

20-THE WAY PROCLAIMED IN EPHESUS AND ASIA MINOR

Acts 19:1-41

Key Verse: 19:21

On his second missionary journey, Paul did not preach in the province of Asia Minor. He followed the leading of the Spirit and crossed over into Europe. After traveling through Macedonia and Achaia (Greece) he went to Corinth. In Corinth, he met Aquila and Priscilla, tentmakers refugees from Rome. Their house church became his home and they became coworkers in making tents and in serving Jesus. When he left Corinth, he took Aquila and Priscilla with him. He stopped by Ephesus briefly. Ephesus was one of the most important cities in the Roman Empire and the leading city of Asia Minor. It was a port city and cross roads for both land and sea commerce. It boasted a magnificent temple dedicated to the goddess Diana. Paul visited the synagogue there and shared the gospel, but he could not stay very long. He left Priscilla and Aquila in Ephesus and returned to Syria. Then, on his third journey, went overland to Ephesus. Acts 19 is about his exciting and controversial ministry in Ephesus. He remained in Ephesus for three years and this time was a pivotal point in his mission life.

First, twelve disciples in the hall of Tyrannus (1-10)

During Paul's absence a charismatic Christian Jew from Alexandria named Apollos, came to Ephesus and preached about Jesus in the synagogue. His preaching was factually accurate, but he did not have a personal relationship with Jesus. He knew about repentance and John's baptism, but he didn't know about the work of the Holy Spirit; he didn't know about forgiveness and he didn't know Jesus. Priscilla and Aquila didn't fight with him. They invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately. He humbly accepted their instruction. Then, he moved on to Corinth. Because of Aquila and Priscilla's introduction, he was welcomed in Corinth and had a fruitful ministry there. Paul once said of him, "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow." (1Co 3:6)

Paul arrived in Ephesus after Apollos had left. He found 12 disciples of Jesus who had learned from Apollos. They had repented, but they only had received John's baptism. They had not received the Holy Spirit, so they did not know Jesus personally. They were baptized with the Holy Spirit and continued to grow in the word of God. At first, Paul preached the kingdom of God in the synagogue, but after about 3 months, some of the Jews in the synagogue rejected the gospel and publicly maligned the "Way." The Way was an early name for Christianity, for those who followed Jesus. The Christian faith is not just belief in certain doctrines and teachings. It is a way of life. Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life." Following Jesus is a new way of life. The Romans knew followers of Jesus by this name. Paul had once conducted a "search and destroy" mission against those who belonged to the Way. Here in Ephesus Paul made disciples and trained them to walk in the way of Jesus.

Verse 9-10 say, "But some of them (the Jews) became obstinate; they refused to believe and publicly maligned the Way. So Paul left them. He took the disciples with him and had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus." Paul continued his Bible teaching, focusing on the twelve disciples, for two years. During that time, all of Asia Minor was pioneered. "All the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord." Especially, a man named Ephphras was converted and went to pioneer the church in Colossae. People traveled through Ephesus from all over the world to the cities of Asia Minor. In Revelations, John reports on the 7 churches that were possibly the fruit of this ministry. In addition to Ephesus and Colossae, there were Laodicia, Smyrna, Sardis, Thyatira, Philadelphia, Pergamum.

When Paul focused on teaching the Bible and raising several disciples, God worked mightily. People were healed and evil spirits were cast out. Paul became so popular that some Jews went around trying to cast out demons in “the name of Jesus whom Paul preaches.” Once, the seven sons of a Jewish priest named Sceva tried to do this and the man with the evil spirit whom they were trying to help jumped on them and beat them all up, saying, “I know Jesus and I know Paul, but who are you?” After this, the fear of God filled the hearts of many people. They repented and had a big book-burning. They burnt up all kinds of magic books and books telling how to practice sorcery. The word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power.

Paul was also changed. He realized that God was working in the Gentile world. His missionary vision was kindled. God wanted to bring the whole world to the feet of Jesus the Savior. God had a great redemptive plan which he was working out on the stage of history. Paul wanted the church to catch this vision, and he himself wanted to press on to unreached territories. So he made a crucial decision. He would go to Jerusalem to kindle world mission vision in the Jewish Christians there. They needed to know God’s heart for the world. Then, he would go to Rome, establish a strategic base for world mission there and go on to Spain—the ends of the earth. This was Jesus’ direction to his disciples in Acts 1:8. (See Acts 19:21) To prepare for this visit to Jerusalem he sent Timothy and Erastus to Macedonia. He would join them and go on to Corinth, visiting the churches in Greece. (Acts 20:1-5) His purpose becomes clear when we look at Romans 15:23-33. He shares with the Romans his plan to take an offering from the Gentile churches to relieve the suffering saints of Jerusalem. He also would take some Gentile converts who could testify to the grace of God among the Gentile churches. In this way, he would share world mission vision with the church in Jerusalem. He knew that this plan was fraught with danger, so he asked prayer support from Rome. He prayed that God might protect him from the unbelievers in Judea and that his service for the saints in Jerusalem might be accepted. Then, God willing, he would go on to Rome. It turned out that his worst fears were realized, but that’s another story—and he did get to Rome, but in chains.

In Ephesus, the devil was hard at work to destroy the tiny, growing church. A silversmith named Demetrius found that as people were converted to faith in Jesus they quit buying the silver idols he made. It was a direct threat to his profitable business. So he stirred up the city to oppose Paul. He preyed on the pride and loyalty of the people to the goddess, Artemis. Artemis was also called Diana. She was called the “silver goddess” and the goddess of the hunt. The temple to Artemis in Ephesus was magnificent. It was the pride of the Ephesians. Demetrius stirred up a riot. But it was quelled by the city clerk, who did not want a riot to disturb the city and incur the wrath of Rome. After this, Paul sent for the disciples, encouraged them, said good-bye and left for Macedonia. He left Ephesus with world mission vision in his heart and a strategy and plan for reaching the whole world with the gospel of Jesus Christ. “After all this had happened, Paul decided to go to Jerusalem, passing through Macedonia and Achaia.’ After I have been there, he said, ‘I must visit Rome also.’”