

Lesson 9: Paul's Third Missionary Journey

Introduction: As we come to the final of Paul's recorded missionary journeys we find him continuing his practice of strengthening existing disciples in churches previously established in his former travels. He also establishes a few new "beachheads" for the Gospel, most notably at Ephesus, where he spent approximately three years.

I. RETURN TO EPHESUS

"Ephesus, one of the largest cities in the empire, had about 200,000 inhabitants. The monumental temple of Artemis [Diana], one of the seven wonders of the world, attracted tourists from all areas of the Roman Empire and also functioned as the credit bank of Asia."¹

- A. Public proclamation in the synagogue – Acts 19:8
- B. Teaching daily in a lecture hall – Acts 19:9-10
 - 1. Initiated because of opposition from the Jews (v. 9)
 - 2. Very successful ministry for two years² (v. 10)
- C. Interaction with sorcery – Acts 19:11-20
 - 1. Paul possessed extraordinary power (vv. 11-12)
 - 2. Others tried to imitate his authority (vv. 13-17)
 - a) They tried to use verbal formulas to accomplish spiritual deliverance
 - b) The end result was reverence for the name of Jesus
 - 3. Converts turned away from the black arts (vv. 18-20)
- D. Riot against Christianity – Acts 19:23-41
 - 1. Economic and religious culture were threatened by growth of Christianity (vv. 23-27)
 - 2. People responded by clamoring in the public arena (vv. 28-34)

¹ Eckhard J. Schnabel. *Paul the Missionary*. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2008), 109.

² As a result of Paul's ministry of teaching disciples churches were founded in Colossae, Hierapolis, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea. Paul personally founded none of these churches, but all of these Asian churches were known to be functioning in the first century.

- a) Paul is guarded by some “Asiarchs” who were his friends (v. 31)
- b) Christianity is again vindicated politically (v. 35-41)³

II. MINISTRY IN ESTABLISHED REGIONS

- A. In Macedonia and Greece - Acts 20:1-4
 - 1. Paul’s ministry to existing congregations was to encourage them (vv. 1-2)
 - 2. The Jews never ceased to persecute Paul (v. 3)
 - 3. Paul had a considerable group of helpers in the ministry (v. 4)
- B. Farewell to the Ephesian elders – Acts 20:17-38
 - 1. Paul recounts his faithfulness in teaching the Gospel (vv. 18-21)
 - 2. Paul recounts his faithfulness to his calling in spite of danger (vv. 22-24)
 - 3. Paul recounts his faithful example to them (vv. 26-34)
 - a) In his tireless preaching and teaching (v. 27)
 - b) In his caring admonition (v. 31)
 - c) In his blameless work ethic (vv. 33-35)
- C. Return to Jerusalem – Acts 21:1-17
 - 1. Everywhere Paul goes he is warned of persecution
 - 2. Everywhere Paul goes he is received with gladness

Conclusion: In just about ten years’ time, Paul had successfully established outposts for the Gospel throughout the eastern half of the Roman Empire. He was relentless in making Christ known and in establishing churches in the truth of God’s revelation. Paul maintained his focus throughout because he was driven by the reality of Christ’s claim upon him as he had stated to the leaders of the church at Ephesus: “But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.” (Acts 20:24)

³ It is very interesting to note in v. 37 that it was publicly acknowledged that Paul and the other Christians, who were clearly adamantly opposed to the pagan religious practices of the Ephesians, did not directly attack their foundational religious beliefs in a way that would be considered sacrilegious or blasphemous to its practitioners. This informs us about how we should engage evangelistically with those who are bound in false religion.