

Engaging the Story: Pursuing the Setting and Context of Epistles

The New Testament epistles are a snapshot into a greater narrative. To preach an epistle with maximum impact, it is critical to grasp the occasion and historical context. How should we do this? Ephesians will be the focus for this year's Advanced Track. Good preaching will be solidly rooted, not only in its original historical setting, but also in the contemporary experience of our listeners. This session will consider how to pursue accurate historical understanding, and will provide a solid foundation for the subsequent passage studies.

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I. Epistles and “Occasional” Writing

A. “Paul nowhere expounds abstract theology, but always only concrete exhortation”
(Peter Stuhlmacher, in Donfried, *Romans Debate*, 341)

B. One side of a telephone conversation (purposeful communication)

II. Sources of Historical Background Information

A. Internal

B. Biblical

1. Acts

2. 1&2 Timothy

3. Revelation 2:1-7

C. Historical

1. History, location and significance

2. Artemis & Ephesian Religion

- a. Cult-prostitution?
- b. “Of all ancient Graeco-Roman cities, Ephesus, the third largest city in the Empire, was by far the most hospitable to magicians, sorcerers, and charlatans of all sorts.” Metzger, “St Paul and Magicians,” in Princeton Seminary Bulletin 38 (1944), 27.
- c. Artemis as powerful benefactor of city, its wife, protector and nourisher.
- d. Two religious festivals: Artemision (Mar-Apr) and Thargelion (May-Jun), involving religious processions, athletic competitions and theatre.

III. The “Ephesians” narrative

A. Autumn 52 – Paul’s First Visit (Acts 18:19-21)

B. Autumn 53-Spring 56 – Paul’s Second Visit (Acts 19)

- C. Spring 57 – Paul’s Meeting with Ephesian Elders at Miletus (Acts 20, note v4)

- D. Later 57 – Paul Arrested in Jerusalem (Acts 21:15-33; note v29)

- E. 60-62 – Paul’s Correspondance from Prison (Note Eph.3:1-13)