

# Far and Wide

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It seems that Paul and Barnabus have barely unpacked from their first journey before the Holy Spirit breathes a desire for Paul to be on the road again. The newly formed churches in Galatia must weigh heavily on his heart and mind as he desires to go visit and encourage them again! Sadly a disagreement arises between Paul and Barnabus as to who should travel with them. Both taking such vehement positions, they are unable to come to terms and choose to part company. How can it be that this successful team that had been through such hardship together in the cause of bringing new believers to faith could not resolve their conflict? It reminds us that these saints are human, subject to human emotions of hard feelings, unforgiveness, and unyielding resolve. But God took these human weaknesses to create two teams that would carry the gospel far and wide according to his sovereign plan.

## Influence

A short three years after the first journey into Galatia, finds Paul readying himself for a return. This time taking Silas, a leader in the Jerusalem church. The two set off on a journey that will be the foundation for several new churches in Greece. Paul representing the Hellenist church of Antioch and its resolve to open the doors to the Gentiles, and Silas, a Hebraic believer from Jerusalem, show the importance of unity in the body of Christ as together they seek to share the Gospel with Jew and Gentile alike. Soon the pair is joined by a young disciple from Lystra, Timothy, the son of a Jewish mother and a Greek father.

As we prepare for today's scripture lesson, let's pray the Lord will open our hearts to receive his word. That we may read it, learn it and live it to his glory and by doing so, we can lead others to faith as well.



Read Acts 16:1-40 and answer the following questions.

As you read today's scripture passage, record the locations Paul and Silas travelled, who joined their missionary journey, and who they inspired to continue the work of leading others to Christ. You may also want to trace this portion of the journey on your map.

<u>Location</u>	<u>People</u>
Derbe & Lystra	Timothy, joined Paul and Silas on their journey

## *Empowered by the Holy Spirit*

As Paul and his companions travelled, what message did they deliver to the towns?

If Timothy's circumcision was not necessary according to the ruling at the Jerusalem council, why was it important that Timothy be circumcised?

What part did the Holy Spirit have in the direction the missionaries traveled?

v. 6

v. 7

v. 9

How did the Lord use Lydia in Philippi?

When Paul and his companions encountered the demon possessed slave girl, how did the Lord use her?

Why was Paul troubled if she was speaking in support of his activity in the city?

Why were her owners angered by Paul's exorcism of the demon in possession of the slave girl?

What charges did they bring against Paul and Silas?

Describe the brutal attack on Paul and Silas in verses22-24.

What were Paul and Silas doing at around midnight?

What were the others doing?

🔥 What about Paul and Silas testified the most to the jailer that would cause him to ask, "*Sirs, what must I do to be saved?*"(v.30)

Why do you think Paul and Silas hold the magistrates accountable for their unlawful beating and imprisonment rather than leaving town right away?

In Philippi the missionaries preach and minister to women, the wealthy, a slave girl and the jailer and his family. What does this tell you about the Gospel message?

The conversion of Lydia tells us some important facts about Philippi. First, the meeting place for those who are God-fearers (as Lydia is) is not in a synagogue, but outside the gates of the city near the river. The fact that there is no synagogue reveals there is no significant number of Jews in the city. 10 Jewish males is the required number to form a synagogue. As there are few to no Jews, Paul directs his attention to the women gathered at the “place of prayer”. Lydia herself is a merchant from Thyatira<sup>1</sup> who sells purple cloth. The purple dye for this cloth comes from Thyatira and is very expensive; the cloth itself is reserved for the most elite in society. Lydia is an influential and wealthy merchant in Philippi. Lydia’s conversion leads her to share her faith with the rest of her household who are soon baptized into the faith. Immediately she insists that Paul and his companions – Silas, Timothy and Luke – all come to stay in her home. This appears to be the birth of the church in Philippi.

The story line then shifts to a slave girl who “*had a spirit by which she predicted the future*” (v.16). This spirit of divination, as some translations call it, is in Greek, literally “spirit of *pythōn*”<sup>2</sup>. According to Greek mythology, *Pythōn* was the name of the serpent dwelling in Pytho at the foot of mount Parnassus which guarded the oracle of Delphi whom Apollo slew. The word *pythōn* later came to be applied to those who could divine the future and were believed to be inspired by Apollo. Despite being under the influence of a demonic spirit, this girl proclaimed that Paul and his friends were “*servants of the Most High God who are telling...the way to be saved.*” While what she is proclaiming is accurate, Paul was troubled because the testimony of a demoniac would not help in his evangelism. Also her words caused confusion among the pagans to whom the most high god is Zeus, not Yahweh; and their pantheon was chock full of “saviors”. Even the emperor claimed to be the savior. The words spoken under the python-spirit lead to confusion, and for the pagans they would be drawn not to Yahweh and salvation, but to Zeus or Apollo and spiritual death. Paul commanded that the python spirit depart from her. This exorcism freed the girl of her demonic oppressor (and possibly led her to faith – we have no idea), but also opened the way for Paul and Silas to be falsely accused of stirring up the town (“*breaking the peace*”, the famed *Pax Romana*) and the vague charge of “*advocating customs unlawful for Romans to accept or practice*” (v20-21). Likely acting upon the fear of a riot breaking out because these “*Jews*” were “*breaking the peace*”; the magistrates themselves broke the law in arresting the Paul and Silas, failing to bring them to trial, beating them and imprisoning them falsely. Despite the humiliation, beating, flogging and imprisoning Paul and Silas are praying and singing hymns to God! Hearing their prayers, God responds with an earthquake that would permit their escape. Rather than escaping the men stay put and witness to an amazed jailer who cannot believe they chose not to run away. He and his family come to faith in Christ and are baptized. They offer hospitality, ministering to Paul and Silas needs – signs of heart touched and transformed by the Holy Spirit. Paul and Silas were no longer prisoners in his eyes, but brothers in Christ.

<sup>1</sup> Thyatira, located north-east of Ephesus in the region of Asia (Modern Turkey), had a large population of Jews and likely Lydia had come to learn of the Hebrew God there.

<sup>2</sup> Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words

## *Empowered by the Holy Spirit*

When Paul and Silas were released, they refused to go without the magistrates being held accountable for their unlawful treatment. This point is significant in that being named “Jews” and associated with “breaking the peace” might give the newly found church a bad reputation. To most Gentiles there was no difference between Jews and Christians. The Christians held much in common with the Jewish faith. Paul and Silas had to be cleared of this charge, their innocence proclaimed and their record set straight in order to have a good reputation among the Roman authorities in Philippi. The Christian witness could not flourish if the church was tarnished by this false accusation.

### *Personal Reflection*

Today’s lesson had a special focus on the role of women and the family unit in the early church. Reflect back over the women we encountered and how the Holy Spirit used them to bring others to faith in Jesus. How does the Holy Spirit use you in your circle of influence? What can you do to be a willing agent of the Holy Spirit in his efforts to move the hearts and minds of others to Christ?

## **Thessalonians and Bereans**

Boy, did we cover a lot yesterday! I promise you today’s lesson will be a bit shorter, but just as amazing! Paul has a way of stirring things up when he comes to town. Let’s get right to work, there is some wonderful little gems to discover today; I can’t wait to share them with you. *Heavenly Father, this beautiful child of yours has been faithful and persistent in studying Word. Bless this dear one with insight and understanding as while working through our scripture passage today. Let the example of the Bereans, who we will read about today, be an encouragement. Bless each of us with understanding and a willingness to share our faith with someone today. We ask these things in the name of your blessed son, Jesus. Amen.*



Read Acts 17:1-34 and answer the following questions.

List the places Paul and his companions travel to and highlight it on your map.

What was Paul’s approach to teaching in the synagogue at Thessalonica?

How was his message received?

What was the response of the Jews?

Of what did they accuse Jason and the brothers?

Why would the Jews bring false charges against the Christians?

What was the Berean's response to hearing Pauls' teachings from the Torah?

Why is it important for each of us individually to compare a teacher or preacher's message against scripture?

- See also John 5: 36-39.

What was the response to Paul's teaching?

Who stirred up the crowd in Berea necessitating Paul's departure to Athens?

The Thessalonians and the Bereans share some similarities and also a distinct difference in their response to Paul's teaching in the synagogue. As noted before, whenever Paul and his companions entered a new city, they first preached to the Jews in the synagogue, but also welcomed any God-fearers or pagans who were interested in hearing the Gospel. In both Thessalonica and Berea, we see Paul preaching in the synagogues, "*explain[ing] and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead*" (v.3) before proclaiming that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ. While his teaching received a positive response from some Jews, God-fearers and Greeks (not to mention prominent women – we'll get to that later), many of the Jews from Thessalonica responded with jealousy. They were more concerned with their own position of authority within the community than they were with doctrinal truth. They couldn't refute Paul's theology, so they found grounds to bring charges against the missionaries that would cause them trouble with the Roman authorities, ever fearful of rioting or insurrection.

In Berea, the members of the synagogue "*received the message with eagerness and examined the scriptures ...to see if what Paul said was true.*" As Luke mentioned, the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians (v.11), and made the effort to investigate for themselves the verity of Paul's message. They were much more receptive to the message because their hearts were inclined to hearing the truth rather than influenced by the opinions of others. They made it a priority to spend time in the scriptures studying God's Word, daily. They understood that a preacher or teacher who gives God's message in truth will never compromise, attempt to "explain away", or even contradict scriptures at the expense of God's Word. As a faithful Christian, it is our duty to measure a preacher or teacher's message against what the Bible says, just as the Bereans modeled in this passage. Luke points out that it isn't until Jews from Thessalonica come that dissension arises in Berea necessitating Paul's departure.

🔥 Read Luke 16:19-31. How are Jesus' words prophetic of the Thessalonians and the Bereans?

### *Personal Reflection*

When Paul was speaking at the Aeropagus, he began his speech by talking about what the Greeks already knew. He affirmed the fact they valued religion, and even had a temple to the unknown god. He spoke about the presence of God about them and led them to Christ in this manner rather than giving them a history of Judaism Christ fulfillment of the scriptures. We, too, live in a religious society – a Christian culture, but many do not know Christ. What can you learn from Paul's approach when speaking to others about God?

## **Corinth**

Paul, after leaving the Bereans travelled on to Athens where he spoke persuasively among the intellectual elite of Greece. From Athens he journeyed on to Corinth where he teamed up with Priscilla and Aquila, believers who recently came from Italy. Corinth was the political and commercial center of Greece. The acropolis of Corinth was graced by the temple to Aphrodite, the goddess of love and war. It is to the Christian community in Corinth that Paul would later write the two letters, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians, in 55AD during his third missionary journey.



Read Acts 18:1-22 and answer the following questions.

List and mark on your map the places Paul travelled.

How did Paul spend every Sabbath?

How did Paul support himself and his missionary work?

Where did Paul go when the Jews became abusive?

What prominent figure (and his household) in the Jewish community were baptized in the faith?

What affect did this have on the community?

How long did Paul stay in Corinth?

🔥 Why do you think the Lord Jesus appeared to Paul at this time?

What was the proconsul Gallio's ruling on the charges brought by the Jews against Paul? On what grounds was he able to withdraw his authority

Where did Paul travel next? What did he do there, who did he leave with the new church and what did he promise?

In Paul's day Corinth was the largest and most cosmopolitan city in Achaia (Greece). It was located at the southern end of the isthmus that connects the Peloponnesus with the mainland. Supported by two ports, Lechaeum on the Adriatic and Cenchrea on the Aegean Sea, it was a major commercial center, as well as, a center of worship for the goddess Aphrodite, whose adherents participated in all manner of licentious acts in their worship of her. This cosmopolitan city was famed as much for its trade as it was for its immorality. Even among the Greeks, to be described as "living like a Corinthian" (*korinthiazesthai*), meant to live immorally.<sup>3</sup> There also appears to have been a community of Jews already established in Corinth prior to Paul's missionary visit, and according to the scripture passage, there was some anti-Semitism bubbling under the surface of the Corinthian society.

In verse 3 we are told Paul, who came to Corinth alone, seeks out Priscilla and Aquila<sup>4</sup> because they are "tentmakers"<sup>5</sup>, as he is too. They have come to Corinth after Emperor Claudius forces all the Jews to leave Rome. The implied reason for Paul's seeking out this Jewish couple is the shared trade. We find that Paul is working to support himself during his stay in Corinth, and preaching in the synagogue on the Sabbath. In several letters<sup>6</sup> Paul mentions the importance of supporting himself during his missionary travels so to neither become a burden on the newly forming churches, nor become dependent upon profiting from teaching the Torah. 1 Corinthians 9 reveals this sentiment and Paul spoke against receiving any support from the Corinthian church in case it became an obstacle to the gospel. Not until Silas and Timothy arrive does it appear that Paul stops working as a tent maker to focus exclusively on preaching and testifying to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ."(v.5)

As Priscilla and Aquila later accompany Paul to Ephesus and take a major responsibility in the shaping of the church there, we can assume this couple came to faith in Jesus during Paul's stay with them in Corinth. We are told that "*when the Jews opposed Paul and became abusive*" (v.6), Paul in fulfilling his responsibility to preach first to the Jews, moved on to the Gentiles. The conversion of the synagogue leader Crispus and his family likely led others to follow suit as they heard his testimony.

<sup>3</sup> NAC

<sup>4</sup> That Priscilla is usually mentioned before her husband is indeed remarkable for first-century usage but probably is less due to her social status than to her prominence in Christian circles. Not to detract from Aquila's ministry, but Priscilla seems to have been one of those women like Lydia whose service in the Christian community stood out. —NAC

<sup>5</sup> Their mutual trade was **tent**-making. The term used here is *skēnopoioi*, which some say includes working in leather. Perhaps leather was used in the tents as was the goat's hair cloth *cilicium*, for which Paul's home province of Cilicia was well known, and is the likely trade learned by Paul.—BKC, NAC

<sup>6</sup> See 1 Cor 4:12; 1 Thess 2:9; cf. 2 Cor 11:7 and Acts 20:34

## *Empowered by the Holy Spirit*

Certainly the splitting of the synagogue and some of its prominent members following Paul enraged the remaining Jews, paving the way for them to bring Paul before the proconsul Gallio.

Paul's vision of the Lord Jesus is a message of encouragement during these difficult times. Jesus urges him to continue speaking and not be silent because "*I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you*" (v.10) – legitimate fears given Paul's experiences in Thessalonica and Berea, and the likely antagonism he faced from the Corinthian Jews necessitating Jesus' encouraging message. Jesus follows these words with "*I have many friends in this city*", point out the fact that Paul has more work to do, and that he, through Jesus, has friends in the city who will be of assistance. No harm would come to him; no opposition would stand against him as he pursued his ministry in Corinth. Paul spent eighteen months in Corinth establishing the church, the longest he'd spent in any one city on his missionary journeys, up to this point.

The Jews brought Paul before the Roman proconsul Gallio, charging him with "*persuading the people to worship God in ways contrary to the law*" (v.13). Their charge is somewhat vague – who's law? Rome's or the Jew's? There were Roman laws prohibiting the proselytizing of Roman citizens by foreign cults, but Judaism was a lawful religion under Roman law. The Romans did not see a difference between the Jews and the Christians. To them Christianity was a sect of Judaism. Gallio saw the Jew's dispute for exactly what it was – an internal dispute within the Jewish community, to be dealt with by the Jews. Gallio refused to judge a matter of theology. Paul had not broken any Roman civil laws; therefore this case did not belong in his court. Gallio's refusal to hear the case should not be understood as his siding with Paul in this matter -- Paul was ejected from the court as well. What we should take from this episode is the precedent set by Gallio: Christianity was legitimized as a religion under the aegis of Judaism; it was not a separate and therefore illegal religion in the Roman Empire. Ironically, the punishment the Jews were seeking against Paul was turned on the synagogue ruler as the Jews turned on Sosthenes and beat him outside the court.

## *Personal Reflection*

Towards the end of our passage today we read that Paul "*had his hair cut off at Cenchrea because of a vow he had taken*" (v.18). While Luke is not explicit in why Paul made this vow, it could be in response to the difficult times he faced in Corinth surrounding the abusive activities of the Jews there. His vow may have been made in connection with receiving his vision and encouragement from the Lord. The vow may have been an expression of thanksgiving for the protection and continued blessings received during the Corinthian ministry. Generally the hair cutting would be done at the end of the vow's time frame and offered up in Jerusalem as a sacrifice to the Lord.<sup>7</sup> According to The NIV Application Commentary:

"People [today] have used vows in a somewhat magical way: "We will do this so that we can get that." The vow does not affect daily life or enhance commitment; rather, it is a means of getting what we want. A Christian use of vows in a given situation should be different. Rather than being an act of bargaining with God, it is a means of affirming that we do not trust in ourselves but in him alone. Viewed in this way, vows will help us focus

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<sup>7</sup> NAC; see also Numbers 6:1-21 regarding the Nazarite vow.

on God. We should always welcome that, given our tendency to focus on the things of the world rather than on God.”<sup>8</sup>

Paul, whose faith by all accounts appears very strong, utilizes vows to strengthen that faith. Have you or would you ever consider making a vow during times of trial as a way to strengthen your relationship with the Lord? What are your thoughts on vows?

## A Third Missionary Journey

Paul is off and running again! It would appear that the Holy Spirit keeps kindling a fire under this man to keep him moving, spreading the gospel and encouraging the disciples in the churches he established on previous journeys. No wonder Paul so frequently uses the metaphor of the life of Christian being like running a race – he is constantly on the run from church to church! Paul must have been a very special man to keep up with the pace set by the Lord! Today’s scripture passage marks the beginning of Paul’s Third Missionary Journey. Our passage today is long, so let’s get our hearts and minds settled and focused on the Lord. *Heavenly Father, open your word to us today, revealing your truth and lessons which you would have us learn and hold dear in our hearts. Encourage us and strengthen our desire to pursue your word as the lesson this week requires our perseverance. Reward our persistence with gifts and blessings of understanding and a closer relationship with your blessed son. Amen.*



Read Acts 18:23-20:1 and answer the following questions.

List below and highlight on your map the places Paul travels in our scripture passage today.

What was Paul planning to do as he traveled to Ephesus?

What part did Priscilla and Aquila have in preparing Apollos for the work the Lord had set for him to do? What would he eventually come to do in Achaia (Greece)?

When Paul arrived in Ephesus, whom did he encounter? To what extent had they heard the Gospel message?

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<sup>8</sup> The NIV Application Commentary

## *Empowered by the Holy Spirit*

What happened when Paul taught about Jesus?

Where did Paul preach when he left the synagogue?

How much longer was Paul in Ephesus? \_\_\_\_\_ With what result?

🔥 Paul didn't enter the region of Asia on his first journey and the Holy Spirit kept him from going to Asia during the second journey (16:6), and even his stay in Ephesus at the end of that journey was brief (v. 18:19-21). Why do you think it wasn't until this time, during the third missionary journey that Paul evangelized in Ephesus?

What happened when “*some Jews...went around driving out evil spirits tried to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who were demon-possessed*”? (v.19: 13-20)

🔥 In order to command these spirits “*in the name of Jesus, whom Paul preaches*” (v.13) what had these Jews had to have heard and seen before hand? What did they do with that information? What did this reveal about their faith?

Who did Paul send to Macedonia allowing him to stay longer in Ephesus?

What was the cause of the uproar in Ephesus (19:23-41)? See also 19:10.

What argument did the city clerk make that brought the uproar to an end?

What did Paul do next? (20:1)

Ephesus, in the time of Paul was the major commercial center in Asia (Asia Minor). It was built along the main thoroughfare connecting the Aegean with all points east, and possessed a port where the Cayster River entered the sea.<sup>9</sup> Its location made easy access for the evangelization of the entire region of Asia. Ephesus was the home of the Temple of Artemis, one of the Seven Wonders of the ancient

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<sup>9</sup> Continual build-up of silt descending the river closed the harbor over time. Ephesus now sits 5 miles inland of the sea.

world. The Temple of Artemis was four times the size of the Parthenon in Athens, and its presence was a major source of income to the Ephesians. Ruins of ancient Ephesus reveal an extensive and wealthy Greek city. In the Roman era Ephesus bore the distinct title of “the first and greatest metropolis of Asia.” Ephesus was the provincial seat of government in proconsular Asia. Due to its cosmopolitan nature and the influx of trade, Ephesus was also home to a large number of Jews.

When Paul first arrives in Ephesus, he meets up with a group of disciples who had not received the Holy Spirit. They can best be described as disciples of John the Baptist. They had heard the call to repentance in preparation for the coming of the Messiah, but had not heard that he had come. John the Baptist had preached a baptism of repentance in preparation to the coming of the Messiah (Luke 3:3) and the Holy Spirit (Luke 3:16). He was an accepted Jewish prophet proclaiming and preparing the way for the coming of the Messiah. To be a disciple of John the Baptist was to have a commitment in the preparation to receive and follow the Messiah when he came. These disciples of John the Baptist had heard neither of Jesus’ death and resurrection, nor of the pouring out of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The point of this brief narrative is to show that becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ is the next logical step of being a disciple of John the Baptist. Disciples of Jesus Christ were the logical, reasonable, and natural progression of Judaism. John’s baptism and ministry had been in anticipation of the Messiah, the baptism into the name of the Lord Jesus was the fulfillment of these things.

As was usual for Paul’s ministry, he spent time speaking in the synagogue and won converts, until some of the Jews there “*refused to believe and publicly maligned the Way*” (v.9). Paul left the synagogue, followed by his disciples, and began preaching and teaching in the public lecture hall of Tyrannus. Being a public location, his ministry opened further to include Greeks, as well as God-fearers and Jews. He continued teaching there for two more years (his ministry in Ephesus would be for a total of three years!). During this time his ministry was so effective that the Gospel was carried throughout the province of Asia (the west coast of modern Turkey). It is believed that the seven churches mentioned in the book of Revelation were founded in this period, as well as, Colosse, Laodicea and Hierapolis. According to Colossians 1:7, they were likely established by Paul’s coworker Epaphras.

Towards the end of his ministry in Ephesus Paul decides to return to Jerusalem and from there to head for Rome (v.21). This decision to visit Rome is a major turning point in Paul’s mission, and therefore becomes a major focal point in Luke’s narrative. Prior to visiting Rome, Paul must travel first to Jerusalem. The journey to Jerusalem is necessitated by his taking up a collection to be given to the impoverished brothers (and sisters) in Jerusalem, but first requiring him to visit the churches in Macedonia and Achaia so they too could contribute to the gift (Romans 15:25-31, 1 Corinthians 16:1-4). While his visits to the churches in these regions were to encourage and strengthen the congregations, his epistles reveal him to be preoccupied with the financial collection for Jerusalem.<sup>10</sup> In preparation for his tour through Macedonia and Achaia, he sends Timothy and Erastus on ahead, allowing him to stay longer in Asia.

Before Paul leaves Ephesus, an uproar ensues as the silversmith, Demetrius incites the craftsmen against Paul and the Christians. He appeals to the craftsmen’s sense of religion (Artemis is being discredited) and patriotism (Ephesus is the center of the worship of Artemis) in covering his (and their) true financial concerns (Paul’s evangelism is infringing on the profits from making and selling idols). Demetrius’ complaint against Paul bore some truth. Paul had been denying that idols were true gods.

<sup>10</sup> NAC

## *Empowered by the Holy Spirit*

The subject of his speech at the Areopagus (17:29) bore that sentiment, and that same subject was in all likeliness preached in Ephesus – the center of Artemis worship. Demetrius' words incited the crowds to chant, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians”, bearing no resemblance to the real monetary issue. Soon the whole city was in an uproar, and the crowd unable to get their hands on Paul, detain two of his associates.

Paul, wanting to defend the Way and the disciples of Jesus, was prevented from doing so not only by the Christians, but also “*some of the officials of the province*” (described as “*friends of Paul*”, v.31). These officials, or *Asiarchs* (rulers of Asia), were in charge of the political and religious welfare of Ephesus. The importance of these connections would be that the Asiarchs were on good terms with Rome and would therefore bear testimony regarding the Christians’ good standing with the government.<sup>11</sup> Paul and the Christians had friends in high places!

The city clerk, or more accurately, the chief administrative officer of the city, presided over the council of city magistrates and the public assembly. He was the liaison officer between the city and the Roman provincial administration.<sup>12</sup> His main concern was that the upraising led by the craftsmen, not the Christians would bring about censure from the Roman provincial government, leading to potential restrictions in their provincial self-governance. In other words, this provincial government would be viewed by the Romans as inept requiring Rome to more directly oversee the governance of Ephesus, which would result not only in loss of privileges, but also higher taxes and stricter governance. The city clerk pointed out that Paul and the Christians had broken no law, they were innocent of the charges brought against them by the crowds. He then pointed out that legal methods were available through the courts if they insisted on pursuing the matter against the Christians, but this assembly was not legal. In fact, they would have a difficult time providing a legitimate explanation for this riot to Roman officials.<sup>13</sup> Once again, Paul and the Christians are exonerated of any misdeeds, religious or political, in the eyes of Rome, a theme to be repeated throughout the book of Acts.

## **Macedonia and Achaia**

Our scripture passage today is the culmination of Paul’s Third Missionary Journey. Yesterday’s scripture passage finished with Paul leaving Ephesus to visit the churches of Macedonia and Achaia, encouraging and strengthening the congregations and also taking up a collection for the poverty stricken Christians in Jerusalem. I know that this week’s lesson has been long. You are probably as travel weary as Paul! Stick with your studies, persevere to the end! The Lord will bless you for your time and devotion to studying his word. Pray that you will be encouraged and strengthened by studying the word, just as were the believers whom Paul visited on his journeys. You are in the homestretch now, don’t give up; stay in the word!



Read Acts 20:1-21:16 and answer the following questions.

<sup>11</sup> BKC

<sup>12</sup> NAC

<sup>13</sup> BKC

List and highlight on your map the places through which Paul travels.

What happened to the young man, Eutychus, in Troas?

What is the significance of this event?

With this brief little story Luke illustrates the saving power of Jesus Christ. The timing of this event is Easter time, shortly after Passover, the first day of the week long Feast of Unleavened Bread. No doubt Paul had been preaching on this subject. In the New Testament, stories of miraculous raising of the dead are a reminder of the Resurrection of Jesus. The Lord himself raised the son of the widow of Nain (Luke 7:11-15) and Jairus's daughter (Luke 8:49-56), as well as Lazarus in (John 11:38-44) when proclaiming "*I am the resurrection and the life*" (v.25). There is even a strong connection between Paul's action of throwing himself over the boy's body and Elijah and Elisha each doing the very same thing as they bring back life to young men through the power of the Holy Spirit (1 Kings 17:21, 2 Kings 4:340).<sup>14</sup> All these stories point to faith in Christ leading to life everlasting, but illustrated in the present life. The end of this story tells us this young man returned home with his family, whole and strong suffering no effects of his fall – he was restored as if he'd never fallen in the first place. The restoration of this young man is a living reminder to the disciples in Troas that Jesus is indeed the "*the resurrection and the life*" as Paul no doubt preached, either that evening or previously. The very last words of this scripture passage tell us the people "*were greatly comforted*" (v.12). No doubt all went home not only comforted, but also their faith strengthened by witnessing this miraculous proof of all that Paul had preached.

After having spent so much time in Ephesus, why would Paul not want to stop there now? (v.16)

🔥 When Paul speaks to the assembled elders from the Ephesian church, what does he set before them as testimony for his teaching there? What is he emphasizing? (v.17-21, 31, 33-35)

Why does he feel compelled to go to Jerusalem and what does he know awaits him there? (v.22-24)

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<sup>14</sup> New American Commentary

## *Empowered by the Holy Spirit*

In verse 26, why does Paul declare himself “*innocent of the blood of all men*”? What has he done that allows him to make such a declaration? What is “*the whole will of God*”? (v.27, see also v.20-21,31)

Of what did Paul warn them? (v.29-31)

How are they to prevent this from happening?

How does Paul feel about this church?

After Paul departs Ephesus and arrives in Caesarea, with whom does he stay and what does the prophet Agabus reveal to him?

🔥 Why do you think the Holy Spirit would reveal this to Paul in such a way that his followers would attempt to persuade him from going to Jerusalem? Why does Paul continue on to Jerusalem and not heed the warnings of his friends?

We see Paul compelled by the Spirit to go to Jerusalem, and with haste. At the same time we have seen the Spirit repeatedly reveal to Paul that hardships and imprisonment awaited him there. Clearly Paul does not feel the Spirit is guiding him away from such a fate, but impelling him toward it. Now “through the Spirit” Paul is urged by the Christians in Tyre not to go to Jerusalem (21:4), and Paul had received a similar warning while with the Ephesian elders (20:23).

There appears to be a conflict in the Holy Spirit’s directions. He is telling Paul to go to Jerusalem, yet compelling the disciples along the way to urge him not to go. The appropriate conclusion to draw is that, yes indeed, the Spirit is compelling him to go to Jerusalem, and also through the disciples along the way, he is revealing the serious nature of his return. Very naturally the disciples first thought is to persuade him to not to go. The revelation of Paul’s future suffering was not so they would stop him, but to help prepare him for what lay ahead. The Lord’s hand can be seen at work in both the leading and the preparing the way for Paul. In such a way the Holy Spirit is preparing Paul for what is to come, the suffering, hardships and imprisonment, while at the same time preparing the disciples everywhere for what Paul will have to face and the implied necessity of their prayers for courage and strength in the face of intense suffering.

Paul seems to have no trouble accepting the direction of the Holy Spirit, even in the knowledge of what it will bring. Agabus’ living prophesy clearly reveals the fate awaiting Paul in Jerusalem, yet he is determined to proceed along the course set for him by the Lord. His leave taking with the disciples of Tyre is similar to that of the Ephesian elders, as they kneel and pray over Paul. They all were fully

aware of the hardships facing Paul and that he was in need of their prayers to be steadfast and resolute in the face of the impending trials ahead. Paul, with the support of the disciples everywhere, was able to commit himself to the Lord's will (21:14). He boards the ship that would take him down the coast to the port of Caesarea. There, Paul is met by some of the disciples there who accompany him on to Jerusalem where he is warmly received by the brothers.

### *Personal Reflection*

Dear One, you have finally come to the end of this very demanding lesson this week. I'm sure you are ready to rest a bit and hopefully reflect on all that we have studied. We covered so much territory this week – two of Paul's missionary journeys, ending with the foreboding revelations of what would come in Jerusalem! The last thing I will ask you to do this week is to pray and reflect on how the Holy Spirit guided and prepared Paul, not only for his missionary work, but also for his return to Jerusalem. Imagine yourself in Paul's shoes as city after city it becomes alarmingly clear that hardship and imprisonment await your return, yet you are compelled to go boldly into that uncertain future. What do you think Paul was thinking, expecting, fearing? What comfort do you think Paul found along the way?