



Ascribed to Valentin de Boulogne
of the 17th. Century

The Life of Paul

Part 4 of 5

Paul's Third Missionary Journey

Acts 18:23 - Acts 21:16

53 - 57 AD

Paul's Second Missionary Journey had ended in Antioch. It was the church in Antioch that had first chosen and commissioned Paul for his missionary service. He spent some time with them (Acts 18:23) reporting on the things that he had observed and experienced during his years of missionary service. Much had been happening and the people were eager to hear of the latest developments in the spread of belief in Jesus Christ.

Knowing that there was still much to be done Paul then began what we refer to as his "Third Missionary Journey." He started out by visiting places in the regions of Galatia and Phrygia helping believers to become stronger in their faith. (Acts 18:23)

While this was happening the Book of Acts reports that there were new developments in the city of Ephesus - where Paul had left Priscilla and Aquila near the end of his previous journey. A believer arrived in Ephesus who had great enthusiasm for the faith. He was a native of Alexandria named Apollos. Although Apollos was a believer in Jesus Christ he had not been informed about the events of Pentecost. Fortunately, Priscilla and Aquila were able to help him understand the Lord's way more completely. After a time Apollos decided that he wanted to travel on to Achaia, the Roman province in which Corinth was located, and the people of Ephesus provided him with letters of introduction. (Acts 18:24-28)

Sometime after Apollos had left Ephesus for Corinth, Paul arrived in Ephesus. One thing he discovered was that there were some people whose knowledge about Jesus was only based on the teaching of John the Baptist. Paul was able to teach them more about Jesus and then baptized them and they experienced a Pentecost experience in Ephesus. (Acts 19:1-7)

As we read the material in Acts concerning Paul we always have to remember that Acts is not intended to be a detailed journal of his experiences but only a record of some of the highlights. Consequently, many questions that we might ask must remain unanswered. For instance, in the case of this Third Missionary Journey most of the focus in Acts falls on things that happened in Ephesus and Paul's experiences in other places are often passed over in a sentence or two.

Since we are told that Paul spent two years in Ephesus (Acts 19:10) the focus on events in that city is perhaps justified. In Ephesus, as was his pattern in other places, Paul began by teaching in the Jewish meeting place where he did gain some followers. However, as also happened in other places, he became unwelcome in the synagogue and had to find an alternative way of contacting people. In Ephesus he moved to a meeting place called the lecture hall of Tyrannus where, we are told, he taught on a daily basis for two years.

Again, as in other places, his stay in Ephesus was not without considerable conflict. Paul was held in high regard by many and perhaps in almost superstitious acclaim by a few.

From the sketchy record in Acts it is difficult to trace Paul's exact itinerary aside from his time in Ephesus. Paul decided to visit in Macedonia and Achaia (Corinth) but he did not depart from Ephesus immediately. (See Acts 19:21)

Acts records a conflict in Ephesus that arose because Paul was perceived to be disrupting the business of those who made and sold silver images of the temple of the goddess Artemis (Diana) - a goddess who was popularly worshipped in the area. Paul was discouraged from addressing the enraged crowd both by his fellow believers and by some local officials who wished to avoid further conflict. A local official finally took charge, placated the crowd, and told them that there were legal avenues through which they could pursue their grievances if they wished to do so.

When Paul left Ephesus he was determined to go to Jerusalem, but he wanted to go through Macedonia first. Interestingly, his intention to ultimately visit Rome was also declared at this time. (Acts 19:21) The narrative as to where Paul went when he left Ephesus is recorded in Acts starting in Acts, chapter 20. We are told that he spent three months in Greece. Then when he was about to set sail to return home to Syria he decided to travel back through Macedonia again. Some of those travelling with him went directly to Troas and waited for Paul there. But Paul travelled to Philippi and then took a five day trip by sea from Philippi to Troas. It was in Troas that the incident occurred in which Eutychus fell asleep while Paul was preaching. (Acts 20:7-12).

Paul then sailed from Troas down the coast to Miletus, which is not far from Ephesus. He invited the elders from Ephesus to come to a farewell gathering in Miletus. Paul made it clear that he never expected to see these people again. (Acts 20:13-28).

From Miletus he sailed towards Syria. He spent a week in Tyre before completing his passage to Caesarea. Though Paul was determined to go to Jerusalem, the people in both Tyre and Caesarea warned him of impending danger if he went there. However, Paul was committed to going and finally reached Jerusalem. He was warmly greeted by the believers in Jerusalem. Paul reported on his experiences and on how he had dealt with the gentile converts to the faith. However, within a week or so of his arrival in Jerusalem Paul began to experience vigorous opposition from the Jewish community. (Acts 21:1-27)

Concerning Paul's Letters:

It is thought that both of Paul's letters to the believers in Corinth were written during the time that Paul spent in Ephesus on this Third Missionary Journey (about 55 AD).

It is also speculated that Paul wrote his letter to the Church in Rome, a city he had not yet visited, sometime near the end of this Third Missionary Journey. From references in Romans it is proposed that perhaps he was in Corinth when he wrote it and that would place the date of its writing around 57 AD.

This map will be helpful in tracing the places visited during Paul's Third missionary journey.

