

PAUL'S LIFE AND TEACHINGS

Lesson 19

Paul's Second Missionary Journey Completed, His Third Commenced

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 Abilene, I started school and went through first grade (I had one day of kindergarten before being moved into the first grade class) and part of second.

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, "veg-
tebles" in three syllables and she pronounced the middle "e" making it a four-syllable word: "veg-e-teble." 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 7th 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.

Now, 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 tells us that Paul left Corinth from Cenchræ, which was the Eastern port facing modern Turkey. Luke adds that at Cenchræ, Paul cut his hair as part of a vow before sailing.¹ Paul was headed back to Syria, but the boat made port first at Ephesus. Priscilla and Aquila sailed with Paul as far as Ephesus, and they chose to stay there rather than go on with Paul.

¹ 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” Nazirite 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 Nazirite 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, 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.²

Acts 28:22 tells us that Paul finally landed at Caesarea, near Jerusalem, “went up and greeted the church” (which is language used for going “up” to Jerusalem),

² Ramsay at 263-264.

then “went down” to his 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. Luke tells us some background information on some important events that had occurred in Ephesus since Paul had last been there. A Jewish fellow from Alexandria, Egypt had come. This man was both eloquent and strong in his command of scripture. His name? Apollos!

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.

Apollos was teaching in the synagogue at Ephesus, as he best understood, when Priscilla and Aquila heard him. Priscilla and Aquila pulled Apollos aside and explained more fully “the way of God.” Apollos took to it immediately and before long left Ephesus and went over to Corinth and Achaia to strengthen the church and aid in disputes with the Jews over scripture and Christ.

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 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 250,000.³ Strabo (c. 64 BC – c. 25 AD) called it, “the largest emporium in Asia this side the Taurus [mountains].”⁴ 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 Tyranus.”

We get an insight into Paul’s teaching at Tyranus’s hall through the Western text (see lesson 16), 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 Tyranus) 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.⁵ The port was to the west, and had direct shipping routes from 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.⁶ We have no way of

³ *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.

⁴ Strabo, *Geography* 14.1.24, Loeb Classical Library translation by Horace Jones.

⁵ 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 road starting in Ephesus 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.

⁶ Trebilco at 310-311.

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).⁷

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, $\epsilon\phi\epsilon\sigma\iota\alpha$ $\gamma\rho\alpha\mu\mu\alpha\tau\alpha$ (*Ephesia grammata*) meaning, "letters or writings of Ephesus."⁸ 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.⁹

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!

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!

Next week, we continue our time with Paul in Ephesus.

POINTS FOR HOME

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

⁷ 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.*

⁸ See Plutarch, *Quaest. Conv.* 7.5.

⁹ Trebilco at 312-313.

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,¹⁰ 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.

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).

What 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. "All the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord" (Acts 19:10).

¹⁰ 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.

Paul was a traveler for God! He took the message to many places across many cultures. But, Ephesus was unique. God placed Paul in a location where Paul was in the center of a communications wheel that branched out in all directions. Paul was able to stay over two years and minister to the church while reaching out to all points, north, south, east, and west. We should pray that our missionaries today find such similar placements so that the message of God's loving sacrifice reaches all points of the compass throughout the world!