

Luke:

Paul was a little more pleasant to be around later on in life, so the brothers in Antioch were not so anxious to see him go away on another long missionary journey. He was about 50, they thought a little too old, and beat-up, to take off on another trip. But the Holy Spirit thought otherwise, especially if he had an excellent doctor, with him whenever possible.

In some ways, the Third Missionary Journey does not appear to be as productive as the first two. But that's only if you're looking on the surface. It seemed to us that everything was happening at once during this time period. Holy Spirit was kicking into high gear as the church was growing explosively. Five major innovations were happening:

- Paul was training at least eight men to be his successors, including Timothy, Titus, Aristarchus, and Tychicus. These men also went through Asia starting and growing such churches as the ones at Colossae, Laodicea, Smyrna, Thyatira, and Philadelphia.
- The church at Corinth was experiencing nearly every problem possible. Paul was trying to address them through letters and sending representatives back and forth. The problems at Corinth dominated much of his time and emotions. The good news was that Paul was addressing a multitude of problems that other churches would face for centuries to come.
- We were collecting a huge relief fund for the Jerusalem church from the churches throughout Asia, Macedonia, and Greece.
- We pioneered an innovative technique for starting new churches. We were growing a new church at Rome by seeding it with members from other churches, including my friends Priscilla and Aquila.¹

¹ Romans 16:3

- We were meeting influential people throughout the Roman Empire, such as Philemon and Epaphras, important to our later work.

The third journey could not have started off better. Paul got the pleasure of revisiting his old friends throughout Galatia and Phrygia, especially those in Derbe, Lystra, and Iconium. Timothy's mother was very pleased to hear that he was growing into such a fine man, and surprised that his stomach had withstood the spicy foods Silas had taught him to eat.

Then, Paul traveled through the province of Asia and arrived in the huge city of Ephesus where he would stay for almost three years. Paul had left his friends, Priscilla and Aquila, in Ephesus on the second missionary journey. They had done such good work there that Ephesus had a strong base of believers. Paul was thrilled to join forces with them again.²

As usual, Paul taught in the synagogue as long as he was welcome, which was about three months. Then he and the other disciples left there to teach in the hall of Tyrannus. Paul taught during the heat of the day. It was cheaper to rent and many of his listeners were not at work during that time. He taught for about two years there, so all of the people living in Asia had the opportunity to hear God's Word. The hall of Tyrannus was the first Bible college.

We didn't know it at the time, but the Holy Spirit was temporarily changing our evangelism strategy. Instead of us traveling to evangelize, He decided we would stay in one location and people would travel to us. Ephesus was the perfect place to do that since it was a major city with a major pagan temple where numerous visitors came. On the Second Missionary Journey, Paul had stayed in Corinth for almost a year and a half, and that had worked well, but this time he was to stay in Ephesus for almost three years.

During this time period, the many men Paul was training started going throughout the region starting and strengthening the churches. Many of the churches

² 1 Cor. 16:19

mentioned in John's book of Revelation were started during *this* time period by *his* trainees.

The Holy Spirit worked very powerfully through Paul during this time in Ephesus. the handkerchiefs and aprons that touched him were able to cure the sick and cast out evil spirits. Some of the Jews were so jealous that they tried to cast out demons. The seven silly sons of Sceva, the high priest, tried to cast out a demon in the name of Jesus, and the demon-possessed man jumped on them and nearly beat them to death. The people in the area were filled with such fear and respect... they confessed their evil deeds and burned their magic scrolls, which were worth a huge amount of money.

The Holy Spirit put in on Paul's heart to go to Jerusalem after he revisited Macedonia and Achaia. He sent his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, on to Macedonia to prepare for his visit while he stayed in Ephesus a little longer. About that time, Paul got news from Corinth about their ongoing internal conflicts, so he sent Titus there with a very stern letter.³ You should read his section about love in that letter. No doubt, Paul had really matured.⁴ I thought, "People will still be reading this letter in two thousand years." (he gives a knowing look)

While in Ephesus, Paul got to spend time with Apollos. He had returned to Ephesus from his trip to Corinth,⁵ and had developed into a powerful preacher that none of the Jews could argue against. It was a good thing that Aquila and Priscilla had taught him well, because they were soon to return to Rome while leaving him behind.⁶ Nero had lifted the ban on Jews living in Rome, so it was a perfect time to let them go back and help start a church there.

We knew that Paul had been effective in Ephesus when the silversmiths caused a riot. Their income had been diminishing greatly because the newly converted

³ 2 Cor. 7:7

⁴ 1 Cor. 13

⁵ 1 Cor. 3:5-6, 16:12

⁶ Romans 16:3-4, 1 Cor. 16:19

Christians no longer bought little silver statues of the pagan goddess Artemis. The Temple of Artemis was the largest building in the world, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Selling statues to the huge number of pilgrims and tourists had always been very lucrative. The silversmiths correctly attributed their loss of income to Paul and the other evangelists. Fortunately, the city clerk was much more worried about the Roman response to civil unrest than the complaints of a few business people. He ended the riot and recommended that Paul leave town. I heard that Paul winked at his traveling companions, Gaius and Aristarchus, because they'd avoided another beating. He couldn't wait to tell Silas and Barnabas.

After that uproar, Paul was told by the Holy Spirit that his time in Ephesus had come to an end. He said goodbye to his Christian friends, and traveled to the region of Macedonia by way of Troas. Their tearful farewell made Paul realize how much the Holy Spirit had changed him through the years. In only a half-dozen years, he had been transformed from the man the people in Antioch were anxious to be rid of, to the man the Ephesians hated to see go. Amazing how a few beatings and floggings can adjust your attitudes, along with help of the Holy Spirit

I got to reunite with Paul, Timothy, and Titus in the Macedonian cities of Philippi and Thessalonica. Titus gave a good report about the reception of the Corinthians to Paul's previous letters. So, Paul wrote another letter to them, and sent Titus back with it.⁷ It was such a joy to strengthen the Macedonian churches alongside so many of my old friends.

Paul went to Greece where he got to be with his friends in Athens and Corinth again. He stayed with his colleague, Gaius in Corinth.⁸ It was on that trip that Paul wrote a letter to the believers in Rome, and sent it to them by the dependable Phoebe.⁹ Paul desperately wanted to go to Rome, but the Holy Spirit told him that he had to go to Jerusalem first, and someday he would get to go to Rome. This

⁷ 2 Cor. 8:16-18

⁸ Romans 16:23

⁹ Romans 16:1-2

was as far west as he would get to go as a free man. The next time Paul went further west, it would be in chains.

The Corinthians had responded so well to Paul's letters and teachings that he was able to take up funds from them to share with the church in Jerusalem.¹⁰ Because of threats from the Jews, he left Greece after being there only three months. He then went back through Macedonia accompanied by Timothy and many other men. Paul and I sent the others on to Troas, where we met up with them later. It had been such a thrill for Paul to encourage all of the churches which had been established throughout Greece and Macedonia.

We stayed at Troas for seven days, longer than intended. On Sunday, Paul talked and taught until after midnight. He knew it was the last time we would see many of these people. Paul gave the usual exciting and scintillating lessons, but there was this teenager, Eutychus, who fell asleep, and fell out of our third story window. When we got to him, he was dead. Paul laid on top of him and brought life back into him. Then we all went upstairs and ate, and Paul continued talking until daylight. Eutychus stayed awake!

Timothy:

We left from Troas and sailed to Miletus. Paul was anxious to reach Jerusalem before the day of Pentecost, so he wanted to avoid going to Ephesus where he knew so many people. We asked the elders of the Ephesian church to meet us near Miletus, then Paul shocked us all.

He said he would never see them again. Paul tearfully told the elders that he had faithfully preached throughout the province, and carefully instructed them to continue evangelizing and to protect their flocks from false teachings. They wept together, then prayed, then our traveling party left for the ship.(pauses) A man who had been so caustic in his dealings with everyone... these people truly loved him. Loved the man who was once a murderer.

¹⁰ 2 Cor. 8:1-9:15

What nobody knew at that time was to be a surprise. Paul wouldn't be going back to Ephesus as he said, BUT, Paul would be sending me back to Ephesus to lead the church there!¹¹

We sailed to Tyre, where our ship unloaded its cargo. We stayed seven days, and all of the disciples tried to convince us not to go to Jerusalem. Paul could not be dissuaded so we prayed with them on the beach, boarded our ship and continued south.

From Tyre, we sailed to Ptolemais, where we were greeted by our Christian brothers and sisters. The churches at Tyre and Ptolemais had not been mentioned in *Acts* previously. These were only two of the many churches that were springing up around the Empire without anyone taking much notice.

We stayed with them one day before going to Caesarea, where we stayed at the house of Philip the Evangelist. My young companions and I were excited to meet Philip...and his four lovely daughters.

Philip:

Paul showed up in my hometown of Caesarea with a bunch of single men! Especially single men that were Christians, and were as handsome as Timothy and Titus. I only had four unmarried daughters,¹² but was quite ready for those four to become happy wives.

Timothy caught me up on things. The mood stayed somber over the next few days. Agabus the Prophet showed up, and it got worse. Agabus was a friend and a true prophet, it had been a decade since he had prophesied to Paul about the famine. Agabus walked over and took Paul's belt. He tied up his own hands and feet and said, "The Holy Spirit says, 'In this way the Jews of Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles.'" Still, Paul felt led by the Spirit to go to Jerusalem on behalf of Jesus. We all begged Paul not to go to Jerusalem, but he would not change his mind.

¹¹ 1 Timothy 1:3

¹² Acts 21:9

My daughters and I sent Paul and his men on to Jerusalem under the care of some disciples of Jerusalem. I was sure somehow I would see Paul and his friends again. Agabus had made a dire prediction, but I was told by the Spirit that Paul had many more years left to be effective in growing the Kingdom.