

CHAPTER 8

THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEY

After his stay of several months in Antioch, during the summer and early fall of A.D. 51, Paul set out on his third missionary journey. In only one verse in Acts this transition from the second to the third journey occurs, Acts 18:23. This third journey was to last nearly three years, the longest of the three (Acts 20:31). His companions included Timothy and Titus; we know this since they are mentioned in the epistles he wrote during this time. Luke accompanied Paul on the return trip to Jerusalem, as indicated by the “we-section” of Acts.

Revisiting the churches in southern Galatia

Acts 18:23 mentions that Paul traveled over the Galatian-Phrygian region. According to the South Galatian theory, this would be the part of the province of Galatia which was Phrygian, and would indicate Paul’s third visit to the churches established during the first missionary journey. According to the North Galatian theory, this would be Paul’s second visit to the ethnic region of Galatia.

During this visit Paul collected an offering which was designated for the church in Jerusalem (“Now about the collection for God’s people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do,” 1 Cor 16:1). According to Acts 20:4 delegates from Galatia traveled with Paul on the rest of his journey, taking the offering to Jerusalem: Timothy (from Lystra) and Gaius (from Derbe).

Apollos in Ephesus and Corinth

Apollos is described in Acts 18 as a Jewish scholar and preacher of great eloquence. Having been trained in the Greek OT in Alexandria and having learned of the ministry of Jesus and of John the Baptist, he powerfully preached this message when he arrived in Ephesus. Priscilla and Aquila, just having arrived there with Paul from Corinth, instructed him about Jesus; and Apollos became a powerful Christian preacher and apologist.

After a time, Apollos went to Corinth, where he became a preacher in the church Paul had started (Acts 18:27 - 19:1). Paul mentioned him several times in 1 Corinthians, but by that time Apollos had gone to another place, probably in Asia (1 Cor 16:12).

Meanwhile, Aquila and Priscilla remained in Ephesus while Paul was there, but sometime before Paul departed for Macedonia and Achaia they left Ephesus and went back to their home in Rome (1 Cor 16:19; cf. Rom. 16:3-5).

Paul's ministry in Ephesus

Paul had tried to come to Ephesus during his second missionary journey, but the Holy Spirit had prevented him. He did manage to stop by there on his way back and promise to return. Now finally he was able to settle in Ephesus and minister there and to the whole region, one of his cherished strategic goals.

When Paul arrived in Ephesus, he found some disciples, numbering twelve men, who, like Apollos, had heard only about John the Baptist. After Paul preached the gospel of Jesus to them, they became Christians.

After three months Paul's preaching in the synagogue led to a division there as the leaders rejected the gospel. As in Corinth, Paul separated from the synagogue, leading the Christians to worship in another place, the school of Tyrannus (Acts 19:8-9). Paul probably rented the hall during the sleepy afternoon hours. Paul continued ministering in the new church in Ephesus for over two more years.

Perhaps during Paul's stay in Ephesus we have the time when he wrote the epistle to the Galatians. He already had passed through that territory two or three times (North or South Galatian view)

One notable event during this time was the failure of the Jewish exorcists to cast out a demon, and the resulting revival, as Christians destroyed their books of magic, valued at 50,000 drachmas (one drachma was an average day's wage; so that would amount to 200 years' wages, or about \$4 million).

As in Galatia, Acts 20:4 tells us that Paul continued to collect delegates from the local regions to accompany his offering for the saints in Jerusalem; he took two from Asia, Tychicus and Trophimus.

Another notable event was the riot caused by Demetrius the metalworker (Acts 19:23-41). Ephesus was the city which had the title Warden of the Temple of Artemis (Diana). The "town clerk" (Greek "scribe") was the highest non-Roman official in Ephesus, which was a free city; he would have been responsible to the Romans for the disorder. The large outdoor amphitheater in Ephesus now is being restored; it seats about 25,000 people. The sound of that large crowd shouting would have been deafening.

Paul's ministry in Ephesus was marked by the following:

- 1) Vigorous evangelism and preaching (Acts 20:20-21, 25-27)

- 2) Successful spread of the gospel (Acts 19:20; 1 Cor 16:9a)
- 3) Manual labor (Acts 20:33-35; 1 Cor 4:11-12)
- 4) Opposition and persecution (Acts 20:19; 1 Cor 15:30-32; 16:9b; 2 Cor 1:8-9)
- 5) Continual warning to the church, “three years, night and day, with tears” (Acts 20:29-31)

Concern for the church in Corinth

While Paul ministered in Ephesus, he was greatly troubled about the church in Corinth, which he had started on his second missionary journey. He visited them briefly from Ephesus; he wrote an epistle to them not to associate with fornicators; he received reports about the problems in that church; and he wrote 1 Corinthians, sending Timothy and Erastus (for details on these events, see notes on 1 Corinthians).

Paul planned to visit Macedonia and Achaia after his ministry in Ephesus. He would be able to see how the Corinthian church was reacting to his strong letters to them. Not only that, but he could complete personally the offering he was collecting for the church in Jerusalem. He planned to winter in Corinth, and to either send or take the offering back to Jerusalem. If he were to send the offering, then he himself would be free to continue his missionary journey to Rome (Acts 19:21; 1 Cor 16:3-7).

As time went on in Ephesus, Paul was more and more concerned about the Corinthian church. It is possible that Timothy returned to Paul in Ephesus, saying that the initial reception of 1 Corinthians was not too good (cf. Goodwin, App. 9). Paul sent Titus and an unnamed “brother” to see how the church fared and to report back (2 Cor 12:17-18). They were to return to Ephesus by traveling through Macedonia.

Journey through Macedonia

Paul could no longer maintain his patience to hear from Titus, so he set out in the fall of A.D. 53 to meet him in Troas or Macedonia (Acts 20:1; 2 Cor 2:12-13). Probably Timothy traveled with him (cf. 2 Cor 1:1). In Troas he preached effectively, but his concern to meet Titus caused him to go on into Macedonia.

While in Macedonia Paul preached effectively in the churches. Even though they were poor at the time, these churches contributed generously to Paul’s collection; they also sent representatives to accompany Paul on to Corinth and then to Jerusalem (Acts 20:4; 2 Cor 8:1-5; 9:4). In addition to the previously collected delegates, Paul took along the following from the province of Macedonia: Sopater son of Pyrrhus (from Berea), Aristarchus and Secundus (from Thessalonica), and Luke (a “we-section” of Acts; even though probably a native of Antioch, Luke had just spent considerable time in Philippi).

In spite of his good reception in Macedonia, Paul was still worried about the church in Corinth. Finally Titus arrived and brought a good report about the church. This greatly refreshed Paul's spirit (2 Cor 7:5-7, 13-16). In this happy time he wrote 2 Corinthians, sending it ahead with Titus and two other men (2 Cor 8:16-24; 9:5).

J. B. Lightfoot proposes this as the time of Galatians, noting how its contents and style bridge a gap between 2 Corinthians and Romans. This is close to the very latest time that Galatians could have been written.

It is possible that at this time Paul managed to go further west than Macedonia and preach in Illyricum (Rom 15:19-20). "Round about" to Illyricum indicates Paul's strategy of evangelizing the main centers of population all around the Mediterranean Sea, the "Roman Lake."

Winter in Corinth

Arriving in Achaia near the end of A.D. 53, according to our chronology, Paul remained there three months (Acts 20:2-3). During this time he enjoyed the fellowship of the church, which had now received his rebukes and instructions and had reaffirmed its love for him. This fellowship would have been enhanced by all the representatives from the different churches that were staying along with Paul in Corinth.

This time in Corinth is the latest feasible time for the epistle to the Galatians, written near the time of Romans.

While in Corinth, Paul wrote to the church in Rome, which he had never yet seen. That church seems to have been large even then, having started perhaps as early as the year of Peter's Pentecost sermon (cf. Acts 2:10; note number of people in Rom. 16). By this time Paul had decided to personally take the offering to Jerusalem, and then to visit Rome, and beyond them, to Spain (Rom 15:23-26).

Return journey to Jerusalem

When the spring of A.D. 54 arrived, Paul was able to travel to take the offering to Jerusalem. He desired to hurry, in order to reach Jerusalem, if possible, by the feast of Pentecost (Acts 20:16). He had planned first to sail directly to Syria (the province included both Antioch and Jerusalem), but a Jewish plot to kill him interfered; instead, he traveled overland back through Macedonia (Acts 20:3).

In Philippi Paul met Luke, who, according to the "we-section" of Acts, stayed with him all the way back to Jerusalem (from Acts 20:5 through 21:18). They were in Philippi during the days of the Jewish Passover (Acts 20:6). Fifty days later it would be Pentecost.

Going against the wind it took five days to sail from Macedonia to Troas. They stayed there seven days. Then it was Sunday, when the Christian celebrated the Lord's Supper (Acts 20:6-7).

One piece of evidence for the Pauline chronology is this fact: the Passover was eleven days before Sunday, i.e., on a Thursday. Ramsay has discussed this at some length (*Pauline and Other Studies*, 1906), and the argument has been refined by C. H. Turner ("Chronology of the NT," *HDB*). Nisan 14 (Passover) could have been on a Thursday in A.D. 54, 56, and 57; it probably would not have been in A.D. 55, 58, or 59. Our chronology places this Passover in A.D. 54, which is agreeable to this evidence.

Listening to Paul's preaching all night in Troas, Eutychus fell asleep and fell out the window; he was taken up dead, but was restored by Paul's prayer. He thus has attained perpetual sympathy and notoriety.

Paul continued his trip by ship, sailing along the coast of Asia, deliberately passing Ephesus so as not to stay too long. While landed briefly in Miletus, he sent to the elders in Ephesus to come to him. His moving address to them and their farewell provide a rare and touching picture of the love between Paul and his churches (Acts 20:17-38).

As Paul spoke to the Ephesian elders, he mentioned that the Holy Spirit was revealing to him in every city that he would be arrested in Jerusalem (Acts 20:23). He had been aware of this possibility when back in Corinth (Rom 15:31), but now it was becoming a certainty. Probably the Lord was speaking to him through Christian prophets in the various churches.

From Miletus Paul sailed to Patara, where they changed ships to one sailing to Phoenicia, the northern coast of Palestine (Acts 21:1-2). They then sailed south of Cyprus to the province of Syria, the port of Tyre. Paul stayed a week in Tyre, where the Christians warned him about going to Jerusalem (Acts 21:4).

The party then sailed south along the coast to Caesarea. They stayed with Philip the evangelist, one of the seven deacons chosen in Acts 6. Philip's four daughters prophesied; and Agabus, who had earlier predicted the famine, came and predicted that Paul would be bound as a prisoner in Jerusalem. In spite of their entreaties, Paul was resolved to see his ministry completed, and to take the offering to Jerusalem. That offering tied his Gentile churches to the church in Jerusalem, and vividly demonstrated the unity of the church in Christ. He could not turn back now (Acts 21:12-14). The Lord stood by him in all his future trials, and it is presumptuous of us to think that Paul was mistaken to go to Jerusalem.

On their way from Caesarea to Jerusalem they stayed in the house of Mnason, whom Luke describes as "one of the early disciples" (Acts 21:16). Mnason could have been one of the sources that Luke used to gain information about the life of Jesus and the early church before he wrote Luke and Acts.

When Paul arrived in Jerusalem early in the summer of A.D. 54, he completed his third missionary journey, and began the next major section of his life—a time that saw him often imprisoned, but also standing before governors and kings.