

Third Missionary Journey

Memory Text: “But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.” (Acts 20:24)

Setting The Stage: There are many advantages to be gained in travel. Mark Twain wrote, “Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness.” Although Paul and his companion’s didn’t have a prejudice bone in their body, their travels to various places continued to remind them of the incredible need of sharing the gospel with people living in darkness and ignorance—Jew and Gentile together. And the more they traveled to share Christ and raise up churches, it only served to further enlarge their hearts and increase their sympathy toward others.

Luke’s account of Paul’s third missionary journey starts abruptly. After spending some time in Antioch, the center of Paul’s missions, the apostle set out on another journey, passing “over the region of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples.” (Acts 18:23). So, the first 1,500 miles of the journey are covered in one sentence. This is because the focal point of this journey was Ephesus, where Paul spent more time than in any other city in the course of his journeys.

From the evangelistic standpoint, the ministry in Ephesus was very fruitful; the impact of Paul’s preaching reached the whole province of Asia (Acts 19:10, 26). It was probably during this time that the churches of Colossae, Hierapolis, and Laodicea were founded. This would be Paul’s last recorded journey as a free man. Later he would travel to Rome as a prisoner.

Sunday – Ephesus: Part 1

Acts 18:24-28; 1 Corinthians 3:5-10; Acts 19:1-7

After leaving Corinth, Paul’s next scene of labor was Ephesus. He was on his way to Jerusalem to attend an approaching festival, and therefore his stay at Ephesus was short. Even though the Jews in the synagogue desired him to stay on, he still made his stay brief but promised to return to them, “if God will.” Aquila and Priscilla had accompanied him to Ephesus, and he left them there to carry on the work that he had begun. It was at this time that a certain Jew named Apollos came to Ephesus.

Acts 18:24-28. It’s likely that Apollos had only a faint knowledge of Jesus’ mission and message. After all, John the Baptist faintly understood it as well (Matt. 11:3). What may not have been known was the establishment of the church, the ordinances of Christian baptism and the Lord’s Supper, the outpouring of the Holy

Spirit, teaching regarding conversion following repentance, and the reception of the gift of salvation by grace through faith.

Aquila and Priscilla heard Apollos preach the Word of God. Upon hearing him they recognized that he came up short in some areas. So graciously, they took him aside (not publicly) and expounded the Word of God more fully, or perfectly to him. Apollos was a meek man and received their caring instruction and admonition. I believe the Seventh-day Adventist Church was raised up by God to, in a large degree, explain the Word of God more fully to Christians and the world. Not with arrogance or pride, but with a strong sense of the incredible responsibility God has laid on their shoulders.

Apollos felt led to go to Achaia (likely Corinth, the chief city), so the church at Ephesus “wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him” as a teacher in full harmony with the church of Christ. He went to Corinth, where, in public labor and from house to house, “he mightily convinced the Jews, ... showing by the Scriptures that Jesus was Christ.” Paul had planted the seed of truth; Apollos now watered it. The success that attended Apollos in preaching the gospel led some of the believers to exalt his labors above Paul’s (1 Cor. 3:1-4). This “party affiliation” threatened to hinder the progress of the gospel. But Paul counseled the Corinthian believers:

1 Corinthians 3:5-10: “Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase. Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor. For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, you are God’s building. According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it.”

Paul uplifted the cross of Christ among the Corinthians to lead them to genuine conversion. Apollos, it appears, took a different approach and built on the work Paul had started. Let’s be careful that we, like the Corinthians, succumb to “party affiliation” too through a misunderstanding of how God works.

“He who sends forth gospel workers as His ambassadors is dishonored when there is manifested among the hearers so strong an attachment to some favorite minister that there is an unwillingness to accept the labors of some other teacher. The Lord sends help to His people, not always as they may choose, but as they need; for men are shortsighted and cannot discern what is for their highest good. It is seldom that one minister has all the qualifications necessary to perfect a church in all the requirements of Christianity; therefore God often sends to them other ministers, each possessing some qualifications in which the others were deficient...no minister is to be idolized.”
(Acts of the Apostles, pp. 277, 278)

Acts 19:1-7. On his arrival at Ephesus, Paul found twelve men, who, like Apollos, had been disciples of John the Baptist, and like him had gained some knowledge of

the mission of Christ. They didn't have the same ability of Apollos, but with the same sincerity and faith they were seeking to spread the knowledge they had received. They knew nothing of the mission of the Holy Spirit. So, like Aquila and Priscilla who ministered to Apollos, Paul expounded the Word of God more fully to them.

"Then the apostle set before them the great truths that are the foundation of the Christian's hope. He told them of Christ's life on this earth and of His cruel death of shame. He told them how the Lord of life had broken the barriers of the tomb and risen triumphant over death. He repeated the Saviour's commission to His disciples...He told them also of Christ's promise to send the Comforter...and he described how gloriously this promise had been fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost." (Acts of the Apostles, pp. 282)

Monday – Ephesus: Part 2

Acts 19: 8-41; Ephesians 5:11

Ephesus was a famous city, capital of the Greek district of Ionia and later of the Roman province of Asia. It became the scene of the apostle John's later labors. The city stood not far from the sea on hilly ground. Ephesus was the center of the worship of Artemis (the Roman Diana) whose temple was visited by pilgrims from all over the known world. In Paul's day Ephesus was by far the busiest and most popular city in Asia.

Acts 19:8-10. As his custom was, Paul went into the synagogue to preach Christ. He reasoned with the Jews there for three months before opposition broke out, leading him to relocate his evangelistic campaign to the school of Tyrannus. Here Paul preached for two years having great effect. The record says that "all" in Asia heard about Jesus Christ as a result. God turned a negative experience into something far more positive. He can do that for you too.

Acts 19:11-20. The idol within the temple was declared by tradition to have fallen from the sky. Upon it was inscribed symbolic characters, which were believed to possess great power. Books had been written by the Ephesians to explain the meaning and use of these symbols. Among those who closely studied these costly books were many magicians, who wielded a powerful influence over the minds of the superstitious worshipers of the image within the temple.

The apostle Paul was given special signs of divine favor. The power of God accompanied his efforts, and many were healed of physical maladies. As these miracles were wrought in the name of Jesus, the people had opportunity to see that the God of heaven was more powerful than the magicians of the goddess Diana.

Ephesians 5:11: "Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them."

Acts 19:21-41. For over three years Ephesus was the center of Paul's work. A flourishing church was raised up here, and from this city the gospel spread throughout the province of Asia, among both Jews and Gentiles. But trouble and trial were about to ensue.

Once a year, special ceremonies were held at Ephesus in honor of the goddess Diana. These attracted a large number of people from all over the province. But because of Paul's work the attendance at the national festival and the enthusiasm of the worshipers had waned. As a result a profitable business in the manufacture and sale of small shrines and images began to suffer loss.

Demetrius, a manufacturer of the silver shrines, called together other tradesmen and blamed Paul for his financial loss. A riot nearly ensued as their misgivings were related to the people of the city. God protected His people during this societal upheaval. And He will be with us if at any time we are blamed for the problems existing in society. Whether we face death or whether we face life, it is always the right thing to share the truth of God's Word.

Tuesday – Troas

Acts 20:7-12

Acts 20:1-6. After the riot, Paul resolved to leave Ephesus. But he took an extended detour through Macedonia and Achaia instead of going straight to Jerusalem. Undoubtedly, Paul desired to visit the churches he had founded in Thessalonica, Philippi, and Berea. Down in Greece he visited the church in Corinth. By this time the believers had received his two letters. After three months in the area, and after spending a little time in Philippi, Paul sailed to Troas.

Acts 20:7-12. In Troas, Paul met with the believers on the first day of the week. For hours he broke the bread of life to them, preaching till midnight. Eutychus tried hard to listen to everything the apostle had to share, but he was overcome with sleep and fell from the third story window being "taken up dead." God overruled what could have ended in disaster when Eutychus was revived. This was a meeting never to be forgotten.

It was the first day of the week when the church met and it was dark, which means it was Saturday night. The Bible says you measure a day from even to even, or sunset-to-sunset. It couldn't be Sunday night for that would be the second day of the week. If the lights are on, then it's dark, and if it's dark on the first day of the week then it is Saturday night.

After the events of the evening Paul got some sleep, he ate, then he walked 14 miles to Assos to catch a boat. Now if he were actually observing a Sunday Sabbath he wouldn't be taking a 14 mile trek on a holy day. He would have caught the boat the

following day.

Mark 2:27: “And He said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.”

Revelation 14:6, 7: “Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people—saying with a loud voice, ‘Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water’.

Wednesday – Miletus

Acts 20:15-27;

Acts 20:13-16. On his way to Jerusalem, Paul made another stop, this time at Miletus, where he had the opportunity to convey his farewell address to the Ephesian church leaders.

Acts 20:17-36. This would be the last time Paul would see the leaders of the church. His departure provides a touching scene of the love and close bond they had for each other.

In this speech, Paul touches on several important things:

1. The centrality of his message was repentance toward God and faith in Jesus Christ (v. 21).
2. Although his way was hard, he intended to finish the race with joy (vv. 19, 22-24).
3. He taught all the counsel of God. He held back nothing that was helpful. (vv. 20, 26, 27)
4. He encouraged the elders to be faithful overseers, defending the flock from error and teachers of error (vv. 28-31).
5. He encouraged a continual and earnest study of the Scriptures as the authoritative Word of God (v. 32).
6. Finally, he appealed to the elders to be generous and liberal in their lives and ministry as he had been (v. 34, 35)

Thursday – Tyre & Caesarea

Acts 21:10-14

Acts 21:1-6. After Miletus, Luke records Paul’s journey in some detail. Still en route to Jerusalem, the apostle spent a week in Tyre, on the Phoenician coast, where the ship was to be unloaded. However, while he was there, the believers urged him not to go to Jerusalem. The Spirit may have shown them the dangers that lay ahead of

Paul; and so, out of human concern, they recommended that he not proceed with his intent. Paul himself was not sure about what would happen to him in Jerusalem (Acts 20:22, 23). Divine guidance doesn't always make everything clear, even for someone like Paul.

Acts 21:7-14. The prophet, Agabus, related his message to Paul in an acted out way. Those who were with Paul apparently took Agabus's message as a warning, not as a prophecy, and so they tried to convince the apostle he should not go up to Jerusalem. Though deeply touched by their reaction, Paul was determined to accomplish his mission, even at the cost of his own life. For him, the integrity of the gospel and the unity of the church were more important than his own personal safety or interests.

Paul's life stands as an example of faith and perseverance. He knew his life was in the hands of God and lived trusting the outcome to Him who knew what was best and right. Paul could look back on his life and know he had given everything he possibly could to the cause of Christ. He would have no regrets. He would have no disappointments.

Mark Twain wrote: "Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things you didn't do than by the ones you did. So...sail away from the safe harbor. Catch the...winds in your sail. Explore. Dream. Discover." Instead of "explore, dream, and discover," I would say, "Venture. Catch God's vision for ministry. Don't hold anything back in an effort to win people to Christ and His last-day truth."