

About Ephesus

For most of us, the events of the Bible take place in distant, magical places, long ago – places that would not be important if not for God's prophets and those who followed Jesus. Our images are formed by old posters shown to us by Sunday School teachers, or perhaps the setting of a movie we watched. In our logical minds we know these are only scenes of our imaginations, and the churches in the cities that Paul visited and wrote to were real, as were the ordinary people who lived in them. We may remember Rome, Jerusalem, and Nazareth, but Ephesus is not usually spoken about very much. So, why was Paul so interested in Ephesus?

Ephesus – once known as “the Treasure House of Asia,” for its importance in the Roman province's trade, also was recognized for the temple of Artemis, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. Her temple was four times the size of the

Parthenon in Athens, with 127 marble columns, each nearly 60 feet tall. The temple also served as a central bank and as a sanctuary for those accused of criminal activity. Ephesus had all the problems of any of the wealthy port community of its day.

The city itself was prominent in the first century mostly because it was centrally located along the coast of Asia Minor (today's Turkey). At the time, it was a busy port on the Aegean Sea, but sediment from a nearby river has now filled in the harbor. Ephesus was populated by as many as an estimated 225,000 people, though that total is disputed by some contemporary scholars; and was known as a place of learning. Around the year 135 a huge library was built there that was one of the largest in the ancient world.

Most of the people were Roman, but after the emperor Claudius sent away all Jewish residents from Rome, many found their way to Corinth, including Priscilla and Aquila. It was here that they met Paul and

moved to Ephesus with him. A small community of Jews already lived in Ephesus, and though Paul first began to preach in the synagogue there, he was not received well by them. He had much more success when he began speaking in a hall owned by a local citizen named Tyrannus.

One little-known story about Ephesus is its relationship with Mary, the mother of Jesus. The story says that Ephesus was the home of Mary after the crucifixion. Most of us have probably given little thought to what happened to her after Jesus's death. But many people believe that when the apostle John came to Ephesus, where he spent the latter part of his life, he brought Mary with him. Tradition holds that on the cross, Jesus entrusted the care of his mother to John, and since Jerusalem in the late first century was not hospitable for the mother of the Messiah, he eventually brought her to Ephesus. The supposed site of her house includes a wall, which is used as a prayer wall not only for Jews and Christians, but for Muslims, as

well.

Paul visited Ephesus twice, the first time for a short while, and later for three years. Between his first and second visit a Jew named Apollos from the city of Alexandria, in Egypt, arrived in Ephesus and, with the help of Priscilla and Aquilla, began a fledgling congregation there. And that's where today's story begins.