aren’t [are not] true. Command them [the Ephesian church members] not to spend their time on stories that aren’t true. They must not waste time on family histories that never end.<sup>11</sup> Things like that cause people to argue instead of doing God’s work. His [God’s] work is done by faith” (1 Timothy 1:3, 4, NIV).

The Ephesian church also profited from the work and advice of Jesus’ beloved disciple John (see Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 194). The early church father Irenaeus<sup>12</sup>

(A.D. 130–200) wrote that John lived in Ephesus (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 2.22.5, 3.1.1). John must have been a source of great strength and joy to the church at Ephesus.

**What about Paul’s farewell speech to the Ephesians in Acts 20:18-35 touches you the most? Why? What have you learned from Paul’s speech? How can his speech improve your walk with God?**

### FRIDAY—SEPTEMBER 30

**ADDITIONAL STUDY:** Read God’s praises and warnings to the church at Ephesus in Revelation 2:1-7. How does Revelation 2:1-7 speak to you and your local church? To learn about the great challenges facing the church in Ephesus, read *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 281–297.

“Through Priscilla and Aquila, Apollos received a clearer understanding of the Bible. Apollos became one of the best defenders of the Christian church. Apollos was a deep thinker and a wonderful speaker. But he learned the way of the Lord more perfectly from the teachings of a Christian man and woman (Priscilla and Aquila) who were humble tentmakers.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White Comments, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*,

<sup>11</sup>family histories that never end—this refers to the Jewish practice of trying to trace your family back to King David or a priest.

<sup>12</sup>Irenaeus—a well-known early church leader, thinker, and writer.

vol. 6, p. 1063.

“The unreligious magicians of long ago are the same as the spiritualists, false prophets, and fortunetellers of today. . . . If God would remove the veil from our eyes, we should see evil angels using all their arts to deceive (trick) and to destroy.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 290.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

1. Every person and historical period must choose between idols and Christ. What idols are strong in your society? How can you help others choose Christ? How can you help other church members not to worship idols?
2. Have someone in the class read aloud Paul’s farewell speech to the Ephesians (Acts 20:18-35). As a class, discuss what comes to your minds about this speech.
3. Read again about those who burned all their books (Acts 19:18, 19). Was burning books going too far? What message can we learn from their actions? Ask class members to share their own experiences of having had to get rid of something for the Lord. What was it? Why did they believe they had to get rid of it? Are they sorry or glad they did get rid of it?