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The Founding of the Church of Ephesus
Acts 18: 23-28

52-53 AD

The Founding of the church of Ephesus DIG: These verses sum up a lot of traveling. How far did Paul travel at this time? What do you make of his companions Priscilla and Aquila? What kind of a man was Apollos? What type of influence did Apollos have in Achaia, specifically Corinth (see verses 27-28)? How effective would he be in the intellectual circles?

REFLECT: Who was very helpful to you when you were young and enthusiastic about your faith? How did this person help? Who are you helping now? How? Where do you sense God has equipped you to serve? How can you do so this week? How does your place of worship balance evangelism with the strengthening and equipping of believers? What makes one preacher or Bible teacher more "popular" than another? And which of these attributes should have little or nothing to do with how accepted their teaching is?

Ephesus was a commercial center, a legal center, and a religious center.

After spending some time in Antioch, probably from the early summer of 52 AD to the early spring of 53 AD, and having doubtless given **his** church a full account of **his Second Missionary Journey** (see the commentary on **Acts, to see link click Bu – Paul's Second Missionary Journey**), **Paul departed** from there, on what proved to be **his Third Missionary Journey** (see **Acts Ce – Paul's Third Missionary Journey**). **His** ultimate destination was **Ephesus**. **He** had been prevented from going there before **(16:6). He** had to cut **his** first visit there short **(Acts 18:20)** and was eager to begin **his** mission in the city. Nevertheless, **his** desire for the new ministry did not prevent **him** from neglecting the old.[6] **Paul** returned to **his** former fields and further ministered from **one place after another throughout the region of Galatia and Phrygia, and discipled all the believers (Acts 18:23).** In this one verse **Luke** summarizes about 1,500 miles of

travel. **Luke** does not give us all the cities **Paul** visited, but what **he** does tell us is that when traveling through this region **Paul discipled** all the churches that were planted during **the First Missionary Journey** (see **Acts Bm – Paul's First Missionary Journey**). In any case, this trip through the Cilician gates and on to **Ephesus** would have happened during the summer of 53 AD when the passage through the gates was possible.

Ephesus was a deceptively beautiful metropolis. The magnificent temple to the fertility goddess Artemis – one of the seven wonders of the ancient world – dominated the skyline and religious social and economic life (see **Acts Ch – Idol-Makers Start a Riot in Ephesus**). No sensual pleasure was denied. It was a world financial center. Dreams of material success and affluence captured the minds and consumed the energies of its populace. All the happiness money could buy was at their fingertips.

But when the early believers looked at **Ephesus**, they saw something very different. They saw a culture of fear barely veiled by the architectural, artistic, and sensual beauty on display. **Messiah's** followers saw a half a million souls trapped in a Satan-dominated world of necromancy, occultism, witchcraft, and useless worship of a lifeless, powerless goddess. Magic symbols and incantations failed to give them control over their world. Their false worship failed to connect them to **the One True God**. Nearly the entire population lived on a treadmill of superstition, confusion and terror. Into this environment walked **Paul**.[7]

With the knowledge that **Paul** was making **his** way towards **Ephesus**, **Luke** fills in the background to the events that had been taking place in **his** absence. **Now a Jewish man named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, Egypt,** where a million **Jews** lived**, came to Ephesus.** Highly educated, **he** was well-versed in the TaNaKh. A skilled speaker, he was a fiery, courageous preacher. A student of **John the Baptist**, **Apollos** knew the basics about **Yeshua**, but he lacked some important facts needed to effectively communicate the Gospel.

While not its capital (Pergamum was the province's official capital), **Ephesus** was the most important city in Asia Minor. In fact, since the Roman governor lived there, it could be argued that **Ephesus** was the de facto capital. It had a natural harbor situated at the mouth of the Cayster River on a gulf of the Aegean Sea.[8] Located on the main highway, **Ephesus** connected the Four great trade routes in the east, and as a result, it was the main **commercial center** of Asia. In fact, no better site could have been picked for the evangelization of all of Asia Minor than **Ephesus**. The

seven churches there (see the commentary on **Revelation Ay – Write, Therefore, What Is Now**) may well have owed their origin to **Paul's Ephesian** ministry.[9]

The city's theater, where **Paul** and his companions were dragged **(Acts 19:29)**, seated some 25,000 people. Athletic events, rivaling the Olympic games, were held in a stadium there. As a free city, it was granted self-government by Rome and no Roman troops were stationed there. It also served as a **legal center** in which the Romans tried important cases and dispensed justice on a regular basis.[10]

It was also a **religious center**. The cult of emperor worship was very strong there, and temples were built for Claudius, Hadrian and Severus. No matter what gods they worshiped, each individual was required to swear allegiance to Cesar as the supreme lord over all. It was also known for its magical arts and was one of the centers of occultism. It had long been the home of the Mother Goddess, who was identified by the Greeks as Artemis, or Diana in Latin **(Acts 19:35)**. To this goddess was dedicated a huge temple that was known as one of the wonders of the ancient world with a tree of "salvation" in the midst of it. About four times the size of the Parthenon, it was 425 feet long, 200 feet wide, and 60 feet high. It had 127 marble pillars, 36 of them overlaid with gold and jewels. Because its inner shrine was supposedly sacred, this temple served as one of the most important banks in the Mediterranean world. The temple also provided sanctuary from criminals. Further, the sale of little idols used in the worship of Artemis provided an important source of income for the city **(Acts 19:24)**. Every spring a month-long festival was held in honor of the goddess, complete with athletic, dramatic and musical events.[11]

The worship of Artemis was unspeakably evil. Sexual immorality was rampant **in Ephesus**, and it was one of the most immoral cities of the ancient world. This temple also became the site of the worship of the goddess Roma and of the Roman Emperor.[12] Thousands of priestesses, who were little more than ritual prostitutes, played a major role in the worship of Artemis. The temple grounds were a chaotic scene made up of priests, prostitutes, bankers, criminals, musicians, dancers and frenzied, hysterical worshipers. The philosopher Heraclitus was called the weeping philosopher because he said no one could live **in Ephesus** and not weep over its immorality. Huddled in the midst of such pagan idolatry that characterized **Ephesus**, was a group of faithful believers. It was to them that the **Messiah** addressed the first of **His seven** letters (see **Revelation Az – The Church at Ephesus**).[13]

Apollos (a shortened form of Apollonius) **was a learned man, well versed in the**

Scriptures. He had been orally **instructed in the way of the Lord** in general as far as the TaNaKh was concerned**. With a fervent spirit, he was speaking and teaching accurately the facts about Yeshua – while only being acquainted with the immersion of John.** This **fervent** scholar exploded like a bombshell on **Corinth's** unconverted Jewish community. But what was **his** message? First, **John** was the forerunner of **the Messiah**; Secondly, **John** has pointed out that **Yeshua** was **the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world** (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Bm – John Identifies Jesus as the Lamb of God**); and thirdly, **he** knew that **Yeshua** was **the Messiah.** So, **Apollos** did not have believers' **immersion**, only **John's** back to **God immersion**. However, **this man began speaking out boldly in the synagogue (Acts 18:24-26a).** In other words, **he** was faithful in what **he** knew. **His** error was not understanding about believers' **immersion**.



Priscilla and Aquila had remained in **Ephesus** to carry on the ministry until **Paul** returned **(Acts 18:18ff).** Evidently the ministry there had not yet extended beyond **the synagogue**. **But when Priscilla and Aquila heard Apollos'** preaching**, they** immediately **took him aside** privately **and explained the way of God** concerning **immersion more accurately (Acts 18:26b).** The fact that both **Priscilla and Aquila** instructed **Apollo**s is significant. Both men and women can have the New Covenant gift of teaching. When **Paul** writes: **I do not permit a woman to teach (First Timothy 2:12a), he** uses the present infinitive, and is not forbidding **a woman to teach** universally. In other words, **he** does not forbid *all* teaching, but because the present tense is used, **Paul** is saying, don't become *the* teacher. **Priscilla** was not **Apollos'** sole teacher, she taught alongside her husband (even though it seems counterintuitive, see the commentary on **Genesis Lv – Women and Spiritual Gifts**). Additionally, **Luke** wishes to show the variety of roles **women** played in the early Church. **Luke** presents **five cameos** of important believing **women** in a variety of roles **they** assumed (see **Acts Bd – Signs and**

Miracles Follow Peter: A closer look at Luke, Women and Ministry), and **Priscilla** was one of **them**. After that, **Apollos** was an unstoppable apologist for **Messiah**.

Once **he** understood about believers' **immersion**, **Apollos wanted to cross over** the region of **Achaia** on **his** way to where **Corinth (19:1)** and Athens were **located. The brothers** in **Ephesus encouraged him and wrote** a letter of recommendation **to the believers** in **Corinth to welcome him. Upon arrival, he greatly helped those who by grace had believed (1 Cor 3:5-6** and **4:6). Apollos'** power in scriptural interpretation **(Acts 18:24)** suited **him** for debate with the **Jews** of **Corinth**. Much like **Peter** with **the Jews** of **Jerusalem** (see **Acts An – Peter Speaks to the Shavu'ot Crowd**), **he** would have used the TaNaKh to demonstrate that **the Messiah** must suffer and be raised from the dead, which was, in the final analysis, the fulfillment of **the Jewish** Scriptures.[14] **And he** also **powerfully refuted** (Greek: *diakatelencheto*, meaning *to overwhelm* someone in an argument) **the Jewish people in public, demonstrating through the Scriptures that Messiah was Yeshua (Acts 18:27-28).**

God is wooing people to **His** table for the meat of **His** Word like never before. **He** is joyfully using many different methods and styles to accomplish **His** goal of equipping **His** Church to be effective and holy during difficult days. **God** has raised up many fine teachers and preachers for our day. Let's reap the benefit of as many as possible and value their contributions whether they are magnetic like **Apollos**, analytical like **Luke**, forthright like **Paul**, or warm like **Priscilla and Aquila**.

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, Praise **You** for **You** are Awesome Always! **You** wisely sent **John the Baptist** as the forerunner of **Messiah** to prepare people's hearts for **the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world**. The first step of drawing near to **God** is to turn from our sins, there is so much more to life than turning away from sin. There is also a drawing near into the intimate relationship with **God** as our **Lord** and **Savior**. How wonderful that when someone turns from loving themselves as first in their lives to trusting **Messiah** as first place in their lives – **You** adopt them as your child **(Ephesians 1:4-5).** Children have special places in families. They are loved and cared for and watched over. **You** love, watch over and care for **Your** children. **John's** baptism was good and important to show people that they needed to turn away from wrong and then be united to **God** as his child when they believed/ trusted in him **(John 1:12, Romans 10:9-10).***

*Wow! What a privilege to be **God's** child! Being a child of **God** means being united*

*into the family of **God** and also united to **Messiah** in his glorious resurrection! **John** could only immerse people as a turning from their sins, but **Messiah's** immersion is an immersion of unity. **Or do you not know that all of us who were immersed into Messiah Yeshua were immersed into His death? Therefore we were buried together with Him through immersion into death – in order that just as Messiah was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become joined together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also will be joined together in His resurrection. . . Now if we have died with Messiah, we believe that we shall also live with Him (Romans 6:3-5, 8).** To have had only **John's** baptism of remission of sins is a good start, but **God** has so much more in your offer to adopt as your sons thru the blood of **Messiah (Ephesians 1:7)** those who love/ believe in **You**. **You** are an awesome father! In **Yeshua Messiah's** holy name and power of **His** resurrection. Amen*