

The Church List in Revelation

Scripture: Revelation 2-3

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the church in Ephesus (2:1a)

Perhaps no church in history had as rich a heritage as the congregation at Ephesus. The gospel was introduced to that city by Paul's close friends and partners in ministry, Priscilla and Aquila (Acts 18:18–19). They were soon joined by the eloquent preacher and powerful debater Apollos (Acts 18:24–26). Priscilla, Aquila, and Apollos laid the groundwork for Paul's ministry in Ephesus.

The apostle Paul stopped briefly in Ephesus near the end of his second missionary journey (Acts 18:19–21), but his real ministry in that key city took place on his third missionary journey. Arriving in Ephesus, he first encountered a group of Old Testament saints, followers of John the Baptist (Acts 19:1–7). After preaching the gospel to them, he baptized them in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 19:5). That began Paul's work of building the church at Ephesus—a work that would last for three years (Acts 20:31). Later, on his way to Jerusalem near the end of his third missionary journey, he taught the elders of the Ephesian church the essential principles of church leadership (Acts 20:17–38), the gist of which he later expanded in his pastoral epistles. Paul's protégé Timothy served as pastor of the church at Ephesus (1 Tim. 1:3). Onesiphorus (2 Tim. 1:16, 18) and Tychicus (2 Tim 4:12), two more of Paul's fellow laborers, also ministered at Ephesus. Finally, according to the testimony of the early church, the apostle John spent the last decades of his life at Ephesus, from which he likely wrote his three epistles in which he calls himself "the elder" (cf. 2 John 1; 3 John 1). He was no doubt leading the Ephesian church when he was arrested and exiled to Patmos.

Dramatic and remarkable events accompanied the birth of the Ephesian church. Paul's ministry profoundly affected not only the city of Ephesus, but also the entire province of Asia (Acts 19:10). As previously noted, it was undoubtedly during this time that the rest of the seven churches were founded. God supernaturally affirmed Paul as His spokesman through a series of spectacular miracles (Acts 19:11–12). Attempting to emulate Paul's success, a group of Jewish would-be exorcists were beaten and humiliated by a demon-possessed individual (Acts 19:13–16). Their debacle spread consternation and fear throughout the city, causing "the name of the Lord Jesus [to be] magnified" (Acts 19:17). Shocked into realizing the futility of trusting in pagan practices, "many also of those who had believed kept coming, confessing and disclosing their practices. And many of those who practiced magic brought their books together and began burning them in the sight of

everyone; and they counted up the price of them and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver” (vv. 18–19). That staggering sum, equivalent to 50,000 days of workers’ wages, reveals the magnitude of Ephesus’s involvement in the magic arts.

The striking conversions of large numbers of Ephesians posed a severe economic threat to the city’s pagan craftsmen. Ephesus was the center of the worship of the goddess Artemis (known to the Romans as Diana), whose ornate temple was one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. At the instigation of a silversmith named Demetrius the craftsmen, who saw their lucrative business endangered, reacted violently. The ensuing riot threw Ephesus into chaos (Acts 19:23–41).

By the time of this letter, four decades had passed since the Ephesian church’s tumultuous birth. The apostle Paul was gone, as were many of the first generation of believers converted under his ministry. A new situation called for another inspired letter to the Ephesians, this one from the Lord Himself, penned by the apostle John.

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