

The City Of Ephesus

by Merrill C. Tenney

The city of Ephesus was one of the oldest of the settlements on the west coast of Asia Minor and was the leading city of the Roman province of Asia. Its origin is shrouded in antiquity, but it was a prominent settlement in the eighth century B.C. and was at an early date taken over by the Greeks. It was located about three miles from the sea on the Cayster River, which at that time was navigable, so that Ephesus was a seaport. The valley of the Cayster penetrated far inland, making a caravan route to the East. Roads from Ephesus communicated with all the other large cities of the province and with the lines of commerce that connected with the north and east. It was a strategic point for evangelism, since workers from Ephesus could maintain contact with the whole Asian hinterland.

The outstanding feature of Ephesus was its great temple of Artemis, a local deity who was later identified with Artemis of the Greeks and with Diana of the Romans. Her image was a many-breasted figure with a female face, having instead of legs a solid block of stone. The first temple was probably begun in the sixth century B.C., but was not finished until 400 B.C. It was burned to the ground in 356 B.C. and replaced by a newer and larger structure, four hundred twenty-five feet by two hundred twenty feet, which was subsidized by contributions from all of Asia. It was considered to be one of the wonders of the world and was an outstanding center for pilgrims who came to worship at its shrine.

Not only was the temple a center for religious worship, but because its halls and grounds were regarded as sacred and inviolable,

it became also an asylum for the oppressed and a depository for funds.

A crude picture of the temple appeared on Ephesian coins, accompanied by the very title which is used in Acts for the city, NEO-KOROS, or "temple-sweeper" of Artemis (19:35). Contrary to much of the routine state worship of the ancient world, the inhabitants of Asia and of Ephesus in particular exhibited an almost fanatical devotion to Artemis. Its intensity appeared in the action of the mob in the amphitheater, which for two hours shouted, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians" (19:34).

Ephesus was rated as a free city and maintained its own government. The ultimate authority lay in the popular assembly when legally convoked (19:39), while the leaders or senate of the city acted as the central legislative body. The secretary or "town clerk" was the responsible officer who was entrusted with keeping records and with presenting business to the assembly (19:35). The influence of labor was also strong, for it was the guild of silversmiths who protested that Paul's evangelizing activities had imperiled their trade in religious souvenirs, the silver shrines that were miniature copies of the temple.

There were several important problems which Paul encountered in Ephesus. The first was the question of the survival of the teaching of John the Baptist, whose disciples were still active after John's life had closed. Apollos, an educated Alexandrian Jew, had already been preaching in Ephesus concerning Jesus, "knowing only the baptism of John" (18:24, 25). Undoubtedly he knew that the Messiah was

coming, that He had already been anointed to serve God, and that preparation for His ministry must include repentance and faith. His knowledge was not so much false as partial; he had not gone far enough. He was preaching in the synagogues and apparently evoked some response.

Under the tutelage of Priscilla and Aquila his understanding was broadened. A contrast of phrases here is enlightening: Luke says that he "had been instructed in the way of the Lord" (18:25), but that "Priscilla and Aquila ... expounded unto him the way of God *more accurately*" (18:26, italics ours). Leaving Ephesus with the recommendation of the believers there, he went over to Achaia and became a strong apologist for the Christian faith, especially among the Jews (18:28). Later he became one of Paul's trusted friends and colleagues (I Cor. 16:12, Titus 3:13).

Apollos departed from Ephesus before Paul arrived, but others like him were there. These men, disciples of John the Baptist, were deficient in personal spiritual experience. So obvious was this fact that when Paul came into contact with them, he asked them if they had received the Holy Spirit when they believed. Their answer was that they had not so much as heard whether the Holy Spirit had come. In view of John's prediction that Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit, it seems inconceivable that they had never heard His name; but they might never have heard of the fulfillment of the promise at Pentecost. The reply of Paul proved that the baptism of John was insufficient to produce a full Christian experience, for the believer must not only repent of sin, he must also

be filled with the Spirit. The first problem at Ephesus, then, was to bring sincere but immature believers up to date.

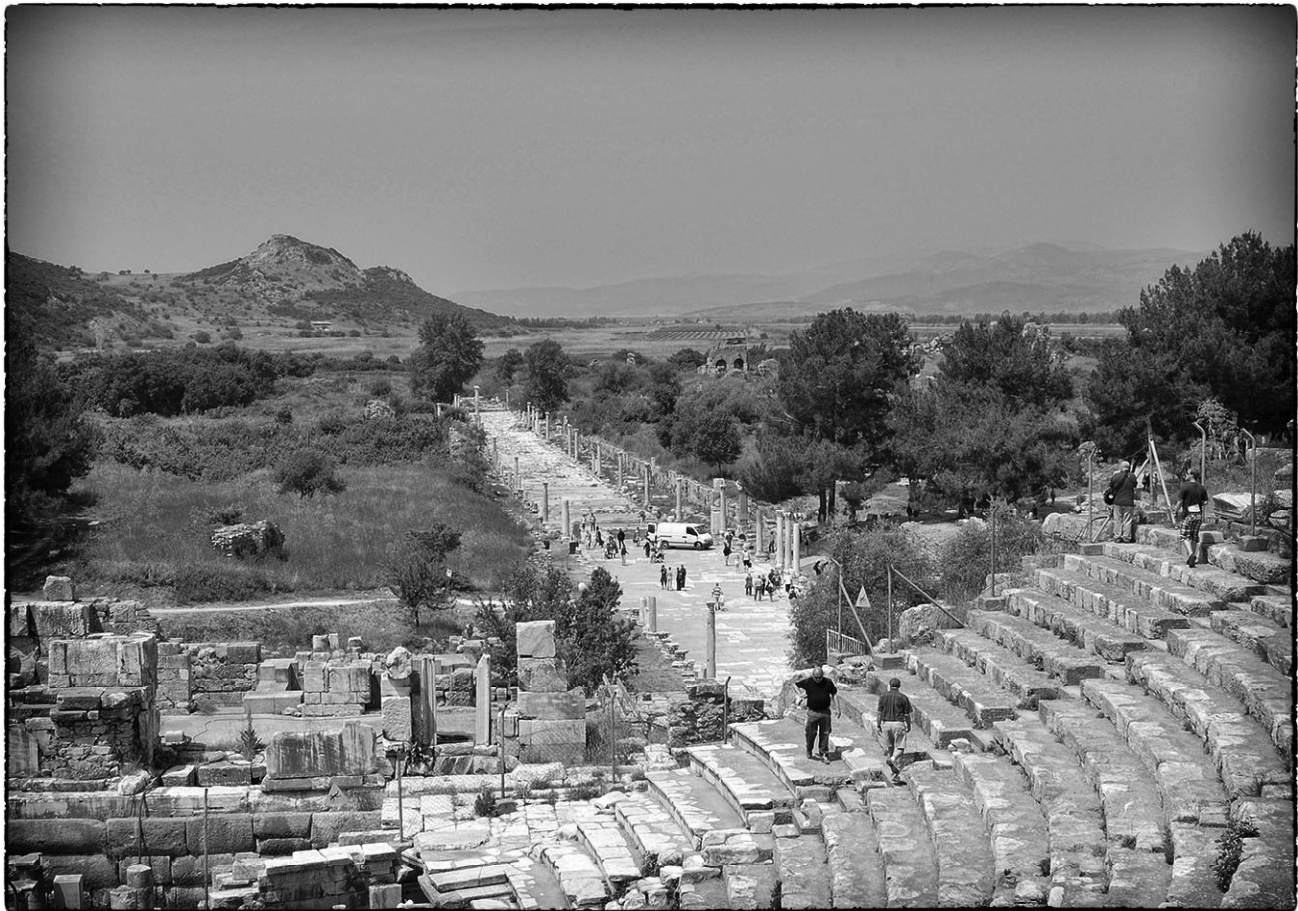
A second important problem of the Asian mission was the occult. The Jewish exorcists represented by the seven sons of Sceva, and the hundreds of nameless persons who burned their books of magic are proof of the wide extent to which superstition and demonology prevailed. The answer to this problem was twofold. On the positive side, the power of Christ was demonstrated to be greater than that of the exorcists and of demon cults. The sick were healed, the obsessed were delivered, and those who

practiced the occult arts were so convicted of the evil of their ways that they voluntarily destroyed the books of magic on which they had relied (Acts 19:19). On the negative side, the exclusive character of the gospel was demonstrated. A Christian did not *add* his Christianity to his other religions; he discarded them. Christianity was essentially intolerant of all rivals, and nowhere is this principle better demonstrated than at Ephesus.

The ministry of Paul in Ephesus was singularly effective. For more than two years (19:8, 10) he was able to preach unhindered, first in the synagogue and later in the school of Tyrannus (19:9). He per-

formed special miracles (19:11) and reached the populace of Ephesus and of the province as a whole more thoroughly than he did the people of any other place. Luke notes that "all they that dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks" (19:10), that "mightily grew the word of the Lord and prevailed" (19:20), and that so many had believed that idolatry suffered economic loss (19:26,27). The church at Ephesus became a missionary center and was for centuries one of the strongholds of Christianity in Asia Minor.

Merrill C. Tenney
New Testament Survey



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