

The Last Pilgrimage

“I will return again unto you, if God will.” **THE APOSTLE PAUL SPOKE**
—Acts 18:21

these words of endearment to the Jews who were gathered at the synagogue in Ephesus. He had stopped there for a brief visit at the completion of his second pilgrim journey, but could not stay there long because he was on his way to keep the feast with the brethren at Jerusalem. From there, he made his way home to Antioch and the brethren. (Acts 18:19) It is believed that the apostle stayed at Antioch for about a year before setting out again on his third and last pilgrimage. At that time, he rejoined his colaborers—Timothy, Silas, and Luke—in witnessing the word of Truth and the heavenly call to the scattered people of God.

THE HISTORIAN’S RECORD

In Luke’s historical record of the beginning of this third trip, he provides the only reliable although brief information that we have. “After he had spent some time there, he departed, and went over all the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order,

strengthening all the disciples.” (vs. 23) Paul had proclaimed the wonderful word of Truth to some of the new brethren in Christ in this same area while passing through on his previous journeys. At that earlier time, the Heavenly Father had not permitted him to go into certain areas of Asia and particularly to the city of Bithynia.—Acts 16:7,8

At this point in Paul’s experiences, the Apostle Peter provides additional reference concerning some of these brethren. In his first epistle, he wrote, “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied.”—I Peter 1:1,2

On this third missionary journey, we learn that Paul went throughout these regions revisiting and ministering to the churches that he had helped establish there on his previous trips. Although the province of Galatia was not specifically mentioned as having been visited by Paul and Barnabas on their earlier journey, we recall how persecution and the threat of stoning had caused these two brethren to flee from Iconium in Lycaonia into the surrounding country. Lycaonia bordered on Galatia, and Derbe was located on the Galatian border. It seems reasonable therefore that the surrounding country of which Luke had made mention no doubt included parts of Galatia. We read, “They were ware of it, and fled unto Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and unto the region that lieth round about: And there they preached the gospel.”—Acts 14:6,7

ASIA MINOR IN ANCIENT TIMES

Portions of the central region of Asia Minor were referred to as Galatia, including not only the province by that name, but certain parts of other provinces as well. Galatia derived its name from the Gauls who had invaded and conquered the area in the third century B.C. Later, the Romans conquered it and Galatia then became a Roman province. When the territory was made subject to Rome, it was much larger in scope than the old Galatia had been. Thus the churches at Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe of Lycaonia were called churches of Galatia. These were all established by the Apostle Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey.

THE JUDAIZERS

These churches were also being visited by Judaizing teachers from Jerusalem who were questioning Paul's ministry and authority, and were seeking to convince some of the new brethren in Christ to accept and observe the Mosaic Law instead of Christ. Paul referred to this troubling problem in his letter to the church at Galatia. His message of Truth was based on faith in our Lord Jesus, "knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified."—Gal. 2:16

Again, Paul proclaimed, "I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God. I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I,

but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.”—vss. 19-21

BRETHREN OF THE EARLY CHURCH

On this third journey, the apostle wanted to go to Ephesus again as he had promised. Near the end of his previous pilgrimage, he had stopped there but could only stay a short time, and he was now on his way to keep that promise.

By that time, the Word of God and the message concerning the heavenly calling to the church had spread to other regions, and congregations now existed in the provinces of Phrygia and Lydia. The apostle had to pass through this area to reach Ephesus, and so he stopped to visit the brethren in those places. Antioch, Colosse, Laodicea, and Hierapolis were cities in that region where classes had been previously organized.

We learn about some of these ecclesias in his letter to the Colossians. He addressed his letter, “To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colosse: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” (Col. 1:2) In this letter, we also read, “Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. For I bear him record, that he hath a great zeal for you, and them that are in Laodicea, and them in Hierapolis.”—Col. 4:12,13

Again we note Paul's salutation, when he wrote, "Salute the brethren which are in Laodicea, and Nymphas, and the church which is in his house. And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and that ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea."—vss. 15,16

Several brethren from these classes were also mentioned by Paul. One of them was Epaphras who was associated with the Colossian church. We read, "Ye also learned of Epaphras our dear fellowservant, who is for you a faithful minister of Christ. (chap. 1:7) Tychicus came from that same area and was also mentioned by the apostle. "All my state shall Tychicus declare unto you, who is a beloved brother, and a faithful minister and fellowservant in the Lord."—chap. 4:7

The testimonials given by Paul of these two brethren reveal their faithful service to God. Paul wrote concerning Epaphras, 'Our dear fellowservant, who is for you a faithful minister of Christ,' and about Tychicus, 'He is a beloved brother, and a faithful minister and fellowservant in the Lord.'

PAUL ARRIVES AT EPHESUS

From Luke's record, we read, "It came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples." (Acts 19:1) The upper coasts which the historian referred to included the province of Lydia where the congregations of Smyrna, Philadelphia, Sardis, and Thyatira were located. These churches were not specifically mentioned by Paul, but were used by the Apostle John

in Revelation as examples of different periods of the church's history during the present Gospel Age.

When Paul arrived in Ephesus, he was introduced to some new disciples of the Lord and he asked them whether they had received the Holy Spirit. Their response was that they had never even heard of the Holy Spirit. This led him to ask them about the nature of their baptism. "It came about that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper country came to Ephesus, and found some disciples, and he said to them, Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed? And they said to him, No, we have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit. And he said, Into what then were you baptized? And they said, Into John's baptism."—Acts 19:1-3, *New American Standard Bible*

The apostle then proceeded to speak of the baptism into our Lord Jesus. "Paul said, John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus. And when they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking with tongues and prophesying. And there were in all about twelve men."—vss. 4-7, *NASB*

AQUILA, PRISCILLA AND APOLLOS

During the intervening time of Paul's absence from Ephesus, we learn from the scriptural record some interesting details about Aquila and Priscilla, and their study of the Scriptures with Apollos who was a Jew. No doubt their discussions included a

more complete understanding of the doctrine of baptism. Luke writes, "Now a certain Jew named Apollos, an Alexandrian by birth, an eloquent man, came to Ephesus; and he was mighty in the Scriptures. This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he was speaking and teaching accurately the things concerning Jesus, being acquainted only with the baptism of John; and he began to speak out boldly in the synagogue. But when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately. And when he wanted to go across to Achaia, the brethren encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him; and when he had arrived, he helped greatly those who had believed through grace; for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, demonstrating by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ."—Acts 18:24-28, *NASB*

THE CHURCH AT EPHESUS

During Paul's previous visit to Ephesus, there apparently was no ecclesia yet established in that city. The scriptural record does not give information concerning whether some of the new members of the church at Ephesus had become interested in the Truth through the ministry of Apollos. They may have arrived there from Judea, but they gave evidence that they were true disciples of Jesus. They had been immersed a second time with the correct knowledge and meaning of baptism, and they also manifested the true spirit of our Lord.

When the apostle returned to Ephesus, his doctrines soon began to arouse opposition, and the other disciples left the synagogue to begin meeting

in a place known as the School of Tyrannus. “He went into the synagogue, and spake boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God. But when divers were hardened, and believed not, but spake evil of that way before the multitude, he departed from them, and separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school of one Tyrannus. And this continued by the space of two years; so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.”—Acts 19:8-10

THE SCHOOL OF TYRANNUS

Tyrannus had been a sophist and a teacher of Greek philosophy. When he was converted to Christianity, he offered his school as a meeting place where both Gentiles and Jews could study and worship together. These gatherings, which continued for several years, attracted the attention of many people throughout the region of Asia as recorded by Luke the historian. Perhaps Paul met there with the Ephesian brethren while he stayed at the home of Aquila and Pricilla.

CASTING OUT DEMONS

Through his preaching and performing of miracles, Paul became well known throughout the city and surrounding area. Ephesus was a prominent Greek city—a city of the Ionians in Asia Minor which was located across the Aegean Sea from the mainland of Greece. It was a seaport, with cross-roads of traffic and trade, and was known as the gateway of Asia Minor. In addition to the commercial traffic, religious pilgrimages also took place there. The city was distinguished for its temple to

the heathen goddess Diana. It was a place of black magic, witchcraft, and sorcery and, as a result, the apostle had many occasions for casting out evil spirits.

Several itinerant Jewish exorcists were in Ephesus at that time. They had seen the apostle's success in casting out evil spirits and they attempted to do likewise. "Then certain of the vagabond Jews, exorcists, took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth. And there were seven sons of one Sceva, a Jew, and chief of the priests, which did so."—Acts 19:13,14

The response from the evil spirit was recorded by Luke and is most interesting. "The evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye? And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded."—vss. 15,16

Soon this event became publicized throughout the city and it had a profound effect upon the people, especially those who were involved in the magic arts. "This was known to all the Jews and Greeks also dwelling at Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. And many that believed came, and confessed, and shewed their deeds. Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver. So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed."—vss. 17-20

DEMETRIUS INCITES DISTURBANCE

At the entrance of the harbor of Ephesus stood an immense statue of Artemis, which was known as Diana by the Romans. She represented the goddess of fertility and was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. For the great festivals held in the month of Artemision, which corresponds to our months of March and April, visitors would come to Ephesus from all areas of Asia Minor to give homage to her. Luke records an episode that took place at the hands of Demetrius who did not like what the Apostle Paul was teaching. He was telling the people that they should not worship their goddess of Diana or any other man-made image, and Demetrius wanted to put a stop to this teaching.

“A certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, which made silver shrines for Diana, brought no small gain unto the craftsmen; Whom he called together with the workmen of like occupation, and said, Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth. Moreover ye see and hear, that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods, which are made with hands: So that not only this our craft is in danger to be set at nought; but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised, and her magnificence should be destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worshippeth.”—Acts 19:24-27

Demetrius found a hearing ear in support of his contention. “When they heard these sayings, they were full of wrath, and cried out, saying, Great is Diana of the Ephesians. *(Continued on page 35)*

(Continued from page 31) And the whole city was filled with confusion: and having caught Gaius and Aristarchus, men of Macedonia, Paul's companions in travel, they rushed with one accord into the theatre." (vss. 28,29) The situation quickly became unruly, "And when Paul would have entered in unto the people, the disciples suffered him not. And certain of the chief of Asia, which were his friends, sent unto him, desiring him that he would not adventure himself into the theatre."—vss. 30,31

As the uproar increased, great confusion arose. "Some therefore cried one thing, and some another: for the assembly was confused; and the more part knew not wherefore they were come together. And they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward. And Alexander beckoned with the hand, and would have made his defence unto the people. But when they knew that he was a Jew, all with one voice about the space of two hours cried out, Great is Diana of the Ephesians."—vss. 32-34

ORDER REESTABLISHED

Luke has recorded some interesting details that emphasize the very high position of honor that the goddess of Artemis occupied in Ephesus, and the role she played in the lives of its citizens. The Apostle Paul's untiring ministry and voice of Truth was surely overruled for the benefit of the true followers of Christ Jesus in that city.

We read, "When the townclerk had appeased the people, he said, Ye men of Ephesus, what man is there that knoweth not how that the city of the Ephesians is a worshipper of the great goddess

Diana, and of the image which fell down from Jupiter? Seeing then that these things cannot be spoken against, ye ought to be quiet, and to do nothing rashly. For ye have brought hither these men, which are neither robbers of churches, nor yet blasphemers of your goddess. Wherefore if Demetrius, and the craftsmen which are with him, have a matter against any man, the law is open, and there are deputies: let them implead one another. But if ye inquire any thing concerning other matters, it shall be determined in a lawful assembly. For we are in danger to be called in question for this day's uproar, there being no cause whereby we may give an account of this concourse. And when he had thus spoken, he dismissed the assembly."—Acts 19:35-41

SPIRITUAL GROWTH AT EPHESUS

The apostle had kept his promise to return to visit the brethren at Ephesus, and this pilgrimage would prove to be the last time that he would see them face to face. The pure message of Truth and the knowledge of the heavenly calling had been faithfully proclaimed to the ecclesia by Paul and his companions. The local church thus prospered and grew, and they were even able to send out many elders to serve other smaller churches and isolated brethren in the area.

The spiritual growth of the Ephesian church is reflected in our Lord's words, recorded by the revelator, "I know thy works, and thy labor, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars:

and hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted."—Rev. 2:2,3

PAUL'S FAREWELL TO EPHESUS

In his final message of farewell, Paul reflected on his experiences and left them with these words of encouragement. "Now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more. Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Spirit hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood."—Acts 20:25-28

In his message, he cautioned the brethren to exercise greater vigilance in their walk of faith. "I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears. And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified."—vss. 29-32

With these words of encouragement, admonition and warning, the Apostle Paul left the church at Ephesus to continue the final phase of his last voyage which lay ahead. ■