

12. Acts 18:19 - 20:3



Ephesus

Acts 18:19-23 and 19:1

47 with Barnabas
49 on way to Troas
52 on way to Ephesus

When they reached Ephesus, Paul left Priscilla and Aquila there, but first he himself went into the synagogue and had a discussion with the Jews. When they asked him to stay longer, he declined; but on taking leave of them, he said, 'I will return to you, if God wills.' Then he set sail from Ephesus. When he had landed at Caesarea, he went up to Jerusalem and greeted the church, and then went down to Antioch. After spending some time in Antioch Paul departed and went from place to place through the region of Galatia and Phrygia strengthening all the disciples ...Paul passed through the interior regions and came to Ephesus.



Ephesus to Ephesus :
3,000ks by sea and land

The Roman Province of Asia was a thickly populated, and agriculturally and commercially prosperous area. Ephesus itself, reconstructed and embellished by Augustus and Tiberius, is estimated to have had a population in the middle of the first century of between two and three hundred thousand.

Located at the mouth of the Cayster river, Ephesus commanded the richest hinterland in the province. The main trade routes, whether by land, sea or river, went through Ephesus. Among the major cities linked to Ephesus by a Roman road were Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea – the cities addressed in the Book of Revelation towards the end of the century.



Paul seems to have been heading for Ephesus in 49AD. At that time he was ‘forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia’ (Acts 16:6). Remembering this, when he is invited to return, he replies: ‘I will return to you, if God wills’ (Acts 18:21).

Luke hurries over Paul’s journey, for his aim is to highlight the drawing of the Holy Spirit who is, in fact, calling Paul to Ephesus. We should not, however, overlook the fact that these few verses encompass a journey, from Ephesus to Antioch and back to Ephesus, of three thousand kilometres, half by sea and half by land. It would have taken Paul every bit of nine months. It is possible that he left Corinth early in the spring of 52AD and arrived in Ephesus just before the winter in late 52AD.

Acts 18:24-28

Now there came to Ephesus a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria. He was an eloquent man, well-versed in the scriptures. He had been instructed in the Way of the Lord (the Torah); and he spoke with burning enthusiasm and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John. He began to speak boldly in the synagogue; but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained the Way of God to him more accurately.

And when he wished to cross over to Achaia (Corinth - see 1 Corinthians 1:12; 3:4-6, 22; 16:12; Titus 3:13), the believers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him. On his arrival he greatly helped those who through grace had become believers, for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the scriptures that the Messiah is Jesus.

Acts 19:1-7

Paul came to Ephesus where he came upon some **disciples**. He said to them, 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?' They replied, 'No, **we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.**' Then he said, 'Into what then were you baptised?' They answered, 'Into **John's baptism.**' Paul said, 'John baptised with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, in Jesus.' On hearing this, they were **baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus**. When Paul had laid his hands on them (see 8:17), the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke in tongues and **prophesied** [Pentecost: Acts 2:4; 2:28; Jerusalem community, Acts 4:31; Samaritan converts, Acts 8:17; Cornelius, Acts 10:44-46] — **altogether there were about twelve of them.**

Acts 19:8-10

Paul entered the **synagogue** and for three months spoke out boldly, and argued persuasively about the kingdom of God. When some stubbornly refused to believe and spoke evil of the Way before the congregation, he left them, taking the disciples with him, and argued daily in the **lecture hall of Tyrannus**.

This continued for **two years**, so that all the residents of Asia, both Jews and Greeks, heard the word of the Lord (see Acts 19:20).

In a letter written during this period Paul writes: 'I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, for a wide door for effective work has opened to me' (1 Corinthians 16:9).

The Apocalypse, composed towards the end of the first century, is addressed to seven churches in the province of Asia.

- From Ephesus Paul wrote

1Corinthians 53

Philemon 54

Colossians 54

Luke is content to sum up two of Paul's most prolific and successful years in one brief verse: 'all the residents of Asia, both Jews and Greeks, heard the word of the Lord.' (see also Acts 19:20). In a letter written during this period Paul writes: 'I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, for a wide door for effective work has opened to me' (1 Corinthians 16:9). That the community in Ephesus flourished is evident from Paul's farewell speech given in Miletus to the elders of the church of Ephesus (see Acts 20:17ff).

In the letter to the Colossians we hear of a certain Epaphras who took the gospel to Colossae (Colossians 1:7; 4:12-13). Luke tells us that Timothy and Erastus were working with Paul (see 19:22), as well as Gaius and Aristarchus (19:29). Titus was there, too (see 2 Corinthians 12:18) and Archippus (see Colossians 4:17; Philemon verse two), as, it seems, was Apollos (1 Corinthians 16:12).

Acts 19:11-16

God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, so that when the handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were brought to the sick, their diseases left them, and the evil spirits came out of them.

Then some itinerant Jewish exorcists tried to use the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, “I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims.” Seven sons of a Jewish high priest (of magic) named Sceva were doing this. But the evil spirit said to them in reply, “Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?” Then the man with the evil spirit leaped on them, mastered them all, and so overpowered them that they fled out of the house naked and wounded.

In Jesus we witness God's power to save; that is to say, to heal so that we can enjoy divine communion. It is because of this communion with God that we are able to carry out our privileged role as human beings, which is to continue God's creative work of bringing order into creation and caring for it.

On the day of Pentecost, Peter spoke of 'Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you' (Acts 2:22).

In his Gospel Luke writes: 'The people had come to hear Jesus and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. And all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them' (Luke 6:18-19; see Luke 4:40; 8:44).

Jesus continues this healing ministry through the apostles:

‘Many signs and wonders were done among the people through the apostles ... so that people even carried out the sick into the streets, and laid them on cots and mats, in order that Peter’s shadow might fall on some of them as he came by. A great number of people would also gather from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those tormented by unclean spirits, and they were all cured’ (Acts 5:12,15-16).

In Iconium ‘the Lord, testified to the word of his grace by granting signs and wonders to be done through Paul and Barnabas’ (Acts 14:3). It is the same here in Ephesus. we are reminded of Paul’s words: ‘The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, signs and wonders and mighty works’ (2 Corinthians 12:12; see Romans 15:18-19).

Acts 19:17-20

When this became known to all residents of Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks, everyone was awestruck (compare Acts 2:43); and the name of the Lord Jesus was praised. Also many of those who became believers confessed and disclosed their practices. A number of those who practiced magic collected their books and burned them publicly; when the value of these books was calculated, it was found to come to fifty thousand silver coins. So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed. (compare Acts 6:7; 12:24)

Acts 19:21-22

Now after these things had been accomplished, Paul resolved in the Spirit to go through Macedonia and Achaia, and then to go on to **Jerusalem** (see Luke 9:51; Acts 21:12, 15). He said, “After I have gone there, **I must also see Rome.**” So he sent two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, to Macedonia, while he himself stayed for some time longer in Asia.

Jerusalem with collection (Acts 24:7; Romans 15:22-25)

Acts 19:23-27

About that time no little disturbance broke out concerning the Way. A man named Demetrius, a silversmith who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought no little business to the artisans. These he gathered together, with the workers of the same trade, and said, “Men, you know that we get our wealth from this business. You also see and hear that not only in Ephesus but in almost the whole of Asia this Paul has persuaded and drawn away a considerable number of people by saying that gods made with hands are not gods. And there is danger not only that this trade of ours may come into disrepute but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be scorned, and she will be deprived of her majesty that brought all Asia and the world to worship her.”

We witness the reaction of those whose prosperity is being threatened by 'the Way' (Acts 19:9). We saw a small example of this in Philippi (see Acts 16:16,19). Luke now plays out the conflict on a grand stage. Ephesus was a prosperous city, and central to its prosperity was the famous temple to Artemis (Phrygian Cybele, Phoenician Astarte). We have been watching the wonders God is doing through the hands of his disciple Paul. We see now the resistance of those whose interest is in what human beings are doing, in the name of a goddess, for their own self-interest, economic prosperity, fame and security.

Acts 19:28-34

When they heard this, they were enraged and shouted, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!” The city was filled with the confusion; and people rushed together to the **theatre** (could hold 24,000), dragging with them Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians who were Paul’s travel companions. Paul wished to go into the crowd, but the disciples would not let him; even some officials of the province of Asia, who were friendly to him, sent him a message urging him not to venture into the theatre. Meanwhile, some were shouting one thing, some another; for the assembly (ekklesia) was in confusion, and most of them did not know why they had come together. Some of the crowd gave instructions to Alexander, whom the Jews had pushed forward. And Alexander motioned for silence and tried to make a defence before the people. But when they recognised that he was a Jew, for about two hours all of them shouted in unison, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!”

Acts 19:35-41

But when the executive officer had quieted the crowd, he said, “Citizens of Ephesus, who is there that does not know that the city of the Ephesians is the temple keeper of the great Artemis and of the statue that fell from heaven? (meteorite?) Since these things cannot be denied, you ought to be quiet and do nothing rash. You have brought these men here who are neither temple robbers nor blasphemers of our goddess. If therefore Demetrius and the artisans with him have a complaint against anyone, the courts are open, and there are proconsuls; let them bring charges there against one another. If there is anything further you want to know, it must be settled in the regular assembly. For we are in danger of being charged with rioting today, since there is no cause that we can give to justify this commotion.” When he had said this, he dismissed the assembly.

(compare Acts 5:34-39; and 18:12-17 - good Roman government!

Writing from Ephesus to the Corinthians (53AD), Paul says:

If with merely human hopes I fought with wild animals at Ephesus, what would I have gained by it? (1Corinthians 15:30, 32).

From Macedonia (55-56AD) Paul wrote 2 Corinthians:

‘We do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, of the affliction we experienced in Asia; for we were so utterly, unbearably crushed that we despaired of life itself’ (2 Corinthians 1:8).

Addressing the Ephesian presbyters from Miletus on his way to Jerusalem Paul states:

‘Some even from your own group will come distorting the truth in order to entice the disciples to follow them. Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to warn everyone with tears’ (Acts 20:30-31).

Acts 20:1

After the uproar had ceased, Paul sent for the disciples; and after encouraging them and saying farewell, he left for **Macedonia** (see Acts 19:21).



‘When I came to Troas to proclaim the good news of Christ, a door was opened for me in the Lord; but my mind could not rest because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I said farewell to them and went on to Macedonia’ (2 Corinthians 2:12-13).

Acts 20:2-3

When he had gone through those regions [55-56AD] and had given the believers much encouragement

[Second Letter to the Corinthians]



After spending the winter of 55-56AD in Macedonia, Paul carried out a wider mission in the area, going as far as Illyricum on the Adriatic coast (see Romans 15:19; Acts 20:2).

Acts 20:3

Paul came to Greece, where he stayed for three months.



Paul arrives in Corinth towards the end of 56AD and spends the winter of 56-57 there. While in Corinth Paul wrote his

Letter to the Romans.