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Deep and Wide: Education Overflowing as Evangelism from Ephesus



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Introduction

By the time the Apostle Paul settled in Ephesus for ministry purposes just after the midpoint of the first century A.D.,² concerns about the great city's harbor silting up from the deposits flowing down the Cayster (or Little Meander) River had existed for well over two centuries.³ In spite of this, Ephesus had grown to become the fourth largest city in the Roman Empire.⁴ Relatedly, it is not too much to say that much of the *breadth* of success of Ephesus as a city was dependent on maintaining⁵ the necessary *depth* in the harbor that would allow access to seafaring craft.

Analogously, in Paul's ministry from his Ephesian base of operations, as described in Acts 19-20, the astounding *breadth* of evangelistic and cultural impact was a direct result of the *depth* of the daily educational enterprise going on in the school of Tyrannus. Not just any kind of "education" would have sufficed; however, to fuel the Pauline mission centered in Ephesus, which is widely understood to be his most productive site of ministry.⁶ Rather, the following presentation argues that Paul's model demonstrates that *in-depth, heart-inflaming education can ignite widespread, life-transforming evangelism, with a far-reaching cultural impact.*

The Focusing of Paul's "Great Commission" Ministry

Paul's overarching missionary goal was the fulfillment of Christ's Commission, particularly as articulated in Matt. 28:19-20. Acts skillfully makes the reader aware of that priority by showing Paul, as he undertakes his three missionary journeys, consistently involved in evangelism (i.e., "going"), then the "baptizing" and "teaching" of the converts, the three "steps" for making disciples commanded in the Matthean Commission. If anyone is tempted to take this extensive evidence as mere coincidence, though, Luke tellingly employs *matheteuo*, the verb rendered "make disciples" in Matt. 28:19, in Acts 14:21, its only use outside the first Gospel (see table 1).⁷

Table 1
THE DISCIPLE-MAKING COMMISSION
(Matthew 28:19-20)
Fulfilled in Acts

Setting/ hearers	Pentecost	Samaria	Ethiopian eunuch	Cornelius's group (Gentiles)	Syrian Antioch	Asia Minor (first missionary journey)	Philippi (second missionary journey)	Corinth (second missionary journey)	Ephesus (third missionary journey)
Make Disciples!						Acts 14:21 (only use outside Matthew)			
Going/ evangelism	2:38	8:5, 12	8:35	10:43	11:20, 21, 24	14:21 a	16:14, 30, 32	18:4, 4, 8a	19:2, 4, 10
Baptizing	2:41	8:12b, 13, 16	8:36, 38	10:47-48a			16:15, 33	18:8b	19:5
Teaching	2:42			10:48	11:23, 26	14:22 (16:15; 18:23)	(20:2)	18:11 (20:3)	19:9-10 (20:27, 31)

On the first missionary journey (Acts 13-14), as well as during the earlier portion of the second missionary journey (Acts 16), Paul and his coworkers tended not to stay in any one locale very long. There appear to have been three basic considerations related to this brevity, all of which are clustered in Acts 14:19-23: 1) Persecution emerged rapidly almost everywhere Paul attempted to minister (14:19-20); 2) evangelism was the primary focus of Paul's ministry early on (14:21); and 3) only enough follow-up teaching (14:22) and organization (14:23) was done in each city to plant the church adequately.

As his second missionary journey continues to unfold through Macedonia, however, Paul's ministry methodology becomes much more focused in respect to the "teaching" aspect, though by no means does he ignore evangelism and baptism. As the following table reflects, this takes place in two interwoven ways: 1) Though Paul and Barnabas had once been described as speaking "persuasively" (Gk. *peitho*; Acts 13:43), now the teaming up of "reasoning" (Gk. *dialegomai*) and "persuading" becomes too obvious to overlook, appearing together for the first time in Paul's ministries in Thessalonica, Corinth, and Ephesus. 2) Though it was not plausible to stay longer in Thessalonica because of the turmoil (Acts 17:8), and though there was only a minimal response in Athens (17:34), evidence related to Paul's ministries in Corinth and Ephesus indicates that he was now ready to commit himself to stay in strategic locations for a considerably longer time (between the two, at least half the total time in all three missionary journeys).⁸ This was for the purpose of undertaking in-depth teaching ministry on a daily basis as well as doing further evangelism. More about the likely nature of this developing educational aspect of Paul's ministry will be discussed in relation to Acts 19:8-10.

Table 2
Paul's Emerging (Daily) Teaching Emphasis

City	Setting	Frequency	Function	Duration
Thessalonica	Synagogue	Weekly	Reasoning (17:2) Persuading (17:4)	(Over) 3 Sabbaths (17:2)
Athens	Synagogue	Weekly	Reasoning (17:17)	Unknown (though relatively brief)
	Marketplace	Daily		
Corinth	Synagogue	Weekly Probably Daily (18:5)	Reasoning (18:4) Persuading (18:4) Teaching (18:11)	A year and a half (18:11), perhaps "many days longer" (18:18)
	House of Titus Justus			
Ephesus	Synagogue	Weekly	Reasoning (18:19; 19:8, 9)	3 months (in the synagogue (19:8), plus two years (19:10), plus "a little longer" (19:22) = "3 years" (20:31)
	"School" of Tyrannus	Daily	Persuading (19:8)	

An Opportunity to “Test The Waters”

It is not completely clear why Paul left Corinth (Acts 18:18), which was up to that point his longest place of ministry on his missionary journeys. One possible explanation has to do with the “vow” related to cutting his hair, mentioned in Acts 18:18. The problem is that such a vow would have had to be fulfilled in Jerusalem, and there is no visit to Jerusalem mentioned in the following narrative of Paul’s geographical movements before the beginning of his third missionary journey (18:19-23).⁹ Presumably, though, Paul sensed that he had accomplished what the Lord wanted to do through him in Corinth, including reaching with the gospel the bulk of the “many people in this city” (18:11, NIV) that the Lord had promised earlier.

For the purposes of this study, the question that must be asked here is, “Why did Paul go to Ephesus at this point?” Several ready explanations, all of which may be correct, present themselves: 1) The only ship leaving Cenchrea in this time frame that would take Paul where he was headed stopped through Ephesus (Acts 18:18-19). 2) Paul’s friends and fellow “tent-makers,” Priscilla and Aquila (18:2-3), were going to Ephesus on a business venture, and Paul wanted to spend as much additional time with them as possible. 3) Priscilla and Aquila may even have paid for Paul’s passage on the ship;¹⁰ and 4) We know from Acts 16:6 that Paul had previously desired to go into the region near Ephesus and had been “kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia” (NIV). This would have been an obvious opportunity for Paul at least to see Ephesus, however briefly.

However, there likely was more to this stop than even all four of these explanations together. There is good reason to hold that Paul was planning ahead for his ministry by stopping at Ephesus. As a strategic thinker who well understood the significance of the city of Ephesus, Paul had planned to go toward Ephesus in the earlier stages of the second missionary journey and had been providentially hindered (Acts 16:6). His question seems to be whether the Lord’s prohibition at that point was permanent or merely an issue of “timing.” A short stop, complete with speaking in the synagogue one Sabbath (18:19), would have provided him more insight to help make that determination. In addition, the wording Paul employs when the Jews prevail upon him to stay longer in Ephesus fits well with his concern to discern the divine strategy: “I will come back if it is God’s will” (18:21, NIV).

In addition, it was no small advantage having his trusted friends, Priscilla¹¹ and Aquila, in Ephesus (18:19) in his absence. According to this understanding, a key part of their role there would have been taking the “spiritual temperature,” so to speak, of both the city and its environs. The way they later handled the shortcomings of Apollos’ message (18:26; see below) indicates that they were very astute theologically and would have made skilled “advance scouts” for the planned Pauline mission to Ephesus. So, it is not at all implausible to conclude

that, in visiting Ephesus at this point, Paul was deploying a plan to determine whether the Lord would in fact allow him to begin the ministry there that he long had hoped to undertake (16:6) and to give him a head start if the Lord allowed.

A “Half-Baked” Evangelistic Outreach in Paul’s Absence

As Paul was completing his time of reporting and enjoying fellowship with the church in Syrian Antioch, and just beginning his third missionary journey overland to the eastern part of Asia Minor (Acts 18:23), a new player appeared on the scene in Ephesus. Apollos, a Jew from Alexandria, Egypt,¹² a well-educated (“learned,” 18:24, NIV) man possessing great facility in the Old Testament Scriptures (18:24), arrived and began to preach with a passionate style (“great fervor,” 18:25, NIV), apparently both in the city at large and in the synagogue (18:25-26).

The focus of the text at this point is not on the results of Apollos’ preaching. That he did have some “converts” seems the natural implication of Acts 19:1-7 (see below). Instead, it is noted that Apollos had been but partially “instructed in the way of the Lord,” since he had been told about Jesus only as far as “the baptism of John” (18:25, NIV).¹³ This meant that Apollos’ message was still “accurate,” *as far as it went*. However, it did not go nearly far enough so as to lay out the finished work of Jesus Christ, the focus of the gospel message. For Apollos’ own sake, as well as that of his hearers, it was incumbent on Priscilla¹⁴ and Aquila to take him aside as soon as possible and to explain the gospel to him “more accurately” (18:26, NASB).

Apollos left for Corinth shortly thereafter (Acts 18:27), but the impact of his ministry lived on in Ephesus, including that of the “half-baked” message he had been preaching before Priscilla and Aquila brought him “up to speed.” That appears to be the problem Paul encounters upon his arrival back in Ephesus in 19:1-7, the next scene depicted in the narrative of Acts.

Beginning His Ephesian Ministry with a Foundational Educational Corrective

We know no details at all about Paul’s ministry after he left “the region of Galatia and Phrygia,” where he had focused on “strengthening all the disciples” (Acts 18:23). He apparently moved fairly directly across Asia Minor in the direction of Ephesus (19:1). However, it is not even possible to know for sure from the general wording in Acts 19:1 (“through the interior,” NIV; Gk. *ta anoterika merē*, “the higher, upper regions”)¹⁵ whether Paul entered Ephesus: 1) from the east, by the main road through the Lycus and Meander valleys;¹⁶ or 2) from the

north, by a road on the north side of Mount Messogis.¹⁷ Apparently, it was *not* of critical importance to Luke to let his readers know what Paul had been about in transit. Rather, it *was* central to the movement of the narrative to announce that Paul had arrived back in Ephesus, implicitly answering the previously hanging question about God's will with regard to possible further ministry there (18:21). If the Lord had *not* wanted Paul to go back to Ephesus, He could have simply "cut him off at the pass" again in the spiritual sense, in the same geographical region in which He had done so previously near the beginning of the second missionary journey (18:23; see 16:6).

Upon arrival, however, Paul could not just begin at "ground zero" with his standard presentation of the gospel. The "disciples" (Acts 19:1) that resulted from Apollos' earlier incomplete message (18:25-26) had to be dealt with immediately.¹⁸ Whether because of the considerable size of the city (modern estimates usually run at least 250,000),¹⁹ or perhaps because of being in and out of town on business or other reasons, the "twelve men" (19:7) apparently had not heard the "more accurate" (i.e., after talking with Priscilla and Aquila) later version of Apollos' message. Nor had they encountered Priscilla and Aquila, or other believers, in the meantime.

Thus, it was up to Paul to correct the serious misunderstanding of these "disciples" (a broad use of the term, meaning no more than "pupil, learner, or follower," with no specific content assumed).²⁰ He did so very effectively, by proceeding, first diagnostically, then pedagogically, and finally practically. Paul's question about the Holy Spirit, along with the natural follow-up interaction, diagnosed the problem: incomplete understanding (Acts 19:2-3). Then Paul was in a position quickly to get these "disciples," who apparently did want to understand correctly and completely, "on the same page" educationally and theologically with where they should have started in the first place (19:4). Finally, because of their previous significant misunderstanding of the nature of baptism (19:3-4), Paul proceeded to rebaptize the group (19:5).²¹

This, then, was the ground floor of Paul's heavily education-oriented ministry in Ephesus, a "remedial education" group. Fortunately, their problem was a lack of informational input, a set of circumstances that Paul was prepared to take on, *head-on*, for the next several years (Acts 19:8, 10; 20:31).

Moving from a Weekly Evangelistic Base to a Daily Educational-Evangelistic Base

After this initial encounter, Paul went back to his standard initial evangelistic strategy in entering any city in which there was a Jewish community of any size.²² He goes into the synagogue and begins to preach (Acts 19:8). Here one revisits Paul's "one-two punch" of "reasoning" (Gk. *dialegomai*) and "persuading" (Gk. *peitho*).

Of the thirteen uses of *dialegomai* in the New Testament, it is surely significant that ten are found in Acts 17-24, related to Paul's ministry. According to the *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, this term, which originally meant to "discuss or hold a conversation," in Acts

approaches the meaning of give an address, preach. It refers to the reading and exposition of the OT, which were, in theory at least, permitted to every man in the synagogue (cf. Lk. 4:16-21). The RSV rendering "argue" is justified insofar as the audience was permitted to ask questions.²³

Alongside the use of *peitho*, which means, basically, to "convince, persuade,"²⁴ one gets a fairly clear picture of what Paul was trying to accomplish in the "three months" he was allowed to speak in the synagogue at Ephesus (Acts 19:8), as he had earlier in Thessalonica (17:2, 4) and Corinth (18:4). He apparently read and preached key Old Testament passages related to Jesus as the coming Messiah and "the kingdom of God" (19:8), taking questions as they arose, all the while seeking not just to inform, but fully to convince (and thus convert), his hearers.

It may seem amazing that Paul was allowed to continue for three months in the synagogue before obstinate opposition convinced him it was time to go elsewhere to continue his ministry (Acts 19:9). However, two Jewish background factors may well come into play here: 1) What Paul was doing fit in with an aspect of traditional Jewish education, even though it did not involve formal study, thus smoothing the way for a longer hearing; and 2) on Sabbaths and holidays, Jewish scholars regularly preached in the synagogues and were very popular. By virtue of his training under Gamaliel (Acts 22:3), Paul certainly qualified as such a scholar,²⁵ which, in Ephesus, seemingly provided him a somewhat "longer leash" before he wore out his welcome in the synagogue. When it became clear to Paul that little or nothing more could be accomplished by attempting to continue to use the synagogue as his Ephesian base of operations, he chose an intriguing location to move to that allowed for considerably more flexibility on a *daily* basis (as opposed to the *weekly* synagogue services): the "school of Tyrannus" (Acts 19:9). Unfortunately, it cannot be known exactly what is meant by this phrase. The Greek *scholē*, often translated "school," "originally meant 1) 'leisure'; 2) then an activity conducted during leisure, such as a 'discussion, debate, or lecture'; 3) a group to which such lectures were given; and 4) a place where such a lecture was given, i.e., 'hall.'"²⁶

Of these possible meanings, it appears that four is the most likely. Option one does not fit the context of Acts 19:9 at all. Option three is also highly unlikely, given that Paul was moving his own "group" of disciples to a new *location* from the synagogue (19:9). Option two may well have been the kind of educational activities Paul was undertaking (see below), but the location for the activity seems to be what is intended. Thus, the NIV rendering "lecture hall of Tyrannus" seems to be fitting.

Who was Tyrannus? The name, a fairly commonly attested one, means “tyrant” and was probably a nickname given by his students or others. He could either have been the owner of the “lecture hall” (who either let Paul use it or rented it to him) or the teacher who primarily used the facility on an ongoing basis.²⁷ There is no way of knowing which is true, and it ultimately is not in any way decisive.

When did Paul use the “lecture hall” to carry on his daily “discussions” (Acts 19:9, NIV)? Again, there is no certainty as to the logistics involved, given the scarcity of evidence beyond “reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus.” However, some information worth carefully considering does exist:

The Western text inserts the most interesting addition that Paul “argued daily in the hall of Tyrannus *from the fifth hour to the tenth*” (i.e., from about 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.), which may represent an accurate piece of information, preserved in oral tradition before being incorporated into the text of certain manuscripts.²⁸

This daily “schedule” is certainly plausible. If there was another teacher using the same building, he would likely have taught in the cool of the earlier morning, then taken off the period of mid-day heat for rest, before resuming in the cooler part of the later afternoon. Paul would have undoubtedly been working at his trade of “tent-making” in the earlier mornings and later afternoons, as needed (see Acts 20:34). Bruce wryly observes, “It says much for the staying-power of Paul’s hearers as well as Paul himself if they frequented the lecture-hall daily during the heat of the day for two years.”²⁹

This brings us to the interesting question of how Paul managed to appeal to the kind of wider audience that, over a period of some “two years” (Acts 19:10), would result in the amazing statement that “all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord” (NIV). This is especially fascinating, given that it appears that the bulk (if not all) of those who came with Paul from the synagogue were Jewish (19:8-9). So, how did the saturation “outreach” to the Gentiles gain its initial foothold in and through Paul’s new “school” in the “lecture hall of Tyrannus?”

It must not be forgotten how much of an impact the prevailing Greco-Roman culture had on the Jews. Most Jews of the Diaspora, in particular, received a standard Hellenistic education.³⁰ Having been raised for part of his earlier life in Tarsus in Cilicia, in Asia Minor (Acts 22:3), Paul would certainly have been aware of this educational “cultural overlap.” Plus, having had quite an exposure to Athens (Acts 17:16-34), Paul would have known very well how philosophers, philosophy teachers, and similar lecturers conducted themselves, including their teaching itself. So, since the Jews would have been well acclimated to the Greco-Roman style, it is not at all unlikely that, as a means of strategic outreach, Paul could have “billed” himself as some kind of private teacher whose lectures and discussions were open to the public.

It is worth considering the possibility that, as the awareness and popularity of “Paul’s school” mushroomed, the lecture hall of Tyrannus may have been “the place to be” in Ephesus, daily through the midday hours for much of the time Paul ministered there! As the word spread, traveling merchants and others who were in and out of Ephesus on a consistent basis may have even organized their schedules around hearing Paul brilliantly and passionately expound the Scriptures and “take on all comers” as far as questions were concerned. Then, when they left town, they took within their minds and hearts the transforming biblical message, which overflowed to many others whom they met, as they fanned out along those Roman highways and reached all of proconsular Asia (Acts 19:10) with the saving gospel of Jesus Christ.³¹

A Little Bit of “Knowledge” Can Be a Dangerous Thing

While everyone in proximity to Ephesus did hear “the word of the Lord” (Acts 19:10, NIV), not everyone understood it or responded positively to it. However, the wide impact of the gospel and biblical truth, as well as Paul carrying out the miraculous “signs of an apostle” (2 Cor. 12:12), did embolden some to attempt to mimic Paul’s miraculous power and use the names of Jesus and Paul superstitiously. The spotlighted incident, the overpowering of Sceva’s seven sons by one man who was demon possessed (Acts 19:11-16) is, on the one hand, among the funniest incidents in the entire Bible. At the same time, it is also tragic, given how readily accessible proper understanding of such matters would have been to any persons willing to avail themselves of Paul’s daily teaching at the school of Tyrannus. Relatedly, the following mirroring (chiastic) structural layout appears to argue that this section (Acts 19:11-16) is a key part of understanding the wider function of Acts 19:1-20. Note the clearly “echoing” wording:

Table 3

Focusing on Remaining Ignorance and Societal Problems, in Spite of All the Teaching and Evangelism (Acts 19:9-10)

- A (1) Passing through “the upper country” on the way to Ephesus.
- B (10b) Word of the Lord.
 - C (10c) Both Jews and Greeks (all who lived in Asia).
 - C’ (17) Both Jews and Greeks (all . . . who lived in Ephesus).
- B’ (20) Word of the Lord.
- A’ (21) Planning to pass through Macedonia and Achaia on the way to Jerusalem and Rome.

Are these ideas echoed in reverse order a mere coincidence? It is very doubtful. Most likely, the section 19:11-16 is being “framed” as the center point of the structure to get across the crucial idea: *Wrong practice is based on wrong understanding and belief, which is even sadder, since proper understanding and belief is available.* This point is, then, “bookended” (i.e., bracketed) by 19:8-10 and 19:17-20, stressing the spread of the gospel and in-depth understanding, contrasting sharply with this attempted counterfeit spiritual power.

The great irony of this “cameo” is that Sceva, the father of the young men who were beaten to bloody pulps and stripped naked by the demon-possessed man (19:14-16), is said to be some sort of *Jewish* “chief priest.”³² It was, of course, a certain “obstinate” portion of the Jewish community in Ephesus that had earlier forced Paul’s hand in leaving the synagogue (19:9). So, by implication, these Jews had no one to blame but themselves for this spiritually ignorant and spiritually dark fiasco. They could well have listened to Paul back when he was reasoning in their synagogue on the Sabbath (19:8), but they did not. They could also have, relatively easily, made their way to the lecture hall of Tyrannus any day over a two-year span (19:10), as some within the Jewish community did (19:9), but, of course, they did not.

Education and Evangelism Resulting in Cultural Impact

The above incident apparently not only spurred on the wider reception of the gospel, but it also brought about a very healthy fear and respect for the Lord Jesus and Christianity and biblical values in general (Acts 19:17-20). Suddenly, belief in Christ began to motivate widespread confession of sin (19:18), and believers began to “put their money where their mouth was,” in a very real sense. Those who had practiced sorcery prior to faith in Christ now made clean breaks with their past, burning their magic scrolls at a very substantial collective financial loss (19:19).³³

It is probably not overstating things to say that a true, full-blown “revival” was breaking out in and around Ephesus. Not only were many people being brought to faith in Christ (Acts 19:10, 20a), but the word of the Lord also “grew in power” (19:20b), apparently meaning, in this context, that it was affecting *behavior* every bit as much as *belief*. What we see here is the intended transformative impact of biblical values in practical living, and to some significant extent, on wider society.

While the entirety of society may not be transformed by any means, as was previewed at the beginning of this presentation, here is the point of everything we have seen in this study: *In-depth, heart-inflaming education can ignite widespread, life-transforming evangelism, with a far-reaching cultural impact.* A huge and rapidly expanding number of profoundly changed lives in Ephesus and the surrounding province (19:26) brought about such a huge “disturbance” (19:23,

NIV) to the societal status quo that an angry riot ensued (19:28-40). That massive “uproar” (20:1) apparently convinced Paul that it was time for him to leave Ephesus. However, Ephesus and the surrounding area would never be the same as it had been before Paul “went to school” (excuse the pun!) on how to overflow evangelism from education that packs a wider cultural wallop.

Paul’s Personal Perspective on His Ephesian Ministry

What we have seen so far is the rich, but surprisingly selective,³⁴ narrative of Luke about Paul’s years in Ephesus. As one of Paul’s trusted ministry lieutenants (Col. 4:14; 2 Tim. 4:11), Luke would, of course, have had access to all the relevant information needed to convey to his readers the explosive impact of Paul’s ministry in Ephesus. Nevertheless, there is still something very special about hearing an autobiographical treatment. In addition, readers of the Book of Acts are blessed to have access to just such a presentation: Paul’s message to the Ephesian elders in their meeting at Miletus, recorded in Acts 20:18-35, which recaps and highlights key aspects of his ministry among them. The table below reflects an interesting chiasmic structure at the heart of this passage, which emphasizes certain critically important aspects of Paul’s message:

Table 4

The Solemnity of Paul’s Education and Evangelism Ministry in Ephesus and the Solemnity of God’s Guidance to Move On

- A (20:20) “I did not shrink from declaring. . .” (Gk. *anangelo*)
 B (20:20) “Teaching you publicly [almost certainly the “school of Tyrannus”] and from house to house³⁵
 C (20:21) “Solemnly testifying [Gk. *diamarturomai*] of repentance toward God, faith in our Lord Jesus Christ
 D (20:23-24a) “Solemnly testifying [*diamarturomai*] of the Holy Spirit, that bonds and afflictions await, to finish my course/the ministry [Paul] received from the Lord Jesus
 C (20:24b) “Solemnly testifying [*diamarturomai*] of the gospel of the grace of God
 B (20:25) “Among whom I went about preaching the kingdom
 A’ (20:27) “I did not shrink from declaring. . . [*anangelo*].”

What Paul is intending to communicate through this elegant structure is that he has painstakingly accomplished exactly what the Lord wanted in his three years (Acts 20:31) in Ephesus. While there, Paul acted courageously in his

hearers' best interest (A; 20:20) in proclaiming the "whole counsel of God" (A'; 20:27). He strategically employed a specific side-by-side ministry *methodology*: teaching in-depth and preaching the gospel (B; 20:20, 25). He unapologetically articulated a specific ministry *message*: repentance toward God, faith in Christ—the gospel of grace (C; 20:21, 24b). Now, however (as the center point of the inverted structure *highlights*), in as serious a vein as he took his ministry in Ephesus, Paul understood that he was going to Jerusalem and what could be "the end of the race," the final stanza of his ministry (D; 20:23-24a).

The "School of Tyrannus": Its 'Deeper, Wider' Impact

As Ephesus was the principal Aegean port city for all of Asia Minor, "Roads from Ephesus radiated in every direction along the coast and through the interior of the province."³⁶ The gospel spread along these roads as "all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord" (Acts 19:10, NIV). As a result, from the New Testament and the writings of the Apostolic Father Ignatius,³⁷

We know that churches were established in the territories of Phrygia (Colossae, Laodicea, and Hierapolis), Lydia (Smyrna, Philadelphia, Thyatira, Sardis), Ionia (Magnesia, Tralles) and Mysia (Pergamum). New communities presumably formed in numerous other villages and cities throughout Asia Minor.³⁸

We now realize that the founding of the seven churches addressed in Revelation 2-3, as well as those in Colossae and Hierapolis, all took place during the three incredible years Paul spent in Ephesus (Acts 20:31). From the literary standpoint, 1 Corinthians was written by Paul from Ephesus,³⁹ while Ephesians, the Letters to the Colossians and Philemon (believers in the nearby Lycus Valley)⁴⁰ 1, 2 Timothy, and Revelation 2-3 deal with the outworking of Paul's ministry in Ephesus. Timothy's ministry in Ephesus (see 1, 2 Timothy) was "delegated" by Paul, and the Apostle John's later ministry there (in which he probably wrote the Fourth Gospel, 1, 2, 3 John, and the Apocalypse⁴¹) likely came about because of the importance Ephesus had gained as a result of Paul's ministry. Over the exceedingly long haul, F. F. Bruce concludes,

The christianization of the province of Asia was carried out during those years by Paul and his colleagues so thoroughly that for centuries the churches of Asia were among the most influential in the world; they survived the Turkish conquest and did not come to an end until the exchange of populations which followed the Graeco-Turkish war in 1923.⁴²

Conclusion: Can There Be a “Deep and Wide” Impact Today?

Is it even realistic to think in terms of a powerful impact on our postmodernist urban context in the early twenty-first century⁴³ even remotely similar to that of Paul’s work in and through the school of Tyrannus in the first century A.D.? Ultimately, it is probably not much less realistic than it was in the urban setting of the great city of Ephesus in Paul’s day, if we are willing to “pay the price.”

However, we need to realize that our smug sense of contemporary in-depth education may get in the way of such an impact. For example, whenever we feel proud of the impressive number of hours that pastors and church members spend in various preaching/teaching settings or that teachers and students spend in the classroom setting, we would do well to recall what Paul did through his base in the school of Tyrannus in Ephesus. There is good reason to believe that for about five hours per day, at least five days per week (he most likely took off the Jewish Sabbath, though he would have been preaching on the Lord’s Day), for over two years, Paul passionately taught the Word of God. Conservatively, that works out to at least 25 hours per week, 1,250-1,300 (or more) hours per year, and well over 2,500 to perhaps 3,000 hours total, over the duration of the Apostle’s Ephesian ministry (Acts 19:10, 22).⁴⁴

Think about it. In a classroom setting, the common full-time level of 15 semester credit classroom hours per week equates out to an average of only three to four hours of class per day. Such a full-time load multiplies out to some 225 classroom hours per semester and 450 per year (perhaps “maxing” out at 500 to 550 classroom hours with a summer school or inter-term course or two). To summarize: With current course loads and educational methodology, it might well take about five or six years simply to duplicate the amount of time Paul passionately poured into his hearers in the school of Tyrannus in something over two years. In other words, it might require far more than our students could learn in one entire degree program for them just to begin to approach the level of biblical/theological “education” of many of Paul’s average hearers in Ephesus.⁴⁵ The comparison to an average church educational setting is, of course, even starker.

This obviously presents modern pastors and theological educators, as well as evangelistic, church planting, church growth, and church renewal theorists with a challenging task of thinking through what could accurately be called “saturation education overflowing in evangelism.”⁴⁶ However, the above likely scenario does go a long way toward explaining why the Pauline mission in Ephesus became a virtual spiritual tidal wave that engulfed the entire region and why it had staying power for so many centuries. Thus, as we look around at the low-ebb cultural impact and far-less-than-comforting theological stability and even less-encouraging evangelistic zeal of much of the evangelical church today, Paul’s “deep and wide” model in Ephesus looks more and more like it might offer some desperately needed perspective.⁴⁷

Notes

¹The datings of respected scholars in regard to the narratives in Acts vary at this point. For example, D. A. Carson, D. J. Moo, and L. Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 230, opt for “about mid or late 52.” R. N. Longenecker, “Acts of the Apostles,” *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. F. E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981), 9:456, takes an A.D. 53 date. R. E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 309, 428, holds 54 to be the “traditional dating.”

²R. E. Oster, Jr., “Ephesus,” *ABD*, 2:542, 543.

³C. H. Miller, “Ephesus,” *Harper’s Bible Dictionary*, gen. ed. P. J. Achtemeier (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1985), 271.

⁴Oster, “Ephesus,” 543, tells of significant evidence still extant of the dredging of the harbor that occurred during and fairly shortly after the time Paul was in Ephesus.

⁵However, see the recent monograph of R. Strelan, *Paul, Artemis, and the Jews in Ephesus*, BZNTW 80 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1996), 2, who asserts that Paul’s wider impact in Ephesus was far from wildly successful. His evidence is far from compelling, however.

⁶The following material is taken from table 5.3, in B. Luter and K. McReynolds, *Disciplined Living: What the New Testament Teaches about Recovery and Discipleship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1996), 84. The formative thinking behind the chart was originally developed in A. B. Luter, Jr., “Discipleship and the Church,” *Bib Sac* (July-Sept. 1980): 267-73; and *ABD*, 2:1090-91, s. v. “Great Commission,” by Luter.

⁷For an enlightening discussion of the strategic nature of these two great cities in that day, see D. P. Cole, “Corinth and Ephesus: Why Did Paul Spend Half His Journeys in These Cities?” *Bib Rev* 4 (1988): 20-30.

⁸Longenecker, “Acts,” 488, discounts the reading of the Western text here (“I must by all means keep the coming festival at Jerusalem”), but does champion the view that Paul was ending a Nazarite vow in Acts 18:18, which was fulfilled in a trip to Jerusalem, compressed in the text into the “went up” and “went down” of 18:22, between arriving in Caesarea and eventually getting to Syrian Antioch. J. B. Polhill (*Acts*, NAC 26 [Nashville: Broadman, 1992], 390) suggests that, in connection with his vision in 18:9-10, he made the vow as “a means of expressing thanksgiving and seeking the continued blessing of the Lord in his Corinthian mission.”

⁹Longenecker, “Acts,” 488.

¹⁰For a vivid description of Priscilla, one of the most intriguing women in the New Testament, see K. McReynolds, “Priscilla,” *The Complete Who’s Who of the Bible*, ed. P. Gardner (London: Marshall Pickering, 1995), 551-52; and “Priscilla: Ready and Willing to Serve,” in B. Luter and K. McReynolds, *Women as Christ’s Disciples* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1997), 119-29. For a more scholarly treatment, see B. Witherington III, *Women in the Earliest Churches* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

¹¹Polhill, *Acts*, 396, states, “Apollus was indeed a common name in Egypt, being a shortened form of Apollonius.”

¹²It is futile to speculate what Apollos might have known about Jesus, beyond his baptism by John and his related recognition that Jesus was the Messiah prophesied in the Old Testament.

¹³Priscilla's name being listed first here (as in Acts 18:18) is unusual, though it is impossible to know for sure if any, or all, of the typical explanations (e.g., Priscilla was from a higher social class; or Priscilla was the more mature believer; or Priscilla was the gifted teacher) are correct, though the apparently parallel flipping of the order of the names of "Barnabas and Saul" (Acts 13:3) to "Paul and his companions" (13:13) implies the latter option.

¹⁴C. L. Rogers, Jr., and C. L. Rogers III, *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 279.

¹⁵Polhill, *Acts*, 398.

¹⁶F. F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1977), 286, following the view of W. M. Ramsay.

¹⁷The variant explanations of the background and theological nature of the problem Paul deal with in Acts 19:1-7 are legion. Given the straightforward movement of the text from 18:24-28 to 19:1-7, the present writer opts for the simplest contextual understanding.

¹⁸C. E. Arnold, "Ephesus," *DPL*, G. F. Hawthorne, R. P. Martin and D. G. Reid, eds. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 249.

¹⁹The standard use of the plural "disciples" in Acts is as an interchangeable term for "church" (see Acts 7:1 and 8:1; 11:26; 14:22-23). However, it should not be considered particularly strange for this kind of broad usage to occur, given that Judas Iscariot was called a "disciple" or that many "disciples" are said to have turned their backs on Jesus and not followed Him anymore in John 6:66.

²⁰For the purposes of this study, the potential ramifications of the controversial inclusions of tongues and prophecy in Acts 19:6 are without significance.

²¹From what we can see of Paul's ministry in Acts, he meant it when he said, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile" (Rom. 1:16, NIV). The only prominent exception to initial synagogue ministry occurred in Philippi, where there apparently were not enough Jews to even have a synagogue (Acts 16:13).

²²D. Furst, "*dialogomai*," *NIDNTT*, 3:820-21.

²³O. Becker, "*peithomai*," *NIDNTT*, 1:588.

²⁴J. T. Townsend, "Education (Greco-Roman)," *ABD*, 2:316.

²⁵See E. M. Yamauchi, "Tyrannus," *ABD*, 6:686.

²⁶*Ibid.*

²⁷B. M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the New Testament* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1971), 470.

²⁸Bruce, *Paul*, 291.

²⁹Townsend, "Education," 315.

³⁰R. Allen, *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?* (London: World Dominion, 1930), 18-19.

³¹This mention of Sceva is problematic from a scholarly standpoint, because the Greek term *archiereus* normally means "high priest." However, there was no Jewish high priest in this time period named Sceva (I. H. Marshall, *Acts*, TNTC [Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1980], 311). However, the word can also mean "member of a high priestly family," which appears to be the best understanding here (B. A. Mastin, "Sceva the Chief Priest," *Journal of Theological Studies* 27 (1976): 405-12.

³²Polhill, *Acts*, 406, writing in the early 1990s, estimates the modern equivalent of 50,000 silver drachma coins at about \$35,000. Now a decade later, it would undoubtedly be much more.

³³Not a few commentators have noted how little proportionately is laid out in Acts about Paul's time in Ephesus, given its duration, impact and ongoing significance.

³⁴This may well be speaking of various "house churches" in Ephesus, or so hold Rogers and Rogers, *New Linguistic Key*, 285. See also the parallel view in Arnold, "Ephesus," 252.

³⁵C. E. Arnold, "Centers of Christianity," *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments*, eds. R. P. Martin and P. H. Davids (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 147. Hereafter cited as *DLNTID*.

³⁶See M. W. Holmes, "Ignatius of Antioch," *DLNTID*, 530-33.

³⁷Arnold, "Centers of Christianity," 146-47.

³⁸Brown, *Introduction*, 512ff.

³⁹M. J. Harris, *Colossians and Philemon*, Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1991), 241-43.

⁴⁰See the helpful discussion of Arnold, "Centers of Christianity," 147.

⁴¹F. F. Bruce, *New Testament History* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1972), 326.

⁴²W. J. Larkin, Jr., "The Recovery of Luke-Acts as a 'Grand Narrative' for the Church's Evangelistic and Edification Tasks in a Postmodern Age," *JETS* 43.3 (September 2000): 405-15, believes the narrative of Acts can offer great help in just such a task.

⁴³If Paul stayed closer to three years (Acts 20:31) than two (19:10), the upper-line figure here would be perhaps four thousand or more hours.

⁴⁴Admittedly, these estimated figures do not bring into play the amount of homework students today are (presumably) doing outside the classroom setting. But, then, neither do they reflect the likely extent to which many of Paul's hearers might have been "Bereans" beyond the School of Tyrannus setting, reviewing what they had heard and searching the Scriptures to see if Paul was on target (Acts 17:10-11).

⁴⁵Pardon the play on words off "saturation evangelism."

⁴⁶This paper was presented as the opening lecture of The Criswell College's "Christ and Culture Conference," 2000, offered to The Criswell College family as an initial step toward the intentional intersection of a biblical philosophy of ministry and a biblical philosophy of education.