

~ACTS~

Lesson 58- The Second Mission Completed

Acts 18:18-22

We're back in the book of Acts looking at the final stretch of Paul's 2nd missionary journey as he returns to the church in Antioch of Syria. A lot has happened on this 2nd journey. You remember that it was just after the Jerusalem Council meeting when the Judaizers, men from James from Jerusalem came up to Antioch and they were troubling the believers again saying that they must follow the Law of Moses to be saved, harassing them to the point that even Peter and Barnabas were swept away in their hypocrisy, Gal 2:11-13. This deception concerned Paul and it prompted him to embark on his 2nd missionary journey. So Paul takes Silas to revisit the churches in Syria, Cilicia, and Galatia, and Barnabas takes Mark and goes to Cyprus, and they begin to edify and strengthen these churches in the faith, Acts 15:36-16:5. And as Paul and Silas pass through Galatia, they come to Derbe and Lystra and Paul invites Timothy into the company.

From there Paul wanted to go into Asia Minor but the Spirit forbade them and instead leads them up to Troas where brother Luke was and he begins traveling with them as well, Acts 16:10. Then all four of them travel to Macedonia and they meet Lydia and the Philippian jailor and the church is born in Philippi. Luke is then left in Philippi and the three travel to Thessalonica as they meet Jason. And after being in Thessalonica for only 3 weeks, the unbelieving Jews chase Paul and company out of Thessalonica into Berea and from there Paul escapes down to Athens leaving Silas and Timothy in Berea. And as Paul is waiting for his brothers to meet him in Athens, Paul begins preaching the gospel in the Agora marketplace which leads him to speak to the council members at the Areopagus of whom Dionysius the Areopagite becomes born again and starts a home church in Athens.

Shortly after this, Silas and Timothy meet Paul in Athens, but Paul is deeply concerned for the church in Thessalonica so he sends Timothy back to strengthen the Thessalonians and he presumably sends Silas back to Philippi and he travels to Corinth alone. But he wasn't alone, Jesus Himself told him in a vision, "ἐγὼ εἰμι μετὰ σοῦ" I AM with you, Acts 18:10 and in addition, God brings a wonderful couple into his life named Priscilla and Aquila, who as we will see today, become very close companions with Paul and continue with him to Ephesus.

Now, it is here in Corinth that Silas and Timothy rejoin with the Apostle Paul, and they stay there 1-1/2 years preaching the Gospel and forming the church at Corinth. Of whom we see Crispus and Justus take the lead of this church. And it was during this year and a half that Paul not only edifies the church at Corinth, but also begins to write three of his fourteen epistles writing back to the Thessalonians and the Galatians. And we spent two weeks taking an overview of these three epistles. So that is where we will pick up our study today in the book of Acts as Paul now leaves Corinth and returns to Antioch, completing his 3rd journey after being gone for three years (51-54ad).

Let's begin our study today in Acts 18:18...

18:18) So Paul still remained a good while. Then he took leave of the brethren and sailed for Syria, and Priscilla and Aquila were with him. He had his hair cut off at Cenchrea, for he had taken a vow.

After the incident with Gallio, which I think was early in his time at Corinth, Paul **still remained a good while**, Παῦλος ἔτι προσμείνας ἡμέρας ἱκανάς, literally Paul yet remained toward them many days. And Luke tells us in verse 11 that he was in Corinth for 1-1/2 years. So after this lengthy stay, he decides to head back to Antioch, but he wants to stop at Jerusalem for the Day of Pentecost. By now it is the spring of 54ad and the travel from Corinth to Antioch was a journey of about 1,300 miles which could easily take a couple of months, so Paul **took leave of the brethren and sailed for Syria**. This shows us there was much fruit in Corinth because he is leaving the brethren, but he is not leaving the brethren without a shepherd, probably either Justus or Crispus has assumed this role, but we also know from his first letter to the Corinthians of several other brethren such as Gaius, the household of Stephanas, Chloe's household, 1

Cor 1:11-16, along with a list of brethren from Romans 16 including Phoebe from Cenchrea and many others.

Paul didn't have his own boat, so he and his company had to rent passage on a merchant ship traveling toward Syria, so Paul travels to Cenchrea which is the major port on the east side of the Isthmus of Corinth. But Paul is not alone. Notice Luke says **Priscilla and Aquila were with him**. Paul had been staying with this couple in Corinth and became such good friends that they have now decided to pack up and move themselves and their business to follow Paul to Ephesus. Remember, Paul traveled to Corinth alone, but he is leaving with a fellowship of believers namely: Silas, Timothy, Aquila, Priscilla, possibly Titus and a man named Erastus, a Corinthian convert who we will meet in chapter 19, Acts 19:22; Romans 16:23; 2 Timothy 4:20.

Luke adds an interesting phrase at the end of verse 18... he says, "**He had his hair cut off at Cenchrea, for he had taken a vow.**" This vow Paul took was probably a Nazarite vow found in Numbers 6. This was a vow to abstain from the fruit of the vine to consecrate themselves away from the world. And in doing so, it was also a token of thankfulness to God. The fact that this was a vow under the Jewish covenant, under the Law has caused much debate amongst scholars and commentators because some say that Paul had given into the Judaizers and conformed under the pressure of the Jews. But I disagree with this completely. Others say it wasn't Paul who took the vow, but Aquila. But when you look at the Greek grammatical structure, it has to be Paul who took the vow. So if Paul wasn't giving into the pressure of the Judaizers, then why did he take this vow? I believe he is offering himself as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, Rom 12:1. Not for salvation, but in honor to God. Paul knew that Law couldn't save anyone. He preached justification by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, Acts 13:39. He withstood the Judaizers in Antioch and Jerusalem. He wrote the epistle to the Galatians warning them of the Judaizers saying, "You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you?" Gal 3:1. So Paul wasn't compromising with the Judaizers here. This Nazarite vow was a token of thankfulness as a response to something God had done in his life, and Paul certainly had much to be thankful for in Corinth. So Paul is not doing this out of compulsion but an outward expression of his devotion and thankfulness to God. And Paul loved the Jews and his Jewish heritage. He is trying to make his way back to Jerusalem for the Day of Pentecost. Not because he has to, but because he wants to. I think the same is true with this vow. He wants to express his heart and thankfulness to God. And it could be that because of the other Jews with him, he dedicated himself in an act that they would be familiar with. Remember he took this vow while he was in Corinth. And it was the letter to the Corinthians where he said, "*I have become all things to all men so that I might save some.*" 1 Cor 9:22. It is the same reason he circumcised Timothy, Acts 16:3, and also why he goes through the purification process in Jerusalem in Acts 21:23-24.

18:19) And he came to Ephesus, and left them there; but he himself entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews.

Paul and his company get on a merchant boat and travel across the Aegean Sea from one capital city to the another; from Corinth to Ephesus, two capitals of commerce because this was a major trade route between the east and the west and would have been fairly easy to find a boat heading this way. Paul's ultimate goal was to return to Antioch, but he wants to stop at Jerusalem first. And along the way he makes his first appearance at Ephesus. Earlier at the beginning of this 2nd journey, the Spirit forbade him to go into Asia, but now it seems there is an open door to this region, **1 Cor 16:8-9**.

Verse 19 is the first time Ephesus is mentioned in the Bible and it becomes a very prominent place for Christianity. But because of the haste in trying to get back to Jerusalem for Pentecost, Paul can't stay in Ephesus very long, but he returns on his 3rd journey and spends three years with these believers, Acts 20:31.

Ephesus was a big city. It was the capital of the Roman province of Asia (Minor) with a population of about 200,000 people. It was known as the gateway to the East. Travelers coming from the west would come through the port of Ephesus and upon arrival to this city, up on the hill for everyone to see was a massive temple dedicated to the goddess Diana (Roman name), the temple of Artemis (Greek name for Diana). This structure was one of the seven ancient wonders of the world. It was built from the purest marble and was 425' long x 220' wide and had 127 columns that were 60' high and 6' in diameter. Four times the size of the Parthenon in Athens and was destroyed in 262ad by the Goths. It was a massive structure that identified Ephesus with pagan worship. But we will find in the next chapter that the Gospel begins changing things in Ephesus, **Acts 19:18-27**. It is my conjecture that in years to come, Paul begins changing the main hub of the Gospel from Antioch over to Ephesus. The last time Paul goes to Antioch is at the end of this 2nd journey and he never comes back. But Ephesus and the churches in Asia become very prominent. In 62ad Paul appoints Timothy as bishop of Ephesus and later after Paul's death in 66ad the Apostle John moves to Ephesus. I believe Paul, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit was changing Ephesus to be the center of Christianity to be a more central hub to the world. However, Antioch still held an important place in Christian history up through the 3rd century with men like Ignatius and Lucian of Antioch.

Luke says Paul **came to Ephesus, and left them there**. The "them" is Aquila and Priscilla. Luke says this because as Paul travels east to Jerusalem and eventually Antioch, this couple stays in Ephesus. We see this in verse 26 when they begin ministering to Apollos, **Acts 18:26**.

Luke continues... **but he himself entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews**. This was always Paul's method... to the Jew first then the Greek and he enters the synagogue and reasoned, *διελέχθη*, with the Jews. This is the fourth time Luke has used this word *διαλέγομαι*, and he uses this word many times in connection with thoroughly explaining the Scriptures. Paul thoroughly explained in a logical manner that Jesus is the Christ, Acts 17:2, 17; 18:4. These other three times Luke uses this word is in the imperfect tense, *διελέγετο*, showing a continual action in the past... he "was reasoning" with the Jews. But here in Ephesus Luke uses an aorist tense, *διελέχθη*, showing just one event and not a continual occurrence. Paul could only stay in Ephesus a very short time, probably only one Sabbath but we will see in chapter 19 that he returns and stays with them for three years. But even though this first meeting was very short, it had great impact and the Jews wanted to hear more so they ask Paul to stay longer in verse 20...

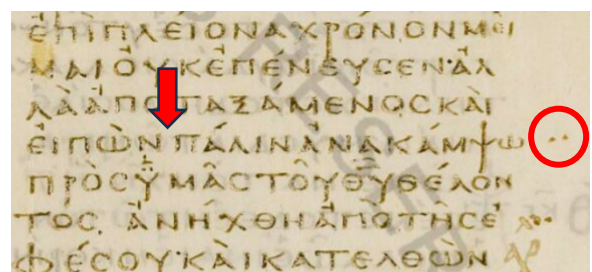
18:20) When they asked him to stay a longer time with them, he did not consent,

This was a rare occurrence when the Jews were begging him to stay and Paul I am sure wanted to stay, but he was compelled to return to Jerusalem for the coming feast.

18:21) but took leave of them, saying, "I must by all means keep this coming feast in Jerusalem; but I will return again to you, God willing." And he sailed from Ephesus.

This coming feast was probably the Day of Pentecost. This is much like the vow. He doesn't have to go back to Jerusalem for this feast, he is free from the Law, but in his freedom he wants to go back and celebrate God.

Just a note concerning this verse, this phrase is another deleted section from our Bibles. Only the Textus Receptus gives us this little tidbit as to why he couldn't stay in Ephesus. This is also identified as one of the omitted phrases in the Codex Vaticanus with the scribal indicator dots.



Notice Paul is putting plans in place to return, but he holds these plans loosely saying, “**God willing.**” This should be the mindset of a Christian... not my will but Yours be done. It’s ok to have plans. In fact, God wants us to have plans, **Proverbs 16:1, 9**. But our focus must be on Him and His will, **Proverbs 19:20-21**.

So after only spending a week in Ephesus, Paul has to board the next merchant ship leaving the port at Ephesus and they travel to Caesarea, verse 22...

18:22) And when he had landed at Caesarea, and gone up and greeted the church, he went down to Antioch.

Luke is extremely brief in his account of Paul’s travels from Ephesus to Antioch. At the end of his 3rd journey, we see the ship stop at several islands along the way, **Acts 21:1-3**. But here Luke records Paul traveling from the main port of Ephesus to the main Roman port of Caesarea. Much has happened in this city of Caesarea already. It was the military capital of Rome. The governors of Rome stayed here such as Pontius Pilate, Felix and Festus, Acts 23:33; 25:1-13. Also, this is where Herod was struck dead for his pride against God, Acts 12:19-23. Philip traveled to Caesarea in Acts 8 and made his home in this city, Acts 8:40; 21:8. And this is also where Paul will be imprisoned for two years before going to Rome, Acts 24:27. It is also my conjecture that Timothy was in prison with Paul in Caesarea, Heb 13:23.

So Paul lands at the port at Caesarea and goes up to Jerusalem. Luke doesn’t say, “to Jerusalem,” but it is implied in the Scriptures that when someone is “going up” they are going to Jerusalem. Paul goes up to Jerusalem for what we assume to be the Day of Pentecost and he greets the church. Probably seeing the “pillars of the church,” James, John, and Peter, Gal 2:9. This is the fourth visit to Jerusalem since the road to Damascus in the past 15 years, Acts 9:26; 11:29-30; 15:4. Luke doesn’t tell us of any trouble on this visit, but all other times including his fifth visit have been filled with persecution. Then from here, Paul travels to his home base to the church in Antioch.

Since chapter 11, we have seen the main hub of Christianity move from Jerusalem to Antioch. This happened 10 years earlier in 44ad. But now the focus begins to change to Ephesus because here in verse 22 is the last mention of Antioch in the Bible. And once Paul leaves on his 3rd journey, he never returns to Antioch again, but instead has great dealings with the church in Ephesus and the surrounding Asian churches. This doesn’t mean that the church of Antioch floundered. It was still very prominent in Christian history for the next few hundred years, but I think it is clear that Paul was making Ephesus his new home base for Christianity.

Next week we will see Paul return to Ephesus as he embarks on his 3rd missionary journey to the world.