



**Ephesus**

We began our tour at the higher elevation of the city and worked our way, literally, down hill. It was no accident that the arriving parking lot was placed at the higher part of the city where our driver could easily move the bus to the lower area where our two-hour tour would end. As in many cities of our own times, the higher elevations were home to the more affluent. In upper Ephesus we visited a small amphitheater that is believed to have had a roof in ancient times (this being determined by the fact that there was not provisions for water drainage in case of rain, as was found in the larger amphitheater in the lower city). In our times we might refer to this as the theater of the “country club set.”

While most of the archeological work at Ephesus has concentrated on the public areas, we did pass sights of archeological work on private homes. However most of these areas remain buried, which protects the remains both from natural deterioration and from the hands of vandals. The houses under excavation were off limits to us.



**Remains of Library at Ephesus**

As we approached the bottom of the hill (probably about a quarter of a mile from where we had begun) we got a closer look at the facade of what had been a two-story library, which at one time housed one of the greatest collection of manuscripts in Asia Minor. While little remains of the building today, I could not help but think of the great writings that must have been contained within these walls. Could any of Paul’s letters or copies of N.T. manuscripts ever have flanked the shelves of this house of knowledge?

We next passed the remains of the sports arena, the road to the harbor, an area that may have been a cemetery, and the remains of the larger theater that I mentioned earlier.

Near the area of the harbor baths stands the remains of the first church in Christianity dedicated to the Virgin Mary. It was at this Church in 431 that the Council of Ephesus took place – a council that addressed the teachings of Nestorius that were deemed to be heretical. Originally built in the second century as a museion (or school of higher

education), the building (which measured approximately 850 feet in length and almost 100 wide) was later renovated and turned into a Church.

It was now almost time for lunch and after finishing our tour of the ruins of the ancient city, we spent some time visiting the souvenir shops adjacent to the parking lot where our bus awaited us. After all, what visit to such an ancient city would be complete without some memories? A sign outside one of the shops caught everyone's attention and we would later have a good laugh about it. It read: "Genuine Fake Watches." Honesty in marketing is always the best policy!



### **Basilica of St. John**



**Replica of Basilica**

After leaving the ancient city, and having a brief lunch, our bus took us up another hill to a plateau on which remains the ancient basilica of St. John build over what is believed to be the burial place of the beloved disciple to whose care the Virgin Mary was entrusted. According to the information available at the sight, the size of the edifice was limited only by the size of the plateau itself.



**Looking toward sanctuary from the back**

Standing at what was the original entrance and looking down the nave of then church, the people standing at the far end seem to be dwarf. It is said that if this basilica were to be rebuilt today, it would be the seventh largest in the world.



Arriving at the sanctuary area, I stood facing a platform constructed of large rectangular pieces of marble on top of which were erected four marble columns with no covering. In the middle was an engraved stone which read “Tomb of St. John”. I felt humbled standing at the gravesite of one of the *Twelve*.



**The Baptistry**



**Pope Paul VI visited this sight on  
July 26, 1967**



**Single stone pillar (left-center) is all  
that remains of the Temple of Artemus**

From the back of the ruins one could look down on the rich green foliage of the valley below, from which rose a single stone pillar. This lonely stone column is all the remains today of one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, the temple of Artemus (Diana). Even the ancient wonders haven't given way to history.

## What happened to Ephesus?

Most Christians of our day know of Ephesus because of the writings of St. Paul. During this era of early Christianity it is believed that the population was somewhere between two hundred thousand and two hundred and fifty thousand. So what happened that would cause a city of almost a quarter of a million people to vanish?

Ancient Ephesus was not only a seaport, but was also a city located at the mouth of the Gediz River. Little is known of its origins but many historians believe it to date from the middle bronze age, or in biblical terms, from about the time of Abraham. Though a center of trade, the city held little importance either militarily or politically.

The Ephesus of the New Testament is actually the third city of Ephesus. Built at the mouth of the Gediz River, over an extended period of time silt and other debris floating downstream filled in the harbor of the first Ephesus, so the city simply followed the land expansion. The same happened to the relocated second Ephesus. As this began to happen a third time, an attempt was made to dredge a canal from the sea back to the harbor area. The remains of this canal can still be seen today stretching between a highway and a small airstrip. This canal eventually fell victim to the same fate as the harbor itself, and with time the size of the city began to dwindle until little remained.



**Area of ancient canal dredge**

While some have blamed outside invasions combined with a lack of willingness of the early Christians of Ephesus to defend and die for their faith, the truth is that the city simply succumbed to mother nature.

## Ankara – the capital of Turkey

After busy day in Izmir (Ephesus) a good nights sleep was more than welcome. But once again the wake up call came early and we headed to the airport for our morning flight – this time to Ankara, the capital of Turkey. Ankara is of no special religious or historical significance but it did give us another chance to experience Turkish culture. We had lunch at a High School supported by the Gulen movement, followed by a tour of the facility. Then it was off again to the airport for an evening flight to Sanliurfa, more often referred to simply as Urfa.

When we deplaned at the Urfa airport we noticed that we had not been the only Americans on that flight. Equipped with tripods, black boxes and other “suspicious” pieces of luggage, we learned that this group of university students were in the area to work on the GAP project. The next day we witnessed several aspects of GAP, which

begins with the Ataturk Dam on the Euphrates river, the largest hydraulic energy production facility in Turkey. Also connected to this undertaking is a massive project to irrigate over one million acres of barren land.

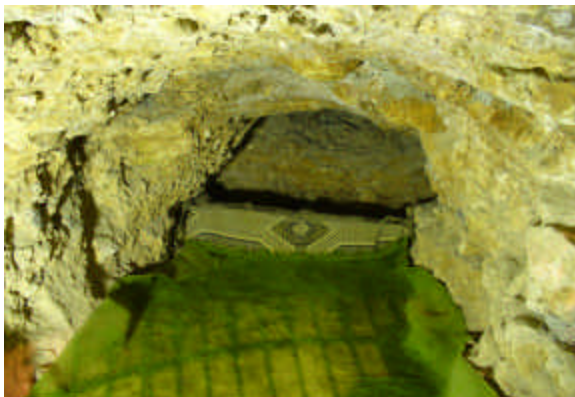
### **Urfa, a city rich in culture and history**



**Women waiting to enter Abraham's cave**

stood in line (the women of our group in one line, the men in the other) and waited our turn to enter the cave. Arriving at the springs, most of the Muslim men washed their hands, heads and faces with the "holy" water and some drank it. I later returned to the cave and filled another empty *Ozarka* bottle with this water. I now had water from the springs at Mary's house and Abraham's cave.

The city of Urfa is located in south central Turkey, about 50 miles from the Syrian border. The city and surrounding area are rich in religious and cultural tradition. One of the more interesting sites is Abraham's cave – an underground cavern believed by the locals to be the birthplace of Abraham. When we arrived at the sight we entered via a large courtyard and saw about fifty women, most in traditional dress with heads covered, carrying various sizes of bottles. Many of them had small children tagging along. We were told that they were getting water from the springs in Abraham's cave. Like the water from the springs at Mary's house, water drawn from the natural springs at this holy sight is believed to have both physical and spiritual healing powers. To the right of the longer line of woman was a much shorter line of men also waiting to enter the cave. The men and women use separate entrances and as a sign of respect shoes are removed before entering. We



**Inside cave of Job**

Another cave in Urfa which is the object of religious devotion is the cave of the prophet Job. Unlike Abraham's cave, Job's cave did not have separate entrances for men and women, so we alternated descending the entrance to view and to meditate a minute or two inside. Though there is no Biblical reference to this cave, Job is said to have spent seven years here suffering from an illness as a part of his "test" by God. The city also claims to house the tombs of Job and his wife, as well as that of the prophet Elisha.