

## **Acts: Paul's 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Missionary Journeys**

### *New Testament Survey – Lesson 19 (Part 1)*

Have you moved around much? How might living in different places affect you?

I was born at Methodist Hospital in Dallas, Texas, in 1960. Shortly after my birth, we moved west to Ft. Worth! After living in Ft. Worth, my father was transferred and we moved to New Orleans, Louisiana, where I have my earliest memories. I remember being on my Dad's shoulders for a Mardi Gras parade. The people on passing floats threw candy that Dad caught and handed up to me. I distinctly remember thinking, "Free candy thrown to us! Why aren't we coming out here everyday?"

We lived in New Orleans about a year when we were again transferred, this time to Shreveport, Louisiana. Our stay in Shreveport was not too long; the company sent Dad to Abilene, Texas. In Abilene, I remember the Wyatt's cafeteria where we would occasionally go eat after church. It was great! My favorite, though, was the A&W Root-beer stand with their frosty glasses of root beer. Although I had yet to start school, I remember being amazed one Sunday that out of the entire congregation, my father was called on to lead the closing prayer!

From Abilene, we moved to Memphis, Tennessee, home to Elvis Presley! His home, Graceland, had a spectacular Christmas display in the yard we would drive through and see each year. In Memphis, I started school and went through first grade and part of second. There was also a Shakey's pizza where they showed movies ("The Pit and the Pendulum"), had occasional live music (bluegrass) and where you could watch them make the pizza!

Mid-way through second grade, we were transferred to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where life was very different! My second grade teacher in Pittsburgh, Ms. Kennedy, informed me that I was mispronouncing my vegetables! I said, "vegetables" in three syllables and she pronounced the middle "e" making it a four-syllable word: "veg-e-ta-ble." If that wasn't enough, she said, "to-mah-toe" while I said, "to-may-toe." Pittsburgh was a long 8 months!

Before third grade began, Dad's company moved us yet again, this time to Rochester, New York. It was 1968 and the hippie movement was in full swing. Rochester had guys with hair longer than my sisters' and no Mexican food (Mom would make us great Mexican food so we "grew up right!")! We lived in Rochester for over four wonderful years. Never had we been in a place that long! I finished elementary school and half of my 7<sup>th</sup> grade before we again moved – this time to Lubbock, Texas (No Lubbock guys had hair as long as my sisters!).

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Mom and Dad kept us in Lubbock for the duration of school. It was not until college that I began moving again, heading off to a summer job at a church in League City, Texas and college in Nashville, Tennessee. After Law School, I moved to Houston where I have stayed since.

These days I still travel quite a bit, but my travels are not “moves;” they are work trips. The upside is my enjoyment of travel. The downside is my family rarely joins me on work trips and I miss them immensely.

Paul was a traveler. He was constantly on the go, forging new friendships, finding new foods, meeting new cultures, and addressing new problems. He adjusted to different accents, different styles, different attitudes, and different local traditions. Paul’s constant was his heavenly Father, his savior Jesus Christ, and the indwelling Spirit. No matter where Paul went, he went with God. God was not only his companion; God was his leader and mission. Paul took the message of God from place to place. We have followed Paul in his travels to the point of his stay in Corinth, where he wrote the two letters to the Thessalonian church. Today, we follow Paul as he brings this second missionary journey to an end and begins a third journey, where he encounters brand new gospel opportunities.

## THE JOURNEY

Paul spent 18 months (a long time for Paul) in Corinth. That time gave Paul opportunity to make lasting friendships with co-workers Priscilla and Aquila. Paul also got to know the Corinthian church intimately, something we will see more fully as we consider the follow-up letters between Paul and the Corinthians.

Luke reported that Paul left Corinth from Cenchræ, which was the Eastern port facing modern Turkey. Luke added that at Cenchræ, Paul cut his hair as part of a vow before sailing.<sup>1</sup> Paul had as companions on this journey, his friends he had made at Corinth, Priscilla and Aquila. Paul was headed back to Syria, but the boat made port first at Ephesus, a journey of two to three days by boat.

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<sup>1</sup> Most scholars believe that Paul was fulfilling a vow he had made that as God protected him in Corinth, he would cut his hair. See, F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles: The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary* (Eerdmans 1990) at 398. McRay suggests that Paul had taken a “private” Nazarite vow of thanksgiving for the fulfillment of the promised protection that had come to Paul in a vision. Paul would then offer his cut hair under the Nazarite vow at the temple in Jerusalem. John McRay, *Paul: His Life and Teaching* (Baker Academic 2003) at 174-6. Ramsay suggests the vow was connected “with safe embarkation from Corinth.” William Ramsay, *St. Paul the Traveller and the Roman Citizen* (Baker 1949) at 263.

Something very rare happened while Paul was in Ephesus. Paul left the boat long enough to go into the city and attend synagogue services. Paul took that opportunity to reason with the Jews. Those Jews asked Paul to stay longer to discuss things with them more. Paul actually said, “No,” adding that he would return to them if God so willed (Acts 18:20-21). This was indeed rare! Paul turning away an opportunity to stay and teach about Jesus! What was it driving Paul to leave so quickly?



Ramsay provides a good explanation for the timing of Paul’s trip. Ramsay explains that Paul was hustling back to Jerusalem for the Passover feast in 53 A.D. If we accept Ramsey’s analysis, then we should note the Passover was March 22 that year. Since navigation in the Mediterranean began as a general rule on March 5 each year (winter weather made such travel unusually dangerous), every day counted as Paul strove to return.<sup>2</sup>

Acts 18:22 recounted that Paul sailed from Ephesus to Caesarea, a journey of about seven days by sea. From the port, Paul, “went up and greeted the church” (which is language used for going “up” to Jerusalem), then “went down” to his

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<sup>2</sup> Ramsay at 263-264.

home church back at Antioch. After spending some time in Antioch, Paul left on his third missionary journey.

Paul's third journey took him back through the Galatian churches for a fourth visit. While Luke gives us no details, it is clear Paul had a pastor's heart toward those Christians he had seen come into the church. Paul spent that time "strengthening all the disciples" (Acts 18:23).

## **EPHESUS**

Paul's third journey into modern Turkey gave Paul a chance to return to Ephesus as promised. To understand Paul's arrival, we need to consider what had happened since Paul had left his brief stopover there.

### *Apollos*

Earlier I referenced Paul leaving the Ephesians, in spite of the Ephesian's wanting him to stay. Importantly, Paul did not leave them high and dry. Although Paul ventured on, he left Priscilla and Aquila in Ephesus to preach and teach the people there. This was a marvelous move because, while Paul was absent, a man from Alexandria came into Ephesus teaching about Jesus. The man was named Apollos.

Apollos is not mentioned extensively in the New Testament, but there are several very notable things about him worthy of study, especially in light of the opinion of Luther and many others that Apollos was the likely author of the Book of Hebrews. Luke said Apollos was:

- "a native of Alexandria" (Acts 18:24)
- "an eloquent man" (Acts 18:25)
- "competent in the Scriptures" (Acts 18:25)
- one who "had been instructed in the way of the Lord" (Acts 18:25)
- "fervent in spirit" (Acts 18:25)
- one who "spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus" (Acts 18:25)
- and one who "knew only the baptism of John" (Acts 18:25).

While Apollos was in Ephesus, he was speaking boldly in the synagogue. Evidently it was apparent to at least Priscilla and Aquila that his learning had

notable holes because Luke explained that they pulled Apollos quietly aside, “and explained to him the way of God more accurately” (Acts 18:26).

From there, the more learned Apollos left Ephesus and went to the church in Corinth to minister there. We know his influence was significant in Corinth because Paul would later write to the Corinthians trying to mend schisms in the church between those who claimed to be “of Apollos” and those “of Paul.” In 1 Cor. 3:5, Paul used the image of Paul having planted and Apollos watering while “God gave the growth.”

Apollos knew about Jesus, but in a rudimentary way. For example, Apollos understood the baptism taught by John the Baptist, but never had been taught about the Christian baptism into the death and resurrection of Christ. It is as if Apollos had gained knowledge of Jesus from the early ministry years, but no more. We can easily imagine Apollos making a trek from Alexandria to Jerusalem. Apollos could have then come under the teaching of John the Baptist, receiving his baptism. Apollos also understood that John the Baptist had directed his followers to follow Jesus. Again, the contact between Alexandria and Jerusalem was close enough that Apollos could have easily kept up with the teachings of Jesus. But somehow, Apollos failed to grasp the full import of the death and resurrection, at least as far as baptism and the gift of the Holy Spirit were concerned.

Scholars are able to use knowledge outside of the Acts narrative to deduce some fairly reasonable ideas, even though Luke’s narrative and the information provided are so brief. For example, Alexandria was the major seat of learned Jews outside of Judea. It was not only the birthplace of the Septuagint, but the home of the learned Jew Philo of Alexandria. Although we do not know for certain when Philo lived, scholars adduce from his writings he was likely born around 20-15BC and likely died around 50AD.<sup>3</sup> To put this into perspective, the events we are discussing around Apollos in Ephesus date in the first half of the 50’s AD (likely between 52 and 54AD).

Because we have a great bit of Philo’s writings still today, we are able to discern a lot about him, and by extension, the Jewish community of Alexandria. Philo was born into one of Alexandria’s wealthier families. He was trained in religion, in philosophy, and in civic affairs. He had great dexterity with an allegorical handling of Scriptures, as is evident reading his commentaries on the Torah, as well as expository writings. This is one of Luther’s reasons for believing Apollos was the writer of Hebrews. The Book of Hebrews has a similar usage of handling

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<sup>3</sup> Borgen, Peder, “Philo of Alexandria,” *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, (Doubleday 1992), v. 5 at 333.

much of the Old Testament Torah as it explains the sacrificial system as a foreshadowing of the sacrifice of Christ, and allegorizes the role of Jesus to that of the High Priest in the Torah.

As “an eloquent man,” Apollos would have been schooled, or at least accomplished in oratorical skills. This skill is something that could easily have set certain Corinthians into a camp of appreciating Apollos over Paul, as Paul wrote to them,

And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom... And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power (1 Cor. 2:1-4).

If this reading of Luke is correct, and he is saying the “man of eloquence” was indeed a trained or skilled orator, then it also makes sense of other passages in Paul’s writing to the Corinthians. Such an orator would also be seen to be a sophist, or a “wise man/debater.” This was a prevalent movement in Alexandria during this period of time.<sup>4</sup> Paul repeatedly told the Corinthians they were not to follow simply wisdom for wisdom’s sake. For the wisdom of the world, was often at odds with the wisdom of God. (See, 1 Cor. 1-3).

Even as a loyal Jew, Philo was quick to plug into the Gentile activities of a wealthy *bon vivant*. He “attended banquets, frequented the theatre, watched boxing matches, and attended horse races.”<sup>5</sup> This is inline with the Corinthian (and Greek) idea of one living off accumulated wealth as opposed to Paul’s teaching of hard work being of greater value. If Apollos carried the same Alexandrian ideas and habits, it would further explain the readiness of certain Corinthians to “follow Apollos.” It is notable that as Paul wrote the Corinthians and asserted the propriety of Paul’s way of life, he never did so at the expense of Apollos. Paul was Paul. Apollos was Apollos. Paul saw that both were involved in ministry as God had called them. It was the hand of God and the mission of God that mattered, not personal opinions or lifestyle.

These Corinthian features did not come into play until after Apollos had additional learning from Priscilla and Aquila. When Apollos first arrived in Ephesus, his teaching about Jesus was quite limited. In light of those developments, it is not surprising that as Paul was heading into Ephesus, he found some disciples that, while following Jesus, understood only the baptism of John. These were folks who had not even heard of the Holy Spirit, much less received it! Paul explained

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<sup>4</sup> Hawthorne, Gerald, *et al.*, eds., “Apollos,” *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, (IVP 1993).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, at 334.

that John's baptism was one that prophesied the coming of Jesus, but the believer's baptism was one that was into Christ himself. Hearing this message, these people were baptized into Jesus' name, Paul laid hands on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying as the Spirit came on them.

Some might wonder how these people had not already been taught more accurately; after all, Priscilla and Aquila were there! Our answer lies in part in understanding Ephesus a bit more fully. Unlike many places Paul had been as he went through Galatia, Ephesus was not a small town. Scholars place the population of Ephesus at this time between 200,000 and 250,000.<sup>6</sup> Strabo (c.64BC – c.25AD) called it, “the largest emporium in Asia this side of the Taurus [mountains].”<sup>7</sup> Having people with various stages of understanding, especially with Apollos having taught John's baptism for some time, makes complete sense.

Paul then fulfilled his promise returning to the synagogue in Ephesus. Paul spoke boldly about Jesus, persuading and explaining about God's kingdom. After three months teaching, some were stubbornly refusing to put their faith and belief in Jesus as Messiah, so Paul left the synagogue and moved his teaching to the “hall of Tyrannus.”

We get an insight into Paul's teaching at Tyrannus's hall through the Western text (see lesson 17, Part 5), which tells us Paul argued/taught there “from the fifth hour to the tenth.” For clock purposes, the day began at 6 a.m., so the “fifth to the tenth” hours would mean roughly from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. This was the time when businesses (including the school of Tyrannus) would be shut down for lunch and afternoon rest. Following this schedule gave Paul a chance to work during normal working hours. Then when folks were eating and resting, Paul could take that time to teach.

For two solid years, Paul used this time and place to teach of Jesus. Ephesus made a splendid location for Paul to do so! Ephesus was not only an important seaport, but it was also strategically located for trade and travel by land. Trebilco explains that Ephesus had roads heading north and south as well as two major highways heading east.<sup>8</sup> The port was to the west, and had direct shipping routes from

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<sup>6</sup> *The Book of Acts in its Graeco-Roman Setting*, editors David Gill and Conrad Gempf, chapter by Paul Trebilco, “Asia” (Wipf and Stock Publishers 2000) at 307.

<sup>7</sup> Strabo, *Geography* 14.1.24, Loeb Classical Library translation by Horace Jones.

<sup>8</sup> In the book of Revelation, we read Jesus instructing John to write to seven churches of Asia. The first letter is to the church at Ephesus, the center of communication. From there, the churches are listed as Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. These churches follow the order of the road starting in Ephesus and winding in a “geographical semicircle...on what must have functioned as an ancient postal route.” John McRay, *Archaeology and the New Testament* (Baker 1991) at 243.

Greece, Macedonia, Syria, Palestine, and even Egypt. Travelers from all over the Mediterranean world would make their way to Ephesus. In addition to standard travelers, Ephesus was home to a “courier school.” This was a school that taught and trained people how to be messengers or couriers. These people were trained to take letters and messages and deliver them where sent.<sup>9</sup> We have no way of knowing how God might have used people trained there to send and secure many of the letters we now have in our Bibles. We do know that as a result of Paul’s time in Ephesus, “all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks” (Acts 19:10).<sup>10</sup>

### *Ephesus and Magic*

Ephesus was a magical place, in more ways than one! Magic itself had a home in Ephesus. There was a term used in the day, Ἐφέσια γράμματα (*Ephesia grammata*) meaning, “letters or writings of Ephesus.”<sup>11</sup> These were words, spells, and incantations of Ephesus that allegedly contained powers over the spiritual realm. In addition to magical spells, we have many inscriptions showing that the Ephesians sought out healing for medical maladies from various gods worshipped there.<sup>12</sup>

Paul came into the Ephesian magic scene bringing not only the truth of God, but the power of God as well. God worked “extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul” (Acts 19:11). In fact, not only through Paul, but also through Paul’s face, cloths, and aprons, the sick were healed and demons exorcised.

Some itinerant Jewish exorcists thought they had found some new magic words that would give them a similar power! Thinking Jesus nothing more than magic, they sought to exorcise some evil spirits. These men (they were “seven sons of a Jewish priest named Sceva”) tried to control a spirit demonizing a man saying, “I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims.” The spirit answered, “Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?” The spirit then used the man to overpower the exorcists, leaving them naked and wounded as they fled the house!

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<sup>9</sup> Trebilco at 310-311.

<sup>10</sup> Trebilco writes, “Paul’s message would quickly be spread through the province, through the agency of people who had come to Ephesus for any number of reasons, had become Christians, and then returned to their homes, but also because *people would be used to hearing news from Ephesus.*” (Emphasis added.) *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> See Plutarch, *Quaest. Conv.* 7.5.

<sup>12</sup> Trebilco at 312-313.

When word of this got out, those who heard the news held the name of Jesus in greater awe and fear than before. Jesus was praised, and those believers that had kept books of magic brought those out and burned them publicly!

Paul had spent over two years in Ephesus teaching daily and seeing the church grow. Somewhere during that time, Paul decided he should go back through Macedonia (Philippi and Thessalonica) and Achaia (Greece) visiting the churches. He then decided to go to Jerusalem followed by Rome. In anticipation of this, Paul sent Timothy and Erastus ahead while he finished up in Ephesus.

### *Ephesus and Albuquerque*

During Paul's last few days in Ephesus, "there arose no little disturbance" (Acts 19:23) concerning the Way (an early term for the church). The disturbance was instigated by a silversmith named Demetrius. Demetrius made his living forming shrines to Artemis out of silver. The Ephesian worship of Artemis was well known and tied to a rock!

And when the town clerk had quieted the crowd, he said, "Men of Ephesus, who is there who does not know that the city of the Ephesians is temple keeper of the great Artemis, and of the sacred stone that fell from the sky? (Acts 19:35).

If you find yourself in Albuquerque, New Mexico with an hour to kill, you might want to go to Northrop Hall on the University of New Mexico campus. Inside you will find the Meteorite Museum with its extensive collection of meteorites (rocks) that have fallen from outer space. The highlight of the collection is a 2,000-pound rock that fell in Kansas in 1948.

Most everyone today knows what a meteorite is. We live in a day when man has traversed space, walked on the moon, and scanned with telescopes deep into the heavens. Have you considered, however, what a primitive people might think if they saw a rock come hurtling out of the sky? Especially if these eye witnesses believed that the gods actually inhabited the sky?

We get insight into this from the famous Greek playwright Euripides (ca. 480BC – 406BC) who wrote a tragedy entitled *Iphigenia Among the Taurians*. In the play the goddess Artemis rescues Iphigenia from a sacrificial death by substituting a deer on the altar and whisking the girl to Tauris (a Greek colony along the northern coast of the Black Sea). Iphigenia works as a priestess at the temple of Artemis where there was a "statue" which "they say fell from the sky." Later in

the play, the “thing that fell from the sky” is stolen by Iphigenia’s brother and taken to Athens.<sup>13</sup>

While to us that may seem absurd, to the mindset of ancient Greeks, it seemed quite sensible. Of course to Paul and those of Judaic Christian understanding, the idea was as absurd as it is to us. The Jews knew about God from his revelation in Scripture, and they would never have thought that God chunked rocks at the earth to be idols for worship. Christians knew the same, but they also understood that God’s real descent to earth was not as a rock, but as a man, Jesus Christ.

This brings us back to Paul in Ephesus. The Ephesians had built, almost 600 years earlier, a massive temple to Artemis.<sup>14</sup> Like the temple at Tauris, the one in Ephesus was built around a meteor that had fallen to earth. Here we understand the reference from the town clerk to the “sacred stone that fell from the sky” (Acts 19:35).

The temple was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Antipater of Sidon, writing in the first century BC spoke of the Temple compared to the other wonders of the ancient world:

I have set eyes on the wall of lofty Babylon on which is a road for chariots, and the statue of Zeus by the Alpheus, and the hanging gardens, and the colossus of the Sun, and the huge labour of the high pyramids, and the vast tomb of Mausolus; *but when I saw the house of Artemis that mounted to the clouds, those other marvels lost their brilliancy, and I said, ‘Lo, apart from Olympus, the Sun never looked on aught so grand.’*<sup>15</sup>

The temple was huge; four times the size of the Parthenon in Athens.<sup>16</sup> It was a huge economic driver for Ephesus. It served as a tourist destination, a site of religious pilgrimage, and even a bank. People from throughout Asia Minor would use the temple as a place to keep their money and treasures. Dio Chrysostom (ca. 40 – 120), a young man in nearby Bithynia at the time, would later write,

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<sup>13</sup> *Iphigenia among the Taurians* Loeb Classical Library (1999) translation by David Kovacs, at lines 86 and 1384.

<sup>14</sup> The original temple was built around 550 BC. It was subsequently rebuilt several times including by Alexander the Great.

<sup>15</sup> Loeb Classical Library, *The Greek Anthology Book IX* (Harvard University Press 1919) translated by W. R. Paton at 58 (pg 31).

<sup>16</sup> Paul Trebilco, *The Early Christians in Ephesus from Paul to Ignatius* (Eerdmans 2004) at 20.

About the Ephesians ... that large sums of money ... belonging to private citizens and deposited in the temple of Artemis, not alone money of the Ephesians but also of aliens and of persons from all parts of the world, and in some cases of commonwealths and kings, money which all deposit there in order that it might be safe, since no one has dared to violate that place."<sup>17</sup>

Apart from its tourist pull, its religious draw, and its banking position, the temple also served as a source of income to those like Demetrius who would fashion replicas of the goddess Artemis or shrines in her honor.

It comes as no surprise that Demetrius was able to stir up quite a commotion when he accused Paul by reporting,

Paul has persuaded and turned away a great many people, saying that gods made with hands are not gods (Acts 19:26).

A number rallied around Demetrius, for as he pointed out,

from this business we have our wealth (Acts 19:25).

A final pointed message was his declaration that,

there is a danger not only that this trade of ours may come into disrepute but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be discredited, and the goddess herself, who is worshiped throughout the province of Asia and the world, will be robbed of her divine majesty (Acts 19:27).

When we consider the extra-biblical insight into Ephesus and the cult of Artemis, it comes as no surprise that when Demetrius issued his fear-inducing indictment, the people,

were furious and began shouting: "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" (Acts 19:28).

In fact, Luke tells us, soon the whole city was in an uproar.

Paul had two companions with him from Macedonia, Gaius and Aristarchus, who were grabbed and hauled into the theater. We consider a theater today as a place for drama or an occasional concert. While the theater held such events in Paul's

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<sup>17</sup> Dio Chrysostom, Discourse 31.54, Loeb Classical Library (Harvard University Press 1940) translated by J. W. Cohoon, H. Lamar Crosby.

day, it was used in many more ways. The Ephesian theater would seat 20,000 people and was used for large meetings, public events, meetings of governmental assemblies, holiday festivities, etc.<sup>18</sup> It was a logical place to haul Paul's co-workers.



In this picture of the Ephesian theater, taken by James Hoffmeier, we can still see today the location of the dispute with Gaius and Aristarchus

Paul sought to intervene and appear before the crowd, but his friends, including some provincial officials, begged Paul not to go into the theater. So Gaius and Aristarchus stood in the theater without Paul, but with God! Jews were involved in the ruckus and grabbed one of Paul's other companions caught up in the riot and shoved him (Alexander) to the front of the theater. Alexander tried to quiet the crowd and present a defense, but the crowd soon recognized him as a Jew and began shouting,

Great is Artemis of the Ephesians! (Acts 19:34).

The Greek being chanted by the people is an actual slogan in use at the time. The Greek phrase begins with *megale* (μεγάλη) translated "Great." The phrase is found in inscriptions in ancient Ephesus as well as in a number of classical writers of the day.<sup>19</sup>

This chanting continued for about two hours! At that point the city clerk managed to get the crowd quiet by using a good bit of logic! Here is where the clerk acknowledged that everyone knows Ephesus is the home of the temple and guardian of the image "which fell from heaven" (Acts 19:35). The clerk then said that everyone should just "be quiet and not do anything rash" (Acts 19:36). In

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<sup>18</sup> Trebilco at 349.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* at 318-319.

fact, the Christians had not stolen anything or done anything illegal. So the proper action by Demetrius and others was not to riot and potentially get into trouble with the Roman authorities. Instead, the Clerk stated, they should take any of their grievances to court.

This fact related by Luke also comports well with our knowledge of Ephesus. Ephesus was a center for the Roman courts in the region. The proconsuls would hear grievances and make decisions on matters relevant to the city and its administration.

The clerk effectively ended the riot, dismissing the crowd. Here we find Paul's time at Ephesus draw to a close. To better understand why he left, we need to turn to the letters Paul wrote to the church at Corinth. Paul likely wrote 1 Corinthians during this time at Ephesus. The letter we call 2 Corinthians, he likely wrote shortly after leaving Ephesus. To those letters, we will next turn our attention.

### **POINTS FOR HOME**

1. *"When they asked him to stay for a longer period, he declined"* (Acts 18:20).

It is still incredible to think about. Paul declined to stay on and teach about Jesus to those who needed and wanted to hear! What do we do with this? First, we should be impressed that Paul was so closely tuned into the work God had for him. Those people left behind in Ephesus were not left without adequate help. Priscilla and Aquila were there, and Apollos was coming shortly. God worked his will in Ephesus while still working his will for Paul. Paul's concern was God's will for his time, his influence,<sup>20</sup> and his ministry. That is what Paul was about.

We live caught between two problems. First, we never want to say "no" to an opportunity God gives us for his good works. Yet, we also never want to miss God sending us one direction for his good works simply because we perceive a more personally preferable direction where we believe he could also use us. How do we decide what to do? How do we make sure we follow God and never wrongfully say "No"? This whole question ties into how we discern God's will for our life.

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<sup>20</sup> Stephen Trammell is currently writing an article for a monthly publication on the stewardship of one's influence. Stephen also writes daily devotionals that are wonderful (and free!) available for download at [www.cfbc.org](http://www.cfbc.org).

We begin by acknowledging that 90 percent of the time, God's will is plainly found in the teachings and mandates of Scripture: love your neighbor, love God, be honest, have the heart of a servant, tithe, be fiscally responsible, *etc.* What about the other 10 percent of the time? The solution there lies in closeness with God. The more we walk faithfully in the 90 percent, the more we spend time in prayer and worship, *etc.*, then the closer we grow to God. We begin to understand his heart and hear his voice. We get fuller understanding of his will for our lives. In this, we find our direction.

2. *"When Priscilla and Aquila heard him [Apollos], they took him and explained to him the way of God more accurately"* (Acts 18:26).

Which is more impressive here, that Priscilla and Aquila had the manner that allowed them to pull Apollos aside and teach the teacher or that Apollos had the humility to learn? We take lessons from both! Both modeled the approach Paul would later urge to the Philippians, "Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves" (Phil. 2:3).

3. *"There is danger the great temple of Artemis may be counted as nothing"* (Acts 19:27).

In a strange way, Demetrius was right. Ultimately Ephesus became a principal and leading Christian city. Once Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire, Ephesus became home to at least one major church council. Even the temple to Artemis was ultimately destroyed, and in the 530's the huge columns were used by Justinian to build the Hagia Sophia church in Constantinople, the largest and most spectacular church for 1,000 years of church history.

Let us remember that our faith in a risen Savior, in a God who created the world and is beyond any idol we might create on our own, is a faith that is in conflict with the values of the world. The world stands opposed to true biblical faith. While the temptation might be to compromise what we believe, or even mesh it into the world's systems and beliefs, we should never be so foolish. We are to be "the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste ... it is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet" (Mt. 5:13). Rather than lose our saltiness, let us be a "light of the world ... on a stand ... [that] gives light to all in the house" (Mt. 5:14-15).