

Bible Stories

3rd MISSIONARY JOURNEY

Acts 18:23

November 11, 2023

Prologue

After spending some time in Antioch, Paul, once again had itchy feet. It was time to return to Galatia and Phrygia.

Meanwhile, a Jew named Apollos, who was originally from Alexandria Egypt, went to Ephesus. He had a thorough knowledge of scripture and he taught in the synagogue with great passion about Jesus – though he only knew how John had baptized. When Aquila and Priscilla heard him, they invited him home and gave him further instruction.

From Ephesus he travelled to Achaia and was a great help to the believers there. *"He vigorously refuted the Jews in public debate, proving from scripture that Jesus was the Christ."* While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul arrived at Ephesus.

Ephesus

In Ephesus, Paul found the 12 men Apollos had baptized. He asked if they had received the Holy Spirit. They didn't know what he was talking about. They told him they only knew of John's baptism. *"That was the baptism of repentance,"* he told them, so they were all baptized again in the name of Jesus, then Paul placed his hands on them and the Holy Spirit came upon them and they began to speak in other languages.

As was his custom, Paul went to the local synagogue. He spent 3 months there, preaching boldly about Jesus.

As was their custom, some of the Jews in the congregation, took exception to Paul's message and publicly criticized him, so, Paul left and took his disciples with him. For 2 years they met in the lecture hall of Tyrannus.

God performed many miracles through Paul – giving evidence that what he was teaching was true.

The 7 sons of a Jewish chief priest, named Sceva, were attempting to take advantage of the people's superstitions by driving out evil spirits. Impressed by Paul's success, they began to claim that their power to drive out evil spirits also came from Jesus. They would say, *"In the name of Jesus, whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out."*

One day the evil spirit answered them, *"Jesus I know, and I know about Paul, but who are you?"*

The man, whose evil spirit they were attempting to cast out, jumped on them and overpowered them all. He gave them such a beating that they ran out of the house naked and bleeding.

When the Jews and Greeks living in Ephesus heard the story, they were all seized with fear, and the name of Jesus was held in high honor. Many believers openly confessed their evil deeds. Those who had practiced sorcery publicly burned their scrolls. The value of the scrolls was over 136 YEARS worth of wages.

- Acts 19:20 - *In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power.*

Paul decided that it was time to go back to Jerusalem, but before he left, he got into a spot of trouble. In Ephesus there was a silversmith, named Demetrius. A large part of his income came from the making and selling of silver representations of the goddess Artemis (Greek)/Diana (Roman). Because of Paul, fewer people were buying his idols and he was losing money – as were all the other silversmiths in town. He called the members of local 666 together:

"Men," he said. "You know we make good money in the idol business. You also know that this fellow Paul has led astray large numbers of people here and practically in all of Asia saying that man-made gods are not gods at all. There is a real danger that we'll lose our reputation among the people, but worse than that, the temple of Artemis will be discredited, and the goddess herself, will be robbed of her divine majesty."

When the men heard this, they were enraged and began shouting: "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!"

Pretty soon the whole city was in an uproar. The mob dragged Gaius and Aristarchus (companions of Paul) into the local theatre. Paul wanted to go to their defense, but his disciples would not allow it.

There was a lot of confusion and most of the people didn't know what was going on.

A Jew named Alexander was pushed to the front and tried to speak, but when the mob realized he was Jewish, they began to chant, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" They carried on like this for 2 hours.

Finally, the city clerk stepped in, "Men of Ephesus, all the world knows that we are the guardians of the great Artemis and her temple. These facts are undeniable, so be quiet and do not act in haste. You have dragged these men here, even though they have done nothing against our goddess. If Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen have a grievance they can go through the proper channels and press charges. As it is, we are in danger of being charged with rioting because we have no evidence to back up our actions." (Acts 19:35-40) – with that, he dismissed the crowd.

After the mob dispersed, Paul sent for the disciples. After encouraging them, he left for Macedonia.

Paul finally arrived in Corinth – where he stayed for 3 months – preaching the gospel boldly wherever he went.

Once again, Paul's success aroused the anger of the local Jews. The fact that he was unapologetic in his insistence that Gentile believers were equal with Jews as children of Abraham was regarded as blasphemy and the Jews were determined to silence him.

Paul desired to go to Rome and even Spain, but he never got any further than Corinth – at least not under his own power. Now he hoped to be back in Jerusalem by Passover, but when he learned of the plot against him, he decided to go back through Macedonia instead of sailing for Syria. He stayed in Philippi and spent Passover with the believers and then sailed to Troas where his 7 travelling companions were waiting for him.

They stayed in Troas for a week. On Sunday night, the congregation gathered to share a meal and listen to Paul speak. Because he was leaving the next day, he spoke until midnight. Seated in an open window, listening to Paul was a young man named, Eutychus (whose name means, "lucky"). As Paul went on and on with no sign of stopping, Eutychus' eyes began to grow heavy and he fell asleep. Out the window he went and hit the ground, 3 stories below. There he lay, dead as a doornail. Paul threw himself on the young man and wrapped his arms around him. "Don't be alarmed, he's alive," he told the onlooking crowd.

Paul got up, went upstairs, ate a little something then continued preaching until dawn – meanwhile Eutychus was taken home and put to bed.

Paul's companions sailed for Assos, while he journeyed on foot. The group met up and sailed for Syria.

Paul was in a hurry to get to Jerusalem by Pentecost, so was not intending to go to Ephesus, but during a brief stop at Miletus, he sent for the elders of the church in Ephesus.

When they arrived, he said, "You know how I lived while I was with you – setting an example by working to supply for my own needs and the needs of my companions. I served the Lord with great humility and with tears, although I was severely tested by the plots of the Jews. You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly. I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus.

Now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. All I only know is that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships await me. However, I consider my life worth nothing, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me.

I know that we will not see each other again, therefore, I declare to you that I am innocent of the blood of all men because I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God. Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church, which our Lord bought with his own blood, because I know that savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth to draw away the disciples. So be on your guard!" (Acts 20:18-35)

The group knelt and prayed, wept and embraced and then they accompanied Paul to the waiting ship.

Eventually, the ship arrived at Tyre, to unload cargo. Paul and his group got off the ship and found the believers in Tyre and stayed with them for 1 week.

The Spirit had revealed to the believers what would happen to Paul, so they tried to persuade him not to go to Jerusalem, but he was determined to go. Paul would not allow the fear of pain or imprisonment to keep him from going to Jerusalem, so, he got back on the ship and sailed to Ptolemais and eventually arrived at Caesarea.

Phillip, the deacon, lived in Caesarea, so they went to his house. After they had been at Philip's for a few days, a prophet from Judea, named, Agabus, arrived at Philip's door. He took Paul's belt, tied his own hands and feet, looked at Paul and said, *"The Holy Spirit says, 'This is the way the Jews of Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will then hand him over to the Gentiles.'"*

All those gathered in Philip's house begged Paul not to go to Jerusalem.

Paul looked at the group surrounding him and said, *"Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."*

- Acts 21:15 - *After this, we got ready and went up to Jerusalem.*

What do we do with this story?

I'm not sure what more I can say to you about Paul's missionary journeys. He spent 13 years trekking through Asia Minor and Greece telling anyone who would listen about the wonders of knowing Jesus. He was dogged relentlessly and no matter where he went, he could not be rid of those desperate to stop him.

Luke does not mention all the difficulties Paul endured during his 3 years at Ephesus, but in 1 Corinthians 15:32 and 16:9, Paul, himself, speaks of the "wild beasts" he fought and the great opposition he faced while there. However, despite the oppositions very best efforts, Paul left new believers in every town he stopped - and the Gospel spread.

It is one thing to speak of courage when the future is unknown. It is quite another to speak of courage when the future is known. When he left the elders from Ephesus at Miletus, Paul already knew he would never see them again. Even then, he was determined to fulfill his mission. Despite knowing what could happen, Paul would not be sidetracked. He was going to go to Jerusalem.