

NEW TESTAMENT BIBLICAL LITERACY

Lesson 38

Acts – Part Nine

Paul's Third Missionary Journey, Part 1

Chapters 18:23-19:41

I. BACKGROUND

During Paul's second missionary journey (Acts 15:36–18:22), which lasted from about 49 to 52 A.D., we read about Paul, Timothy, Silas (and at times Luke) starting churches in a number of cities in Greece and Macedonia. Paul also went into Ephesus on his way back to Jerusalem, albeit briefly. Paul left Priscilla and Aquila in Ephesus. The Ephesians asked Paul to stay longer, but he declined, instead promising to return if “God wills” (Acts 18:21). Paul ended his second journey by returning to Caesarea, visiting the Jerusalem church, and finally returning to Antioch.

While on this second journey, Paul wrote the two letters to the recently established church at Thessalonica. Having finished our review of those letters, we now pick back up with the Acts narrative.

II. THE THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEY

A. The Third Journey Starts

Paul stays in Antioch for an unknown time (scholars typically assign about 6 months to the stay based on chronological dates we can use for events in the earlier journey as well as the next). Paul then launches his third missionary journey. Unlike the first two, Luke does not tell us of anyone setting out with Paul on this journey.

Paul again travels inland through the regions of Galatia and Phrygia on this journey. Paul did so to strengthen the disciples in the churches he previously planted in those areas.

B. Apollos

Luke interludes Paul's journey to tell us some necessary background information of what happened in Ephesus. A “learned” Jew named Apollos came from Alexandria to Ephesus. Apollos had “a thorough knowledge of the scriptures” (18:24). We are told Apollos “had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great

fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John” (Acts 18:25).

When Apollos began to speak boldly in the synagogue, Priscilla and Aquila heard him. They invited him home and taught him more adequately about the way of God. Apollos was then sent to Achaia (Corinth area in Greece) where Apollos greatly aided the Christians in public debate with the Jews. Apollos was in Corinth when Paul arrived in Ephesus.

As Luke digressed, so shall we at this point! It is useful to elucidate a bit on Apollos and what we know about him. Hailing from Alexandria, Apollos came from one of the largest and most well known cities in the Roman world. It was in Alexandria that history records that Jewish scholars translated the Old Testament into Greek (the “Septuagint”). The Talmud indicates that the Jews had a synagogue of such great size that flags were used to indicate to those at the back when to “Amen” during services. Scholars estimate the Jewish population of Alexandria at this time to be around one million people! Apollos was from an area where he could receive a Greek and Hebrew education second to none.

We also know that Apollos was instructed in the “way” of the Lord. During this time, the church and Christianity are referred to as “the way” in Acts (see later in Acts 19). While Luke does not tell us where Apollos came to know the way of the Lord, we can surmise that it might be from Pentecost itself.

Earlier in Acts 2, Luke told us that when Peter preached the gospel on the day that the church doors were first opened (Pentecost), there were Jews from Egypt who would have returned home. One line of early manuscripts of Acts (called the “Western Text”¹) has an insert

¹ The “Western Text” is a title given to a group of manuscripts that date back to perhaps before 150 A.D. Two individuals named Westcott and Hort were scholars who put together one of the main Greek New Testament texts scholars use today. They went through the many Greek texts in an effort to determine how the original Greek documents would have read. In doing so, they assigned the various texts to different categories based on the premise that certain strains were produced early in the church, then propagating themselves and allowing certain errors or variances to be reproduced over and over. For example, if the “western churches” were using a certain text that they were copying over and over for church use, and if that “mother copy” of the text had a typo or error, then we can rightly assume that the other Greek manuscripts that produced the same typo or error were copied either directly or indirectly from the “mother text” or one of the children! The “Western text” carried a number of characteristics according to Westcott and Hort, one of which is paraphrasing to get the point across. “Words, clauses, and even whole sentences were changed, omitted, and inserted with astonishing freedom, wherever

in Acts 18 telling us “Apollos had been instructed *in his own country* in the *word* of the Lord.”

Apollos had a marvelous and Godly trait we see here. Many people who get a “share” of God’s truth and begin to teach that truth are hardly open to learning more from others. Often times, people think that they are teaching and have no need of further teaching themselves. Many think that their understanding of the truth is right and they need no greater understanding. Apollos humility was such that, even though he eloquently and with great knowledge taught the way, he was quite ready to learn more accurately what God was about and what God wanted.

C. *Paul Arrives at Ephesus (19:1-7)*

With Apollos at Corinth, Paul arrives in Ephesus. Paul found some followers at Ephesus whom Luke called “disciples” (Acts 19:2). Evidently, Paul discerned that while followers, something was missing in their walk. Paul asked them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” The disciples responded, “No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.” The N.I.V. translation of their response is fair, but not necessarily right. Literally, the traditional Greek text used says “that” or “if there is a Holy Spirit.” But, within the context of the passage, it could easily mean that the expression “Holy Spirit” was new.

The Old Testament, which we may presume they knew, is replete with the teaching of God’s Spirit. We may fairly assume that the Ephesians are expressing that they were unaware that God’s Spirit was available for them. In fact, the Western Text has a different reading of this passage. It specifically quotes the Ephesians as saying, “No, we have not even heard if any are receiving the Holy Spirit.”²

it seemed that the meaning could be brought out with greater force and definiteness.” Westcott and Hort, *The New Testament in the Original Greek*, (Cambridge, 1881), p. 134.

² This is a good passage to indicate that while there are thousands of Greek manuscripts, there are often variations in the texts themselves. None of the variations create questionable accuracy on any matter even remotely relevant to the gospel and matters of faith. At most, the substantive variances (as opposed to what we would today term “typo’s”) offer various interpretations or traditions that help us understand how some understood the original story.

Paul then asks what baptism they had received. They responded, “the baptism of John.”³ Paul then explained that John’s baptism was one of repentance that was anticipating the coming of Jesus. They were then rebaptized into the name of Jesus, Paul laid his hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues and prophesying.

D. The Lecture Hall of Tyrannus (19:8-10)

In Paul’s second missionary journey, the Thessalonican Jews permitted Paul’s teaching in the synagogue for three weeks before he was compelled to teach elsewhere. The Ephesian Jews were more tolerant, and presumably more receptive. Luke tells us that Paul was allowed to teach in the synagogue for three months.

After Paul stopped teaching at the synagogue, he took his disciples and began using the lecture hall of Tyrannus for daily teaching.⁴ Paul did this for two years!

E. Paul and the Magicians (19:11-19)

God bore witness to Paul’s authority working many miracles through him. Many received healing, even through items that Paul worked with and touched. As people were healed and demons cast out through Paul, some others decided to treat Paul as a magician rather than a vessel of God and the Spirit.

Magicians were well known in Ephesus, as other existing writings still attest. A number of “magical papyri” are in museums that readily illustrate the practice. The key to magic was the invocation of certain secret names that supposedly held authority over the illness or possessive demon.

³ We are not told how they received John’s baptism. It could have been at the hands of Apollos; however, this interchange occurs within 25 years or so of John the Baptist, and they certainly could have received it from John in Jerusalem a quarter century earlier.

⁴ The Western text adds that Paul taught at the hall from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Scholars believe that the cultures of this part of Asia Minor in Pauline times were VERY early risers, starting their day in the dark. Public activity slowed significantly by 11 a.m., and the heat of the day was more for sleeping and rest than work. This cultural attribute would explain why the lecture hall was available to Paul during this time period.

Also, we have evidence that Jews were often highly regarded as magicians because they had a name (Yahweh) that no one was allowed to say or pronounce, save the High Priest, and he was allowed to do so only once a year in the Holy of Holies. In fact, some of the documents still available show that non-Jewish magicians tried to document and pronounce “Yahweh” in an effort to gain magical control over certain demons and illnesses.

Some of these folks did not see Paul as anything more than a magician who had command over some illness and demons by invocation of the name of “Jesus.” Seven of these people were Jewish sons of Sceva, a “Chief Priest”⁵ (19:14). These seven sons attempted an exorcism by invoking the name of Jesus, as they had seen Paul do so effectively. On one occasion, there was an evil spirit truly in play and the sons found themselves way out of their league! The sons said, “In the name of Jesus, whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out.” The evil spirit answered the sons! “Jesus I know, and I know about Paul, but who are you?” And with that, the man with the evil spirit jumped on the exorcist-wannabes and beat them naked and bloody! The sons fled the demon, instead of the demon fleeing.

When word of this got around, Jews and Greeks alike were fearful! As Luke notes, “the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honor!” A number of the sorcerers and magicians themselves turned in faith to Jesus. They brought their scrolls of magic with the names and spell contained therein and defused the names of any special secretive power by revealing the names publicly and then burning the scrolls.

Sometime after these events, Paul sent Timothy and Eratus on to Macedonia while Paul stayed on in Ephesus a bit longer.

⁵ Unlike 21st century English, Luke did not have quotation marks at his disposal. Had he, Luke most likely would have used them here. While the text actually says that Sceva was a “High Priest” there is no way he really was. He was, no doubt, a self-designated “High” or “Chief Priest,” not an authentic one!

F. The Riot (19:23-41)

Paul's teaching of the gospel was making quite an intrusion into Ephesus. In fact, a number of artisans thought Paul's teaching was affecting their economic sales of man-made gods (idols!).

Ephesus itself was home to one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, the temple of Artemis. The Roman historians Pliny and Strabo wrote of the temple. It was four times the size of Athen's Parthenon and was supported by 127 pillars, each 60 feet high. The temple stood a mile and a half Northeast of Ephesus. Within the last 150 years, the temple ruins have been found and excavations started.

A silversmith named Demetrius was concerned that Paul and others were converting so many that their sales of the silver idols of Artemis were suffering. Demetrius convened a meeting of the artisan guild and they decided to stage a protest. To generate more concern beyond those who made the idols, Demetrius urged all the locals to see that if Artemis and the temple became discredited, then all of Ephesus would suffer.

This argument had a snowball affect and soon the whole city was in an uproar over Paul and Christianity. Two of Paul's companions who were in from Macedonia were seized and all the people went into the Ephesian amphitheater (which held around 25,000!). Paul also wanted to enter the theater to address the crowd, but the disciples restrained him. Even non-believing city officials asked Paul to refrain from entering the theater. The crowd shut out any attempt to defend or explain, even though one of Paul's companions tried to get the crowd to listen.

Finally, the City clerk entered the theater and quieted the crowd. He explained that if they did not quietly disburse, then they would be charged with rioting and all get in trouble! In his reasoning, there was no disputing that Artemis was great and that the temple would always be held in high regard. He added that Paul and others had never stolen from the temple or broken any laws. If the people felt they had, then the answer lay in the courts not rioting!

The clerk dismissed the crowd and shortly thereafter Paul left for Macedonia.

Sometime in this two-year plus stay in Ephesus, Paul wrote some correspondence to the Corinthian church. We will pause our study of this third missionary journey to study those letters next.

III. POINTS FOR HOME

1. Everyone Learns
2. The Holy Spirit Is Not an Afterthought
3. Hold the Name of Jesus in Honor
4. Money Changes Preaching to Meddling