The church at Ephesus was a significant church in the first century. It became the base of operations for the Apostle Paul in Asia Minor or modern day Turkey. The six other churches Jesus addresses in Revelation were planted by the church at Ephesus. The church had a great pastoral team over the course of time. Paul founded the church, Timothy and the Apostle John also pastored there. Many of the epistles were written to or about Ephesus, (Ephesians, 1 & 2 Timothy, I,II,III John and Revelation) which speaks to its influence and importance in the first century.

(Ephesos). On the west coast of Asia Minor. Made the capital of the Roman province of Asia Minor by Augustus (27 BC—AD 14). Ephesus is the setting for Acts 19. Paul taught daily there for two years (Acts 19:9). The elders from Ephesus came to see Paul on his last journey to Jerusalem (Acts20:17–18), and in 1 Cor 15:32, Paul says that he fought the beasts there. The city was originally founded ca. 1000 BC by the Greeks. It came under Roman control in 133 BC.

Location
Ephesus was located at the mouth of the Cayster River on the Aegean coast—in the Southwestern corner of present day Turkey. Roads from the city spread out in every direction along the coast and through the interior of the province.

Population
Ephesus was the third largest city in the Roman empire. Its population is estimated to have been around 250,000 during the time of early Christianity. The ethnic make-up of the inhabitants of Ephesus included (but was not limited to): Lydians, Ionians, Greeks, a native population of Anatolians (Strelan, Paul, Artemis, 33), and a large Jewish constituency (Josephus, Ant. 14.225–27; 16.162–68, 172–273). Rome sent many of its citizens to its provinces—as a colonial strategy—to protect the interests of the Empire.

Commerce
During the reign of Augustus, the city experienced substantial growth, benefiting economically from the Pax Romana (Peace of Rome). Ephesus was a major commercial port, but the harbor required constant dredging. It seems that remarkable feats of engineering kept the harbors of Ephesus from silting up. Silting was a common problem for all Mediterranean ports at the mouths of rivers because the small tides were inadequate to clean them out (Stark, Cities of God, 42).

Some of the major public buildings discovered at the site of ancient Ephesus include the famous temple of Artemis, public squares, stadiums, gymnasiums, and theaters. One significant theater built into the side of Mount Pion accommodated about 24,000 people.

The city was home to various artisans. The artisans were considered of lower social status, in part because they worked with their hands (Plutarch, Per. 2.1–2). The only basis for their social identity was the wealth they might secure from their craft (Witherington, The Acts of the Apostles, 593).

The Artemis shrine in Ephesus provided the area with a lucrative tourist business from pilgrims traveling to the temple. In addition, the temple served as a financial institution and lent out money from the wealth deposited at the shrine (Stark, Cities of God, 42). The temple was perceived to be a safe place to store resources because no one dared to violate its sacred space (Dio Chrysostom, Rhod. 31:54).

However, this did not prevent corruption and inappropriate use of the funds by temple officials (Trebitio, “Asia,” 343–344). Ephesus acquired its first imperial temple during the reign of the emperor Domitian (ca. AD 81–96). For a city to be the owner or warden of an imperial temple was very prestigious.

HISTORY OF THE CHURCH AT EPHESUS

- Holman Christian Study Bible
REVELATION 2:1-7

Write to the angel of the church in Ephesus:

“The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand and who walks among the seven gold lampstands says: 2 I know your works, your labor, and your endurance, and that you cannot tolerate evil. You have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and you have found them to be liars. 3 You also possess endurance and have tolerated many things because of My name and have not grown weary. 4 But I have this against you: You have abandoned the love you had at first. 5 Remember then how far you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. Otherwise, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent. 6 Yet you do have this: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. 7 “Anyone who has an ear should listen to what the Spirit says to the churches. I will give the victor the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in God’s paradise.

Keyword

“Love” / Greek: “agapē”

Phonetic Pronunciation: ag-ah’-pay

Definition: Brotherly love, affection, good will, love, benevolence

Questions to consider

1. What was the church at Ephesus doing right?
2. What mistake did they make? How do we make the same mistake?
3. Why do you think they abandoned the love they had a first?
4. How does Jesus tell the church to respond to the problem?
5. Take a minute to examine your life and ask yourself the question, “Do I really love God?” What do you need to do in order to make Jesus your first love?

Additional passages

John 14:15, Matthew 22:36-40
Observations / WHAT DOES GOD WANT ME TO KNOW?

Commands / WHAT DOES GOD WANT ME TO DO?

Promises / WHY DOES GOD WANT ME TO DO THESE THINGS?

Principles / examples

Practical application

Sermon notes / journal