

THE LOOKOUT

NOVEMBER 2023

Unit: Acts (Part 2)

Theme: The Church Goes Global

Overview: Shrunk spirits and miserly hearts have no place in God's global mission. His plans are always larger than ours (Genesis 1:28; 11:4, 9; 12:3; Isaiah 49:6; Daniel 7:13-14; Zechariah 9:9-10). Clearly God's mission for the church has always been worldwide. The International Conference on Missions realizes this; the theme for their gathering Nov. 16-18 in Oklahoma City is "Hope for the Nations." In Part 2 of this study from Acts, students will learn of this global mission by studying one family (Cornelius's household), a first journey (by Paul and Barnabas), and two cities (Ephesus and Rome).

HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.

WEEK OF NOVEMBER 8, 2023

LESSON AIM: Celebrate the inclusiveness of God's love and grace.

SCRIPT: Acts 10:1-11

THEME: The Church Goes Global

LESSON TEXT: Acts 10:1-11, 34-35

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Acts 10:1-11, 34-35, 11:1-18

STUDY

TITLES ARE ADDED TO THE CHURCH
BY PAUL SCOTT

After the initial and difficult work of the Bible study, the next step is to apply the study to the real world. This is where the study becomes a living and breathing reality. The study is not just a collection of words and phrases, but a living and breathing reality that is meant to be applied to the real world. The study is not just a collection of words and phrases, but a living and breathing reality that is meant to be applied to the real world.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery**.

Tabs indicate the week of each lesson.

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APPLICATION

GO WHEREVER GOD SENDS YOU
BY DAVID FAUST

Apply what you have learned in the Bible study to your own life. This is where the study becomes a living and breathing reality. The study is not just a collection of words and phrases, but a living and breathing reality that is meant to be applied to the real world. The study is not just a collection of words and phrases, but a living and breathing reality that is meant to be applied to the real world.

DISCOVERY

BY DAVID FAUST

1. How does Paul's vision of the "great commission" in Acts 1:8 relate to the "great commission" in Matthew 28:19-20?
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9. How does Paul's vision of the "great commission" in Acts 1:8 relate to the "great commission" in Matthew 28:19-20?
10. How does Paul's vision of the "great commission" in Acts 1:8 relate to the "great commission" in Matthew 28:19-20?

Use the **Discovery** questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

WEEK OF NOVEMBER 19, 2023

LESSON AIM: Pray that “whole provinces,”
states, and countries will
hear the “Word of the Lord.”

UNIT: Acts (Part 2)

THEME: The Church Goes Global

LESSON TEXT: Acts 19:8-10, 23-41

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Acts 18:18—19:7, 11-22; 20:17-38

STUDY

EPHESUS

BY MARK SCOTT

Some cities are so significant that just saying their names gets a reader's or hearer's attention. Some examples include Jerusalem, Athens, Rome, London, New York, Mexico City, Tokyo, Moscow, Calcutta, and Beijing. In the ancient world the same was true with Ephesus, a city with a population that rivaled Rome and Thessalonica. It boasted a library equal to the ones in Ur and Alexandria. And Ephesus was home to the Temple of Artemis, one of the seven great wonders of the ancient world. Some of the greatest ancient ruins are evident there today.

Paul visited Ephesus toward the end of his second missionary journey as he made his way back to Jerusalem and then to the church in Antioch of Syria. He promised he would return to Ephesus if the Lord willed (Acts 18:21-22). Paul kept his promise and returned there toward the beginning of his third missionary journey.

Instead of traveling by boat, Paul passed through the inland country and came to Ephesus. He found some disciples, but he also found some deficient theology. They had heard of Jesus but knew only the baptism of John. Paul instructed them about the connection between belief, baptism, and the Holy Spirit. Upon receiving the Holy Spirit, they spoke in tongues (the third Pentecost of sorts—cf. Acts 2:1-4; 10:44-48). This was more a matter of incomplete doctrine than false doctrine, a situation similar to what Priscilla and Aquila encountered with Apollos (Acts 18:24-26).

Establishing Beachheads

Acts 19:8-10

The apostle to the Gentiles typically went to the Jewish synagogue when he entered a city, if one were present. Paul used the synagogue as a beachhead for the gospel. What we know as the Old Testament was already being studied there, and Paul knew he could easily enter the conversation there. When he got to the synagogue in Ephesus, he *spoke boldly* (or *freely*) for three months. Paul did apologetic evangelism (literally, dialogued with those present) concerning the *kingdom of God*. (The word *kingdom* does not occur often in Acts, but when it does, usually a geographic or ethnic expanse of the gospel is taking place.)

The Jews living in this pagan Roman city did not appreciate Paul's message, so they became *obstinate*, *refused to believe*, and *publicly maligned the Way*. Early believers were sometimes called "followers of the Way." (The phrase occurs twice in our lesson text and probably stems from John 14:6.)

But this rejection by the Ephesians did not dissuade Paul from establishing another beachhead for the gospel. He knew how crucial Ephesus was for reaching the whole *province of Asia*, a part of what was known as Asia Minor (or Turkey on a modern map). So, Paul took the *disciples* and held *discussions* in the *lecture hall of Tyrannus* during the day when it was not being used. This campus ministry of sorts lasted for *two years*. This beachhead helped *all the Jews and Greeks* who lived in the region to hear the gospel.

Encountering Challenges

Acts 19:23-41

Establishing beachheads for the gospel was no walk in the park. The Jews in Ephesus first opposed Paul. Then Paul encountered the spirit world through the incident with the seven sons of Sceva (Acts 19:13-16). Finally, the patrons of Artemis caused a riot in the city. A Catholic priest once said, "Wherever Paul went there was riot or revival. Wherever I go they serve tea." While Paul did not rob temples or speak against Artemis (v. 37), he did offer the unbelievers an alternative to every other belief system. When the people embraced the Way and thus renounced idol worship, the idol makers became *furios*.

Demetrius (vv. 24, 38) led the rebellion. He was a *silversmith* who made little idols of Artemis for profit. He claimed to be concerned for Artemis's reputation, but he clearly was motivated by greed. He must have been a compelling speaker for he stirred up the crowd. Luke uses the words *disturbance*, *uproar*, and *confusion* to describe the scene.

The riot moved into the main theater of the city (a beautiful structure that held 25,000 people). Various people were put forward, some to stir up the crowd and others to quiet the crowd. Paul's traveling companions (Gaius and Aristarchus) were used as pawns. Paul himself wanted to speak to the *crowd*, but *officials of the province of Asia*, described as *friends of Paul*, believed it too risky for him to do so. For two hours the Ephesians yelled how great Artemis was (compare this with 1 Timothy 3:16 to find out how great Christianity is). *Alexander the Jew* was also put forward, but he could not quiet the crowd.

Finally, the *city clerk* gave the crowd an appropriate sanity check. The clerk was very careful not to commend Paul, but he reminded the people of their responsibilities under Roman authority and successfully dismissed the *assembly* (the Greek word used is the normal word translated "church").

The gospel needs beachheads to expand, but those beachheads may create challenges. ■

APPLICATION

WHAT I LEARNED IN AN ANCIENT THEATER

BY DAVID FAUST

Visiting Ephesus was a highlight of my recent visit to Turkey (now spelled Türkiye). In New Testament times, Ephesus was the capital of the Roman province of Asia. At the height of its glory, the city had a population of about 250,000 and a seaport accessible to large ships. Today the site is a sprawling, fascinating collection of stone artifacts, but no one lives there anymore.

Spiritual Challenges and Open Doors

First-century Ephesus was a complicated place to plant a church. It was filled with idolatry, sexual immorality, and crime. Yet, God opened “a great door for effective work” there (1 Corinthians 16:8-9), so the apostle Paul spent more than two years in Ephesus (Acts 19:8-10; 20:31), conducting daily discussions in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. The gospel spread rapidly and “all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord” (Acts 19:10). The seven churches mentioned in Revelation 2 and 3 may have been planted by missionaries trained in Ephesus who returned to preach in their hometowns.

Paul urged his young protégé, Timothy, “Stay there in Ephesus” (1 Timothy 1:3). Priscilla and Aquila lived in Ephesus for a while, too, and helped the eloquent speaker Apollos to know the Lord more adequately (Acts 18:24-26). Tradition says the apostle John wrote his Gospel and Epistles in Ephesus before dying there.

The city’s temple dedicated to the goddess Artemis was larger than a football field—425 feet long and 220 feet wide, with a roof supported by 127 tall stone pillars. Today, only the foundation and one stone column remain. (I noticed a stork had built a nest on top of the one remaining pillar.) First-century silversmiths made hefty profits by selling statues of Artemis, and they worried that the Christian faith would have a negative impact on their business. An angry mob dragged some of Paul’s companions into the theater and shouted, “Great is Artemis

of the Ephesians!” for about two hours (Acts 19:28-34). The massive semicircular stone theater where that happened, which seated 25,000 people in biblical times, has been thoroughly excavated and restored.

A Lost Priority

Our tour group spent several hours exploring the archaeological remains of Ephesus, but one site held special fascination for me. I scrambled to the top of the theater and sat by myself for a while in the highest row available. It was precarious to climb those weathered stone steps, but it was worth the trouble. Sitting there alone, I pictured the theater filled with boisterous, rioting crowds, and I thanked God for the historical reality of the Bible.

But a troubling thought crossed my mind. The Ephesian Christians had a lot going for them. Paul lived and served there for a while. So did Priscilla and Aquila, Timothy, John, and other noteworthy leaders. Paul personally encouraged and prayed for the church’s elders (Acts 20:17-38), and he penned a letter that closed with these words of blessing: “Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love” (Ephesians 6:24). Yet, a few decades later, the Lord warned the Ephesian church, “You have forsaken the love you had at first” (Revelation 2:4). Eventually the church’s “lampstand” was removed (v. 5), and the Ephesian church faded into the annals of history.

Many churches today are blessed with good teaching, skillful leaders, and comfortable buildings. But before I left my seat in that ancient theater, I prayed, “Lord, never let us lose our first love for you.”

Personal Challenge: On a piece of paper or in your personal journal, write a list of reasons you love the Lord. Say a prayer of praise and tell him why you love him. Ask the Lord to keep your love for him strong and vibrant for as long as you live. ■

DISCOVERY

BY DOUG REDFORD

1. Following up on last week's "Personal Challenge" projects: What steps can you take to continue your involvement in and support of missions and missionaries? How can you involve others (family and church friends) in this effort?
2. In what subject or subjects do you think you would be best suited for leading a discussion group of, say, 10 to 15 people?

Ask two people to read aloud **Acts 19:8-10, 23-41**, one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize the passages.

3. Some in Ephesus "publicly maligned" the Christian faith (Acts 19:9). In what ways do we see the faith maligned today (publicly or otherwise)?
4. While in Ephesus, Paul was able to have daily discussions in the lecture hall of Tyrannus (Acts 19:9). Do you think the discussion format would be effective in today's culture as a means of communicating the Christian faith? Why or why not?
5. Silver images of the goddess Artemis were worshipped in Ephesus. What items or ideas could be considered "idols" in Western society today?
6. Mark Scott notes the part that greed played in the thinking of Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen in Ephesus.
 - In what ways does greed manifest itself in contemporary culture?
 - What can we do to avoid being impacted by greed?
7. Two of Paul's traveling companions, Gaius and Aristarchus, were seized during the uproar in Ephesus (Acts 19:29).
 - What personality or character type was well-suited for traveling with someone like Paul?
 - What risks would be involved in traveling with Paul (besides what happened to Gaius and Aristarchus)? What might be the blessings?
8. Acts 19:31 notes that some of the officials of the province of Asia were friends of Paul and were concerned for his safety.
 - What does this tell us about Paul's strategy in taking the gospel to new locations?
 - What would be some examples of similar friendships that Christian leaders might want to develop in today's setting?
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: "I will . . ."
10. As a follow-up to last week's lesson and Personal Challenge, commit to praying each day this week for one (or more) of the following: a missionary your church supports, a missionary whom you know (but whom your church does not support), and/or a missions-related organization. Pray for two points noted in today's Scripture: boldness (Acts 19:8) and protection from opposition (Acts 19:35-41).

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Acts 28:17-31**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. ■