VCBC-SLG 2022 Fall Term
The Book of Acts
Session #11: Paul's Third Missionary journey—18:23 – 21:16

I. The Apostle Paul's Third Missionary Journey--Overview

Galatia & Phrygia (18: 23)	A good 1,500 miles journey	Purpose: to strengthen churches	Glossed over by Luke: with Ephesus as key mission base in mind?
Ephesus (I) (18: 24-28)	A Tale of two Baptisms (I)	Introducing Apollos—only received John's Baptism— "fervent in the Spirit" (v.25)	Background story to the understanding of church in Corinth
Ephesus (II) (19: 1-7)	A Tale of two Baptisms (II)	12 "disciples" only received John's Baptism, never even heard of the Holy Spirit	Paul had them "re-baptized" in name of Jesus

Ephesus (II) (19: 8-41)	Great success leading to all within Asia heard the Gospel (v.10)—total time in Ephesus was 3 years (20:31)	Gospel impacting secular life—threatening idol worship, leading to riot sparked by silversmith	Paul desired to visit both Jerusalem and Rome (vv.21)
On way to Jerusalem (I)—Macedonia and Greece (20: 1-6)	Sensing that would be his last journey, he spent quite a bit of time there	These were churches Paul and his team planted.	Likely a circular journey (see map above)
On way to Jerusalem (II)—Troas, Assos, Mitylene, Kios, Samos & Miletus (20: 7-38)	Notable events included: (1) Raising of Eutychus from dead, and (2) farewell speech to Ephesians elders	Luke's record of Eutychus' miracle validated Paul's apostleship	Miletus' sermon—the most passionate and powerful pastoral exhortation—what a pastor's heart is about!
On way to Jerusalem (III)—Cos, Rhodes, Patara, Tyre, Ptolemais, Caesarea (21: 11-16)	Spirit urged Paul not to go to Jerusalem, through disciples in Tyre, prophet Agabus in Caesarea.	Paul bares his soul to them (21:13)	Leaving us to wonder if Paul's desire to go to Jerusalem his or of the Lord?
Paul's final journey: finally in Jerusalem because of which—ending in Rome!	Will cover his final journey next lesson.		

II. Major Events:

(1) A Tale of Two Baptisms (18: 24 -19: 7)

Many see Luke purposely arrange to have the two stories read side by side to, perhaps, refute the idea that "baptism is the indispensable mode of entry into the Christ life and that it and it alone leads to the operation of the Holy Spirit. It is…impossible to read either of these stories 'on its own', and it may be assumed that Luke intended each to be read in the light of the other." (Barret, *Acts II,* 885)

(A) Apollos of John's Baptism—no rebaptism needed

"**24 Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. 25 He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor [in the Spirit] and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John. 26 He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately. 27 When Apollos wanted to go to Achaia, the brothers and sisters encouraged him and wrote to the disciples there to welcome him. When he arrived, he was a great help to those who by grace had believed. 28 For he vigorously refuted his Jewish opponents in public debate, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah.**

Background: while there is no mention of mission endeavor to Alexandria, the 2nd largest city in the Roman Empire, and a place of high learning with "one of the largest and most significant libraries of the ancient world", it is believed that the gospel had definitely reached there by the time of Paul's 3rd missionary journey, but we know very little about 1st century Christianity in Alexandria, and "anything (about it) is "a guess" (ditto, 887).

But Luke does give us the following information about Apollos apart from his likely learned upbringing in Alexandria, as a Jew, since he was able to enter the synagogue to speak0):

- **thorough knowledge of the Scriptures**
- **fervor (fervent) in the Spirit**
- **taught about Jesus accurately**
- **knew only the baptism of John**
- **needed to be taught the way of God more "accurately"**

So, while Apollos only knew the baptism of John, he was already fervent in the Spirit—as most commentators agree that he would have believed in Jesus and had the indwelling of the Spirit, so that he, in fact, had taught about Jesus accurately.

He would be like the Gentiles in Cornelius household, whose hearts had believed in Jesus, and the Holy Spirit came upon them, even before their baptism in the name of the Trinity. Th even more telling part of this narrative is that Priscilla and Aquilla did not insist that he had to be baptized again, except that as much as he already was teaching accurately about Jesus, he needed to be taught even more accurately the "way of God". It is debatable whether the "way" should be capitalized to mean "Christianity" as the norm in the narrative throughout Acts.

Some commentators insightfully point out that while Priscilla and Aquilla could have corrected or supplemented Apollos' teachings, they preferred to do it privately in their home, a sign of grace and humility. While we have no idea what Apollos was lacking in his standing of "the way of God", it seems not to be errors or misunderstanding of the basic gospel message.

While the couple's learning (from Pontus), might not be as sophisticated as Apollos', the latter was humble enough to learn and demonstrated even greater knowledge and power in the Spirit that his time Ephesus became his "seminary" preparing him to minister to the church in Corinth adequately. From Paul's 1st letter to the Corinth, it's more than obvious that Apollos was very suited to disciple those Corinthian Christians (of high Greek learning), and we should not think that he himself contributed to the divisions in Corinth.

(B) Twelve John's Disciples—Paul had them re-baptized

The story of the 12 disciples of John appears to be a study in contrast.

"19 While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples 2 and asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" They answered, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." 3 So Paul asked, "Then what baptism did you receive?" "John's baptism," they replied. 4 Paul said, "John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus." 5 On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 6 When Paul placed his

hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues[c] and prophesied. 7 There were about twelve men in all."

This is what we are told about these 12 disciples of John:

- They are called "**disciples**"
- But had not "**received the Holy Spirit**" when they "**believed**"
- In fact, they "**have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit"**
- They had only received "**John's baptism**"
- They were then **baptize**d (or re-baptized) ***in the name of the Lord Jesus***,
- And when **Paul laid hands on them**, **the Holy Spirit came upon them** and
- **They spoke in tongues and prophesied**.

The interesting thing to note is

- They were called "disciples" and yet had not received the Holy Spirit and had not even heard there was a Holy Spirit, yet they had "believed."
- It is perhaps important to note that Paul, somehow sensed that they did not have the Holy Sprit and therefore he asked.
- Also, it is a credible belief that John the Baptism's disciples continued as a small "sect", but because of John's testimony, as they spread beyond Palestine, they would continue to attend the synagogues as Jews, but tended to associate themselves, naturally with the Christians. Likely as such, they blended in with Christians and identified themselves as disciples in general
- But if Paul could sense that they did not have the Holy Spirit, then they definitely were not born again, not unlike many of "believers" in today's church that did not exhibit any signs of being born again.
- The interesting thing is, they never have heard that there is a Holy Spirit, meaning their association with other Christians in Ephesus was something of a new thing—they had just begun to attend Christian meetings and they had the good fortune to come across Paul right away.
- At that time (of primitive Christianity), their baptism in the name of Jesus, would bring about the coming upon them of the Holy Spirit accompanied by the sign of tongue speaking and the speaking of prophecies.
- Of note is the laying hands by the Apostle Paul that had brought about these sighs, which in the opinion of some commentators that it was a deliberate attempt by Luke (and thus the Holy Spirit) to affirm the apostleship of Paul, as he did what Peter and John did back in Acts 8:17 with the new believers in Samaria with the same authority.
- With the establishing of his authority as equal to the Jerusalem Apostles, now Paul was ready to make an enormous impact on the church in Ephesus.

(2) The New Mission Base--Ephesus (19: 8-20)

A brief word about Ephesus might be appropriate:

<u>Politically</u>:

"When Rome took over the kingdom of Attalus in 133 BC Ephesus was already a large and notable city and as part of the Empire it continued to expand in wealth and in architectural splendor. It was the residence of the proconsular governor of the province of Asia, though not the titular capital. "(Barret, *Acts II*, 893)

Socially and spiritually:

"Ephesus was the market of Asia Minor. In those days trade followed the river valleys. Ephesus stood at the mouth of the Cayster and therefore commanded the richest hinterland in Asia Minor…She was the seat of the Pan-Ionian Games which the whole country came to see…She was the home of criminals. The Temple of Diana possessed the right of asylum. That is to say, any criminal reaching the area around the temple was sage. Inevitably, therefore, Ephesus had become the home of the criminals of the ancient world. She was the center of pagan superstitions. She was famous for charms and spells called the "Ephesian Letters"…the greatest glory of Ephesus was the Temple of Artemis. Artemis (Greek) and Diana (Latin) were one and the same. The Temple was one of the Seven Wonders of the World…The story of that (the image of Artemis) had fallen from heaven," (Barclay, *Acts*, 140-1)

"**8 Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God. 9 But some of them became obstinate; they refused to believe and publicly maligned the Way. So Paul left them. He took the disciples with him and had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. 10 This went on for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord. 11 God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, 12 so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them.**"

It is obvious that before Paul formally began his ministry in Ephesus, a church had already existed and begun to grow in its importance as a teaching base evidenced by the visit by Apollos and the recognition of their letter of recommendation sent to the church in Achaia (the church in Corinth). It appears that Priscilla and Aquilla played not small part in this respect. But Paul's official ministry took the church in Ephesus to a new level.

- Preaching Points:
    - As much as the local Jews eventually opposed to the message, Paul was able to preach for three months in the local synagogue, a much longer time than in other synagogues
    - Upon their opposition, Paul chose to rent a lecture hall and went on for some two years, and the Western Texts (not translated here) add that it was rented to Paul from 11 am – 4 pm daily, a time of day believed to be too not for such use. Nothing more is known about this lecture hall of Tyrannus, although speculations abound.
- The impact:
    - The statement that "**that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord**" is significant in that the province of Asia basically covered most of Turkey today, from Lycia on the south and Bithynia on the north (see map on page 1).
    - By Paul's own words, many churches so established at the time were the work of other evangelists like Epaphras (Col 1:7), and many believe that the rest of the seven churches mentioned in Revelation were the indirect fruit of Paul's 2 to 3 years of ministry in Ephesus. In other words, "Paul's coming to Ephesus marks decisive moment in the

missionary history.' Ephesus was to be a new center for the Gentile mission—the next in importance after Antioch…" (Bruce*, Acts*, 365)

- Unusual Signs and Wonders
    - Up to this point, we only come to know Paul as a bold evangelist, greatly used by the Holy Spirit to convert both Jews and Gentiles through his powerful messages
    - But in Ephesus, we are told that that he even performed unusual signs and wonders that parallel those of Peter (5:15)
    - **"11 God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, 12 so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them.**"
    - As much as such this forms the precursor to the conversion of many who practiced sorcery which is worth-reading at this point:
    - "**17 When this (**the jumping of the evil spirit on the sons of the chief priests who tried to invoke 'the name of Jesus whom Paul preaches') **became known to the Jews and Greeks living in Ephesus, they were all seized with fear, and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honor. 18 Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed what they had done. 19 A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly. When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to fifty thousand drachmas.[**a silver coin that is worth one-day wages**] 20 In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power**."
    - "It is customary to point out the parallel with the effect of Peter's shadow" (Barret, Acts II, 907)—I, for one, do believe that Luke's account does carry such an intention to further validate the authority of Paul as an Apostle equal to those in Jerusalem.

(3) Paul's desire to go to Jerusalem and Rome (19: 21-22)

"21 After all this had happened, Paul decided[d] to go to Jerusalem, passing through Macedonia and Achaia. "After I have been there," he said, "I must visit Rome also." 22 He sent two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, to Macedonia, while he stayed in the province of Asia a little longer."

At the peak of his ministry in Ephesus, Paul somehow "decided" to leave for Jerusalem and eventually Rome

- If we did not know Paul better, we would think that Paul could hardly stay in one place, but given the specificities of his call by the Spirit is to "**carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel**" (Acts 9:15)
- With the good foundation being laid in Ephesus as a new mission-base to reach out to the Greeks, that part of his call had by and large been accomplished
- But no kings or rulers had yet been able to be reached with the gospel, not to mention the most important political powers based in Rome; and
- As much as he had been preaching in many synagogues, but they were all in Gentile-land; he had yet to properly preach to the people of Israel in Jerusalem—Yes, the Jerusalem Apostles had begun their work, but it might seem to Paul that the gospel work in Jerusalem might have plateaued, now that they seemed to be able to co-exist with the Jewish authorities by still

"following" many of the practices of the Law, it seemed to him that "before the people of Israel" meant before the people in Jerusalem!

- While he had no idea how he might be able to reach Rome, he believed that it's time for him to obey the last part of his call (which, unknown to him, would also lead him all the way to Rome).
- The word "decided" might best be translated "planned in the Spirit" which "most probably denotes a consciousness of guidance by the Holy Spirit." (Bruce, *Acts*, 371)

The rest of the chapter (19) gives am account of the riot stirred up by the silversmiths whose livelihood was jeopardized by the impact the gospel had on the whole province of Asia—a spectacular demonstration of the power of the Gospel.

(4) The Pastoral Sermon to the Ephesian Elders (20: 13-38)

"He had made this arrangement because he was going there on foot. 14 When he met us at Assos, we took him aboard and went on to Mitylene. 15 The next day we set sail from there and arrived off Chios. The day after that we crossed over to Samos, and on the following day arrived at Miletus. 16 Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus to avoid spending time in the province of Asia, for he was in a hurry to reach Jerusalem, if possible, by the day of Pentecost."

As his time (after three years) in Ephesus came to a close, set out to visit Macedonia (Philippi) and went down to Greece and stayed there for three months (his route would necessarily cover Thessalonica, Berea, Athens etc.) Finally, the whole company of Paul's team arrived in Troas…

- From Miletus to Ephesus was a 30 miles' journey, but Paul was so eager to go to Jerusalem that he did not want to be delayed, knowing should he show up at Ephesus, the people would not willing to let him go right away, and since the Spirit had given so much warning about the sufferings that awaited him, he might even be persuaded by these people whom he loved so dearly,
- So, Paul chose to see one last time the elders of Ephesus, inviting them to see him in Miletus, giving them the most heart-wrenching farewell speech—this was how much he loved them; it also indicated how important was the church of Ephesus.

As we have already covered a good part of Acts, if we do not have an insight into the inner life of Paul, we could hardly know Paul, if we do not know Paul, it would be like we have not read the Book of Acts at all.

Yes, we think of Paul, we might be drawn to his faithfulness, fearlessness and obedience to the cause of Christ, but we would seldom think of him as an Apostle of Love which this final farewell address to the elders of Ephesian shows. Yes, the word love is not even mentioned once in the speech, but every word is colored by love.

So, let's look at this sermon under the respective headings:

(i) How Paul lived (vv. 18-19)

17 From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church. 18 When they arrived, he said to them: "You know how I lived the whole time I was with you, from the first day I came into the province

of Asia. 19 I served the Lord with great humility and with tears and in the midst of severe testing by the plots of my Jewish opponents.

- **A life of consistency: "the whole time I was with you, from the first day"**
    - As Paul spent a good three years in close quarters with the church, especially the elders, if Paul was to lead a life on inconsistency, especially have one side in public, another side in private, not only would he not able to say this, but the elders would not have loved him so much.
- **A life marked by great humility**
    - It is one thing to be labeled as humble, it is another thing for one to say that about himself
    - But this is a moment that he must be very honest with these elders, as he was passing the gospel baton to them, he was not bragging, but would like them to follow his example, especially that of humility—great humility which Paul no doubt, had demonstrated especially to the Jews who opposed him.
- **A life marked by tears**
    - Tears not for felling sorry for oneself, but as Romans 9:1ff can testify—he shed tears for the hard-heartedness of people toward the gospel, especially his own race
    - Indeed, his tears qualify him to speak harsh words against their errors—because even harsh words were spoken out of love.
- **A life marked by persecution**
    - He knew that persecution came with his calling: "**I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.**" (9:16)
    - It is so important that those have been called to church leadership, especially pastors, have a clear sense of their calling, because sufferings are always part of the territory. In time of suffering or persecution, a clear sense of calling is very important. That also explains why recent statistics show that the average "new" pastors could not last even three years.

(ii) How Paul preached (vv. 20-21)

"20 You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house. 21 I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus."

Paul's commitment to preach the Word is demonstrated in

- Preaching without hesitation: he would preach in season and out of season (II Tim 4:2); with or without opposition; and no "man-pleaser"
- Teaching both publicly and from house to house: a testimony to his tirelessness, giving full priority to expound the Word of God.
- Preaching the gospel to both Jews and Gentiles—no discrimination, no favoritism, but with same love—the central message of salvation: repentance and faith in our Lord Jesus.

(iii) Sharing the reason for going to Jerusalem (vv. 22-24)

22 “And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. 23 I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. 24 However, I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the good news of God’s grace.

Not a choice, because:

- It is of the Holy Spirit: he might have his passion, but ultimately, he was going not out of ego, but clearly compelled by the Spirit
- However, the Holy Spirit seems to be telling everyone about his impending imprisonment in Jerusalem and hardships, but it seems that such warnings serve two purposes at least:
    - To prepare the heart of Paul, and
    - For the church to intercede—after all, he was really not going by himself, but on behalf of God’s people—he needed their prayers!
- It is his assigned task: given by the Lord Jesus, so whether other people might see it differently
    - He had no choice but to finish it, and
    - Even if it cost him his life, he was prepared to do so (from day one, may I add!)

(iv) Task in Ephesus Accomplished (vv. 25-27)

25 “Now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about preaching the kingdom will ever see me again. 26 Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of any of you. 27 For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God.

The “you” here refers not to the elders only, but all the people in the province of Asia.

- He had honestly done his job in proclaiming “the whole will of God”—in three years, whatever needed to be proclaimed, he felt that he had done so
- He was now leaving with a clear conscience—his assigned task in Ephesus was done, not it’s their turn to take up the local baton!

(v) Task now passed on to the Elders (vv. 28-31)

“28 Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God,[a] which he bought with his own blood.[b] 29 I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. 30 Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. 31 So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.

- Who they were:
    - Overseers and shepherds appointed by the Holy Spirit
- Who the flock was:
    - The church of God purchased by His own blood
- What then should they do:
    - Keep watch over themselves (II Tim. 4:15)

        - Over their lives: how they conduct themselves—in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity;
        - But watch also their doctrine: what they preach
            - Thorough study of the word
            - Preach not to please or to capture an audience
            - But to divide the word correctly
            - That is the lament by the author of "Operation World" about today "seminary products".
- On guard against wolves
    - Aimed not to spare the flock
        - Likely about continued Judaizers' influence
        - But prophetically extended to heresies of all kinds
    - Saddest thing is:
        - It would also come from within their ranks in distorting the truth
    - How to guard:
        - Perhaps, implied by the "keep watch" command, but
        - Likely with the following prayer of Paul

(vi) Committing the Elders:

32 "Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. 33 I have not coveted anyone's silver or gold or clothing. 34 You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. 35 In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

- Committing them to the God and His Word:
    - It was prayer of commitment obviously, but it also reminds the elders how to answer the call to shepherd and to guard
    - It is the Word that can build them up and enable them to continue their path to sanctification, and
    - With the immediately context in mind, the weapon to fight heresies is still the Word of God, but
    - Paul would not omit to point them to the eternal hope of "inheritance' that awaits all who are sanctified.
- A Word against Greed
    - It should not come as a surprise, as money or greed is always one of the greatest temptations to God's servants—I have seen it over and over again
    - Paul reminds them of his own example as a tentmaker (in the proper sense: tentmakers refer to those who devote to serve the gospel full-time and yet would not depend on the provisions of those they serve).
- A Word about the poor:
    - While the New Testament does not seem to talk too much about giving to the poor, not because it is not its emphasis, but because it is a "given" as Paul said of the instruction

from the Jerusalem leaders: **"All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I had been eager to do all along." (Gal. 2:10)**

- Paul's quote from the Lord could not be found anywhere from the NT which show that there are oral traditions about the Lord's saying that had not been part of the written Word, but such a quote appeared to be familiar to the Ephesian Elders.

(5) Final Farewell (20: 36-38)

36 When Paul had finished speaking, he knelt down with all of them and prayed. 37 They all wept as they embraced him and kissed him. 38 What grieved them most was his statement that they would never see his face again. Then they accompanied him to the ship.

The final scene was very touching which demonstrated how much Paul was loved by his flock. I seriously think that this final sermon to the Ephesian Elders should be a "must-teach" in all Bible Schools and Seminaries in their training and preparation of all "would-be" ministers of the Gospel.