

Third Apostolic Journey

Acts 18:23–19:41

Paul's second apostolic journey took him through modern-day Turkey to the region of Macedonia, the northern reaches of modern-day Greece. In Macedonia, he visited a number of cities including Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea. Having been pushed out of these cities by unbelieving Jews, he sailed to Athens and finally came to Corinth at the southern tip of modern-day Greece. He saw many Jews and Gentiles come to understand the grace message, and he was instrumental in forming the church at Corinth. He stayed there for 18 months and then moved on to Ephesus, leaving Aquila and Priscilla there, before sailing to Caesarea, traveling to Jerusalem and finally stopping in Antioch where he "tarried there yet a good while."

Beginning of third journey (verses 18:23–28)

Paul probably stayed in Antioch for almost a year. He then set out on his third major trip to strengthen the churches he visited before. The first areas he ministered to were Galatia and Phrygia, including the cities of Derbe, Lystra and Iconium. During this time, Apollos was traveling and preaching Jesus Christ, but he was yet lacking knowledge in the most current events, including the giving of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and the raising up of Paul as the apostle to the Gentiles. Apollos ended up in Ephesus where he met Aquila and Priscilla. Since they have been traveling with Paul, they understood the many dispensational changes that were happening and had the opportunity to teach Apollos about these important changes. Apollos was quick to understand this new doctrine and began to speak powerfully against the Jews who rejected Jesus Christ. He had become a great help to the grace believers.

Ephesus (verses 19:1–20)

It appears that after being instructed in the message of Grace in Ephesus that Apollos traveled to Corinth to work with the believers there. While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul was traveling throughout the region of Asia, finally stopping in Ephesus. This is where Paul gave the Holy Spirit to some Kingdom believers, in a manner akin to Peter giving the Holy Spirit to the Samaritans (Acts 8:14–17). This is another proof of apostleship since no one else was able to part the Holy Spirit.

Paul stayed in Ephesus for two years, first speaking in the synagogue, and then when forced out, he went to the school of Tyrannus.

Not only was Paul preaching boldly, but he was also performing great miracles. Handkerchiefs that he touched were carried to those who needed healing or demons cast out. Paul was doing miracles to prove that he was sent from God as an apostle (2 Corinthians 12:12), and as a sign to the Jews. He was driving out demons in the name of Jesus. There were those in Ephesus who were trying to imitate Paul's miracles through black magic. There was much demonic activity in the city of Ephesus and sorcery was commonly practiced.

Sceva was a Jew who was called a high priest, although he was probably not truly a high priest because he would have been serving in the temple at Jerusalem. He had seven sons who were practicing exorcism. When they saw Paul casting out demons in the name of Jesus, they began to cast out demons using a phrase similar to what Paul had been using, "We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preaches." Unfortunately for them, the demons did not recognize them as having any authority over them because they were not believers. The man who was possessed with the demon jumped on them and beat them so badly that they fled the house naked and wounded.

Word of this event began to circulate throughout the city and many became believers through this incident. A large number of people who had been practicing black magic renounced it and brought their demonic

paraphernalia to be burned, probably worth several million dollars today. Through this incident, the word of God was rapidly gaining acceptance.

Paul's future plans (verses 19:21–41)

From Ephesus, Paul intended to go through Macedonia (Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea), down to Achaia (Athens and Corinth), and finally to Jerusalem. After that, he desired to travel to Rome, most likely to visit with the churches that he wrote to in the book of Romans. He sent Timothy and Erastus ahead of him into Macedonia while he stayed in Ephesus for a while.

But until then, Paul stayed in Ephesus and became the center of an uprising of craftsmen who were making silver idols to Artemis (or the goddess Diana). The Ephesians worshipped Artemis as a mother earth goddess with emphasis on fertility and reproduction. Her worship was often based on lascivious practices at the temple constructed in her honor.

A silversmith, Demetrius, saw his profits plummet because so many were turning to the true God through Paul's ministry. He drew other craftsmen together to stir up the people against Paul by showing how Paul was desecrating the great goddess Artemis. The riotous mob couldn't find Paul, but they were able to drag two other believers, into the open theater, and chaos ensued with uproarious shouting for over two hours. Many of the rabble-rousers did not even know why they were there.

The town clerk finally stepped in to calm them down. He encouraged them to bring the matter to the authorities through legal channels instead of anarchistic rule. He emphasized that they were breaking Roman law by rioting and that they could pay the consequences for what they are doing. He then dismissed the assembly.

The assembly (verse 32)

The word assembly comes from the Greek word *ekklesia*. Here, the *ekklesia* is a riotous mob (Acts 19:32, 39, 41). Most people understand that the word *ekklesia* refers to a church. An *ekklesia* is a general term for a called out group. A church is a group of people called out of the world to meet together and worship God. The riotous mob was also a called out group who came out to protest the desecration of the goddess Artemis. Acts 7:38 speaks of the church (*ekklesia*) in the wilderness, referring to Israel. It's easy to see that when *ekklesia* is used, the context is important in clarifying which assembly is in view.

This is important when reading about the "church." When Peter was told that Jesus would build His church on Christ, we have to understand from the context that He was speaking of the Hebrew assembly that we see had formed through Jesus' ministry to Israel, the Little Flock. This is the same church that Paul was persecuting before he was saved (Acts 8:1). The church at Jerusalem was formed from the many converts in early Acts and continued as the Little Flock even into Acts 21.

Different churches were being formed by the Apostle Paul. These churches were often composed of Jews and Gentiles. There were often members of the Little Flock and members of the Body of Christ meeting together under one roof. Both were worshipping God, but the Little Flock was looking for an earthly kingdom while the Body of Christ is looking forward to a heavenly existence. The seven church assemblies in Revelation are often confused to be members of the Body of Christ, when they are actually the Little Flock, probably toward the end of the tribulation, being encouraged to hang on to the very end.

Building, Body, Flock, Israel

It is important to realize that the term *church* means assembly. Most people think church always refers to us in this Dispensation of Grace. It can refer to the Little Flock of believers, the Body of Christ believers, a church building, a riotous mob, or even Israel. Context is most important in deciding which church is being referred to.

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