

# GOD WITH US

## Part 9: ACTS

### Message 6 – Paul’s Third Journey Acts 18:23 – 21:36

#### Introduction

Paul’s 3<sup>rd</sup> missionary journey was actually a 3-year stay in Ephesus, with a journey before and after his prolonged stay in this influential city. From Ephesus (in modern-day Turkey), Paul planted churches throughout Asia Minor (the 7 churches of Asia that Jesus addressed in Revelation 2 & 3) as well as strengthening churches in Greece that he had planted on the 2<sup>nd</sup> journey. Several of Paul’s longer N.T. letters were written during this time in Ephesus (Romans, 1&2 Corinthians). After departing Ephesus, the final leg of Paul’s journey took him back to Jerusalem. Along the way, the Spirit kept indicating, through various prophets and witnesses, that Paul would be persecuted and arrested in Jerusalem; but it was his conviction that this was God’s will for his life. Luke records several emotional farewells as Paul spent time with his beloved friends in city after city for the last time.

#### **Apollos helped by Priscilla and Aquila: 18:23-28**

The 3<sup>rd</sup> journey of Paul is preceded by an introduction to a powerful though untrained young disciple/teacher named Apollos.

*“He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John. 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” (18:25,26).*

Apollos was sent to Achaia (Greece) and became a key leader in the church at Corinth. We see his name appearing in prominent passages in 1Corinthians (1:12; 3:4-6; 3:22; 4:6; 16:12). This may explain why Luke included Apollos in the Acts narrative: the power of his personality, gifting and his speaking skills, may have been part of the cause of divisions in the Corinthian church, a Christian community prone to following impressive personalities and charismatic speakers – like Apollos, and unlike Paul.

*Priscilla and Aquila played a key role in mentoring Apollos so that he could be more accurate in his teaching, and more effective in his ministry. If you are a more seasoned believer, God can use you to mentor younger ones. Ask God if there are certain ones that He wants you to pour into and encourage. You never know . . . it may be your encouragement that stirs them to go on and do great things in their lifetime for God.*

### **Paul's Ministry in Ephesus: 19:1-41**

Paul's extended ministry in Ephesus was the focus of Luke's attention, since Ephesus was a key city in Asia Minor. It later became the hub in a network of 7 churches in the region. Before the gospel came to Ephesus, the city was religiously significant for 2 reasons: 1) It was the home of the Greek goddess Artemis, with a large shrine in her honor. 2) It was a center for the practice of pagan magic. Thus, Paul's *miracles* were significant here.

*“Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God. 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. 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. God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, 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” (19:8-12).*

The power of the Holy Spirit overwhelmed the power of pagan magic – so much so that people began abandoning their devotion to magical practices:

*“Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed what they had done. 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. In this way, the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power” (19:18-20).*

Trouble erupted when the local silversmiths began to experience the economic impact of Paul's message. One silversmith, Demetrius, led the charge to rally the union of silversmiths to

demand the authorities force Paul to leave town:

***“You see and hear how this fellow Paul has convinced and led astray large numbers of people here in Ephesus and in practically the whole province of Asia. He says that gods made by human hands are no gods at all. There is danger not only that our trade will lose its good name, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be discredited; and the goddess herself, who is worshiped throughout the province of Asia and the world, will be robbed of her divine majesty” (19:26-27).***

As the gospel advance, economies and cultures will be changed. The righteous standards of Christ, when applied to many lives, will impact how people spend their time, their money, and their energies. It will change what people in business are comfortable doing and the practices they might no longer engage in. Can you think of modern-day examples where the message of Jesus is having an impact on cultures and/or economies as His righteous standards take hold in a community, or an organization?

### **Journey back through Macedonia and Achaia: 20:1-6**

Having been forced to leave Ephesus, Paul sailed across the Aegean Sea to visit the churches in Macedonia and Achaia, beginning in the north and moving south (Philippi > Berea, > Thessalonica > Athens > Corinth). Then, to avoid a death-trap plot by his Jewish opponents, he decided not to sail directly back to Jerusalem, instead, retracing his steps from south to north visiting these same churches one last time. When he came to Philippi for his final visit, Luke re-joined Paul’s team (note the change from “he” to “we” at 20:6).

***“But WE sailed from Philippi after the Festival of Unleavened Bread, and five days later joined the others at Troas, where WE stayed seven days” (20:6).***

Luke would remain with Paul for the remainder of Paul’s life.

### **Lydia: A Business Woman who gave God 1<sup>st</sup> Place**

Comments from Shirley

Luke wrote 2 scrolls about the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, and the birth of the Christian Church. He had to choose material from ALL that he experienced and researched. I’ve been fascinated by how much room Luke gave to highlighting WOMEN, and also PRAYER!

*In Acts 16 he highlights Lydia, whom they met at a prayer meeting.*

*1. A wealthy business woman: Paul and Luke traveled to Macedonia (Europe) and came to Philippi, a well-established Roman Colony. There they met Lydia. She was originally from the city of Thyatira, in Asia Minor, about 240 miles east. Thyatira was famous for purple dyes used to weave expensive purple fabrics. Lydia had moved to Philippi, strategically placing herself on a major trade route to sell her purple fabrics. They were only used by royalty, the wealthy, and prominent people in the Roman Empire. Lydia owned a large home, with several servants in her household.*

*2. A Worshiper of God: We learn from the story, that Lydia was already a worshiper of the Jewish God, Yahweh, rather than the many Greek gods of her society. Lydia took time out of her busy schedule to join other women who prayed each week, just outside of Philippi by the river. I imagine God used the prayers of those women to prepare the soil of people's hearts, including their own, to be receptive to the gospel. Lydia's presence among them one Sabbath, positioned her to meet Paul and his companions and listen as he shared God's Word.*

*3. She responded to the Word of God: She was not Jewish, nor had she heard about Jesus Christ and His death for her sin. But, when Paul shared the story of the promised Messiah, fulfilled in Jesus, she listened intently. God opened her mind and her heart to fully understand the story of God's redemption. She eagerly believed and accepted Christ, and was baptized to publicly declare her new faith in Jesus. Then, she shared her new faith with her entire household, and they all believed and were baptized!*

*4. Lydia's hospitality: Luke recounts that Lydia was eager to use her home as a safe place for the group to rest. She was a persuasive woman, and convinced Paul, Silas, Luke and Timothy to stay at her home as her guests. They remained for some time and shared the gospel in Philippi, until Paul and Silas were unlawfully beaten and thrown into prison.*

*5. Europe's first house church: Acts 16:40 says "After Paul and Silas were released from prison, they went to Lydia's house, where they met with the believers and encouraged them" before they left the city. The believers were already gathering in Lydia's home, which became the first known house church in Europe! The 'Church at Philippi'.*

*6. Lydia's Financial Partnership: The believers in Philippi were a huge encouragement to Paul, emotionally and financially. Paul wrote to them from Rome where he was imprisoned (in his letter to the Philippians), and recalled how they had blessed him 'from the very first day he met them'. That 'first day' was when he met Lydia, and*

was shown her gratitude and generous hospitality. She became a devoted follower of Christ and no doubt one of the generous financial partners that Paul referred to in his letter. She was a strategic player in the spread of the gospel.

*LYDIA- What an INSPIRATION and A TRUE CHALLENGE to US ALL! The FIRST CONVERT in EUROPE; A VITAL WITNESS for CHRIST; The FIRST HOUSE CHURCH in EUROPE; A FINANCIAL PARTNER of PAUL. AND, A CLASSY WOMAN WHO SOLD PURPLE FABRIC!*

### **Eutychus Raised from the Dead at Troas: 20:7-12**

In Troas, a strange thing happened. Paul's extended nighttime sermon led to a young man named Eutychus being overcome with sleep and falling out a 3<sup>rd</sup> story window! Paul ran down and raised the him from the dead. (Note: Luke was a physician, and he knew when someone was *truly* dead.) Why would Luke give space to such a story? Aside from giving us a very realistic insight into what these final meetings with Paul were like, it also shows the power of God at work in/through Paul as he moved on his final journey toward arrest and imprisonment. (It also shows how aptly "Eutychus" was named: "fortunate.") Evidently Paul was not one to let a sleepy audience cause him to shorten his message. After raising Eutychus from the dead . . .

***"Then he went upstairs again and broke bread and ate. After talking until daylight, he left" (20:11).***

### **Farewell to the Ephesian Elders: 20:13-38**

As Paul headed back to Jerusalem, he made a stop near Ephesus and called for the elders of the church to come to be with him. He had spent 3 years developing the church in Ephesus, and undoubtedly spent much of his time with the leaders who would oversee the church when he left. His final talk with these elders is one of the most emotional sections in the New Testament – much like Jesus final discourse with His disciples in John 13-17. Paul reminded them of his manner of ministry among them; he charged them to be faithful shepherds of the flock of God; he warned them that savage wolves would come in and try to take advantage of the flock; and he told them that his only motivation was to finish the race that the Lord Jesus had given to him:

***"And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. I only know that in every***

*city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. 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” (20:22-24).*

“My only aim is to finish the race ...” (Acts 20:24). In 2Timothy 4:6-8 Paul will say, “I have finished the race.” This really is a great way of looking at our life with Jesus. Once we begin a relationship with Him, He has a ‘race’ for each of us to run. Hebrews 12:1,2 reminds us to “fix our eyes on Jesus and to run with endurance the race that is set before us.” The key is to make sure we are running the race that HE has set before us . . . not the race that WE or someone else has set before us. Are you continuing to seek God and to ask Him to show you the plans that He has for your life, and the paths that He wants you to run in?

### **Journey back to Jerusalem: 21:1-16**

Luke’s account of the journey back to Jerusalem focuses on how the Holy Spirit continued to show Paul that trials and imprisonment awaited him when he returned. Yet, at every turn, Paul remained confident that it was God’s will for him to do so.

*“A prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. Coming over to us, he took Paul’s belt, tied his own hands and feet with it and said, The Holy Spirit says, ‘In this way the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles.’ When we heard this, we and the people there pleaded with Paul not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, “Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.” When he would not be dissuaded, we gave up and said, “The Lord’s will be done” (21:10-14).*

When Paul was first called to be a servant of Jesus, the Lord said: “I will show him how much he must suffer for My name” (Acts 9:16). Sometimes it IS God’s will for His servants to suffer hardship for His sake. It is often difficult for those who are friends or relatives to accept “God’s will” of suffering for the one they love. Is there some direction that God is calling you to that might involve sacrifice and/or potential hardship? Are you willing to follow God’s plan, no matter what others around you are saying?

## Arrival and Arrest in Jerusalem: 21:17-36

When Paul arrived in Jerusalem, he met with the leaders of the church. They informed him that the Jewish-Christian community had heard reports that he had been spreading an anti-Jewish message throughout the Gentile world. To correct this misunderstanding, they urged Paul to undergo Jewish purification rituals and to offer sacrifices in the Temple according to the requirements of the Mosaic Law. It was in the process of Paul complying with this advice that he was seen by non-Christian Jews in the Temple, causing a riot and leading to the arrest of Paul.

*When the seven days were nearly over, some Jews from the province of Asia saw Paul at the temple. They stirred up the whole crowd and seized him, shouting, “Fellow Israelites, help us! This is the man who teaches everyone everywhere against our people and our law and this place. And besides, he has brought Greeks into the temple and defiled this holy place.” [They had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with Paul and assumed that Paul had brought him into the temple] (21:27-29).*

The angry crowd would have killed Paul, were it not for the intervention of the commander of the Roman troops in Jerusalem.

*“While they were trying to kill him, news reached the commander of the Roman troops that the whole city of Jerusalem was in an uproar. He at once took some officers and soldiers and ran down to the crowd. When the rioters saw the commander and his soldiers, they stopped beating Paul” (21:31-32).*

Paul would be “an ambassador in chains” (Ephesians 6:20) from this point forward in the story of Acts.

### Discussion Questions

1. How does Paul’s perseverance and determination strike you? (See Acts 20:24) Have you had to persevere to live out God’s will for your life?
2. There are many ‘minor characters’ that played an important role in the story of Acts. Is there any character that sticks out to you?
3. Acts 20:13-38 records Paul’s farewell message to the elders from the church at Ephesus. It reveals a lot about the heart and passion of Paul. Read it through. What stands out to you?