

THE THIRD JOURNEY OF PAUL

“the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and persecutions are waiting for me”

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EPHESUS

Ephesus, situated at the mouth of the Cayster River, was the fourth greatest city of the first-century AD after Rome, Alexandria, and Antioch. Although the archaeological remains of Ephesus date from the mid-second millennium BC, Lysimachus, one of Alexander's generals, established the city in its present site c. 286 BC. When Attalus III left the kingdom of Pergamum in his will to Rome (133 BC), Ephesus became part of the Roman province of Asia. After a troubled period, Octavian (the emperor Augustus) subdued the city (31 BC), placing the proconsul of Asia permanently in the city (Acts 19:38).

Many buildings in Ephesus are datable to Augustus' reign. The double temple to Rome and Augustus was built and enclosed within the precincts of the temple of Artemis. The theatre could seat 24,000 people (Acts 19:29). There were also baths, gymnasia, a stadium, and a medical school in Roman times. But the most famous building was the temple of Artemis (Acts 19:35), begun at the end of the eighth century BC, and one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. It measured 130 by 70 metres. The 127 columns in double row surrounding the building were 60 feet high (Pliny, *NH* 36.95-96), adorned by the famous sculptor Praxiteles, among others. The temple functioned as a bank, acquiring vast wealth because of the donations made to Artemis (Acts 19:24, 25b, 27a; Dio Chrysostom, *Or.* 31.54-55).

Ephesus was proud of its reputation as the “Temple Warden of Artemis” (Acts 19:27, 34-35). Artemis, the mistress and protectress of wild life, was worshipped as the virgin huntress throughout Greece (Acts 19:27b). The temple of Artemis housed her image with many breasts (or are they fruits?), believed to have fallen from the sky (Acts 19:35). Although Ephesus had many magicians (Acts 19:18-20), Artemis was considered a goddess of great occult power. Six magical “Ephesian Letters” were inscribed on her image and she wore a zodiac necklace. An inscription promises that Artemis would “melt down with her flame-bearing torches in nightly fire the kneaded works of wax, the signs of the evil art of a sorcerer”. On a papyrus, the figure of Artemis is drawn in order to ensure the success of its love spell.

The Artemis cult was marked by strong missionary zeal and spread as far west as Massilia and Carthage. The goddess competed with early Christianity in its universal mission, providing dream revelations for the extension of her own cult (Strabo 4.1.4). Little wonder that Luke depicts God directing the Christian mission by means of Spirit-inspired dreams and visions (Acts 2:17; 9:10ff; 10:10ff; 16:9ff; 18:9ff; 23:11).

Paul arrived at Ephesus in AD 54, stayed there for the best part of three years (Acts 20:31; cf. 18:8, 10), and directed the evangelism of Ephesus and the wider province (19:19; cf. Col 1:6-7; 4:12-13; Rev 2-3). Upon Paul's arrival, twelve disciples of John, not knowing about the Spirit (Acts 19:3-4; cf. 18:25), responded to the gospel (Acts 19:1-

6). The Jews of Ephesus possessed the citizenship alongside their Gentile contemporaries (Josephus, *AJ* 13.125): but we cannot determine how many converts there were in the church from the synagogue (Acts 19:8-9a). Clearly the gospel impacted on Jew and Gentile alike (Acts 19:8-10, 17; cf. Eph 2:11-18). Travelling Jewish exorcists tried vainly to compete with Paul (Acts 19:14-16), as did the Ephesian silversmiths and magicians (19:19-20, 23-27, 38), but Jesus' power and authority in word and deed outstripped them all (19:11, 15, 20, 27).

While at Ephesus Paul determined to revisit the areas in Greece he had already evangelised (Acts 19:21: "Macedonia and Achaia"), drop off the Jerusalem collection (Acts 24:17a; cf. 1 Cor 16:3; Rom 15:25-26) and, after its delivery, visit Rome with a view to a mission in Spain (Rom 1:19-15; 15:24, 28). Paul sent Timothy and Erastus on an advance mission to Macedonia (Acts 19:22a; cf. 1 Cor 16:5), perhaps in order to organise the collection. However, Paul continued to minister at Ephesus (Acts 19:22b: "in Asia"), having already written 1 Corinthians (c. AD 55) while he was in the city (1 Cor 16:8).

MACEDONIA AND ACHAIA

Having adopted a low profile after the riot (Acts 20:1, 3), Paul returned for three months in the winter of AD 57-58 to strengthen some of the Macedonian and Achaian churches he had founded (20:1-5). This journey had been precipitated by an earlier "painful visit" of Paul to Corinth (2 Cor 2:1) — unrecorded in Acts but occurring during Paul's stay at Ephesus — where he had been opposed by "false apostles" and by a Corinthian leader (2 Cor 2:5ff; 3:1; 7:12; 10:12ff; 11:13ff, 22ff).

Humiliated, Paul left Corinth, wrote the (now lost) "letter of tears" to the Corinthians (2 Cor 2:4; 7:8ff), and sent it off with Titus to effect reconciliation (2:12; 7:8, 12). Paul found out about the letter's success when he met Titus again at Macedonia (2 Cor 7:5, 13ff). He sent off 2 Corinthians upon his impending third visit to Corinth (2 Cor 12:14; cf. Acts 20:1-2a), in order to finalise the collection (8:1-9:13), and to ensure the sincerity of the Corinthians' repentance, probably completing the letter after fresh news arrived about residual problems (2 Cor 13:1ff). When Paul arrived in Corinth (Acts 21:3), he stayed three months and while there wrote Romans (Rom 16:1-2, 23).

The men accompanying Paul (Acts 20:4-5a; cf. 1 Cor 16:3; 2 Cor 8:19) are the Gentile church delegates bringing the collection for the Jerusalem poor (Acts 24:17; Gal 2:10; 1 Cor 16:1-4; 2 Cor 8-9; Rom 15:25-28). The collection expressed Jew-Gentile unity and equality (2 Cor 8:13-15; 9:13-14), thankfulness for God's overflowing grace (2 Cor 8:9, 8-12, 14b-15), and Gentile gratitude to the Jerusalem church for the gospel (Rom 15:27).

TROAS

Paul's decision to sail from Philippi to Troas in the spring (AD 58) *after* the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Acts 20:5b-6a) illustrates his Jewish piety (cf. 13:13-14; 14:1; 18:7, 18b; 21:23-26; 27:9), though the Feast was transformed by the tradition of the Lord's Supper (1:13; 2:42; cf. Lk 22:14ff; 24:30ff; 1 Cor 11:23ff). The commencement of another "We-Section" (Acts 20:5-15; cf. 16:10-17) indicates that Luke has again joined Paul's travelling party. When Eutychus (or "lucky one") falls from the window of an apartment building (the ancient *insula*: Acts 20:9-12), Luke highlights Elijah-Elisha

parallels when Paul resuscitates the youth (20:10; cf. 9:36-41; 1 Kgs 17:21-22; 2 Kgs 4:34-35), underscoring the continuity of the gospel with the Old Testament.

THE JOURNEY TO MILETUS

Paul's companions sailed from Troas to Assos (32 km away), whereas Paul travelled overland by foot to meet them there (Acts 20:13-17a). We do not know the reason for Paul's decision, but perhaps he wanted to avoid a potentially stormy trip along a treacherous coastline (cf. 2 Cor 11:25b, 26b). From Assos they proceeded south to Mitylene (71 km away), the main city of the island of Lesbos. Then, in a series of day trips, they travelled to Chios and Samos and arrived at Miletus, a substantial seaport with four harbours 50 km south of Ephesus (Acts 20:14-15).

The reason for bypassing Ephesus was Paul's determination to reach Jerusalem before the Feast of Pentecost (Acts 20:16). Again, we see evidence of Paul's Jewish piety, though the Spirit's outpouring had dramatically transformed the meaning of the Feast for believers (Acts 2:14-39). But, undoubtedly, the danger posed by the riot of the Ephesian silversmiths was fresh in Paul's mind (Acts 19:23ff; cf. 2 Cor 1:8-9; 1 Cor 15:22). Nor could Paul count this time on the intervention of his powerful friends, the *asiarchs* (Acts 19:31), who, according to the evidence of the Ephesian inscriptions, were a powerful elite of city office-bearers and benefactors.

Consequently, Paul summoned the Ephesian elders to meet him at Miletus (Acts 20:16), where the apostle delivered his moving "farewell" address (20:21-35), a well-known "type" of speech in antiquity (e.g. Gen 49; Josh 23-24; 1 Sam 12; Tob 14, Jub 19-21; Homer, *Iliad* 16.844ff). Paul reminds them of what they have already learned from his ministry (Acts 20:18, 31, 34), focusing on his example and message as a pastor-evangelist (20:18-27), and alerting them to the dangers they would face in the future (20:28-35).

We might ask whether this speech is Luke's composition rather than an accurate rendering of what Paul said. Certainly, some ancient historians invented speeches for their main characters, an accusation that Polybius made regarding his contemporary Timaeus (Polyb. 12.25a[3]-25b[1]). But others, like Thucydides, while adding creative touches, tried to render the thrust of what was originally said (Thuc. 1.22)

What is impressive about Luke's presentation of Paul's speech is how closely it aligns with Paul's portrait of ministry in his letters. It emphasises Paul's servant role (20:19; cf. Rom 1:1; 12:11), humility (20:19; cf. 2 Cor 10:1; 11:7; Phil 2:3), self-support (20:33-34; cf. 2 Cor 11:7; 2 Thess 3:8), athletic metaphors (20:24; cf. 1 Cor 9:24-27; 2 Tim 4:7), theology of redemption and church (20:28; cf. 1 Cor 1:2; Eph 1:14), gospel of grace (20:24, 32; cf. Gal 1:15-16; 2 Cor 6:1), house church ministry (20:20; cf. Rom 16:5; Col 4:15), appointment of elders (20:17, 28; cf. Phil 1:1; 1 Tim 3:1ff), and outreach to Jew and Gentile (20:21; cf. Rom 1:16; 1 Cor 10:32). Luke's speech graphically captures the authentic Paul.

Paul appeals to a saying of Jesus unrecorded in the gospels (Acts 20:35). The saying undermines the Graeco-Roman "payback system" where benefactors gave gifts in order to secure favours and honours in return, or to place the recipient under obligation. In emphasising giving without expectation of return (cf. Luke 6:32ff; 14:13-14), Jesus exposes the self-interest underlying first-century social relationships and transforms the understanding of giving in antiquity.

JERUSALEM

A travelogue of sea voyages from Cos to Caesarea — the trip to Jerusalem being by land — introduces another “We-Section” (Acts 21:1-18). The prominence of Spirit-inspired prophetic media in early Christianity (Acts 2:17ff; 13:1; 15:28, 32; 16:6ff; 20:32) is seen in the prophetic gifting of Philip’s daughters (21:9; cf. 1 Cor 11:5) and in the prophecies of Agabus (21:10-11; cf. 11:27-28). Luke highlights Paul’s Spirit-guided return to Jerusalem (Acts 19:21; 20:22-23; 21:4, 10-11, 13).

Members of the Jerusalem church are again disturbed by Paul’s law-free gospel (Acts 21:20-21; cf. 15:1ff), reminding Paul and his Gentile delegates of the decisions of the Jerusalem council (21:25; cf. 15:20, 28-29), and encouraging them to undertake a temporary Nazarite vow in order to calm Jewish sensitivities (21:23-24, 26; Num 6:1-21). Paul may have felt that if he undertook the vow along with the Gentile delegates, he would secure the acceptance of the Jerusalem collection among Jewish believers, an issue about which Paul was very worried (Rom 15:30-32). The silence of Acts about a positive reception of the collection is probably ominous (cf. Acts 24:17), unless Paul’s reference to his “ministry” (*diakonia*: Acts 21:19; cf. *diakonia*: Rom 15:31; 2 Cor 8:4; 9:12, 13) among the Gentiles indirectly refers to the collection (21:20a).

Finally, Acts 21:20b points to the evangelistic success of the Jerusalem church and of the Maccabean “zeal” traditions underlying its law-affirming piety (1 Macc 2:27; cf. 2:24; 26, 50; cf. Num 25:6-13; Gal 1:14b; Phil 3:6a).

PAUL IS ARRESTED

When Paul’s purification vow was almost over, Asian Jews stirred up their compatriots, alleging that Paul had taught against the Jewish nation, law, and Temple (Acts 21:28a). This charge echoes the charges brought against Jesus and Stephen (Mark 14:57; Luke 23:1-5; Acts 6:11-14). That the Jews are from “Asia” clears the Jewish Christians at Jerusalem of complicity in Paul’s arrest and lays the blame at the feet of Diaspora Jews from Ephesus (cf. Acts 19:9a, 13ff; 23:19), present in Jerusalem for the Feast of Weeks (cf. 2:1ff; 20:16).

The critical charge was that Paul had (allegedly) defiled the Temple by bringing Trophimus the Ephesian beyond the court of the Gentiles into the sacred precincts of the inner courts (Acts 21:28b-29). A stone balustrade had been erected to mark off the inner courts. Slabs inscribed in Greek and Latin warned Gentiles of the death penalty if they proceeded further (Josephus, *BJ*, 5:193-194; *AJ* 15:417; Philo, *Leg.* 212). Two such inscriptions have been found.

The tribune of the cohort, Claudius Lysias (Acts 23:26), of the nearby Fortress Antonia in the northwest corner of the Temple precincts (Josephus, *AJ* 5:243-245), intervened before Paul was killed (Acts 21:31-40). That Paul is confused with the Egyptian “sign prophet” (Acts 21:38; Josephus, *BJ* 2:261-263; *AJ* 20:169-172) and “assassins” (*sicarii* or “dagger men”: Josephus, *BJ* 2:254-257) points to the social chaos engulfing Judaea before the Jewish revolt.

PAUL DEFENDS HIMSELF

In Acts 22:1-24:21 Paul defends his gospel in front of the Jewish crowd at the Temple courts (22:3-21), before the Jewish Sanhedrin the next day (23:1-7), and before the Roman procurator of Judaea, Antonius Felix (24:2-21), at Caesarea several days later.

Several notable features emerge here from Luke's narrative. Paul's account of his vision in the Jerusalem temple (Acts 23:17-21), subsequent to his Damascus road vision (9:1-18; 26:12-19), expands our knowledge of his conversion. The respect given Paul because of his Roman citizenship (Acts 22:25-29; cf. 21:39) fits the first-century historical context where possession of the Roman citizenship in the provinces was rare. The vow to kill Paul by certain Jews (Acts 23:12-35), exposed by Paul's nephew (23:16) and necessitating a military guard for Paul's journey to Caesarea (23:23ff), points to continued social and political breakdown. Paul exploits the disagreement between the Pharisees and the Sadducees over whether there is a resurrection (Acts 23:6ff; Josephus, *BJ* 2:164-165; *AJ* 18:16) to divide his accusers.

The result of these defences was Paul's imprisonment under Felix at Caesarea for two years (Acts 24:27: AD 57-59). This ex-slave (Tacitus, *Hist.* 5.9-10), who had risen to be a procurator under Claudius (Tacitus, *Ann.* 12.54), was famous for his corruption (Acts 24:26-27; Josephus, *AJ* 20.182) and savagery in crushing and collaborating with the *sicarii* (Josephus, *BJ* 2.253, 266-70; *AJ.* 20.160-161, 173-178). When Porcius Festus succeeded Felix (AD 59 or 60: Acts 24:27-25:12), Paul delivered a further defence before Herod Agrippa II (25:13-26:32), emphasising the continuity of Christianity with Judaism (26:1-29). It is ironical that Festus, who slaughtered a messianic pretender (Josephus, *BJ* 2.271; *AJ* 20.185-188), lost the opportunity of responding to the real Messiah when he sent Paul to Rome upon his appeal to Caesar (Acts 25:10-12; 27:32)