

**THE REVIVAL AT EPHESUS**  
**Great Revivals**  
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We have looked at five revivals in the Old Testament and two in the New Testament – the church at Jerusalem and the church at Antioch. Today the church at Ephesus, Acts 19. Acts 19:1-10 “When Apollos was at Corinth Paul passed through the upper country and came to Ephesus. There he found some disciples and said to them, ‘Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?’ and they said ‘No, we have never even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.’ He said, ‘Into what then were you baptized?’ They said, ‘Into John’s baptism.’ Paul said, ‘John baptized with the baptism of repentance telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him. That is Jesus.’ On hearing this they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. When Paul had laid his hands upon them the Holy Spirit came on them and they spoke with tongues and prophesied. And there were about twelve in all. He entered the synagogue and for about three months spoke boldly, arguing and pleading about the kingdom of God. When some were stubborn and disbelieved speaking evil of the Way before the congregation he withdrew from them taking the disciples with him and argued daily in the hall of Tyrannus. This continued for two years so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord both Jews and Greeks.”

Just a word about the city itself. Ephesus located on the Eastern side of the Aegean Sea, now western Turkey, was a major town in the ancient world. A city of about 200,000 in population. Again, by our standards not so large but by ancient standards considerable. The population of the city itself doubled every May when persons came in for what was the Ephesian equivalent of the Olympian games. The population of the town without the advantage of Holiday Inns doubled to 400,000 during these times. Persons came in from all the Roman province of Asia. Not Asia as we know it today – China and India – but the Roman province of Asia which would be modern day Turkey and also those crossing the Aegean sea from Macedonia and Asia, present day Greece.

A major center in Ephesus itself was the temple of Diana, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. It was at the time that Paul came to the city of Ephesus the world’s largest building. It housed the goddess Diana or Artemis. There were two names for the goddess, a kind of goddess of fertility associated with the worship of Diana. There was a great deal of immorality.

The building itself would be approximately the size of our entire church lot, about an acre and a third in existence. It had surrounding it 127 columns holding up, 6 foot thick each and 37 of the columns had life size figures carved into the base of the column so this was part of its claim to fame as one of the world’s greatest buildings.

From this temple a great deal of the commerce of the city flowed. One of the chief products of the town was the silver idols that were made by the artisans of the temple, the profit accrued to the city of Ephesus because its magnificent goddess was revered throughout the ancient world.

Not only did it have the temple of Diana but we know both from accounts in Acts 19 and also by modern archeological investigation it had an amphitheater that sat about 25,000 people. It was this amphitheater that Paul wanted to preach the gospel in. It would have been the largest crowd he’d ever preached to. One can understand that had he gone into the raging mob they would

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have torn him from limb to limb. Even knowing this prospect however the disciples literally had to sit on him or tie him down because he saw it as the one time in his life when he could preach to the size of crowd he'd never had the opportunity to preach to before.

The city of Ephesus therefore because of its location on the Aegean Sea and its crossroads trade position was a center for commerce, a center for learning, a center for athletics, a center for religion in its locale of the world.

When the gospel gets through with three years and a half under the apostle Paul in this town things have considerably changed. I'll start this message by going from beginning to end, then most of the content of the message we'll focus in on how in the world this happened.

By the time Paul had been in the city for a little over two years we find that there is a bonfire in the town by the Christians who have occult books and paraphernalia. They come and burn them – Acts 19:19. Luke notes the value. Luke likes to count things. He was the first church record keeper. He saw the importance of keeping accurate records, which included numbers. He notes that the amounts of material that was burned up approximated fifty thousand pieces of silver. A piece of silver approximated a working man's day's wages. That kind of situation was an impact on Ephesus which you could well realize.

Not only was this happening but another measure of the impact the gospel of the town was that the people who worked in the trade union making the idols, man by the name of Demetrius was the leader. He was very upset. The preponderance of Christians in the town had become so great that his market was being withered away. Therefore the town was on the verge of suffering great economic loss.

I think it's significant that a measure of the gospel's impact upon this town was the fact that it effected the economy of the town. A rather unusual way to measure the impact of the gospel but I think nevertheless a kind of intriguing way of measuring the impact of the gospel. That when persons become believers their buying habits became different and some industries that they supported before they were a believer are now not being supported. So without organizing any marches or pickets or official boycotts but simply as a matter of disuse the leading economy of the town undergoes a tremendous suffering just because Christians coming under the power and gospel of Jesus Christ altered life patterns. That's how deeply the gospel invaded this town.

Paul started out with twelve persons at Ephesus and within two years all of Asia – that is the towns you read about in Revelation 2 and 3 which surrounded Ephesus – probably a population of anywhere from a half a million to a million persons had heard the gospel and a tremendous percentage of these had believed. Twelve people and double that every month, the Christian community in Ephesus alone would have been 50,000 people.

Something extremely dynamic happens in this town. How did this happen? Is the pattern duplicable?

I'm convinced there are things we can learn from every founding of a church in the New Testament. The Lord doesn't necessarily say, here's a program that worked in Ephesus – put it to work here. The spirit is unique in each situation. As you study the New Testament you'll find there were individual uniqueness to the founding of every church. Just like there were unique

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conversions. Like Lydia who quietly opened her life to the Lord. Had what you'd call a non dramatic conversion. Then there was Saul of Tarsus who was literally cast to the ground by the dynamic nature of the appearance of the risen Lord to him. We as individuals could tell as many different stories as there are people in this room. God works in individuality.

But some specific things strike me in the founding of the church at Ephesus, in this great revival that occurs in this town which show us the kind of phenomenon in the church. It's unlike the founding of the church at Antioch, which had begun really as the result of an unplanned effort. Laity from Cyprus and Phoenicia found themselves going to Antioch and began sharing the gospel. But Ephesus church results from a direct effort by a mission – the Apostle Paul – to plant a church. What are the key ingredients?

One key ingredient certainly for Ephesus is the fact that Paul himself a divinely ordained leader. You look at what had happened in Ephesus and you must remember that by the time Paul got there it was around 54-55 A.D. Christ had rose from the dead 29 A.D. – 33 A.D.. That means the gospel presence in the world had already been for at least two decades. Yet nothing had happened at Ephesus. But within two years after Paul's revival in this town a key change in the town had happened. It suggests that God in his infinite way of bringing the church into existence uses leadership.

In fact, as I look around at churches today which are alive I generally find that there are alive pastors in the church. And churches which are dead or dying you generally find dead or dying pastors. A kind of indictment on the ministry.

This is not to say we see Paul as a person who did things by himself because he didn't. He continually worked with a team of ministry. But there is a place in God's way of doing things for individuals who have a specific call by God for a specific task. Paul would later write to the Ephesians and say, "God put in the church first apostles." This is the kind of individual the apostle was called to be.

The divinely ordained leader. What are the qualities of divinely ordained leaders? Certainly this person had a definite call from God. I think one of the things we want to do as a worshiping community especially in regard to our young people, is provide them the kind of atmosphere in teaching which causes every young person to seriously consider what call does God have upon my life? Knowing that our life eventuates out of the call, which we feel God has placed upon us.

There is a tremendous training that the apostle goes through before he hits the town of Ephesus. God redeemed the features of his pre Christian experience. The long training he'd had a rabbi became useful. Just like God could take features from our pre Christian experience and channel them into positive experiences of our Christian life.

He was a person by the time he reaches Ephesus, seasoned in terms of already having two missionary tours behind him. The old idea that if you want to be used of the Lord, that he uses persons without training, is laid to rest by the kind of strategy which emerges in the New Testament where Jesus intensively trained twelve persons. And where the apostle Paul himself was intensively trained by the Lord in scriptures and in practical experience for the work which God had called him to.

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He's a person as a leader is tuned in to the leading of God. There's some real practical application for us all. He'd wanted to come to Ephesus for a long time. At the beginning of his second missionary journey, as early as five years before he got to the town, he wanted to go there but the Holy Spirit said no. So he didn't. At the end of the second missionary journey he came to Ephesus and he spent a few weeks in the synagogue preaching. They wanted him to stay but he said no. He realized he wasn't ready for the kind of demands that Ephesus would place upon him so he needed to go back to his home town, rest up, and get a new fresh surge.

He was a person who was confident that the Lord puts him in the right place at the right time in his will. With this kind of sequence of timing he had his life committed to the Lord.

You may feel in respect to the way God is leading you, "You've closed so many doors on me. Why don't you tell me when you're going to open the doors?" Paul had this kind of experience. He wanted to go to Ephesus and the Lord simply said no, you can't go and didn't tell him where he could go at the beginning of his second missionary journey.

I've found this sometimes in regard to the will of God in my own life. I want to do something and the Lord slams it off. Then he has the audacity *not* to tell me what he wants me to do next. So I stumble around for a while.

All of this is part of our training in obedience to the Lord and following him by faith rather than by sight.

The apostle Paul as the divinely called leader is a person under intense discipline. We find at Ephesus if we were to reconstruct his working day (he's single so he can get away with a lot of things married people couldn't get away with) He'd get up in the morning and work on his tents. He taught in the school of Tyrannus. One text says the hours he taught were from 11 in the morning to 4 in the afternoon. We know from secular accounts that that appears to be the siesta time for Ephesus. The whole town shut down. But Paul kept awake and people came to his school. He worked in the morning, maybe 5, 6 hours making tents then he went to this school taught for 5 hours, then he precedes to say when he reviews his ministry to the Ephesians in Acts 20 that he went from house to house with tears and weeping and taught them both in public and from house to house. Which meant his evenings were taken up with home ministry and then probably around 10-11 at night he turned in. Only to get up and repeat the cycle the next day, taking the Sabbath off of course. But discipline in his life.

I would suggest that in your own life the degree of satisfaction you feel with what you're doing is somewhat related to the kind of discipline you are experiencing. If you're being very undisciplined in your life – in your spiritual life, about everything – your image of yourself, your satisfaction with yourself in the actual things you are doing are going to not be very good at all. Discipline is a quality, which God uses to bring about good positive results in his kingdom.

Also this called man is a person of faith. He has the audacity to believe that God is going to do a work in the town, which God has called him to.

And he's a person of perseverance. He can say at Ephesus that he fought with wild beasts in that town. Whether he's speaking symbolically or literally we don't know. But he had great

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struggles. He had threats on his life. He lived with anxiety for the other churches. But in all of this he kept to his calling.

God uses divinely called leaders. Paul was in that position of being able to communicate to others because he himself had something to give. You cannot give others what you yourself do not have. Paul is seeing this in his life.

Another quality, a thing that happens in the church of Ephesus, is not only does God have someone divinely ordained to be a catalyst which he uses, but also there is a sequence which this person uses in the planting of the church in that town. Three stages he goes through.

The first thing that Paul does when he comes to Ephesus is he finds disciples. So that reads easily as Luke describes it. But how do you find twelve people who are disciples in a town with 200,000 population? Where do you look? He had to search them out. Most normally his approach was to go to the synagogue first because there weren't any disciples to find in the town so he linked up first with the Jewish community of which he himself was Jew. But here in Ephesus he searches first for the disciples, those who had already had contact with the Christian message. How he found them we don't know but he found them first. I think what he wanted to do with this group is build upon what God had already been doing. This is how God works. He takes the apostle Paul and links him up with persons whom the Holy Spirit has already touched. What God is always seeking to do with his body is take us from the point we're at the next point he wants us to be. The disciples at Ephesus had come as far on their own as they could go and they needed the apostle to come.

What is his purpose when he comes? He says, Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed? When they say they haven't heard of the spirit then Paul assumes that they really haven't even had Christian baptism because Christian baptism was to be given in the name of the father, the son and the spirit. They hadn't heard of the spirit so this meant that they didn't know the full ramifications of Jesus' ministry. So he rebaptized them and they were filled with the spirit.

I think the difference between these twelve when Paul first found them and by the time he's through with that initiatory contact is the persons had been translated from being disciples to prophets. What's the difference? The disciple is a person who basically soaks in. A disciple is one who is living under a discipline, following a teacher, following a master. He doesn't feel so much under any authority to say anything himself because he or she is still learning.

But by the time that Paul is through with this small group of twelve they have become persons who are doing two things. They are filled with the spirit and as a result of that they are speaking in tongues and prophesying. Speaking in tongues suggests to me that the Holy Spirit is opening up the avenue of praise that they would need in their intercessory life for that to own. It was a town in which the occult reigned. The spirit would raise up a strong power to match the occult in the town of Ephesus.

But also they prophesied. A prophet is not simply one who all of a sudden invents predictive ideas about the future. But a prophet is simply one who declares God's word. All of a sudden these persons who had simply been disciples are prophesying. From being persons who soaked

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in, they became persons who were capable of giving out. So the work of discipling was to the augmented by the work of giving.

That small group at Ephesus where people in the company of twelve close relationships with one another, became a model by which the whole church would be built. It's a tremendous thing to get a hold of. The success of a church like at Ephesus for example is built around the modeling of persons within the church. If the church is to be dynamic and alive in the Lord then it needs as Ephesus needed persons at its base who perpetuates that experience into the other group, which will emerge. I think the city of Ephesus was filled with small Christian groups all over the place. They were having the same kind of experience as these twelve being changed from disciples into prophets.

This is a function of the Lord for us. There is a time to learn but there is also a time to give. The junction of that time when you begin making the metamorphosis is when the spirit is poured out and you sense that aliveness to Jesus in your life, which the spirit brings. Which makes it possible for communication to take place with others.

The first thing he did was find disciples. The second thing he did was he went to the synagogue. The key linking point because he himself was a rabbi. The synagogues of the ancient world, the visiting rabbis were given the privilege to speak. It was largely a lay run organization. Paul stood up and spoke. And for some three months the text of Acts tells us he spoke in the synagogue. What was he speaking about? Significantly his theme was the kingdom of God. That has to be one of the central themes of the Old Testament. It also becomes one of the central themes of the New Testament. How did the Jews at Ephesus perceive the kingdom of God? They would have to have thought of it in Old Testament terms. A literally existence of a political state at Israel presided over by a king. With the help of priests and prophets to administer the affairs of the kingdom.

I think they were persons who had largely given up on the concept of the kingdom. They were Jews of the dispersion. If they had really believed in the kingdom being restored then they would have already been back in Jerusalem. But the very fact that when travel and political conditions permitted them to return to Jerusalem if they had wanted to they had chosen not to but remained in the town that they were. They were in effect saying, "We don't think the king will ever come. I don't think I'll ever be a part of it."

What did Paul do? He taught them the kingdom as Jesus presented it. The kingdom basically is this. Jesus has appeared and he has all authority. But he's chosen for this present age not to express that authority in political and national terms. Rather he has ascended into heaven and we are the ones declaring the message. That he has all power and all authority and that he wants to rule and reign in your life. It's that message of the kingdom, which Paul is preaching in the synagogue to persons who were agnostic about the kingdom. That message became so charged that he was cast out of the synagogue.

That took him to his third place, the school of Tyrannus or the hall of Tyrannus. A rented place evidently which Paul took and taught for five hours a day in this school. Through this school came students who I think were marked by two characteristics. A hunger to learn and a willingness to immediately implement and share what they had learned.

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A hunger to learn. If you consider the fact that at Ephesus the siesta time lasted from about 11 till 4. And persons would normally take off. Instead you find the school of Paul is filled with students. Not students in the sense of 18-22 years of age. But persons from all ages and background who simply hungered to know reality. I think it's easy to get the concept that once you get to a certain age you quit learning. You quit being hungry. But a belief, a characteristic of vibrant Christians is a hunger for more of God. A hunger to really learn his word. A hunger to do his will. This Bible school at Ephesus was a school in which there was that kind of a characteristic – great hunger for God. Rather than a casual kind of approach or putting in an appearance at the assemblies so we do our weekly duty so to speak. A real vibrant hunger.

I believe that what Paul did next with those students was he sent them out. He said now that you've been in the school for a while it's time for you to go out and begin sharing some of what you learned. Paul had faith in the people that he taught that they would communicate what they had learned. Paul operated in the realm of Christian education and teaching.

As a result of these three things all of Asia was hearing the word.

One other thing in regard of Ephesus. We talked about a divine leader, three places in order to see this congregation grow to the extent that it did. One other thing occurs. That is the impact of the supernatural in this town.

This is God's part. We find at Ephesus if you look at verse 11 and following that at Ephesus God did extraordinary miracles through the hands of the apostle Paul. Too many times I think that the church waits around for a miracle to happen in order for the gospel to spread. The church at Ephesus didn't function like this. Persons came to the Lord based upon the teaching and the miracles were kind of a bonus. I think most of them were occurring to believers. That seems to be an inference. Never at Ephesus does it say that people are believing because of the miracles. It was that people were hearing the kingdom of God expounded. And were being taught and were believing. That's not to say that there aren't times when persons really come to faith in Jesus because of a miracle that occurs. But a primary observant in the New Testament is that people do not come to faith simply because of a miracle. The primary miracle has happened. Jesus has risen from the dead. Once that is taught and expounded we come to faith in Jesus Christ.

Added to that emphasis at Ephesus is the extraordinary work of God. It is so extraordinary Luke has to note that handkerchiefs and aprons were carried from Paul to the sick. They were laid upon them and they were healed. I think there were many reasons for this. Paul was so busy ministering he didn't have time to go pray for the sick as he normally would. The handkerchiefs were like sweat rags worn around the head. The apron was the leather covering, which he wore when he was working making tents. People were taking the very things associated with his work, on which his sweat had drained. And if Paul could not go personally they could be as Oral Robert says a point of contact.

Why was the point of contact important? It was important because the person being healed must understand that the power that was healing them was the power that Paul was speaking of and preaching about. The authority of the Lord Jesus Christ. Extraordinary miracles at Ephesus were not so much the result of Paul's conjuring up faith. But the result of the sovereign work of God in cooperation with the faith that he had had in that city.

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Also at Ephesus there was exorcism. One of the humorous scenes of the Bible in verse 13 where certain Jewish exorcists under the leadership of an cultic high priest by the name of Sceva, the 7 sons of Sceva tried to cast out some evil spirits using the name of Jesus. Ephesus was great with mumbo-jumbo or incantations. The whole occult thing was if you say the right thing then things are going to happen. So since these persons had always dabbled in this saying things they thought here is something that evidently works – the name of Jesus – so we'll use that as our next mumbo-jumbo. So they used it. The demon came out but it didn't come out in the way that they expected. One single demon leaps on them and sent the seven brothers fleeing into the city naked.

The striking thing about this exorcism is the fact that the demon answers back when these 7 sons of Sceva says "I adjure you by the name of Jesus, come out." These demons respond with, "Jesus, I know and Paul I know but who are you?" In the Greek for the verb "know" there are two different words employed. For "Jesus I know" it carries the idea of "I am well acquainted with. And "Paul I know" it's "I'm acquainted with" but it doesn't convey the intimacy or full awareness as does the previous word. What is striking is Jesus never once goes to Ephesus did he? Never ministered outside of Israel. He died on a cross in Jerusalem. Rose again in Jerusalem. Yet a demon at Ephesus, "Jesus I really know." Which says something about the interlinking of communication in the spirit world. "Jesus I really know and Paul who was here physically, I know somewhat. But who are you?"

And the incident occasions something that happens in the Christian community. Like many times when the gospel comes to a new culture people have not yet put away some of their pre Christian practices. Some of the kinds of habits they'd gotten involved in. They had Jesus but they still had their "thing" that they liked to do. At Ephesus it happened to be the occult; when this event happened there is what I would say a revival even within the fledgling church there. A revival of holiness. Saying we must put out of our life all that is not like Jesus. So they dump it.

One of the things that this occasions in us as believers today is to ask ourselves am I carrying around any pre Christian garbage? Am I walking around with it in my life and I should dump it in order that my experience with the Lord might be as vibrant and real as the Lord wants it to be.

This break with the occult is key at Ephesus. This church goes on to be a very mature church. We see it later in Paul's letter to the Ephesians which is I think along with the letter of Romans one of the most deep, mature letters in the New Testament. I think the church at Ephesus is much different than Corinth. Corinth couldn't take the kind of heaviness that the Ephesian letter revealed. They had moved ahead in the Lord and were able to take in. And it becomes a great church.

In the next few moments I'd like to just look over these eight revivals and ask me and you to look at the lessons that have been for us in this experience of looking at revivals. Hopefully we've been looking at these more from the standpoint of simply filling up the Sunday mornings with topics. But that they have had relevance for our lives and our experience together as a community, as a church.

The first revival we looked at was Jonah. We saw him as a person who did not understand the heart of God. If we begin by understanding the heart of God we will know that God pities

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people. God has compassion for people. Any great revival is accompanied by a stirring in our hearts that reaches out in compassion that makes us something other than simply self-centered persons. But makes us outgoing. That was God's work with Jonah.

The revival under Samuel started as we indicated in the life of a mother who hungered desperately before God for a child. And who acted in obedience and fulfillment of her promise once the child was born by indeed giving him in commitment to the Lord. So again we see the quality of revival is intensity before God of desire. And a willingness once the Lord answers our initial prayer to act in obedience to what we have promised.

The revival under Elijah we saw a person who acted because he believed God's word. He had been reading evidently in his copy of the Old Testament. He only had the five books of the law. It said that if the day came when Israel would turn away from God that God would withhold rain. Elijah begins his ministry by standing before the king and says, It will not rain until I give the word. What was he doing? He was acting on the ancient word of God. He looked at the conditions and said, God you said that this would be the case. Now I'm going to act upon your word and this is what's going to happen. When you act upon the word of God things inevitably happen.

What about the revival under Hezekiah? A person who tore down high places. Who was a good man ruling a nation which by and large was committed to the Lord but it never went all the way in its commitment. It allowed a kind of fortress in its life which was not Christian, not like God. That high places had to be dealt with.

Ezra and Nehemiah couldn't be stopped by roadblocks that arose, but kept walking around, jumping through and pushing past the roadblocks for spiritual development. And the development of their nation.

What about the Jerusalem church? Caught up in the authority of Jesus Christ. Absolutely certain of the fact that he had all power and all authority. From that premise they themselves could become a powerful and loving community. They were intoxicated with truth. Jesus said "I am the truth." When you come to Jesus you're no longer looking after you've found him for truth. Because he is truth. The basic truth. He is the Lord.

The revival at Antioch. The church which grew in love and in learning, hungry to learn and ready to love. In fact, I think they had a love for learning and in addition, they learned to love.

The church at Ephesus. An exhilaration of the work of the Holy Spirit. A willingness to believe it didn't take a generation to see something tremendous come into existence in regard to the work of God. It took only the commitment of time to the Lord. The commitment of obedience to his word which exhilarated the expansion of the gospel so that within 2½ short years there was still unprecedented growth of the church.

All of these messages and principles are designed to help us look at our spiritual life and our walk together as a community and say, "Revive me! Revive our church!"

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That is our cry, heavenly Father, that you would revive us and that your spirit would be especially poured out on all of us so that the kind of models that we have looked at in the Old and in the New Testament your written revelation become more than distant pictures at which we gaze. But become living incentives for us to be ourselves a purified people, a people caught up in love and adoration, and obedience to you doing all of your will as you have summoned us to do it. Let that deep desire and quest for you build within us that it will be for your glory and for the expansion of your word in us and in our community. We pray this in deep sincerity knowing that you hear and you will answer. In Jesus' name. Amen.