



Who are you?

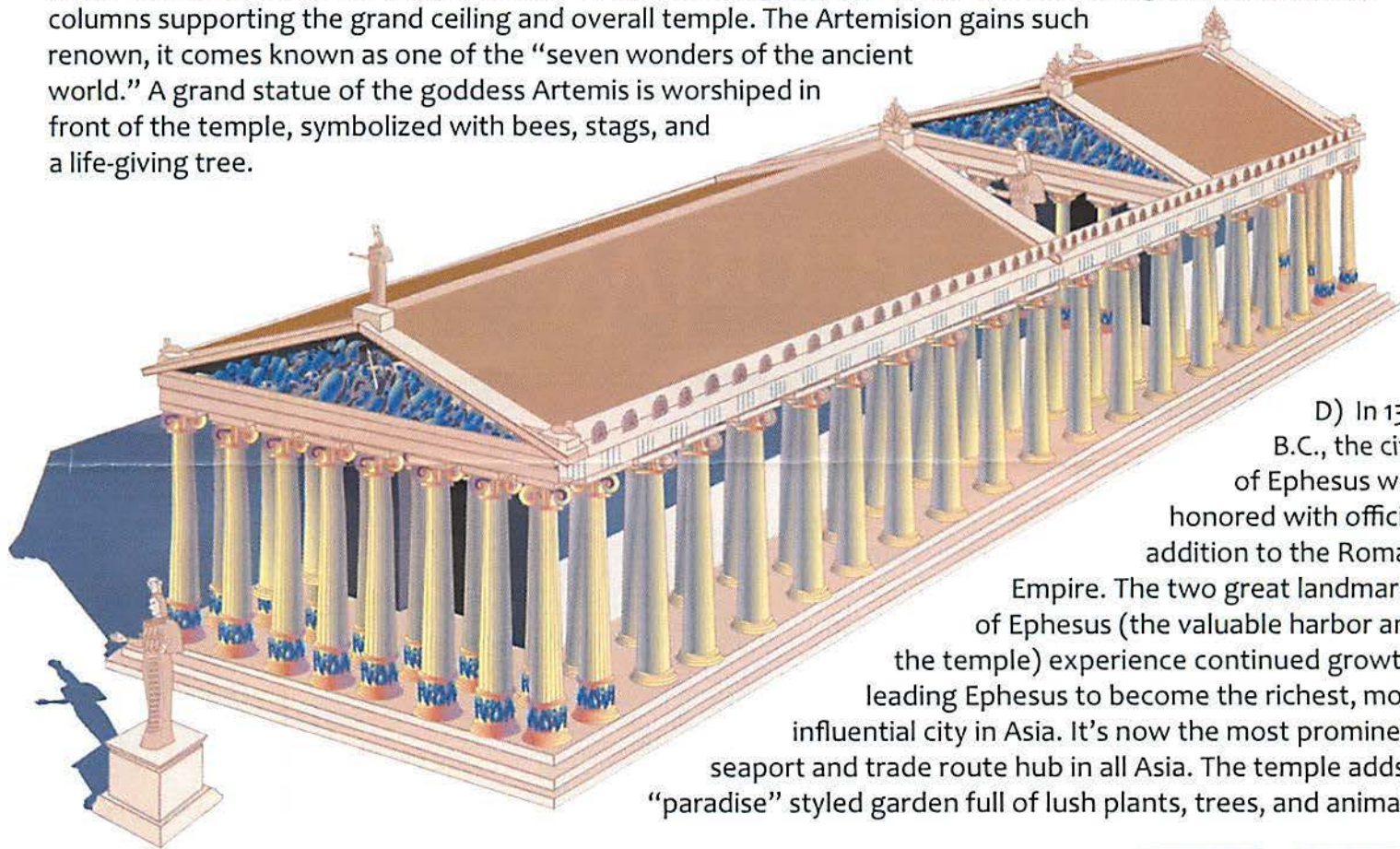
Long Beach Alliance Church

March 2, 2014

Pastor Chris Lankford

1) The Ancient City of Ephesus

- A) Ephesus, and the regions around the city, have a long and storied history. In 550 B.C., the earliest establishment of Ephesus was on the slopes of nearby Pion Hill (to the east on the graphic), a smallish town compared to the sprawling metropolis of 250,000 people we read about in the New Testament. Conquered by Croesus of Lydia, the town of Ephesus was moved around an ancient temple dedicated to the Greek goddess Artemis (goddess of animals and fertility), built in a large, flat valley area nearby.
- B) In 375 B.C., a sea harbor was built near Ephesus (on the Aegean Sea), and the city gradually moved to center around the economy the harbor provided. The Temple to Artemis is burnt down in 356 B.C. (not too long after it was built) by arson, coincidentally on the same day Alexander the Great was born.
- C) The temple was again rebuilt, beginning in 323 B.C. in spectacular fashion, with construction lasting for many years. The structure of the temple measured 450 feet long, 225 feet wide, and 60 feet high, with nearly 130 columns supporting the grand ceiling and overall temple. The Artemision gains such renown, it comes known as one of the “seven wonders of the ancient world.” A grand statue of the goddess Artemis is worshiped in front of the temple, symbolized with bees, stags, and a life-giving tree.



D) In 133 B.C., the city of Ephesus was honored with official addition to the Roman Empire. The two great landmarks of Ephesus (the valuable harbor and the temple) experience continued growth, leading Ephesus to become the richest, most influential city in Asia. It's now the most prominent seaport and trade route hub in all Asia. The temple adds a “paradise” styled garden full of lush plants, trees, and animals.

- E) During the time of Christ (around 5 B.C. to 25 A.D.) the Temple of Artemis employed thousands of priests, artisans, and temple prostitutes. It was the center of religious culture in both Ephesus and Asia Minor (Turkey).
- F) As the fame of the Artemis temple spread, so did the legends attached to the extraordinary structure. Festivals celebrated Artemis through the city twice a year when citizens would worship a portable idol of Artemis and cry out, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!” (Acts 19:28).
- G) Another legend asserted the large idol of Artemis in the temple (reportedly a very large, jet-black stone, appearing as a many-breasted woman (see to the right), with birds and stags surrounding her body) had fallen to the earth from the sky (a meteor) and had never been formed by human hands (carved, chiseled) – but simply appeared in the form of Artemis, thus justifying worship of Artemis (cf. Acts 19:35).



2) Jesus Comes to Ephesus

- A) Toward the end of the Apostle Paul's 2nd Missionary Journey (around 52 A.D.), he briefly stopped in Ephesus with friends Aquila and Priscilla (married couple from Pontus who were also fellow tentmakers, Acts 18:2-3), and planted the seeds of the Gospel in the local synagogue (18:19).
- B) Aquila and Priscilla remained in Ephesus after Paul left the city, carefully establishing the church in Ephesus with the help of Apollos, a young and talented preacher from Alexandria, Egypt (southern portion of the map; 18:24-26).
- C) During the Apostle Paul's 3rd Missionary Journey (detailed to the right, beginning in Antioch around 54 A.D.), he returned to Ephesus, establishing himself as an influential preacher



and proponent of the Gospel of Jesus Christ (19:1-10). Paul remained three years (20:31), fighting hard for the “whole counsel of God” against false teaching/teachers in Ephesus (20:17-32).

- D) As Paul leaves Ephesus, he appoints Timothy, a young elder and pastor in Ephesus, to lead the church and provide solid biblical teaching (1 Timothy 1:3-11). Paul writes to Timothy often, giving him guidance for his leadership and providing a blueprint for the establishment of the Gospel work for churches in locations such as Ephesus. Paul passionately pleads with Timothy to remain faithful in leading the important church in Ephesus (6:20-21). The secular nature of the Ephesians is even preserved in this local carved sign (to the right), leading men from the harbor area to a local brothel, common in Ephesus.



- E) Onesiphorus (2 Timothy 1:16, 18) and Tychicus (2 Timothy 4:12) also ministered in Ephesus, and we understand from apocryphal (widely circulated, impossible to confirm historical accuracy) church tradition the Apostle John lived to a very old age in Ephesus after his exile to Patmos, and was buried in Ephesus. A large church was erected in the 4th Century on the supposed site of the Apostle John’s tomb, and remains to this day.

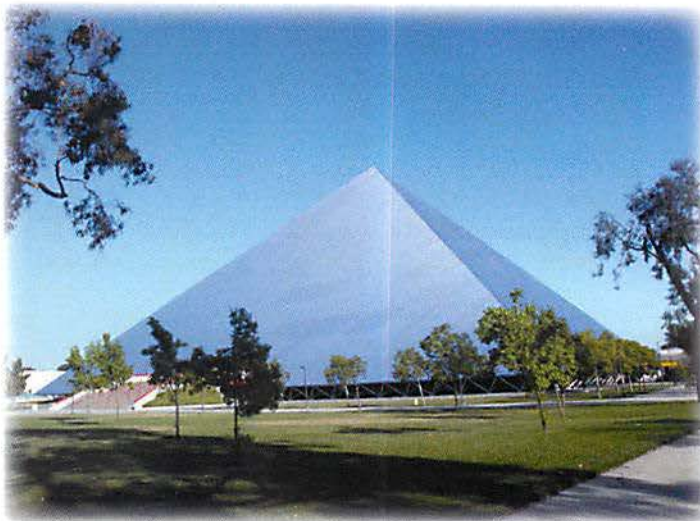


- F) The modern site of the once famed Temple of Artemis is pictured here to the left. The location is swamp land, completely uninhabitable, and the only remaining mark of the famous site is this singular pillar.

- G) Ephesus is last mentioned in the Bible as the first of the seven churches of Revelation (Revelation 2-3), complimented by Jesus Christ for being hard working and maintaining vigilance regarding false teachers, but warned regarding “abandoning the love you had at first” (Revelation 2:1-7). Jesus Christ asserts He will “remove the lampstand” (the church) from Ephesus if they cannot overcome their loss of love for the Gospel of Jesus. Unfortunately, the area of Ephesus (closest to the nearby Turkish city of Selçuk) is 99% Islamic, and once again in need of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

3) Ephesus Comes To Long Beach Alliance Church

- A) As we approach the book of Ephesians, it is important to see the similarities between Ephesus and our own Southern California culture. The culture in Ephesus was aggressively anti-religious, just as the culture in our own area is progressively becoming more anti-Christian. Entertainment was important and embraced by the Ephesians, attracting an ethnically diverse and varied populace. Sporting events were prized in Ephesus, with fantastic money invested in stadiums, the arts, and pagan religious practices. Ephesus prized their icons and practices of intellectual and spiritual insight, setting the pace for art, culture, religion, and success in the region.



B) Like Long Beach, Ephesus was a sprawling city supported by a very lucrative harbor/seaport industry which brought numerous benefits. The wealth of the port placed Long Beach on the map at the end of World War II, as a prized location for both comfort and stability. Even in the past 15 years, which most would characterize as economically difficult, our local area experienced a 27% increase in personal salaries.

C) The “creature comforts” which come with prosperity, like in Ephesus, produce a very self-serving culture into which God needs to fit our lives, rather than our lives discovering identity in Jesus Christ. In the midst of a culture which leads us toward self-fulfilling experiences and happiness in our own provision, where and how does God fit? Paul’s letter to the Ephesians is concerned with this answer, but not in the manner you might expect.

D) Ephesus pressed her values in against the church, and the church struggled mightily. How do you respond to our own culture? Embracing, maybe secretly? Resisting but failing in some “smaller” areas? Do you fight the culture, screaming your objections? Are you an agent for change in culture, and if so, how do you do it?

E) The answers to these deeper issues will lead us to redefine our lives, to reconsider the spiritual aspects and war which surrounds us, and how our families and relationships are “ground zero.” When all is said and done, at the end of your life, how will you answer this simple question from God... “Who are you?”



EPHESUS

48 A.D. - 400 A.D.

