

Paul Begins His Third Journey

*“So mightily grew
the word of God
and prevailed.”*

—Acts 19:20

THE SCRIPTURES DO NOT

reveal the exact time when the Apostle Paul completed his second journey, but it is thought by many that it may have been in AD 53 or 54. On his way home, the apostle made a brief stop at Jerusalem, and then went on to Antioch where he remained for perhaps a few months. Meanwhile, his fellow travelers—Luke, Silas and Timothy—were away from their homes, actively engaged in assisting the new congregations in Macedonia and Achaia [Greece].

After spending time in Antioch, the Apostle Paul was ready to join them again to continue the work of searching for God's people, and so his third missionary journey began. In explaining the first part of this trip, Luke gave but a brief account, saying, “After he had spent some time there [at Antioch], he departed, and went over all the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples.”—Acts 18:23

Much of this territory was the same region he had passed through on his first and second journeys.

Now Paul traveled there again, revisiting and ministering to the churches he had helped establish on his previous trips. It is also likely that this time he went into areas where he had not formerly been permitted by the Lord to preach.—Acts 16:6,7

REGION OF GALATIA

Galatia and Phrygia are not specifically mentioned as having been visited by Paul and Barnabas on their first journey. However, the province of Galatia was very close to a number of the cities they passed through at that time, including Lystra, Iconium and Derbe. We remember how persecution and the threat of stoning had caused Paul and Barnabas to flee from Iconium into the surrounding country. Luke says that they fled “unto the region that lieth round about. And there they preached the gospel.” (chap. 14:6,7) Thus, it seems reasonable that the region that “lieth round about” included parts of Galatia, and now Paul intended to travel there once again.

At that time, a large portion of the central region of Asia Minor was referred to as Galatia. Its name came from the Gauls, who invaded from the west and conquered the area in the third century BC. Later, in 189 BC, the Romans conquered it, and Galatia became a Roman province in 25 BC. The churches that were established by Paul in this region on his first and second missionary journeys were visited by Judaizing teachers from Jerusalem. They questioned the Apostle’s authority and convinced some of the brethren to accept the necessity of observing the Mosaic Law. After passing through the province of Galatia a third time, Paul saw the need to write to the brethren there about this

matter. He composed his epistle to the Galatians later during his third missionary journey, probably between AD 54 and 58.

In this letter, Paul asserted and established his apostleship, supported by revelations he had received directly from God and Jesus Christ. He explained why the Mosaic Law Covenant was not the foundation upon which the Gospel church was formed. In addition, the Book of Galatians provides much valuable doctrinal information as well as admonitions for Christian living, which are just as pertinent today as they were in the days of the Early Church. It is interesting to see how the circumstances and experiences of the Early Church were so shaped and directed by God, as to make possible scriptural writings which would be of benefit to the work of the entire Gospel Age, as well as being applicable at the time they were written.

PHRYGIA AND UPPER COUNTRY

Getting back to our consideration of Paul's third journey, he was on his way to Ephesus again. Near the end of his previous pilgrimage he had stopped there, but could only stay a short time. The Jews of the local synagogue had asked that he stay longer, but he could not because of his plan to keep the feast at Jerusalem with the other apostles. Paul had promised to return, and he was now on his way to keep that promise.—Acts 18:19-21

In addition to the province of Galatia, the Gospel message had spread to other areas, including the region of Phrygia. Paul had to pass through this area to reach Ephesus, and so he would have stopped to visit the brethren there as he journeyed.

Antioch of Pisidia, Colosse, Laodicea, and Hierapolis were cities in Phrygia where ecclesias had been organized. Some of these are mentioned in Paul's letter to the Colossians.—Col. 1:2; 4:12-16

Several brethren from these classes were mentioned by Paul. Epaphras was associated with the Colossian church, and was very likely an elder. Tychicus also came from that area, although we cannot be sure to which congregation he belonged. 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: "A beloved brother, and a faithful minister and fellowservant in the Lord."—Col. 1:7; 4:7

Luke wrote: "Paul passed through the upper country and came to Ephesus." (Acts 19:1, *New American Standard Bible*) The "upper country" included the cities of Smyrna, Philadelphia, Sardis, Pergamos and Thyatira. The churches located in these cities are not specifically mentioned by Paul. However, they had evidently been established, because they are referred to by the Apostle John in the Book of Revelation as examples of different periods of church history.

ARRIVAL AT EPHESUS

When Paul arrived in Ephesus he was introduced to new disciples of the Lord, and he inquired of them if they had received the Holy Spirit. Their response was that they had not even heard of the Holy Spirit! This led Paul to ask them about the nature of their baptism, and their reply was that they had been immersed into John's baptism. (Acts 19:2,3) Whether

this immersion was recent or many years before, we do not know. More than twenty years had elapsed since John the Baptist's ministry had come to a close at his death.

Apollos had passed through this region a few months earlier, on his way to Greece. He too, had only known about John's baptism. In Paul's absence, Aquila and Priscilla had studied with Apollos, and explained the doctrine of baptism more accurately. (Acts 18:24-26) It is possible that these additions to the Ephesian church who Paul now met on his third journey had become disciples through Apollos' ministry, prior to his gaining a correct understanding of baptism and his subsequent departure to Greece. Paul saw, however, that these Ephesian brethren were true disciples of Jesus, and upon being immersed a second time with the correct knowledge of the meaning of baptism, they did receive evidences of the Holy Spirit.—chap. 19:4-6

During Paul's previous visit at Ephesus, which was very brief, apparently no ecclesia had been established. After he departed, the disciples—including Aquila and Priscilla—continued to meet with other Jews in the synagogue. When Paul returned, he too preached in the synagogue for about three months. Soon his doctrines began to arouse such opposition that Paul and the other disciples left the synagogue and began teaching in a place known as "the school of one Tyrannus."—vss. 8,9

Tyrannus was evidently a teacher of Greek philosophy, and offered an area at his school for Paul to use as a meeting place. There both Gentiles and Jews could study and worship together, and be taught by Paul. These gatherings, which continued

for two years, attracted the attention of so many people that Luke wrote, “All they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.” (Acts 19:10) During this time, it is very probable that Paul lived at Aquila and Priscilla’s home, and no doubt various meetings were held there as well.—I Cor. 16:19

MANY MIRACLES PERFORMED

In addition to his preaching, Paul became well-known throughout the city and surrounding area for the many miracles he performed. (Acts 19:11,12) Ephesus was a prominent Gentile city, and was situated on the western coast of Asia Minor, across the Aegean Sea from the mainland of Greece. It was a seaport, with crossroads of traffic and trade, and was a major commercial gateway to Asia. In addition to traffic because of commerce, religious pilgrimages flowed through Ephesus, distinguished for its temple to the heathen goddess, Diana. (vss. 27,35) It was also a place of curious arts, black magic, witchcraft, sorcery, and the like. As a result, Paul had many occasions for casting out evil spirits.

Several itinerant Jewish exorcists were in Ephesus at this time. Most notable among these were the seven sons of the Jewish chief priest, Sceva. They had seen the success Paul had in casting out evil spirits, and sought to do likewise, by saying, “I command you in the name of Jesus whom Paul preaches.” (Acts 19:13,14, *J. B. Phillips New Testament*) However, when they said this to a man possessed, the evil spirit within him knew this was a misuse of the name of Jesus, and stated: “Jesus I know, and I am acquainted with Paul, but who . . . are you? And the

man in whom the evil spirit was living sprang at them and overpowered them all with such violence that they rushed out of that house wounded, with their clothes torn off their backs.”—Acts 19:15,16, *Phillips*

Soon this event became publicized throughout the city. It had a profound effect upon the people, especially those dabbling in magic arts. A great number of them brought their books, which instructed them in these evil practices, together to one place and burned them. (vss. 17-19) Luke summarized the magnitude of the effect of this incident with the statement, “So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed.”—vs. 20

PROBLEMS IN CORINTH

During the time Paul was in Ephesus, he learned of problems arising in the church at Corinth. The family of Chloe had told him about factions developing there as a result of the ministry of the gifted orator, Apollos. (I Cor. 1:11) Some began to contend that Apollos was their leader, while others said they were followers of Paul. This, of course, was not the fault of Apollos, but rather a sign of weakness and lack of spiritual perception by the brethren in that city. The report from Chloe continued by saying that still others claimed Peter as their leader, and a few held that Christ was their head.

Paul saw the need to immediately deal with this matter. Thus, while still ministering at Ephesus, he wrote the first of two letters to the Corinthian brethren. He addressed the situation with these words: “Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas [Peter]; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name

of Paul?" (vss. 12,13) Two chapters later, in I Corinthians 3:1-6, Paul elaborates further on the source of these problems, ascribing them to immaturity and fleshly thinking. He concludes by saying, "You are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men? For when one says, I am of Paul, and another, I am of Apollos, are you not mere men? What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one. I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth."

—vss. 3-6, *NASB*

The Apostle emphasized to the Corinthian brethren that the apostles and teachers whom the Lord had appointed for the ministry were not divided. All of them with their different talents and gifts were cooperating in the work of God, and that this should be recognized by all the brethren. "Let no one boast in men. For all things belong to you, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or things present or things to come; all things belong to you, and you belong to Christ; and Christ belongs to God."—vss. 21-23, *NASB*

Paul's letter continues this important theme. "These things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and to Apollos for your sakes; that ye might learn in us not to think of men above that which is written, that no one of you be puffed up for one against another. For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?" —I Cor. 4:6,7

VISIT TO CORINTH DELAYED

Much of this information about conditions in Corinth probably came directly from Apollos, who had evidently come to Ephesus while Paul was there. Paul tried to persuade Apollos to return to Corinth, but apparently it was not possible at that time for him to do so. (I Cor. 16:12) We learn in verses 5-9 of this account that Paul also wanted to see the Corinthian brethren again, but he, too, postponed his visit for two reasons. One was that he wanted to spend more time with the brethren than his current obligations would allow. The other reason was that in Ephesus a special door of opportunity had opened, and he wanted to avail himself of it.

There were other brethren from the Corinthian church who were currently residing at Ephesus. Paul cites them in this same passage as examples of faithfulness and love. "Ye have known the household of Stephanas, that it is the first-fruit of Achaia, and to the ministration of the saints they did set themselves— . . . I rejoice over the presence of Stephanas, and Fortunatus, and Achaicus, . . . for they did refresh my spirit and yours; acknowledge ye, therefore, those who are such." He also mentions Aquila and Priscilla, and the church which met in their home. They, too, sent their greetings from Ephesus to the brethren at Corinth.—vss. 15-20, *Young's Literal Translation*

THANKFUL FOR ASSISTANCE

It was disappointing to receive news about the problems concerning some of the brethren in the Corinthian church. However, Paul was stimulated and refreshed by these other wonderful brethren

who had traveled such a long distance to assist him in Ephesus. Stephanas was one of the first converts in Corinth whom Paul had immersed, along with his entire family, and they became devoted servants of the Lord and the brethren. (I Cor. 1:16) When Stephanas and his family, along with Fortunatus and Achaicus, joined Paul at Ephesus to help with the marvelous work being done there, they all were a welcome addition. They joined the other laborers there—Timothy, Luke, Aquila and Priscilla—in the ministry of the Gospel.

Another brother from Corinth, Erastus, who was a city official there, arrived to help Paul at Ephesus. (Acts 19:22; Rom. 16:23; II Tim. 4:20) Sosthenes was still another who had come to help in the work of the Gospel. He had formerly been a ruler in the synagogue, prior to being converted by Paul. (I Cor. 1:1; Acts 18:17) Although those invited by God to be disciples of Jesus were mainly from the poorer and less influential class of this world, occasionally prominent persons were called, like Erastus and Sosthenes. (I Cor. 1:26) Their hearts were right, their faith was strong, and they had qualities the Lord was seeking.

It appears that at the time of Paul's current stay at Ephesus, Timothy and Silas had done what they could at Corinth and had left. Timothy joined Paul at Ephesus. Silas, however, who had traveled and worked faithfully with him for four years, is not mentioned again as one of Paul's companions. Later, he is noted as being with the Apostle Peter. (I Pet. 5:12) Thus, although taking his leave of Paul, Silas continued to work in the ministry, using the opportunities the Lord opened for him.

CHURCH AT EPHESUS PROSPERED

The new ecclesias in Macedonia needed assistance, and Paul wanted very much to visit them again. However, at that time, the opportunity for witnessing in Ephesus continued to be so great that he decided instead to send Timothy and Erastus to those classes, while he stayed in Ephesus. (Acts 19:22) As stated by Luke in our opening text, the Word of God had indeed grown “mightily . . . and prevailed.” The church at Ephesus prospered and grew, becoming a large class with many elders.

Many years later, after the death of Paul, it is believed that the Apostle John became an elder in Ephesus, and also traveled to other surrounding cities of Asia Minor, serving the brethren in those locations. He ministered in this capacity until he was exiled to Patmos, an island in close proximity to Ephesus. As he wrote the Book of Revelation, John could attest to the Lord’s words of commendation to the church at Ephesus: “I know thy works, and thy labour, 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

The ministry of the Gospel had borne much fruit in Ephesus and in many other areas of Asia Minor. Thus, the search for God’s people progressed with fervor through the great zeal of those who were moved by the Lord to engage in giving witness to God’s wonderful plan. ■