

~ACTS~

Lesson 59- The 3rd Missionary Journey Begins

Acts 18:23-28

Today we begin looking at Paul's 3rd missionary journey in the book of Acts. This 3rd journey becomes his longest in both time spent away and miles traveled (4 years, 54-58ad and 3,100 miles). And it is on this 3rd journey in which the church of Ephesus is established, and we see Paul begin transferring his home base from Antioch over to Ephesus. But also on this 3rd journey we see his deep concern for the churches as he continues to revisit the brethren in all these cities, and he will continue to write letters of encouragement back to them. Up to this point in 54ad, on his 2nd journey, Paul wrote 3 of his 14 epistles (1-2 Thessalonians and Galatians). And now during the course of his 3rd journey, he is going to write 3 more epistles, (1-2 Corinthians and Romans).

We left off last week in verse 22 as Paul returned to Antioch after being gone for about 3 years (51-54ad) on his 2nd journey. And now verse 23 picks up just a few months later with him leaving Antioch, embarking on his 3rd journey, never to return to this church where they were first called Christians. Let's read verses 22 into 23 to get context...

18:22-23) And when he had landed at Caesarea, and gone up and greeted the church, he went down to Antioch. ²³ After he had spent some time there, he departed and went over the region of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples.

We don't know exactly how long he was at Antioch before he left on his 3rd journey, but I would guess it was pretty quick... only a few months and he is right back on the road. Remember that at the end of his 2nd journey, he had stopped at Ephesus and preached Jesus to them in the synagogue, but he had to leave only after a short time, probably only one Sabbath because he wanted to make it to Jerusalem for the coming feast, the Day of Pentecost. But before he left, Paul promised to return to them, God willing, Acts 18:21. So after just a few short months, Paul is excited to get back to Ephesus knowing the harvest is plentiful in that city.

To get to Ephesus, Paul is traveling on foot going through the region of Galatia and Phrygia. Luke doesn't tell us exactly who is with Paul. But we know Silas is no longer traveling with him. The only other mention of Silas in the Bible is him being an amanuensis to Peter in his first epistle, 1 Peter 5:12. Silas probably stayed in Jerusalem on Paul's travel back to Antioch. But we are fairly certain that Timothy is with him, and probably Titus as well. So Paul is traveling through the region of Galatia revisiting the churches, as Luke says in verse 23, **in order, strengthening all the disciples.**

On the last journey, Paul began his journey in Galatia as well to see how they were doing being concerned that they had been swayed by the false gospel of the Judaizers. And indeed they had, so later, on that same 2nd journey, Paul writes a harsh letter of rebuke back to them trying to wake them up to the Truth of the Gospel. Telling them that we are saved by grace through faith apart from the works of the Law. That letter was written at the end of 52ad, and now it is probably the summer or fall of 54ad, so roughly 2 years later and he returns to the Galatian churches. We can assume that this church must have been doing ok because we don't hear a bad report or another letter being written to them.

Another major task that Paul implements on this 3rd journey is a collection for the saints at Jerusalem. Luke doesn't mention this, but we see this in Paul's letters that on this journey he is taking up a collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem. And he does this because after visiting the church at Jerusalem, Paul must have seen a major need to take up a collection of money for them. There were two main reasons for this collection: 1) persecution from the unbelieving Jews toward Christians. Christians were treated as outcasts and hated by the Jews and many of the Jews who turned to Jesus were put out of the synagogues and lost their jobs, John 9:22. And 2) antiquity tells us that there were four major famines in the world during the reign of Claudius Caesar, from 41-54AD, with Jerusalem being the worst. This was prophesied

by Agabus, Acts 11:28 and also recorded by Josephus, Eusebius and three other Roman historians by the name of Suetonius, Dio Cassius, and Tacitus. Ten years ago in 44ad, Paul and Barnabas took famine relief to Jerusalem from Antioch, and now it seems Jerusalem needs help again. This shows the unity of the Church, Gentile churches helping the Jewish church in Jerusalem... churches helping other churches to unify "The Church." This was prevalent in the early church, and it is a shame we don't see more of this in our modern day churches. So Paul is taking up a collection for the saints at Jerusalem and he starts with Galatia, **1 Corinthians 16:1-4**; Romans 15:25-26. And we find out in 2 Corinthians that Titus is the one chosen to carry this gift. This is how we know Titus is on this 3rd journey with Paul, **2 Corinthians 8:1-6, 16-21**.

As Paul is traveling through the region of Galatia strengthening the churches, Luke at this point pans over to Ephesus and he tells us of some happenings in this city with Aquila and Priscilla and a man named Apollos... **Acts 18:24-28**.

24-25) Now a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus. ²⁵ This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things of the Lord, though he knew only the baptism of John.

This man Apollos is a unique individual. He is a Hellenistic Jew, born in Alexandria Egypt. Alexandria was the headquarters for Hellenistic learning for Jews and Gentiles. It was founded by Alexander the Great in 332bc. The total population in the first century was around 500,000. Making it the 2nd largest city in the Roman Empire, 2nd only to Rome. And in this city of Alexandria there was a large population of Jews, being 1/3 of the population. This was a result of the Diaspora from Nebuchadnezzar 250 years earlier (586bc). And because of this large Jewish population, the Septuagint was translated here. Usually identified as LXX- 70 Hellenistic Jewish scholars who translated the Hebrew Bible into Greek. This became the common record of the Scriptures in the first century which is significant because even though it was a translation, it was so good that the Apostles would quote this version and the Holy Spirit recorded it in the New Testament making those quotes from the LXX, divinely inspired.

Alexandria was known for its philosophers and universities of learning. It held the largest library in the world containing up to 700,000 volumes until Julius Caesar burned it down in 48bc. Famous men such as Philo and Euclid also lived in Alexandria. Euclid is known as the father of geometry and Philo was a Jewish philosopher who adopted Greek mythology into the Jewish religion and thus creating the beginnings of Gnosticism. Which, later over the next first few centuries, the Gnostics would make Alexandria Egypt their main hub which is why the Alexandrian texts of the New Testament are so corrupt, because they were being manipulated by the Gnostic heresies down in Alexandria.

But Apollos wasn't swayed by these heresies. Luke says he was **an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures**. This phrase eloquent man is *ἀνὴρ λόγιος*, he was a Word man, and he was mighty in the Scriptures, *δυνατὸς ἐν ταῖς γραφαῖς*, from *δύναμις*, *dunamis*, meaning power. This guy knew his Old Testament Greek Bible and he was eloquent and powerful in the Word.

Luke continues in verse 25, **This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things of the Lord**. This man was extremely smart; a Bible man, the Scriptures were mighty in him, a good speaker, who spoke the things of the Lord accurately. But there is a problem... he hasn't been taught the whole Truth of the Gospel. He is still preaching the message of John the Baptist. Luke says, **he spoke and taught accurately the things of the Lord, though he knew only the baptism of John**.

He doesn't know the fulfillment of the Scriptures in Jesus Christ. He only knew the baptism of John which was a baptism of repentance getting ready for the coming Messiah. The baptism of John was preparing people's hearts for their coming King. It was a call to repentance in anticipation for the Messiah's arrival.

And the outward expression of baptism was a confession of need, the need for a Savior. It was saying I am acknowledging that I am in need of the cleansing of the Messiah. I am a sinner and I repent with the expectation of the coming Messiah who will cleanse me.

But the problem is Apollos didn't know the Messiah had already come. What is so surprising in this is 22 years after Jesus had died and rose again and fulfilled the Scriptures (32-54ad), and yet a learned man like Apollos had not yet heard the good news. This just shows how slowly things moved in the first century. There is this transition from the old to the new that we are constantly seeing in the book of Acts, **Heb 8:13**. We will see something similar in chapter 19 with twelve men who were still waiting for the Messiah to come having only been baptized into the ministry of John the Baptist.

So, Apollos decides to come to Ephesus. We don't know exactly what brought him here from Alexandria, but God had providentially arranged this meeting with Aquila and Priscilla so that he could know the Truth.

26) So he began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Aquila and Priscilla heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.

Apollos is a bold man. He doesn't know the whole Truth, but yet he is so confident in the Scriptures, and he knows the Messiah is coming that he has traveled all the way from Alexandria Egypt to Ephesus preaching the message of John the Baptist. Luke said he spoke and taught accurately the way of the Lord. Remember John the Baptist message, Luke 3:4- "*The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the LORD; Make His paths straight.*" He was preaching the way of the Lord accurately, he just didn't know that The Way had already come. So Aquila and Priscilla take him aside and **explained to him the way of God more accurately**. So after being taught by Aquila and Priscilla, Apollos knows the Truth and the fulfillment of the Scriptures in Jesus Christ. But I want to highlight something remarkable about the character of Apollos here. This man was a schooled, eloquent, learned man, mighty in the Scriptures, and yet these tent makers that probably never went to college come up to him and tell him he could be doing a better job, that he doesn't have the whole picture. Most of these intellectual types would get mad and offended and wouldn't even give Aquila and Priscilla any consideration, just like the religious Jews would mock anyone who tried to teach without having been learned in their rabbinical schools, Acts 4:13. But Apollos wasn't like that. He was humble and listened to the Truth that these tent makers had to share. Apollos hears the Truth, believes in Jesus as the Christ, and starts preaching the whole Gospel. Notice the first phrase of verse 27...

27) And when he desired to cross to Achaia...

I think it's interesting that this is the next thing Luke says. Luke doesn't mention anything about his conversion or being baptized or being filled with the Spirit, but we know all this happened and he was born again because we instantly see the fruit. And this is what Luke tells us. He wants to go preach the Gospel... **he desired to cross to Achaia**. This reminds me of Paul in Damascus. As soon as he was born again, healed and filled with the Spirit... *Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God...²² and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this Jesus is the Christ.* Acts 9:20, 22. This is what is happening inside Apollos.

27) And when he desired to cross to Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him; and when he arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace;

Now that Apollos is born again and filled with the Spirit, he has an intense desire to preach and edify the brethren. As a result of this fervency, Aquila and Priscilla told him about the church in Corinth and he desired to go. Aquila and Priscilla knew these believers in Corinth intimately, they lived there, they had a business there in Corinth and a house church, so they wrote a letter telling them to receive Apollos when

he arrives. And evidently the Corinthian believers accepted him, because Luke says **he greatly helped those who had believed through grace**. This word greatly helped is *συμβάλλω*, literally to throw with. Apollos was so fervent in Spirit, he threw himself with the believers in Corinth and gave himself to the Church. And not only the believers but also the Jews in the synagogues... verse 28

28) for he vigorously refuted the Jews publicly, showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ.

Apollos was a bold man who was now speaking the whole Truth being led by the Spirit, unlocking the Scriptures by proving Jesus as the Christ. The text literally says, “for he stretched out vigorously to the Jews, thoroughly and intensely putting to proof, through the Scriptures, showing that Jesus is the Christ.”

This last part **that Jesus is the Christ** is the key that Aquila and Priscilla gave him. The understanding that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Scriptures. Apollos was mighty in the Scriptures, but without Jesus there is no life in them, **John 5:39-40**. Apollos was speaking Life in Jesus to these Jews in the synagogues and greatly helping the believers in Corinth strengthening them in the faith. They obviously loved Apollos and he became very prominent and successful in this city, to the point that some of the believers began elevating him to an unhealthy level and calling themselves disciples of Apollos and creating schisms among the church. Paul writes about this in his first epistle to the Corinthians, **1 Corinthians 1:10-13**. Paul also tells them in chapter 3 that Apollos and himself are just vessels of God, servants to bring them to the Lord and not to be revered or exalted, **1 Corinthians 3:3-8, 21-23; 4:6**. This also shows the humility and character of both Paul and Apollos to not get offended at one another. It is possible this is why Apollos didn't want to go back to Corinth, **1 Cor 16:12**.

This is a danger that we must always be mindful of. In this modern age with these mega churches there is a tendency to elevate the pastor to become a “celebrity pastor.” This is destructive to not only the pastor, puffing him up with pride, but it is also harmful to the flock. Because many times the flock can be so enamored with the pastor that they lose sight of the Great Shepherd, Jesus Christ. Jesus alone is the One who is worthy of all glory, and it is the pastor's responsibility to keep the bride's focus on the groom. To keep the flock focused on the Shepherd who is coming again in glory.

From this point, Apollos becomes a fellow worker with Paul in this network of the Gospel because about nine years later (63ad), Paul writes to Titus, who becomes the bishop of Crete, Paul instructs Titus to send Apollos on his journey, Titus 3:13. Apollos was in Ephesus, then went to Corinth and then came back to Ephesus possibly even delivering Choe's letter which prompts Paul to write what we know as 1 Corinthians.

This ends chapter 18. Next week we will continue with Paul's 3rd journey as he travels into Ephesus. And in Ephesus he will come across a group of 12 men who, like Apollos, are uninformed of the Truth, only having been baptized into the ministry of John the Baptist. Showing again this slow transition into the revelation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and we will see how Paul ministers to them.