

How to Change a City

Acts 19:8-20^{*}

This is a perfect time to revisit *Ephesians*, because the letter is a miniature doctrine of the church, a short course in what theologians call ecclesiology, and there has seldom been greater need for a sound doctrine of the church than today.

There is mass confusion about what the church is to be in our time, especially among so-called evangelical Christians. The problem is not with biblical terminology. Evangelicals know that the church is “the body of Christ,” “the bride of Christ,” a “temple not made with hands,” a “fellowship,” and such things. But for many people those are only slogans.

The important questions have to do with how the church comes into being: Is forming the church something we do, or is it God’s doing? How is the church to function? Are we free to organize it any way we want or does God have determining ideas in this area? Perhaps most important; What is the church for anyway? Does the church exist merely to reach others with the gospel? Does it exist only to make us happy? Or is there some greater plan involved, something perhaps that even the angels look into (Eph. 3:10–11).³

Powerful proclamation (8-10)

Range of responses (11-19)

So What? (20)

^{*} These notes are prayerfully provided to aid, not replace, your personal study of God’s Word.

³ James Montgomery Boice, *Ephesians: An Expositional Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Ministry Resources Library, 1988), ix.

Paul’s Second Visit to Ephesus



Ephesus. Most important city of the Roman province of Asia, located on the western shore of Asia Minor (modern Turkey). Ephesus was built on a natural harbor whose waves, according to the Roman writer Pliny the Elder, “used to wash up to the temple of Diana.” Ephesus was described by Strabo, an early Greek geographer, as the largest commercial center west of the Taurus mountains. It was also well known as the “guardian” of the temple of Artemis or, as the Romans called her, Diana (Acts 19:35).

Christianity’s threat to that pagan temple and to the commerce it produced for the makers of idols almost cost the apostle Paul his life (Acts 19:24, 30, 31). Priscilla and Aquila were associated with the early preaching in Ephesus (Acts 18:18, 19), as were Timothy (1 Tm 1:3) and Erastus (Acts 19:22). According to Irenaeus, an early Christian writer, the apostle John, after his exile on the island of Patmos (Rv 1:9), returned to live in Ephesus until the time of the emperor Trajan (AD 98–117). The commendable practices of the Christian community described in the letter to the Ephesians had been largely abandoned by the time John wrote the Book of Revelation (Rv 2:4).

Ephesus was founded by Ionian Greeks at a location where the Cayster River emptied into a gulf of the Aegean Sea. It had been a city for about a thousand years when Paul arrived there on his third missionary journey. The worship of Artemis in Ephesus was as ancient as the city itself.²

AD anno Domini

² Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, “Ephesus,” *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 709.