



THE BEREIA PAGE

“Examining . . . to see if these things are so” ~ Acts 17.11

Feedback Welcome

The new year’s first issue—and as I welcome several new subscribers (!)—is a good time to repeat this from Issue 1, 1:

I welcome interaction from readers, having often benefited from hearers and readers who asked questions, sought clarification—or just thought I was wrong about something. Such exchanges sharpen my thinking, help me clarify my communication, and, yes, at times, lead me to rethink and revise. Please feel free to use the email address in the lower right corner to contact me. I’ll read, reflect, and at some point respond.

Go [here](#) to review the full statement of purpose and direction for this publication, also included in issue 1, 1.

Defending the NT Canon

I am scheduled to teach a two-part class at this fall’s Harding Lectureship on the evidence for the New Testament canon. In lieu of last fall’s postponed lectures, several speakers from the 2021 program were invited to share some of their material online in a Virtual Lectureship. I used the opportunity to introduce the subject in my presentation, “Why Talk About the New Testament Canon?”

To view all the virtual lectures, go [here](#). For my manuscript (with bibliography) and slides, go [here](#).

We Can Do This

David Anguish

Invited to be the guest preacher for a church’s Family Emphasis Day, I chose Ephesians 5.22-33 as one sermon’s text and determined to do a fresh study of the passage with particular focus on the Ephesian historical-cultural context.

With a population of about 200,000¹ to 250,000,² mid-first century Ephesus was one of the largest cities in the Roman world. Cosmopolitan in make-up, it was home to “the indigenous Anatolian peoples of Ionia, Lydia, Phrygia, Caria, and Mysia”; settlers from Egypt, Greece, and Rome; and a strong Jewish community (Arnold, 301).

The religious milieu was pluralistic. Most prominent was the Artemis cult, as evidenced by the presence of multiple statues depicting the goddess and the Temple that measured 377 by 197 feet, “the first monumental structure ever constructed of marble” (McRay, 256).³ But as many as fifty other deities—including Zeus, Aphrodite, and Dionysius—were also worshiped. In addition, Ephesus was known for its interest in magic and the occult arts (Arnold, 303).

The imperial cult was also prominent. Emperor worship was first authorized in the reign of Augustus (27 BC-14 AD) and by the time of Claudius (41-54 AD), three cultic temples had been erected. Emperor worship was also a feature of household rituals, evidence of trust in the chief of state to guarantee peace and prosperity (McRay, 256-258).

The city’s harbor made it an important trade destination, amplifying its place as a wealthy commercial center. The Artemis cult was the region’s “major savings and loan institution” (Arnold, 303) and trade guilds flourished. But, there is also evidence of a class divide, the average Ephesian being less prosperous than many in other Asian cities (McRay, 251).

With idolatry and wealth came sexual immorality and related vices along with the practice, especially in the

Making a Defense—Don't Forget the Church

“... I am put here for the defense of the gospel.” - *Philippians 1.16b*

Darrell Bock and Daniel Wallace referenced Bart Ehrman* as an example of formerly conservative religious adherents who turned away in disillusionment when they examined the evidence and saw that things were not as black-and-white as they were led to think. They wrote:

“Part of the reason, no doubt, is that they feel they have been deceived by Christian teachers who are hiding certain embarrassing facts about the Christian faith. Many, if not most, theological liberal scholars have backgrounds as fundamentalists or evangelicals. And all too often, they were indeed presented with a truncated view of the evidence, leading to fragile theological constructs that requires only a little investigation to topple.”

— *Dethroning Jesus: Exposing Popular Culture's Quest to Unseat the Biblical Christ* (Thomas Nelson, 2007), 43

In view of their analysis, we should take seriously the caution implied by Colin Brown who wrote: “If our faith is of the kind that would persist regardless of evidence and regardless of historical models, it is an unanchored faith. Its utterances might be indicative of the believer's particular mental states, but they would not be informative at all about anything that is the case outside them. - *History and Faith: A Personal Exploration* (Zondervan, 1987), 76

* Review a similar story with a positive outcome [here](#)

Dionysian cult, of worship that featured “frenzied and ecstatic rituals” and revelry (Arnold, 329-331)⁴ (cf. Eph 5.3-18).

As a member of the minority Christian community not long separated from active participation in the culture, what would it have been like to live in Ephesus as a Christian husband or wife? To prepare children to resist the temptations so openly accessible as they walked the streets? To risk cultural and economic ostracism by refusing to conform to the accepted Greco-Roman religious expectations and the pressure to declare primary allegiance to the powerful Roman state?⁵

As I considered Ephesians 5.22-33 (and chapters 4-6 generally) in light of the culture and questions like these, I was struck by Paul's matter-of-fact appeal for the holy living⁶ that was “worthy [of their] calling” (4.1). He didn't write as if being truthful, pure, a good husband, and so on, were *hypothetically* possible, but with a tone that assumed they *could* live that way—even in a place like Ephesus.

We've previously noted the decades-long trend wherein our society has grown less amenable to sharing the goal of “instilling Christian values.”⁷ In this environment, we need reminders about our status as God's chosen people (Eph 1-3) and the teaching that helps us fulfill our calling (Eph 4-6).

But, moving forward, what may help as much will be regular reminders that, no matter how depraved the society around us, we can do this.

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Notes

¹ John McRay, *Archaeology and the New Testament* (Baker Academic, 1991), 250. Additional references will be cited parenthetically in the text above.

² Clinton E. Arnold, “Ephesians,” *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary*, vol. 3, ed. Clinton E. Arnold (Zondervan, 2002), 301. Additional references will be cited parenthetically in the text above.

³ Compare an American football field which, including end zones, measures 360 by 160 feet. McRay notes that the Artemis Temple was “the largest building in the Greek world” (McRay, 256).

⁴ For consideration of the cult's widespread presence in antiquity and its significance for issues in Ephesians, see Cleon L. Rogers, Jr., “The Dionysian Background of Ephesians 5:18,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 146 [1979]: 249-257.

⁵ Regarding the Christians' ostracism, see the quote from Larry W. Hurtado, *Why On Earth Did Anyone Become a Christian in the First Three Centuries?* (Marquette University Press, 2016), 75, 78, part of the discussion in my “Strangers and Exiles, 1” ([Issue 1, 12](#)).

⁶ Forms of the adjective ἅγιος (*hagios*) and the verb ἁγιάζω (*hagiazō*) occur a total of sixteen times in Ephesians.

⁷ See Stanley Hauerwas & William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony*, Expanded 25th Anniversary Edition (Abingdon Press, 2014), 15-18. See my “Strangers and Exiles, 2 & 3,” ([Issues 1, 13](#) and [1, 14](#)).

All Scripture quotations not otherwise designated are from the ESV.
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