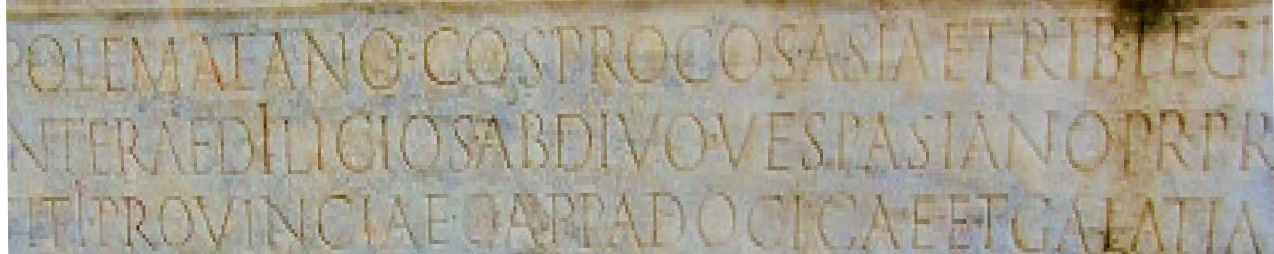




FOUNDATIONS

Lessons in Discipleship
from the New Testament Church



Study Guide



CENTER FOR
HOLY LANDS STUDIES

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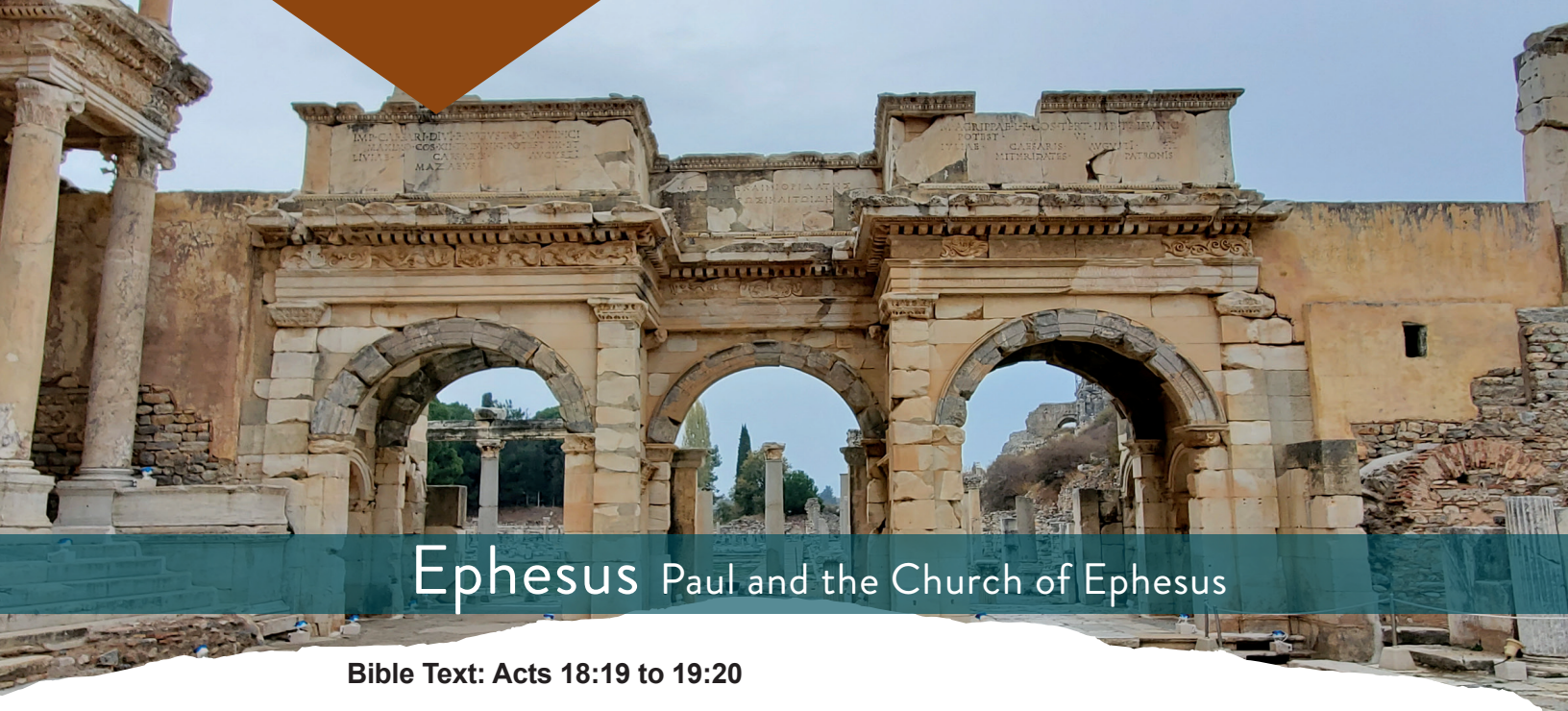
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Ephesus Paul and the Church of Ephesus

Bible Text: Acts 18:19 to 19:20

How do you feel when someone steps in and takes control of something in your life? Perhaps a business that you have spent your life building. Or maybe it's a project you were working on, and when you were 80 percent of the way there, you handed it off to someone else for completion. It's not comfortable releasing something that you have worked hard on, something that has your investment and time incorporated into its outcome.

Maybe you have a dream that you want to see come to fruition, but the timing is not right, the finances are not there, yet you have all the plans worked out. In this situation, it is difficult to shrug it off! This reality carries an even more significant burden when the dream we are hoping for and the work we are doing are not only ours, but are focused on winning people to the kingdom of God.

When we first take that step in saying yes to being a disciple of Christ, our mindset changes to become less individually focused and more kingdom-focused.

Being a disciple of Christ becomes part of our identity. The rest of our life now centers on answering the question, "How can I participate in building up the kingdom of God?"

But what happens in your excitement when you feel like God is directing you to take a back seat in what your ideas are for the Kingdom? What happens when you are seemingly fulfilling your passion for the Kingdom, and God says, "Hold on there one minute"?

As far as we know, in the second half of the first century AD, there was no one like the apostle Paul when it came to planting churches in the Greco-Roman world. Almost everywhere Paul went, the gospel was preached, lives were changed, and churches were planted. These are the same churches whose examples still teach us today.

Based on his previous work, what do you think happened to Paul when he arrived in the city of Ephesus, one of the largest cities in the entire Roman Empire?

WATCH PAUL AND THE CHURCH OF EPHESUS VIDEO



When Paul's ministry began in Acts 13, he was one of three people out on the first missionary journey. The three were Barnabas, Paul, and John Mark. At first, Paul was not the leader. Instead, it was Barnabas. Paul and John Mark served as helpers to Barnabas. The three left Antioch to spread the gospel to the Roman world. The work of the ministry of Jesus Christ was assigned to them.

During his second missionary journey, Paul led a group of companions as he traveled throughout the Mediterranean area. Paul was then in a situation he could begin to give responsibility to others.

Paul was willing and able to delegate to grow God's kingdom.

Delegating can be difficult. Often, we want things done the way we want them done! Do you know what I mean? Is it possible someone may have another way of working or presenting? Paul took a step back and encouraged others to use their gifts and calling to further the message of Christ and the kingdom of God.

Though Paul could only stay in Ephesus for a short time sharing the gospel in the synagogue, he had Aquila and Priscilla stay behind to fan the spark that was beginning. Aquila and Priscilla were capable leaders from their time spent working and learning under Paul in Corinth.

Neither Aquila, Priscilla, or Paul knew they would meet a person of the caliber of Apollos in Ephesus. Apollos played a vital role in the development of the Early Church. By leaving Ephesus and going to Achaia in southern Greece, Apollos essentially made Ephesus a missionary sending city. Ephesus became a springboard for the gospel to regions that had yet to hear the gospel message.

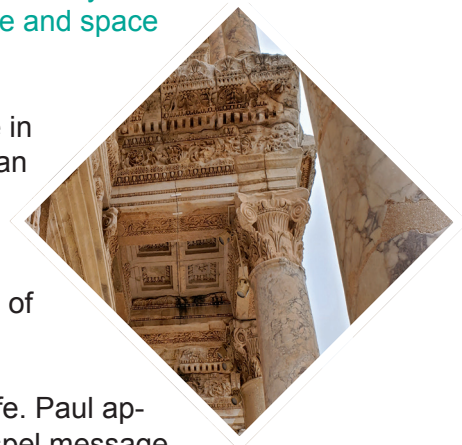
Many of the New Testament churches, like the churches of Colossae, Laodicea, Smyrna, and Philadelphia were not planted by Paul. This does not lessen Paul's role in the days of the New Testament, but it does tell us that the New Testament church's growth spread far beyond the work of just one or two individuals. It took a network of men and women who were willing to follow God's call. They had been taught,

instructed, and disciplined by one who had already said yes to God, someone like Paul, Aquila, Pricilla, or Apollos. Their work changed the Roman world of the first century and still has an impact today.

You come from a long line of individuals who have said yes to God. You may not know these individuals. You may have never heard their names. You may not know their story. The biblical text shows us that what happened in Ephesus was the start of something greater than just one or two people.

God utilized individuals to do even greater works than anyone realized, spanning an even greater distance of time and space than Ephesus.

Paul's theological influence has a strong presence in the Church's foundation. Paul contributed more than 37,500 words or 32,000 words of the New Testament. In contrast, another individual contributed about 5,500 more words than Paul. His name was Luke. He is the author of Acts and the Gospel of Luke.



Paul's influence was incredibly evident in Luke's life. Paul appears to be the one who introduced him to the gospel message (Acts 16:8 -10). God's plans for Paul were great, and arguably just as great for Luke. God brought Paul to a time when he was forced to stay in the same location for over two years. Through this stay, God carried out the work He had planned for Luke. His written works impacted generations to come, and still do today.

Acts chapters 23 to 27 record Paul's time in Caesarea in Judea. He was placed under the authority of procurators Felix and Festus. They held him captive until Paul appealed to Caesar in Rome. Luke, originally from Asia Minor, modern-day Turkey, traveled with Paul upon his arrest. Luke chose to stay with Paul during his time in Caesarea. During this time, Luke began a God-ordained task. He produced a written account of the birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ. Luke produced the gospel that carries his name.

Today, Luke's Gospel serves as the longest and most complete of all four Gospels. It gives arguably the most significant understanding of the character and ministry of Jesus found in a singular work in the New Testament. Notice, without the pause of Paul's ministry in Judea, Luke

would never have had the opportunity to interview the eyewitness of the events from the life of Jesus. Luke was not a witness to the events of the gospel. Instead, Luke came to know Christ over fifteen years after the events took place. Luke never physically walked with Jesus through the towns and areas where miracles were performed. Yet his writings have been passed on to us, two thousand years later in the Gospel of Luke.

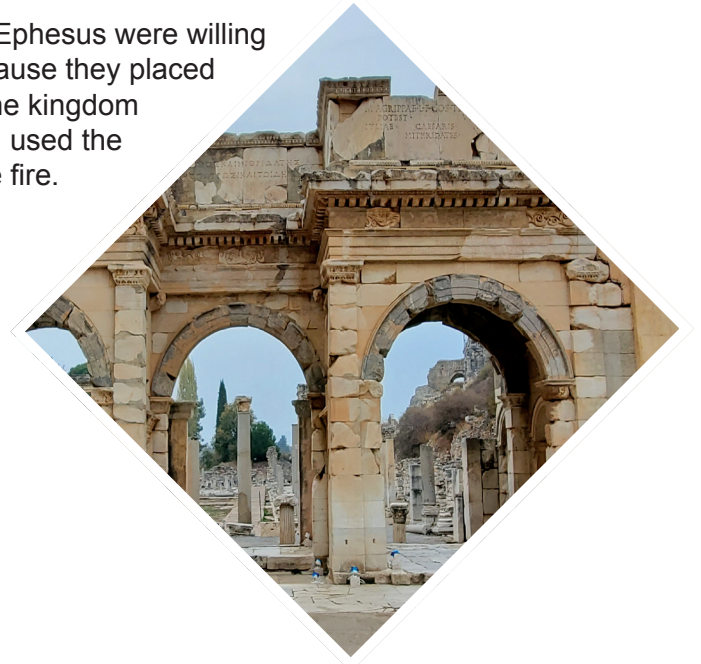
Perhaps it is easy to review the events in Paul's life in Ephesus and in Caesarea with Luke, and think, *"Was that hard on Paul? He worked so hard, and in the end, others shone brighter while he sat imprisoned."*

Romans 1:1 tells us a different story. Paul identified himself as *"a slave of Christ Jesus."* Paul understood that he was in the world to do the bidding of the Master. Whether the will of the master was accomplished with or without him, Paul continued to be *"full of joy"* (Philippians 4:4) regardless of his outcome.

Suppose we, like Paul, set ourselves in a similar mindset. In that case, we will understand that an individual's value in the kingdom of God rests not in abilities, rather in a sincere desire and willingness to be used by God. Paul knew it was not about him. He did not let selfish desires overtake the work that God was doing in and through others. Paul played his role as commanded by God.

Paul, Luke, and the men and women of Ephesus were willing to be used by God. They were used because they placed God's desires above their own. In this, the kingdom of God grew. They were willing, and God used the church in Ephesus to spark a passionate fire.

"So the message about the Lord spread widely and had a powerful effect." (Acts 19:20)



DIG DEEPER



One could look at the events in Paul's life in Ephesus and in Caesarea with Luke and think, "Was that hard on Paul? He worked so hard, and in the end, others shone brighter while he sat imprisoned."

Do you notice others? Inately, we are self-focused individuals. Our bodies are created to make sure that we are okay, and we are supposed to care for ourselves! At times it takes effort to really see another person, realizing that they too, have a purpose, needs, and feelings. Who do you need to see? What are their gifts that could be used in the spread of the gospel?

PERSONAL REFLECTION
