

Paul at Ephesus

“I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publickly, and from house to house, Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.”

—Acts 20:20,21

WHEN THE DOOR OF opportunity for witnessing to the Truth opened at Ephesus during Paul's third journey, he extended his stay in that city beyond the two years initially mentioned by Luke. (Acts 19:10) While he desired to travel again to Macedonia and Achaia [Greece], at this time he sent Timothy and Erastus to those regions, planning to join them when he completed his ministry in Ephesus. (vss. 21,22) Because of his long time in Ephesus, Paul became a well-known figure to many of the townspeople as a result of his extensive preaching and the reforms that it precipitated. However, his work also created some extreme enemies.

An imposing temple had been erected to the pagan goddess, Diana, in the city of Ephesus. It had been impressively built—roughly four hundred and fifty feet long, two hundred and twenty-five feet wide, and sixty feet in height. More than one

hundred and twenty-seven huge pillars graced the structure, many of which bore intricate carvings. So outstanding was its architecture that it has since been called one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.

THE GODDESS DIANA

The people believed that the heathen goddess Diana, also called Artemis, had been sent by the god Jupiter to select Ephesus as the site for this temple. The time of its construction spanned many years, beginning about 323 B.C., and its preservation was considered a sacred responsibility. Every year thousands made pilgrimages to worship this Asian goddess of nature and emblem of motherhood to all living things. When visitors came to see this great temple dedicated to Diana, they wanted to return home with a souvenir which they could worship. As a result, a very profitable trade was brought into existence by silversmiths, who produced miniature replicas of the temple, as well as small images, charms and amulets to be worn in honor of Diana.

During Paul's long stay in Ephesus, their business fell off sharply. One of the leaders of the silversmiths, named Demetrius, investigated the reason for this, and found that Paul's influence in the city was no doubt the probable cause. He assembled all the craftsmen of the city and explained that Paul had convinced many in Ephesus and throughout all Asia Minor that gods made by the hands of man were false and had no power. (Acts 19:23-26) Their once-profitable business had dwindled since many people were now holding

these charms in contempt. Shrewdly, Demetrius did not make their loss of business his chief concern. He stressed, rather, that since the effective preaching of Paul was directed against Diana, her worship was diminishing, and as a result the great temple eventually would be left in neglect, or even destroyed.—Acts 19:27

Paul, of course, had not primarily directed his preaching against Diana. He emphasized instead a belief in the true and living God, the Creator of all things, who had given everyone life—an invisible spiritual being whose form could not be copied in material substance. Demetrius, however, was successful in inciting his fellow tradesmen into action, as well as other citizens of Ephesus. These quickly developed into an angry mob who poured through the streets crying, “Great is Diana of the Ephesians,” as if to safeguard her interests, and save her from extinction.—vs. 28

CONFUSION AND DANGER

The mob action soon grew into mass rioting which filled the city with confusion. The silversmiths, it seems, had only one objective in mind, and that was to seize Paul and silence him. Exactly how they planned to accomplish this is not completely clear. From Luke’s brief account of these events, however, it is obvious that Paul’s life was in extreme danger.

At that time there was a council of “certain of the chief of Asia.” (vs. 31) Various Bible commentators state that this group was composed of ten men chosen from the prominent cities of Asia Minor. These rulers were called “Asiarchs,” and were men of wealth and influence, whose tasks included presiding

over pagan religious observances and public games. The Asiarchs, at least some of whom lived in Ephesus, were evidently gathered together at this time for either special religious rites, or games being planned or happening there. They were well acquainted with Paul, even considering him a respected friend.

Meanwhile, Demetrius and his supporters went looking for Paul, perhaps going to the home of Aquila and Priscilla, but he was not there. Instead, they found two of Paul's companions, Aristarchus and Gaius, whom they seized. (vs. 29) We can imagine what a difficult experience it was for all of them, as they must have undergone rough treatment and threats to disclose the whereabouts of Paul. The likelihood that this confrontation occurred at the home of Aquila and Priscilla is attested by Paul's later writing that they were his "helpers in Christ Jesus: Who have for my life laid down their own necks: unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles."—Rom. 16:3,4

Thus, Aristarchus and Gaius became hostages in Paul's stead. This is the first time in the Book of Acts that Aristarchus is mentioned. We learn that he was a Macedonian from Thessalonica, one of the faithful Gentile brethren of that ecclesia. (Acts 20:4) The Thessalonians were a great inspiration to Paul because of their zeal for the Gospel, and Aristarchus was evidently an excellent example of these faithful brethren. He well fits Paul's description of their spirit of love and loyalty as commended in his first epistle to them, specifically in chapters one to three. Aristarchus had come to Ephesus to assist Paul in his ministry. From that time until Paul's

imprisonment in Rome, he accompanied him, and is mentioned on several occasions.—Acts 27:2; Col. 4:10; Philem. 1:24

As far as Gaius is concerned, we know he was the “Gaius of Derbe,” who was with Paul in Ephesus at this time. (Acts 20:4) Both he and Aristarchus were taken by the angry crowd and carried into the amphitheater. Apparently some kind of religious ceremonies or games were being held, and the arena was full. Soon there was great confusion. Some were shouting one thing, and some another, and many of those present had no idea what was going on.—Acts 19:32

When Paul heard what had happened, he wanted to go to the coliseum and secure the release of his friends, but the brethren restrained him. He also received a special message from the Asiarchs advising him not to go near the amphitheater. They knew that the riot was caused by the silversmiths for the purpose of getting rid of Paul. With difficulty, Paul took their advice and stayed away—vss. 30,31

Matters got further out of hand when the mob started to speak against the Jews who resided in Ephesus. Because of Paul’s background and association with the Jews, many things were said against them. The Jews who were present put forward a man named Alexander as spokesman in their defense. Although Alexander’s words are not recorded, he likely tried to explain to the people that Paul was a renegade, and that the Jews in Ephesus took no part in his preaching. The crowd, however, realizing that Alexander was a Jew, wanted no part of his defense. They shouted continuously for two hours, “Great is Diana of the Ephesians.”—vss. 33,34

MOB QUIETED

Finally, a town official was successful in quieting the people. He pointed out that Paul and his associates were not temple robbers, nor blasphemers of the goddess Diana. He suggested that if Demetrius had a charge against Paul, there were courts and proconsuls who would handle the matter. He also explained that they were all in danger from the Roman authorities, because of the uproar that had come about from among their own citizenry. The assembly was then dismissed, and no harm was done to Aristarchus or Gaius.—Acts 19:35-41

This experience was, no doubt, an attempt to disrupt Paul's work in Ephesus by the Adversary, but he was unsuccessful for the time being. However, it seems that subsequently some brethren were deluded and drawn away from the Truth. In a later letter to Timothy, who had been in Ephesus at the time of this uprising, Paul instructed him to continue his admonitions to those who were separating themselves from the faith. It seems, as he said, that they were involving themselves in "fables and endless genealogies," and erroneous teachings concerning the Law. (I Tim. 1:3-7) In concluding this chapter he wrote, "This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare; Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck: Of whom is Hymenaeus and Alexander; whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme."—vss. 18-20

It has been supposed that this Alexander was the same as the one involved in the mob experience.

Since he was a coppersmith, he had a profession similar to that of Demetrius, but exactly how he opposed Paul is not clear. It is believed that he had at one time joined the disciples as a follower of Christ, and then later returned to Judaism, becoming an ardent opponent of the apostle. Paul wrote of him again in his second letter to Timothy: "Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil: the Lord reward him according to his works: Of whom be thou ware also; for he hath greatly withstood our words."—II Tim. 4:14,15

Some suggestions have been made that Demetrius the silversmith later became converted to Christianity. If this be so, it is conceivable that the Demetrius subsequently mentioned in III John verse 12 as having a "good report of all men," is the same person who, earlier in his life, led the riot against Paul at Ephesus. This is, of course, purely a matter of speculation, and we include mention of it only as an interesting possibility.

THE "BEASTS AT EPHESUS"

While Paul stayed in Ephesus, he wrote his first epistle to the Corinthians. In this letter he refers to some of the difficulties they were undergoing, and showed that the will of the brethren to endure was an expression of how firmly they believed the Truth and the hope of a future resurrection. He said, "Why stand we in jeopardy every hour? I protest by your rejoicing which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily. If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth it me, if the dead rise not? let us eat and drink; for tomorrow we die." (I Cor. 15:30-32) His mention of "beasts"

seems to be a metaphorical reference to the unruly men who opposed him and raised the insurrection at Ephesus previously noted. Paul's point was that if there was no hope of a resurrection, why would he risk his life, as well as the lives of his associates, in speaking about doctrines such as the resurrection and other teachings pertaining to the Gospel of Christ.

Before the uproar at Ephesus occurred, Paul had planned to go to Macedonia for the purpose of revisiting the church at Thessalonica, and then to Corinth, in Achaia. From there he knew he would be going to Jerusalem and later Rome, having been made aware of this by God's Holy Spirit. (Acts 19:21) He had already sent Timothy and Erastus to Macedonia in advance, and now he was ready to join them. Paul embraced the disciples at Ephesus and, bidding them farewell, left for his new destination.—Acts 20:1

MACEDONIA AND ACHAIA

Paul's trip to Macedonia is described only in brief, Luke writing simply that he gave them "much exhortation." (Acts 20:2) However, it is evident from even this abbreviated statement that Paul was a great blessing to the brethren there. Although the churches are not named, it seems reasonable that he went to Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea. From Macedonia he went on to Achaia, as he had planned, visiting Corinth for about three months.—vs. 3

When a plot was made against his life by the Jews in Corinth, Paul returned to Philippi in Macedonia. A number of brethren—Sopater, Aristarchus, Secundus, Gaius, Timothy, Tychicus and Trophimus—went ahead and sailed to Troas, awaiting Paul's arrival.

It was also during this brief stopover at Philippi that Paul is rejoined by Luke. Evidence of this is that Luke again begins to record events with the pronouns “we” and “us,” as he had done several years earlier when he was with Paul in Philippi during his second journey. (See Acts 16:11-17) In the intervening time, Luke wrote in the third person, but now he states, “We sailed away from Philippi, . . . and came unto them [the brethren who had traveled ahead to Troas] . . . where we abode seven days.”—Acts 20:3-6

All of the aforementioned brethren would accompany Paul to Jerusalem. The enormous task of searching for God’s people could not be accomplished by one man alone. We do not know the names of all the many brethren who toiled in the service of the Lord, aside from those mentioned in the writings of Luke in the Book of Acts, and some named by Paul, Peter, and John in their letters. However, it was through the efforts of these many brethren, known and unknown to us, that the important work of starting the churches was accomplished.

ADDITIONAL HELPERS

Two of the helpers acquired on this journey, as cited above, were Tychicus and Trophimus. These two brethren served Paul faithfully to the end of his life. They were used to fulfill assignments for Paul, serving brethren, carrying messages, and assisting him in any way possible. Several references are made to these lovingly performed services.—Acts 21:29; Eph. 6:21; Col. 4:7-9; II Tim. 4:12,20; Tit. 3:12

Another loyal aide not mentioned in the Book of Acts was Titus. Starting prior to Paul’s second journey, Titus supported him in various assignments.

Paul entrusted Titus with a letter he had written to the brethren who were having trouble in the church at Corinth. Paul wanted to go personally to see them, but was unable to do so. He sent Titus to assist the brethren in their problems in his stead.

Paul's appreciation of Titus is evident in II Corinthians 7:5-16. He explained that he was "troubled on every side," but when Titus came he was comforted. Titus brought a cheering message to Paul that things were better in the church at Corinth. "We were comforted in your comfort," Paul wrote the Corinthian brethren. "Yea, and exceedingly the more joyed we for the joy of Titus, because his spirit was refreshed by you all." (vs. 13) We see from this passage that Paul's first letter to the brethren in Corinth was softened by Titus' explanations, so they would not misunderstand what seemed to be harsh words that Paul had written to them. Titus' service in this way was very useful to Paul, and to the Lord.

Titus also was instrumental in bringing a gift from Corinth to the poor among the brethren in Jerusalem. Other churches in Macedonia had also made such a contribution previously. This was a delicate matter, as the collection of money for others always is, but Titus handled it well. "Thanks be to God, which put the same earnest care into the heart of Titus for you. For indeed he accepted the exhortation; but being more forward, of his own accord he went to you. . . . Avoiding this, that no man should blame us in this abundance which is administered by us: Providing for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men. And we have sent with them our

brother, whom we have oftentimes proved diligent in many things, but now much more diligent, upon the great confidence which I have in you. Whether any do enquire of Titus, he is my partner and fellow-helper concerning you.”—II Cor. 8:16,17,20-23

Still another incident which shows Paul’s admiration of Titus’ character and the role he played in removing misunderstandings and in promoting the Spirit of Christ, was when he wrote to the Corinthians concerning the establishment of his apostleship. Paul asked the brethren, “Have I gained selfish advantage over you through any one of the messengers I have sent to you? I begged Titus to visit you, and sent our brother with him. Did Titus gain any selfish advantage over you? Were not he and I guided by one and the same Spirit, and did we not walk in the same steps? . . . It is as in God’s presence and in communion with Christ that we speak; but, dear friends, it is all with a view to your progress in goodness.”—II Cor. 12:17-19, *Weymouth New Testament*

After Titus had completed these assignments for Paul, he rejoined the apostle’s traveling group. Later, when Paul journeyed to Rome and made a stop at the island of Crete, he left Titus there to establish and organize congregations of the brethren. (Acts 27:7,8,12; Tit. 1:4,5) The letter written by Paul to Titus explains more concerning this commission, and gives us greater insight into the faithfulness of this dear brother in Christ.

CHANGES TO OCCUR

As Paul’s third journey drew on toward its conclusion, the Holy Spirit gave indication that certain changes would soon begin to occur in the search for

God's people. This search would not cease. On the contrary, the Lord would continue it through those Paul had found, taught, and nurtured. Paul himself would be giving special testimony, and soon would no longer be free to move around as he had previously.

More than twenty years had elapsed since Paul was intercepted by the risen Lord on the road to Damascus, and was immersed into the body of Christ. During that time, many ecclesias of God's people were established in remote areas of Gentile lands. These came into being and prospered in the Truth through the energy, zeal, and untiring efforts of Paul and those associated with him. ■