

discover

EPHESIANS



STUDY 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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How to Study

The questions in this study booklet will help you “do it yourself” and discover together what the Bible says.

Questions are the key to Bible discovery. Through questions you search for the writers’ thoughts and ideas. The questions in this study guide are designed to help you in your quest for answers. You can and should ask your own questions too. The Bible comes alive with meaning for many people as they uncover the exciting truths it contains. Our hope and prayer is that this guide will help the Bible come alive for you.

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.

Step 1.

Read through each Bible passage several times. Allow the ideas to sink in. Think about the meaning of the passage.

Step 2.

Answer the questions in the “What does it say?” section of the study guide lesson, drawing your answers from each passage. Write answers in your own words. If you use Bible study aids such as commentaries, Bible handbooks, or Internet sites, do so only after completing your own personal study. Answering the questions before the group meets enables you to remember what you have discovered and to prepare for the group conversation.

Step 3.

Fill in the “Conversation” boxes with your questions and thoughts. Include questions that you would like to discuss with the group, topics that you would like to learn more about, and ideas from the passage that have made an impact on you. For example, in the “Conversation” boxes, you might include answers to questions like these:

- What is this passage saying to me?
- How does it challenge me? Comfort me?
- Is there a promise I can claim?
- For what can I give thanks?

Step 4.

Have fun talking with others about what you have discovered!

Step 1.

Step 2.

Step 3.

1 **Isaiah 1**
Judgment and Justice

Getting Started
The prophecy of Isaiah beautifully reveals the amazing, surprising God who is the Lord of heaven and earth. Let's see what the opening chapter of Isaiah shows about this God, and how he calls his people to live.

What Does It Say?

1. Isaiah 1:1
What does Isaiah tell us about himself and his book in the opening verse?

2. Isaiah 1:2-9
What charge does God bring against his people? Describe their situation.

3. Isaiah 1:10-15
In the Old Testament, God set up a sacrificial system that became part of Israel's covenant relationship with the Lord. Animals such as bulls, lambs, and goats would be sacrificed to atone for ("cover over") sin. The purpose of this type of sacrifice was to bring the people close to God and seek his forgiveness. Ultimately the sacrifices pointed to Jesus' death for our sins once and for all (Heb. 10:10, 9:26-28).
New Moon feasts (usually the first day of the month in the Hebrew lunar calendar) and

Let's talk about ...

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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.

What Does It Say?

1. Acts 18:24-28

- a. How is Apollos described?

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

Let's talk about ...

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?

- 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?

For conversation ...

3. Acts 19:8-10

- a. What was Paul's strategy for reaching people in Ephesus? What was the content of his teaching?
- 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?
- d. What do we learn about the discussions Paul had in the hall of Tyrannus? What were the results?

I wonder about...

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?

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?

For discussion...

.....
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?

My thoughts about ...

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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