

discover

EPHESIANS



LEADER GUIDE

discover

EPHESIANS



CoffeeBreak





We thank Deb Fennema for writing the original lesson material (2002) on which this revision of *Discover Ephesians* is based. We also thank Dave Huizenga for his significant contributions (lesson 1 and numerous updates and additional insights) to this revised edition.

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To the Leader

Prepare the Lesson

Coffee Break and Bible discovery leaders help people discover together what the Bible says and means. They are not teachers but guides, facilitators, and conversation leaders.

This leader guide is meant to assist you as a small group leader by coming alongside you in your own personal work. Always answer the study guide questions first, using the suggested basic steps of preparation. Then use the leader material to enrich your understanding of the passage.

We encourage you to study ahead of time so that you do not have to rely on the leader guide during your Bible study group meeting. You don't want to give the impression that the leader guide is an answer book. The answers are in the Bible; you are a guide to help your group find the answers in God's Word.

Get Ready to Lead

Learn to think in terms of questions. As you prepare to lead a lesson, ask yourself questions and try to discover the answers yourself. This will prepare you to anticipate group members' questions and thus help others discover truths from God's Word.

The new "Conversation" box in the study guide is for extra questions. The leader guide includes many extra questions that you may use to help build the group's conversation around the text. We also suggest that you write your own questions. You know the interests, personalities, and needs of your group members. You know what they will be curious about or when they will want to dig deeper into a Scripture passage. Put those extra conversation-building questions in the "Conversation" box and use them during your group time to help get dialogue started.

Also, encourage group members to put their own questions and discoveries in the "Conversation" box. By doing this, they will also be preparing for the group discussion. You might want to start a group discussion by saying, "What is in your 'Conversation' box? What would you like to talk about together?"

If you are able to prepare and pray thoroughly before each group session, you will be able to lead without frequent references to your notes.

This will free you to be more aware of the work of the Holy Spirit during your group discussion time and to focus more effectively on your facilitation and leadership responsibilities. You will also be able to keep better eye contact and listen more carefully.

Lead with Questions

Use questions to direct the group discussion. Draw out positive contributions by asking questions. Break down difficult or unclear questions with smaller, concise ones. Also use questions to respond to wrong or problematic answers. If you learn to lead others into truth by using questions, you will be a good Bible discovery leader. The questions in this study are designed to be used with the New International Version of the Bible, but other translations can also be used.

Help to Apply

Gently help group members discover the meaning of God's message for their own lives. Be careful not to be judgmental of persons who may not yet seem to be applying the truths you encounter together. It's the Holy Spirit's work to apply God's Word to people's hearts. Tactfully let the group know how the Spirit is applying the Word in your own heart and life. Pray faithfully for the Spirit's work in others.

While giving people the time and space to apply biblical truths as the Spirit leads them, simply try to help group members see that there is a relationship between the Bible and life. Questions for reflection at the end of each session invite everyone to take some time for personal reflection and optional sharing. Try to offer at least a few minutes for reflection time toward the end of each lesson, and encourage group members to do additional follow-up reflection at home.

Introduction

You are about to embark on an exciting, transformational journey. The apostle Paul wrote Ephesians as a letter to the people whom God used to bring new life in Christ throughout the province of Asia in the Roman Empire. Paul worked with the Ephesian Christians for more than two years “so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord” (Acts 19:10). In this letter, written some years later while Paul was a prisoner in Rome (see Acts 28), Paul reiterates what he once taught the people face-to-face. In this study you will have the opportunity to join the Ephesian Christians in being taught by Paul. You may encounter some difficulties in understanding Paul’s words to people living nearly two thousand years ago in the Roman Empire, but just as the Holy Spirit blessed Paul’s original readers, the Spirit will bless you.

To begin, it is helpful to understand that Paul wrote this letter after being placed under house arrest in Rome, while awaiting trial for his faith before Caesar (Acts 28). Paul lived in a house there and was free to accept visitors and correspond with people, but he was probably chained to a guard at all times. Paul’s letters to the Ephesians, the Philippians, the Colossians, and Philemon were most likely composed during this time. The content of the Ephesian letter also corresponds to the teaching Paul brought while he was there.

To capture the context and intent of Paul’s letter to the Ephesians (which also became available to many other churches in the province of Asia), it will be helpful to note some background information on the timing of the work in Ephesus and the practical reality of the city of Ephesus.

Timing of the work in Ephesus. Many scholars believe that Paul was kept from spreading the good news of Jesus in the province of Asia during his second missionary journey (see Acts 16:6) because God wanted some other work done there first. Before Paul was able to return to Ephesus, he met Priscilla and Aquila in Corinth and mentored them (see Acts 18:1-3, 18-19), and they later mentored Apollos in Ephesus (Acts 18:24-26), who in turn raised up disciples in the city of Ephesus, whom Paul met during his third missionary journey (Acts 18:23-21:16). Later God used these disciples and other believers powerfully to spread his Word throughout the province of Asia.

Practical reality in Ephesus. Picture a wide, paved road with columns along either side. The road extends from the center of the city of Ephesus to the harbor on the clear blue waters of the Mediterranean Sea. The harbor bustles with activity. Because the city is also located on a major east-west highway, it is a center of commerce. Beyond the city lies the Coressus Mountain range, and through it runs the Cayster River. Ephesus is proud of its library, its theater, its marketplace, and its public baths. But what sets this city apart from any other is its temple to Artemis, the ancient Greek goddess of hunting and fertility. As a result, Ephesus had a strong spiritual influence over the whole province of Asia.

The apostle Paul worked in this setting for over two years, and the choice of Ephesus for a new church plant was a wise one because of the city's trade routes and its importance as the capital of the Roman province of Asia. Ephesus was the third or fourth largest city in the Roman Empire. Many people traveled through the city and were therefore influenced by the occult-like worship of Artemis. As we learn in Acts 19, however, many people also heard the Word of God through Paul and the disciples of Christ there, and from Ephesus the good news of Jesus spread throughout the province of Asia.

Since Paul wrote Ephesians to people whom God used to do such a great work for his kingdom, we can believe that the content of the letter is similar to the message God gave the Ephesians while Paul was with them. What would people who are in such a pivotal city need to know? They would need to understand their identity in Christ, how to live in that identity, and how to stand against opposition to that identity. This is exactly what Paul gives us in his encouraging, motivating letter to the Ephesians. As you encounter and grow from the amazing teachings in this beautiful letter, may God work transformation in your ministry as well!

Glossary of Terms

- administration**—carrying out a responsibility as a steward would.
- apostle**—one sent by God to preach the gospel. One qualification seems to be that an apostle must have seen Jesus after his resurrection. Originally the term applied to the disciples, then Paul was added, and then other missionaries. The term emphasized the authority of God, the sender.
- blameless**—without fault.
- coming age**—the time when Christ returns to judge all people and take believers to heaven.
- covenants**—promises that God had made with the Israelites throughout the Old Testament era. Covenants made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob promised that God would be with his people and that all nations of the earth would be blessed through them.
- debauchery**—extreme indulgence in sensuality; orgy.
- Ephesus**—the most important city in the Roman province of Asia (now Turkey).
- evangelists**—those whose primary calling is to present the gospel to the unsaved.
- “Grace”**—a customary Greek greeting.
- heavenly realms**—a phrase used frequently in Ephesians to describe all that is associated with the spiritual world, but not separate from the physical world.
- holy**—set apart by God to reflect God’s purity.
- idolater**—one who sets someone or something ahead of God.
- mystery**—something unknown before the coming of Christ, but revealed in him. Paul uses the word twenty-one times in his writings, and six of those times are in this letter to the Ephesians.
- “Peace”**—a customary Hebrew greeting.
- predestined**—foreordained; planned or purposed by God.
- prophets**—those who spoke God’s Word to the people. In Ephesians, this word refers to New Testament prophets.
- redemption**—a transaction in which one thing is given in exchange for another. Christ gave his life so that we would not have to experience eternal death as punishment for our sins.
- revelation**—when something that has been hidden is made known.
- ruler of the kingdom of the air**—Satan.
- seal**—something that confirms; a guarantee, assurance.
- spiritual blessing**—a benefit given by the Holy Spirit.

“the circumcision”—a title given to Jews as a group. Because the rite of circumcision (removal of the foreskin) set Jewish males apart, this title signified the setting apart of God’s chosen people.

transgressions—sins; a host of thoughts, words, and deeds “gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts” (Eph. 2:3).

“uncircumcised”—a label given by the Jews to those who were not Jewish or circumcised.

1 Acts 18:24-19:22

A New Church in Ephesus

Getting Started

Why would we start a study on the book of Ephesians by looking at a chapter in the book of Acts? This lesson will help us learn more about the people and place to which Ephesians was written. In Acts 18-19 we read about the first church planting efforts in Ephesus, which was then the capital city of the province of Asia in the Roman Empire. (Today that provincial area is part of the nation of Turkey.) We learn of the spiritual condition of Ephesus as it housed the temple of Artemis, a magnificent marble structure that became known as one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. There was money to be made as the temple brought in visitors and worship from throughout the province of Asia and beyond. Silversmiths made and sold silver replicas of the temple, and temple priestesses sold their bodies as acts of worship to Artemis, the ancient Greek goddess of hunting and fertility. In addition, sorcery and other occult practices were widely welcomed in connection with the worship of Artemis.

The book of Ephesians, written by Paul while he was a prisoner in Rome (see Acts 28), is a powerful reminder to the church in Ephesus of their relationship with Christ, how they are called to live in that relationship, and how they have the power to stand against the schemes and plans of the devil. Ephesians provides essential teaching and training that every church needs in order to work with the Holy Spirit to advance the Lord's kingdom in a volatile culture.

Optional Share Questions

The optional share questions in each lesson may serve well at the beginning of your session or at some other time during your discussion. Use or adapt share questions in a way that works best for your group.

If you were new to town, where would you go to meet people who would have something in common with you?

or

How do you communicate with old friends? What kinds of things do you talk about?

What Does It Say?

1. Acts 18:24-28

a. *How is Apollos described?*

- **Who was Apollos, and what had he been teaching the Ephesians?**

b. *What did Priscilla and Aquila explain to Apollos at their home? What was missing for Apollos?*

Encourage your group to look at a map to see where this took place. (You can find maps of Paul's missionary journeys and the Roman Empire in a study Bible or on the Internet.) You might want to talk about what countries are there today.

The work of Apollos introduces us to the ministry and church planting work that takes place in Ephesus. In order to comprehend the situation Paul entered into when he arrived at Ephesus, it is helpful to learn a little of Apollos.

Apollos was “a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures” (Acts 18:24). Bearing a Greek name, this Jewish scholar was able to teach about Jesus accurately and with great fervor. However, Apollos “knew only the baptism of John” (18:25), which was a baptism of repentance, leading up to the coming of Christ (see Mark 1:4-8). Apollos was mentored by Priscilla and Aquila, a husband and wife team who had come to Ephesus with Paul earlier (see Acts 18:18).

2. Acts 19:1-7

a. *Where did Paul travel, and whom did he meet?*

b. *What did Paul want to learn about these disciples?*

c. *What was the difference between John's baptism and baptism in the name of Jesus?*

Apollos left Ephesus and went on to Corinth, and Paul arrived in Ephesus to begin a work that God had been preparing for him by the work of Apollos and others.

- **What do you know about John and his baptism?**

- **How was the experience of John’s disciples incomplete?**

Many scholars equate the disciples that Paul finds in Ephesus to be those that followed the teaching of Apollos when he was in Ephesus. These disciples were baptized with John’s baptism. John the Baptist, the last of the Old Testament (old covenant) prophet figures, proclaimed the coming of Christ and was instrumental on hearts being softened and prepared for Christ’s ministry (John 1:19-28). John’s baptism was a baptism of repentance, not of salvation in Jesus. Apollos and the disciples Paul found in Ephesus had repentant and open hearts, ready to receive the message of salvation found in Jesus. Upon hearing that Jesus was the promised Messiah who died on the cross to save them from their sins, the message was complete and they believed. God often softens people’s hearts in preparation for the message of salvation.

Since these disciples did not know the Holy Spirit, their faith did not yet include belief in Jesus Christ as Lord. Those who believe in Christ Jesus for salvation receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (John 7:37-39).

- **What does it mean to “receive the Holy Spirit” when one becomes a believer in Jesus?**

d. What happened as a result of the baptism? What might be the significance of this for the disciples? For Paul?

e. What was the size of the group of believers in Ephesus?

- **What might be the significance of Paul placing his hands on these believers?**

- **How do you think this experience affected the group?**

These few verses show us the importance of the work of the Trinity in our salvation. God the Father chooses us, Jesus the Son saves us, and the Holy Spirit fills us. Baptism is a sign and seal of God’s work in us: a sign of God’s gift in Christ, and the seal of God’s work in us by the Holy Spirit.

In these new disciples living in the volatile city of Ephesus, God made his presence known through tongue-speaking and prophesying to help them in their new life in Christ. Tongues and prophecy are just a couple of the signs that show the Holy Spirit is present in our lives. This is true for us

today as well: Believers who trust in the saving work of Christ have the presence of the Holy Spirit given to them.

The presence of the Spirit was absolutely essential in directing and empowering this new group of disciples who would begin the church in Ephesus. Without the Holy Spirit, they lacked direction, purpose, and power.

- **In what ways has God shown you his presence in your life?**
- **Why is there no mention here of women and children?**

In this period of history, people were usually counted by how many men were present. Women and children were also present, but their numbers would be calculated based upon the number of men. Today, the number of disciples would probably be counted to include men, women, and children.

3. Acts 19:8-10

a. What was Paul's strategy for reaching people in Ephesus? What was the content of his teaching?

Paul was Jewish—in fact, he was a Pharisee, a learned teacher of the Jewish law. He was qualified to speak and teach in the Jewish synagogue. Paul even testifies that the gospel came “first to the Jew, then to the Gentile” (Rom. 1:16). As was his custom, Paul first went to the synagogue in Ephesus to bring to the Jews the good news of Jesus. He had also done this in Iconium (Acts 14:1), Thessalonica (17:10), Athens (17:7), and Corinth (18:4). Jewish people were waiting for the Messiah, God’s promised deliverer, to come, so when they learned that Jesus had come as the Christ, the Messiah, who fulfills all of God’s promises to his people, many became believers.

John the Baptist preached, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near . . .” (Matt. 3:2). In the book of Mark we learn that “after John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. ‘The time has come,’ he said. ‘The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!’” (Mark 1:14-15).

When he says, “The time has come,” Jesus means that he himself is the one who ushers in the kingdom of God. He is the one who is heir to King David’s throne (2 Sam. 7:12-13; Isa. 9:7). He is the King! When Paul taught

the Jews about Jesus Christ, he taught that Jesus is the one who fulfills the ushering in of God's kingdom.

b. Why do you think some of the Jews in the synagogue became obstinate with regard to Paul's teaching? How did they show their resistance?

c. What was Paul's response, and where did he go?

- **What happened to the message as a result of this trouble with the Jews?**

What appear to be closed doors or failures in our lives are often, in reality, God stepping in to redirect us in his work. Perhaps there are those in your group who have prayed diligently over something and have aimed to follow God's leading, only to find resistance, opposition, and closed doors. God is truly in control, and we need to watch for where he might want us to turn next. His plans are bigger and better than ours. He truly sees the big picture.

- **What effect does bad publicity have on news today?**

- **Can you think of a situation in your life where a door closed to something but another opened? Describe what happened.**

d. What do we learn about the discussions Paul had in the hall of Tyrannus? What were the results?

- **How might Paul's teaching in the hall of Tyrannus be different from his teaching in the Jewish synagogue?**

In the hall of Tyrannus God opened a door to a more powerful and effective ministry. This lecture hall was a neutral place designed in the Roman atmosphere of Ephesus as a place of learning. It was an ideal place to teach the Jewish disciples of Christ and to attract more disciples who were Gentiles. Paul "had discussions daily" there for two years. As a result, both Jews and Greeks (Gentiles) throughout the province of Asia heard the good news of God's salvation in Jesus Christ (Acts 19:10).

This is one of the main reasons we are looking at Acts 19 before digging into the book of Ephesians. In the hall of Tyrannus, Jews and Gentiles were taught about Christ as King and were sent out to bring God's Word to their neighbors and friends. It was quite effective work because the news of God's salvation spread throughout the province of Asia. Further, this was no small task because Ephesus was not automatically receptive

to the message of Christ. Ephesus was the center of the fertility religion of Artemis and a hotbed of sorcery and other occult practices. Yet Paul taught the people there about their identity in Christ and how to live within that identity and to defend it. And in the book of Ephesians, which is a letter Paul wrote to the believers there, we can find the same teaching for Christians today.

- **How is the culture we live in similar to that of Ephesus?**
 - **What can we learn from Paul and the Ephesians about stepping out into our culture to share the good news of the kingdom of God?**
-

4. Acts 19:11-12

- a. What types of miracles took place? How did they occur?*
- b. What happened as a result of the miracles?*

- **Why might the miracles God did through Paul be labeled “extraordinary”?**

The apostle John calls miracles “signs” because they point to the source and author of the miracle—and thus take the focus off the miracles themselves. God worked so powerfully through Paul that even handkerchiefs and aprons Paul touched were used to bring healing to people (see also Acts 5:12-16). The healing wasn’t because of the handkerchiefs or aprons, or even because of Paul. The healing was because of the superior power and authority of Jesus Christ over life and death. Considering the reality that Ephesus was a stronghold for the very visible forces of evil (such as sorcery, temple prostitution, etc.), God performed “extraordinary” miracles through Paul. After many hours of chants and incantations, those engaging in sorcery in Ephesus may have had some capacity to do minor healings or “miracles” through the power of demons. But when something as ordinary as a handkerchief was used to show the extraordinary power of Christ, no one could argue against Christ being Lord over heaven and earth.

5. Acts 19:13-16

- a. *Who were the seven sons of Sceva, and what did they do?*
- b. *Why were those who were not followers of Jesus using his name?*
- c. *What happened to the sons of Sceva?*

The name of Jesus is greater than any other name. It is not to be used lightly, ignorantly, or presumptuously. The seven sons of Sceva learned that in order to be one who speaks the name of Christ with power and authority, one must first bear the name of Christ in his heart.

- **In what ways might we use the name of Jesus lightly and ignorantly today?**
- **Why were the seven sons of Sceva able to be overpowered by the man with the evil spirit?**

Only those who belong to Jesus Christ can represent his name with authority. Today the devil still unceasingly schemes to stop the advancement of God's kingdom. And yet the name of Jesus still drives away and exposes the work of the devil. Note for your group that in Ephesians 1:19-22 (covered in the next lesson) we will learn of the supremacy of the name of Jesus Christ, so group members can look forward to discovering that teaching again soon.

- **In what ways today can believers in Jesus use his name with power and authority?**

6. Acts 19:17-22

- a. *Why were the Jews and Greeks in Ephesus "seized with fear"? What kind of fear was this?*
- b. *What was the result of their fear? How did they respond?*
- c. *What happened after the burning of scrolls by the sorcerers? Why?*
- d. *What did Paul do next?*

Throughout Scripture the "fear of the Lord" refers to a healthy reverence of God in his power and holiness. It draws us to God's good, righteous, and powerful authority and inspires us to be whole and completely his. It can bring unbelievers to repentance and new life in Christ, and

it can move people who do believe to rid themselves of any remaining ties to sin that hinder the work of God in their life. The fear of God is a beautiful work of the Holy Spirit that brings people into God's kingdom.

- **Why did the event with the seven sons of Sceva cause people to repent?**
- **What drove those who practiced sorcery to destroy their scrolls?**

When people come face-to-face with the reality of the supremacy of Christ, they need to either surrender or be defeated. The people who practiced sorcery in the city of Ephesus had great influence. Their ungodly religion coincided with the worship of the fertility goddess Artemis. For sorcerers to publically burn their valuable scrolls filled with all the power of their witchcraft was a powerful testimony to the supremacy of the name of Jesus Christ.

People who had been using sorcery and other means to gain power for themselves confessed their sin and became believers. They wanted to take part in the powerful work of God's kingdom where the name of Jesus sets people free from the tyranny of the devil.

In Ephesus, sorcerers had had great power and influence. When they turned to Christ and burned their scrolls, that made a profound impact for the kingdom of God throughout the entire region.

- **In our world today are there people who practice sorcery? In what ways can we help these people come to Christ?**
- **Why is confession so important?**

The work of confession broke the devil's power: Satan's evil was exposed; his ability to manipulate was shut down; and his condemnation of those he controlled was eliminated.

When the people confessed, they were forgiven by Christ (1 John 1:9). Confession is a rich gift to the church of Jesus Christ. In 1 John 1:9 we learn that "if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." Our faithful and just Lord responds to confession with complete forgiveness. What a blessing this was for the people in Ephesus who confessed their sin; they were

met with grace and healing from all kinds of sin and unrighteousness. God's forgiveness and restoration are truly amazing!

- **Who do you know that has a strong testimony of turning to Jesus Christ? What is the extent of their influence?**
- **Why do you think Paul then felt free to move along and visit other towns?**

Taking It Home

- a. What have you learned about God's message through Paul?*
- b. In what ways is our culture similar to and different from that of Ephesus?*
- c. What do you hope to learn through this study of Ephesians?*

Ephesus had a strong spiritual influence over the province of Asia Minor (present-day Turkey) in the first century A.D. God led the apostle Paul to bring the good news of Jesus to this cultural center, and from there the word of Christ's salvation spread throughout the region.

In this study of Ephesians, beginning with the background story of Paul's work in Ephesus (from Acts 18-19), we discover powerful reminders of our relationship with Christ, how we are called to live in that relationship, and how we have the power to stand against the schemes and plans of the devil. Ephesians provides essential teaching and training that believers need in order to work with the Holy Spirit to advance the Lord's kingdom in a volatile culture.

Discover Ephesians features 8 lessons on the New Testament book of Ephesians. This material is intended for small group Bible study, but it can also be used profitably for personal study. Guides for leaders and students are available.

The approach to Bible study in this series emphasizes discovery (the reader discovers what the Bible has to say by asking questions and seeking answers from the passage studied). This is an effective and enjoyable way to study God's Word.

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