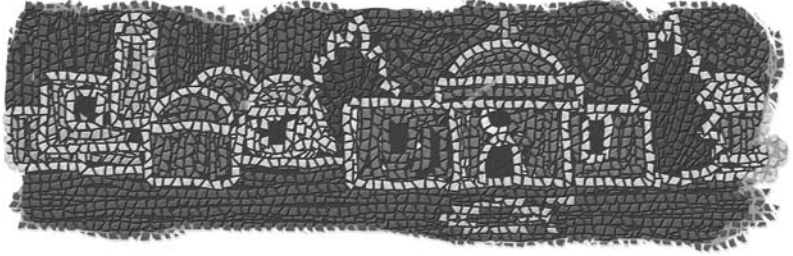


# The Church at Ephesus



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Acts 19, 20:17-38.*

**Memory Text:** “So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed” (*Acts 19:20, NKJV*).

The Ephesian church was fortunate to have had the ministry of Paul. Imagine—Paul as your minister? What a blessing! It needed a Paul too. The church itself had many enemies, some as ferocious as wild beasts (*1 Cor. 15:32*), and this explains all the more Paul's closeness to the Ephesian congregation. No wonder his ministry there was long and arduous, but when he left, he did so with the satisfaction that would be the envy of any pastor: “‘I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God’” (*Acts 20:27, NIV*).

Among others associated with the church were Aquila and Priscilla, Apollos, Timothy, and the apostle John. Each of them had a role to play in the building of this church, one of the finest of the first century. What can we learn as we delve into this fascinating and instructive moment in early Christian history?

**The Week at a Glance:** What kind of culture did Paul face in Ephesus? What really motivated much of the opposition against him? Who were Aquila and Priscilla? What was the secret of Apollos's power? What was the essence of Paul's farewell address to the Ephesians?

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

## **Ephesus: Jesus v. Diana** (*Acts 19:24-29*)

Located at the western edge of Asia Minor, with easy access to the Aegean Sea, Ephesus was at the height of its glory in the first and second centuries A.D. The fourth-largest city of the Roman Empire, the capital of Asia Minor, Ephesus boasted of a rich heritage of wealth, philosophy, and Roman law.

Perhaps the most attractive point about the city was its temple of Diana, the goddess of fertility whom “all Asia and the world” worshiped (*Acts 19:27*). Known as Artemis to the Greeks and Diana to the Romans, the goddess had a cult of followers who practiced magic and astrology; the worship of this figure also brought to the city a flood of worshipers and tourists. Built of marble and lined with gold, her temple measured 324 x 164 feet and held in the center of its inner sanctuary the image of Diana. During Paul’s time the temple was considered one of the seven wonders of the world, and the city’s commerce, industry, and economy depended on the multitudes flocking there to worship Diana.

Into this city, absorbed with the worship of the deity of fertility, entered Paul proclaiming, “they are not gods which are made with hands” (*Acts 19:26, NKJV*). In other words, his message struck at the heart of all that these people held dear.

**Read Acts 19:24-28. What was the real issue that caused the people to react against the truth as they did?**

The conflict between Christ and Diana is as old as the conflict between Christ and Satan. The war is not always about what is right and wrong or about who offers the good life and who does not. The conflict is an appeal to the immediate as opposed to the eternal, to the emotional as opposed to the spiritual, to the pleasures of life as opposed to salvation from sin.

At Ephesus the two stood in confrontation. Paul was on one side, Demetrius on the other, and both were appealing in the name of religion. That raises a point we can forget only at our peril: We confront an Ephesus at every corner, and that includes our own hearts.

**Read again the argument made against Paul and his faith. Notice how his opponents justified their opposition so that it appeared their concerns weren’t just about their own livelihood but about something greater than themselves. In what ways do we do the same thing, making excuses for what we do on the pretext of some cause greater than ourselves when, in the end, our real and immediate concern is only ourselves?**

**Key Text:** *Acts 19:20*

### Teachers Aims:

1. To acquaint the student with the environment in which Paul wrote his letter to the Ephesians.
2. To stress the importance of one's willingness to grow and learn in the Christian faith.
3. To draw a parallel between the issues and problems that the church in Ephesus faced and those that we as Christians face today.

### Lesson Outline:

#### I. Jesus v. Diana (*Acts 19:34, KJV*)

- A. Paul's message is profoundly disruptive to the Ephesian way of life.
- B. The goddess Diana, as worshiped by the Ephesians, can be regarded as a symbol of the attractive but empty values that the world offers as the alternative to Christ.
- C. In order to be a Christian, we often must go against our own impulses and even against what appears to be self-interest.

#### II. The Church at Ephesus (*Acts 18:24-26*)

- A. Then, as now, dedicated laypeople, such as Aquila and Priscilla, are essential in accomplishing the mission of the church.
- B. Apollos, although having plenty of reasons to be arrogant, is willing to accept new knowledge from Aquila and Priscilla.
- C. As Christians, we often must put aside our egos and accept correction from people whom we might regard as inferior to us.

#### III. Paul and Ephesus (*Eph. 1:1*)

- A. Paul was attached particularly to the church at Ephesus.
- B. Ephesus, as a central point of the Hellenistic world, especially was prone to intellectual fads and false or meaningless doctrinal disputes.
- C. Paul suits his leadership style and parting instructions to the unique situation in Ephesus.

**Summary:** Unlike many of the other churches to which Paul wrote, Ephesus is in many ways a good example of Christian faith. We can continue to be inspired by the Ephesians' faithful witness in the midst of a profoundly alien culture and by the dedication of its members.

## COMMENTARY

*Ephesus* means "desirable." Before the gospel reached that city, Ephesus was noted as a center of commerce, as the fourth largest city in the Roman Empire, and as a great melting pot of Greek philosophy and Roman philosophy of law. It was also the famous center for its reigning goddess, Diana. But the entry of the gospel of

## Ephesus: Aquila and Priscilla

Paul's first visit to Ephesus was a brief one, at the close of his second missionary journey, en route from Corinth to Antioch on the way to Jerusalem. While in Corinth, he met Aquila and Priscilla. The three had much in common: They were Jews who had accepted Jesus as the Messiah. They had traveled quite a bit—Paul on mission, the couple on business. They were refugees—the couple driven from Rome and Paul from many cities. And they all were tentmakers.

Forged out of necessity, born out of love for Jesus, and burdened with sharing the gospel, the threesome made an effective team ministry. After witnessing in Corinth, the three went to Ephesus (*Acts 18:19*). There Paul preached his first sermon (as his custom was) to Jews in the local synagogue. His audience was so impressed that they requested him to stay longer, but he declined, promising, “I will return . . . God willing” (*vs. 21, NKJV*). The apostle must have sensed the potential of Ephesus to become a great Christian center, and so he left Aquila and Priscilla behind. The two faithful laypersons became instrumental in the establishment of the early believers at Ephesus. Later, when Paul wrote 1 Corinthians (c. A.D. 57) from Ephesus, he sends the Corinthian church greetings from Priscilla and Aquila and the church that met in their house (*1 Cor. 16:19*). The lay couple and the church at Ephesus have left us a meaningful role model in lay ministry, particularly that of team ministry.

**Read** the following passages that refer to Aquila and Priscilla: **Acts 18:2, 3, 18, 19; 1 Cor. 16:19; Rom. 16:3, 4.** From these texts, what can you learn about the characteristics essential for Christian life and ministry?

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Aquila and Priscilla were a blessing, not only to the Ephesus church but also to the early missionary movement in that they brought Apollos to the full knowledge of truth (*Acts 18:26*). Consequently, the early church gained an eloquent, educated, cultured, and fearless preacher in Apollos.

**Reread Romans 16:3, 4.** How many people would you be willing to risk your life for? For what causes would you endanger your life? Mull over your answers. What conclusions can you draw from them about yourself?

Jesus revealed that all these factors do not contribute to what is truly desirable. During this quarter we will study that which is meaningful and desirable in God’s perspective: a changed life, being restored to a perfect relationship with God and with one another.

Today’s study introduces the city, the beginnings of the church, and Paul’s Epistle to that church.

### **I. Ephesus, the City of Diana**

During Paul’s time, the most significant point about Ephesus was not its wealth, commerce, or learning but its religion. Diana—the goddess of fertility whom “all Asia and the world” worshiped (*Acts 19:27*)—dominated the city’s life. A cult centered around magic, astrology, and sex—the worship of Diana catered to human pleasures and perversions under the respective garb of religion. The religious phenomenon was matched by the physical grandeur of Diana’s temple overriding the city’s skyline. Built of marble and lined with gold, the temple measured 324 by 164 feet. It was considered one of the seven wonders of the world, attracting the worship of the royalty and the poor, the philosopher and the illiterate.

Into this city came the gospel of Jesus, with Paul proclaiming that “they be no gods, which are made with hands” (*Acts 19:26*). The gospel polarized the city: between the false god of fertility and the Maker of a “new man” (*Eph. 2:15*); between Demetrius and the craftsmen who made their living by selling Diana’s silver replicas and Paul, who proclaimed Jesus in whom life took on new meaning and purpose (*Acts 19:4, 5*).

For us, Ephesus is symbolic of the cosmic challenge of choice that confronts every age, every person: Diana or Jesus? The falsehood of Satan or the truth and life as in Jesus? Until every city and people group that are captives to the allurements of today’s Dianas hear the transforming message of Christ, the work of every modern Aquila, Priscilla, Apollos, and Paul must continue.

### **II. Ephesus: the Beginnings of the Church**

After a brief visit during his homeward journey to Jerusalem from the second missionary journey, Paul left his early converts and fellow tentmakers, Aquila and Priscilla, in Ephesus to be quiet witnesses for the gospel. This lay couple’s ministry and their faithful teamwork provided a model Christian home church that became the hub of the good news of Jesus and led to the establishment of the first church in Ephesus (*Acts 18:2, 3, 18, 19*).

Ephesus was also the beneficiary of the ministry of Apollos, a Jew with a Roman name, in itself a symbol that the church of Jesus is a uniting church with no difference between people. Eloquent, learned, and mighty in the Scriptures, Apollos preached “diligently the things of the Lord” (*Acts 18:25*). So effective was his preaching that Aquila and Priscilla made him their houseguest and filled in

**Apollos at Ephesus** (*Acts 18:24-28*)

**In this** account, we have a Jew who is named after a Greek god. What’s a subtle but important message for us in this fact? See also *Dan. 1:7*.

Even before Paul began his full-fledged ministry at Ephesus, the church there was exposed to Apollos, a brilliant orator from Alexandria, the second most important city in the Roman Empire. A Jew from that great center of Greek learning, he was highly cultured and learned in philosophy and rhetoric and knew the Scriptures well (*Acts 18:24*). But what is culture without conviction? And what is conviction without a passion to persuade others toward what one is convinced about?

**Read** the account of Apollos in *Acts 18:24-28*. What things are expressed there that reveal why he was so powerful an evangelist?

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Despite all that he had going for him, Aquila and Priscilla detected a deficiency in Apollos’s message. Evidently “he knew only the baptism of John” (*Acts 18:25, NKJV*), not the baptism of Jesus. The Baptist himself knew the difference: One was of water, the other was of the “ ‘Holy Spirit and fire’ ” (*Matt. 3:11, NKJV*). It is not enough to go through the ritual of baptism. A ritual has no saving power. It is only a symbol of something deeper and greater. John spoke of repentance from sin, and this was only the first step. The whole gospel calls us to repent and believe in Jesus—His death and resurrection—and be transformed by the baptism of the Holy Spirit. This Apollos did not know, and Aquila and Priscilla “took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately” (*Acts 18:26, NKJV*).

The church at Ephesus, thus, early in its beginnings, not only had the benefit of a great scholar expounding the Scriptures but also became the venue of turning this scholar into a true disciple of Christ.

**Apparently, among his other attributes, Apollos was able to receive instruction and correction. Why is being open to correction so important for any Christian? When was the last time someone attempted to correct you on something? How did you respond? How can you learn to accept needed correction better?**

some blanks in his message, one of which was Christ’s gift to the church—the Holy Spirit. Apollos, no doubt, accepted the fullness of the gospel and went on with his work of “publicly showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ” (*Acts 18:28, NKJV*). Later, Paul acknowledged the usefulness of Apollos’s ministry by including him with Peter and himself as a faithful sower and nurturer of the gospel seed (*1 Cor. 1:12*).

Thus, early in its existence, the church at Ephesus became a learning center, a witnessing outlet, and a prime example of unity and love that should exist among believers. This church the risen Jesus “used as a symbol of the entire Christian church in the apostolic age.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 578.

Paul, of course, was primarily responsible for the growth and development of such a thriving center of Christianity in a city divided by political intrigue and prejudices, by struggles between the affluent and the oppressed, and various religious factions. It

## Inductive Bible Study

**Texts for Discovery:** *Acts 19; 20:17-38; Ephesians 2:8, 9; 4:8-11; 1 Peter 4:10, 11*

❶ If you offer your child a piggyback ride now or a brand-new bike tomorrow, which will he or she choose? Why are we drawn to what is close at hand over a more valuable gift soon to come? Review Acts 19:24-41. These verses record the turmoil in the Ephesian church between the message of Jesus Christ and the worship of the goddess Diana. How will you invite God to help you choose what is truly worthwhile? Who needs to hear the story of your choice and its benefits? How will you tell them?

❷ Paul records that Aquila and Priscilla “laid down their own necks” (*Rom. 16:4*) in ministry. Discuss the level of commitment this phrase implies. How did their service bless the people of Ephesus? In what ways are you reaping the benefits of their ministry? Why does God ask us to follow their example? How can you follow their example?

❸ It is fun to watch first-graders finally master all 26 letters of the alphabet. They beam with the wonder of having acquired so much knowledge, thinking it is all they will ever need to know. Apollos preached Jesus with “thorough knowledge” and “great fervor” (*Acts 18:24, 25, NIV*); yet, there was more he needed to learn (*vs. 26*). Discuss the ways God has reached you with deeper insights about His Word. How can this review prepare you to work with those who need to learn more about the gospel?

## Paul at Ephesus *(Acts 19:1-20)*

During Paul's third missionary journey he kept the promise he made to the Ephesians (*Acts 18:21*) and returned to the great city where he spent about three years preaching and establishing a strong church. "All who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks" (*19:10, NKJV*). Note the phrase *Jews and Greeks*. The church at Ephesus was a mixed congregation that provides the backdrop for the joy and celebration of unity and relationships the Epistle to the Ephesians speaks so much about.

Paul's ministry in the city began on the right note: bringing the fullness of truth to some of the believers who were already there. As in the case of Apollos, these believers had the baptism of John but not of Jesus and had not even "heard whether there is a Holy Spirit" (*vss. 1-3, NKJV*). Paul, great teacher that he was, quickly gave them more light, which they readily accepted.

**Paul's** ministry there, however, did meet with opposition. Thus, even such a great evangelist couldn't reach all hearts. How did he respond to that opposition? Why do you think he did what he did?

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Despite the obstinacy of some (*vs. 9*), both Greeks and Jews throughout the province of Asia heard the Lord's message. Paul taught and preached daily for over two years, and God performed "unusual miracles" through him (*vs. 11, NKJV*).

Results of Paul's preaching and healing ministry were astounding. Many believed, confessed their sins, and turned from their past ways of magic and sorcery. The world of the occult was shattered, and the city had a bonfire of incantation books worth several million dollars (*vss. 18, 19*). Most important of all, the "word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed" (*vs. 20, NKJV*). Even as "the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified" (*vs. 17, NKJV*), the city was gripped with fear that "Diana may be despised and her magnificence destroyed" (*vs. 27, NKJV*).

**Read verses 18 and 19. Look at what their new faith cost these people. What has your faith cost you? Look inside your heart. What do you need to put on the bonfire?**



must have taken Paul enormous courage, patience, and, above all, reliance on the One who called him to enter the city with a gospel that was in every way counter to the lifestyle of the proud metropolis (*see Acts 19*). And yet, he did, and in his third missionary journey, he spent nearly three years building a strong center for Christ, because “all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks” (*Acts 19:10*).

### III. Ephesus: The Epistle

More than any other Epistle Paul wrote, the one to the Ephesians is of great theological and redemptive significance. This Epistle underscores the role of the church in the divine scheme of history, in which all things both in heaven and earth, as participants in the great controversy between God and Satan, move toward an ultimate and triumphal unity in Christ (*Eph. 1:10*). Nowhere in the Scriptures is this road map of God’s redemptive restoration as clearly set forth as

## Witnessing

“Thou shalt have no other gods before me. . . . Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them” (*Exod. 20:3, 5*). What could be more clear? Under no circumstances are we to substitute, or replace, God in our lives with some other creation—animate or inanimate, organic or inorganic.

Remember, we lead by example. When we exhibit Christian behaviors in our daily life, we not only reinforce these behaviors for ourselves but also for others who observe us.

Attempt to identify and eliminate anything that takes up so much time it obstructs opportunities to nourish a growing personal relationship with God. Limiting nonspiritually nourishing activities may at first be difficult for both adults and children; but think of the witness to others when word spreads that we choose activities that are physically and spiritually healthy.

Avoid saying anything to anyone that does not reflect Jesus Christ—either in tone or content. Others will quickly notice that you are not one to speak ill of people. Then they may be encouraged to model that same type of behavior the next time they are tempted to gossip or complain.

Finally, become conscious of how envy and jealousy affect those around us. By focusing on worldly possessions or earthly definitions of success, people often lose sight of the ultimate life-time goal and achievement: eternal life. By controlling our own urges when faced with a situation that might invite envy or jealousy, we set an example to others that honors Jesus Christ.

By allowing *nothing* to replace God in daily living, we are following the biblical mandate to have no other god but Him.

## **The Depth of Paul’s Ministry** (*Acts 20:17-38*)

After serving in Ephesus for three years, the apostle left on a mission to Macedonia, Greece, and Troas, and then planned his return trip to Jerusalem. The boat’s itinerary included a stop in Miletus, some thirty miles from Ephesus. Paul summoned the Ephesian church elders to Miletus for a farewell fellowship. Of all the churches Paul established and visited, Ephesus was very close and special to him. His depth of love and commitment to that church is seen in the farewell address in Acts 20:18-35.

**Note the following about Paul’s ministry and then give a reason why each is important to ministry:**

- 1. His life was as transparent as his ministry** (*vs. 18*).
- 2. He ministered with heartfelt sincerity** (*vs. 19*).
- 3. He spoke of the truth both publicly and privately** (*vs. 20*).
- 4. He had one common message to both Jews and Greeks: faith in Jesus** (*vs. 21*).
- 5. In his life, service came before self** (*vss. 24-26*).
- 6. He declared the whole counsel of God** (*vs. 27*).
- 7. He delegated responsibility for shepherding the flock and warned of the dangers in ministry** (*vss. 28-31*).
- 8. He believed that the church was purchased by Christ’s own blood** (*vs. 28*).
- 9. He believed in supporting himself** (*vss. 33-35*).

Paul left the Ephesian church under the stewardship of competent elders (*vs. 17*). The apostle also appointed Timothy to minister there, with a special commission to ensure that the Ephesians “teach no other doctrine, nor give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which cause disputes rather than godly edification which is in faith” (*1 Tim. 1:3, 4, NKJV*).

The Ephesian church also had the privilege of the ministry and counsel of the beloved disciple John (see Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 194). The early church father Irenaeus (ca. A.D. 130–200) wrote of John’s residence in Ephesus from where he wrote the Gospel (*Against Heresies*, 2.22.5; 3.1.1). The elderly disciple’s presence itself must have been a source of great strength and joy to the church at Ephesus.

**Read prayerfully Paul’s farewell address to the Ephesians in Acts 20:18-35. What points touch you the most? Write out a paragraph on that point or points: what it is, how it touches you, what you have learned from it, and how, if applied, this could better your life and enhance your walk with the Lord.**

in Ephesians. Nowhere else does the road map outline the role of all parties involved—the Trinity, the church, and the believer as an individual—in the overthrow of Satan’s diabolic schemes. The theme of the great controversy, crucial to the Seventh-day Adventist theology and mission, finds its fullest expression in the Epistle of Ephesians. Studied from this point of view, the Epistle is more than a theology of redemption, more than a philosophy of history, more than a psychology of Christian living: It is God’s ultimate expression of His will against every conceivable detour.

## Life-Application Approach

**Icebreaker:** Take a mental journey around your home. If you were preparing to move and there was limited space on the moving van, what would you choose to take? God sends us on a spiritual journey to reach others. As a class, make a list of what attitudes and skills we should take with us on our travels to reach the lost.

### Thought Questions:

❶ Lewis and Clark explored the North American continent. Marco Polo ventured into the uncharted land of China. They dared to go beyond the margins of the map. Paul established a church in Ephesus. Review the story in Acts 19 and 20:17-38. What do you think motivated him? What opposition did he meet? How is serving God like being asked to be a spiritual explorer for Him?

❷ Special miracles of healing accompanied the advance of the gospel (*see Acts 19:11*). List some of the miracles God has performed in your church family. Then discuss how difficult it was to make this list. How do we miss God’s working in our midst? What other evidences of His presence in our church and its ministry might God be hoping to reveal if we were more willing to dare for Him?

### Application Question:

When we anticipate a long absence from someone, just before we say Goodbye, we tend to share our deepest thoughts and wishes for her or him. Paul shares his heart and wisdom with the Ephesian church in Acts 20:17-38. What are the elements of this farewell address? Make a list of the advice, encouragement, and warning Paul shared. Choose at least three of the most relevant items; record them on your calendar or in your appointment book. At the end of the week, review how following this counsel was helpful to you. How might Paul’s counsel positively impact the life of your church?

**Further Study:** Read Revelation 2:1-7. Note God’s commendations and warnings to the church at Ephesus. How relevant are these to you and your local church?

Read *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 281–297. Note the great challenges Ephesus posed to evangelism.

“Through their [Priscilla’s and Aquila’s] teachings he [Apollos] obtained a clearer understanding of the Scriptures, and became one of the ablest defenders of the Christian church. Thus a thorough scholar and brilliant orator learned the way of the Lord more perfectly from the teachings of a Christian man and woman whose humble employment was that of tentmaking.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 1063.

“The magicians of heathen times have their counterpart in the spiritualistic mediums, the clairvoyants, and the fortunetellers of today. . . . Could the veil be lifted from before our eyes, we should see evil angels employing all their arts to deceive and to destroy.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 290.

### Discussion Questions:

- ① Every age and individual faces the same struggle: Diana or Christ. What kinds of “Diana” are prevalent in your society? How can you, as a church, help others see clearly the two issues? Also, how can you, as a class, help others within the church not be slowly swept into the worship of “Diana,” in whatever form she comes?
- ② Have someone in the class read aloud Paul’s farewell address to the Ephesians in Acts 20:18-35 and then, as a class, discuss whatever comes to your minds about his words.
- ③ Read again about those who burned all their books (see Wednesday’s lesson). Wasn’t that a little extreme (after all, burning books)? What message can we glean from their actions? Ask people in the class to share their own experiences of having had to “burn” something for the Lord: What was it? Why did they believe they had to do it? Are they sorry or glad they did it?