

**PROCLAIMING THE WORD
IN EPHESUS**

ACTS 18:19 - 21:14

¹⁹When they reached Ephesus, he left them there, but first he himself went into the synagogue and had a discussion with the Jews.

²⁰When they asked him to stay longer, he declined; ²¹but on taking leave of them, he said, 'I will return to you, if God wills.'

Then he set sail from Ephesus.

²²When he had landed at Caesarea, he went up to Jerusalem and greeted the church,

and then went down to Antioch.

²³After spending some time there he departed

and went from place to place through the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples.

[After introducing Apollos - see the following passage - Luke continues]

¹Paul passed through the interior regions and came to Ephesus.

Accompanied by Aquila and Priscilla, Paul makes the four hundred kilometre sea voyage across the Aegean and arrives in Ephesus, the main city of the Roman province of Asia. Josephus tells us that there were five hundred cities in the province. Allowing for his tendency towards exaggeration, we can still imagine 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' (16:6). Remembering this, when he is invited to return, he replies: 'I will return to you, if God wills'.

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 arrived in Ephesus just before the winter of 52AD.

On the overland journey from Antioch to Ephesus, Luke mentions only 'the region of Galatia and Phrygia', probably referring to the part of Phrygia which was in the province of Galatia. Paul had first visited this area in 47AD, and again in 49AD on the journey which took him, under the guidance of the Spirit, to Troas and on to Macedonia (see 16:6).

Map 6 : Ephesus to Antioch and back



²⁴Now there came to Ephesus a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria. He was an eloquent man, well-versed in the Scriptures.

²⁵He had been instructed in the Way of the Lord; and he spoke with burning enthusiasm and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John.

²⁶He 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.

²⁷And when he wished to cross over to Achaia, 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, ²⁸for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the Scriptures that the Messiah is Jesus.

Luke is about to recount a most fruitful period in Paul's mission to the Gentiles: the three years spent in Ephesus, from the closing months of 52 to 55AD. Before doing so he introduces us to a Jewish convert from Alexandria, the second largest city in the Roman empire and well-known as a seat of Jewish learning. The Greek version of the Hebrew Scriptures, the Septuagint, had its origin there. Apollos (a distinctively Egyptian form of Apollonius) is described by Luke as 'an eloquent man, well-versed in the Scriptures'.

As a Jew he had been instructed in the 'Way of the Lord'. This term well describes the Jewish Torah in which is found the way in which the Lord has acted in the history of Israel, and also the way in which God's chosen people are to respond to God's love. Luke is speaking of the fulfilment of the Torah 'in the things concerning Jesus'. Apollos knew of the 'baptism of John'. It was John's vocation 'to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins' (Luke 1:77). He proclaimed 'a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins' (Luke 3:3). Apollos knew of this and knew also that John pointed the way to Jesus.

Paul had visited the synagogue in Ephesus on his way to Antioch (see 18:19), and as a result of the discussion which he had there, he was invited back. Luke presents Apollos as filling in the time of waiting, preparing the Jews, like John the Baptist, for the full message of life which Paul will bring them. His ministry is powerfully sustained by the Holy Spirit, for he speaks 'with burning enthusiasm' and 'boldly', though Paul's disciples, Aquila and Priscilla (see 18:2,18), are needed to 'explain the Way of God to him more accurately', which includes introducing him to the baptism of the Holy Spirit (see Luke 3:16) which is the gift of the risen Lord.

With the encouragement and recommendation of the community in Ephesus, Apollos goes to Corinth, where, empowered by the Spirit of Jesus, he engages the Jews in debate, 'showing by the Scriptures that the Messiah is Jesus'. This was the essence of Paul's message to the Jews in Damascus (see 9:22), in Thessalonica (see 17:3), and in Corinth (see 18:5). Paul speaks of Apollos in a letter written from Ephesus to Corinth (see 1 Corinthians 1:12; 3:4-6,22; 16:12; see also Titus 3:13).

It seems that Paul did not approach Ephesus through the Lycus valley. This would account for his not having visited Colossae (see Colossians 2:1). When he arrives again in Ephesus, he ‘found some disciples’. Though disciples of Jesus, they have obviously not been in contact with Aquila and Priscilla or the Christian community in Ephesus. Perhaps they have only just arrived. Luke gives us few details. His only interest is to point out that they have ‘not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit’. Perhaps they encountered Jesus during his public ministry and left Jerusalem before his death and resurrection. Certainly they cannot have been present at Pentecost. Or perhaps, like Apollos, they had been converted to Jesus but not fully instructed. Like him they ‘knew only the baptism of John’ (18:25).

John was the last of the prophets, and his baptism was the culmination of the Old Testament:

The law and the prophets were in effect until John came; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is proclaimed.

– Luke 16:16

Paul repeats the teaching about the role of John which he gave at Antioch in Pisidia (see 13:24; also 1:5; 11:16; 18:25), and the disciples are ‘baptised in the name of Jesus’. Then Paul lays hands on them, as the two apostles, Peter and John, had done to the newly baptised Samaritans (see 8:17), and ‘the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied’. (On the relationship between baptism and the receiving of the Holy Spirit, see commentary on 1:5.) They receive the same outpouring which the twelve received at Pentecost (see 2:4), the gift promised to the Jewish crowd (see 2:28), the gift received by the Jerusalem community in prayer (see 4:31), by the Samaritan converts (see 8:17), and by Cornelius and his family and friends in Caesarea (see 10:44-46; 11:17; 15:8).

Luke points out that there were ‘twelve’ of them. The link with the twelve apostles is obvious. It seems to point to their being Jews, and to their being chosen by the risen Jesus to carry out the mission of a restored Israel, by taking their part in proclaiming the news of God’s saving love to the Gentile world.

¹While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul passed through the interior regions and came to Ephesus, where he found some disciples.

²He 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.’

³Then he said, ‘Into what then were you baptised?’ They answered, ‘Into John’s baptism.’

⁴Paul 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.’

⁵On hearing this, they were baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus.

⁶When Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied — ⁷al-together there were about twelve of them.

⁸He entered the synagogue and for three months spoke out boldly, and argued persuasively about the kingdom of God.

⁹When 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.

¹⁰This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia, both Jews and Greeks, heard the word of the Lord.

We have been hearing of John the Baptist, first with Apollos ‘speaking boldly in the synagogue’(18:26), and then with the twelve disciples encountered by Paul on his arrival (see 19:1-3). The way has been prepared for Jesus who is present in Paul, speaking out ‘boldly’, and ‘arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God’. Paul comes up against stubborn rejection, not for the first time. We think of Antioch in Pisidia. On that occasion Paul declared:

It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken first to you. Since you reject it and judge yourselves to be unworthy of eternal life, we are now turning to the Gentiles.

– Acts 13:46

He came up against opposition in Iconium (see 14:2), Thessalonica (see 17:5) and Corinth (see 18:6). There is something different, however, about what happens in Ephesus. While he does not stop speaking to Jews, this is the last time we hear of him speaking in a synagogue. He takes his disciples with him and for two years speaks to all and sundry in a public lecture hall.

Luke does not go into details, but 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 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’(1Corinthians 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 20:17ff). We should also recall that the Apocalypse, composed towards the end of the first century, is addressed to seven churches in the province of Asia. 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 2Corinthians 12:18) and Archippus (see Colossians 4:17; Philemon verse two), as, it seems, was Apollos (1Corinthians 16:12).

All agree that it is from Ephesus that Paul wrote the First Letter to the Corinthians. Many scholars suggest Ephesus as the most probable place from which he wrote to Philemon and to the Colossians. Some hold the opinion that Galatians, too, was written in Ephesus, though in this commentary we are following the opinion of those who hold that it is more likely to have been composed from Antioch prior to the Jerusalem Assembly.

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' (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 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' (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' (2Corinthians 12:12; see Romans 15:18-19).

One cannot use Jesus' name as a magic incantation. It is true that 'everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved' (2:21; see 4:12). However, to call on the Lord's name is humbly to recognise one's need. It is also to listen for the Lord's response, and to be resolved to do his will. It is to allow his Spirit to transform one's whole being: thoughts, feelings, desires, decisions, actions, and relationships. Healing may not remove physical weakness, sickness, or death, for through these, too, God's power can be manifest. However, at times the saving effect of grace can be such as to be manifested in miraculous physical and psychological healing. When the seven sons of an itinerant Jewish exorcist, a high priest in the art of magic, try to use Jesus' name, they are powerless over an evil spirit and are left 'naked and wounded'.

¹¹God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, ¹²so 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.

¹³Then 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.' ¹⁴Seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva were doing this.

¹⁵But the evil spirit said to them in reply, 'Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?'

¹⁶Then 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.

¹⁷When this became known to all residents of Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks, everyone was awe-struck; and the name of the Lord Jesus was praised.

¹⁸Also many of those who became believers confessed and disclosed their practices. ¹⁹A 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.

²⁰So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed.

²¹Now after these things had been accomplished, Paul resolved in the Spirit to go through Macedonia and Achaia, and then to go on to Jerusalem.

He said, 'After I have gone there, I must also see Rome.'

²²So he sent two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, to Macedonia, while he himself stayed for some time longer in Asia.

Once again Luke stresses the all-encompassing scope of divine grace. The healing grace of the risen Jesus becomes known to 'all the residents of Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks', and 'everyone was awestruck'. The powerful presence and action of God is manifest to all, and their response mirrors that of the residents of Jerusalem: 'Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles'(2:43). As is his custom, Luke concludes his account of the ministry of Paul in Ephesus with a summary statement of the victorious growth of the word: 'the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed'(compare 6:7; 12:24).

God has accomplished his design for Paul in the east. A critical moment has come in Paul's life and ministry. 'When the days drew near for Jesus to be taken up', Luke tells us that 'he set his face to go to Jerusalem' (Luke 9:51). So it is with Paul. Just as Jesus 'sent messengers ahead of him'(Luke 9:52), so does Paul. Jesus told his disciples that he was 'going up to Jerusalem' so that:

everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished. For he will be handed over to the Gentiles; and he will be mocked and insulted and spat upon. After they have flogged him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise again.

– Luke 18:31-33

Paul is 'going to Jerusalem'(see 21:12,15) where he will share in the paschal mystery of Jesus (see 21:11). We find out later that he is eager to be in Jerusalem for Pentecost (see 20:16). On his way, following the drawing of Jesus' Spirit, he will revisit the communities in Macedonia and Achaia, and then he 'must also see Rome'. He knows that this is the design of the risen Jesus for him. It will be confirmed later (see 23:11; 27:24).

Timothy has been with Paul now for six years (see 16:1). This is the only time Luke mentions Erastus.

One of Luke's favourite themes in his gospel is that of the dangers attached to wealth. If we seek security in material possessions, our longing for God will be suffocated. Our soul will die. This takes us back to the first temptation faced by Jesus in the wilderness. We cannot meet our real needs by using our power to acquire possessions. 'One does not live by bread alone' (Luke 4:4). It is to God that we must look for our 'daily bread' (Luke 11:3). We 'cannot serve God and wealth' (Luke 16:13).

Luke has just demonstrated the power of God's saving word bringing healing to the poor (see 19:11-12) and liberating people from superstition (see 19:19). More and more people throughout Asia (see 19:10) are praising the name of the Lord Jesus (see 19:17). Now we witness the reaction of those whose prosperity is being threatened by 'the Way' (19:9). We saw a small example of this in Philippi (see 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), one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. 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.

Jesus commanded his disciples to give the hungry 'something to eat' (Luke 9:13). He told them: 'when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind' (Luke 14:13). The rich man was condemned, not for doing harm to Lazarus, but for ignoring him (see Luke 16:26). The word proclaimed by Paul challenges a system which attempts to build prosperity on the worship of idols, whatever form they may take. What we do will bring true prosperity only if we are open to divine grace. If we worship what our own hands have made, we will experience only the confusion, turmoil, injustice and lack of true freedom that is rife in Ephesus.

²³About that time no little disturbance broke out concerning the Way. ²⁴A man named Demetrius, a silversmith who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought no little business to the artisans. ²⁵These he gathered together, with the workers of the same trade, and said, 'Men, you know that we get our wealth from this business. ²⁶You 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. ²⁷And 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.'

²⁸When they heard this, they were enraged and shouted, 'Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!' ²⁹The city was filled with the confusion; and people rushed together to the theatre, dragging with them Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians who were Paul's travel companions.

³⁰Paul wished to go into the crowd, but the disciples would not let him; ³¹even some officials of the province of Asia, who were friendly to him, sent him a message urging him not to venture into the theatre.

³²Meanwhile, some were shouting one thing, some another; for the assembly was in confusion, and most of them did not know why they had come together.

³³Some 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. ³⁴But when they recognized that he was a Jew, for about two hours all of them shouted in unison, 'Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!'

God has brought Paul's mission in Asia to its conclusion (see 19:21). It is obvious that Paul is not at the centre of attention here. He has decided to move on, and he remains offstage during the tumult. Luke's interest is in the clash between Christianity and a religious system that is based on what human beings do, rather than on what God does, and that is inextricably bound to financial interests that are self-serving.

Ephesus boasted a theatre that could hold twenty-four thousand spectators. It was the stage for theatrical spectacles, especially during the spring festival in honour of Artemis. Gaius and Aristarchus are dragged into the theatre. We find out later that Gaius is from Derbe (near Philippi). Aristarchus is from Thessalonica (see 20:4; see Colossians 4:10; Philemon 24).

The assembly (Greek: *ekklēsia*) is in a state of confusion. The Jews push Alexander forward, presumably to distance the Jewish community from Paul and his followers. In any case he makes no impression.

The chief executive officer in Ephesus had the official title *grammateus*, used here by Luke (and not well translated as ‘town clerk’). He recalls with pride the title of ‘temple keeper’ (Greek: *neōkoros*) enjoyed by Ephesus, and refers to the archaic sacred image traditionally acclaimed as having fallen from heaven. He manages to restore some semblance of order, by demanding that the matter be brought before the proconsuls when they held court in Ephesus. The plural ‘proconsuls’ may be a reference to the unusual situation in Asia at the time. During the chaos that followed on the murder of the proconsul of Asia, Julius Silanus, in late 54AD, the province was ruled jointly by two proconsuls.

The point that Luke wishes to underline throughout this scene is that being a Christian does not in itself constitute a crime in Roman law.

³⁵But when the town clerk 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? ³⁶Since these things cannot be denied, you ought to be quiet and do nothing rash. ³⁷You have brought these men here who are neither temple robbers nor blasphemers of our goddess. ³⁸If 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. ³⁹If there is anything further you want to know, it must be settled in the regular assembly. ⁴⁰For we are in danger of being charged with rioting today, since there is no cause that we can give to justify this commotion.’ ⁴¹When he had said this, he dismissed the assembly.

¹After the uproar had ceased, Paul sent for the disciples; and after encouraging them and saying farewell, he left for Macedonia.

In his brief account of Paul's three-year stay in Ephesus, Luke says little of the problems faced by Paul or of his sufferings there. The riot that has just been described hardly affected Paul personally, and, apart from the rejection which he experienced in the synagogue (see 19:9), his work seems to have gone from success to success. That there were problems within the community is hinted at in a remark which Paul will make a little later to the elders of the Ephesus church. He is warning them about future problems, but his 'tears' hint at present difficulties:

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

Though Luke wishes to focus on the power of the word, on its success and on the challenge it poses for the economic system prevailing in the empire, from Paul's own writings we know that he went through times of extreme difficulty during these years. In his first letter to the Corinthians, composed in Ephesus, he is arguing against those who deny the resurrection. If there is no resurrection, says Paul 'why are we putting ourselves in danger every hour? ... If with merely human hopes I fought with wild animals at Ephesus, what would I have gained by it? (1Corinthians 15:30,32). Whatever form these 'wild animals' took, it doesn't sound very pleasant.

Elsewhere, he speaks of his many imprisonments, his countless floggings and of his being often near death. He speaks of 'danger from rivers, danger from bandits, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers and sisters' (2Corinthians 11:23-26). It is hard to imagine that none of this happened during his three years in Ephesus. In his First Letter to the Corinthians 16:9, Paul speaks of his 'many adversaries', and in his so-called Second Letter written from Macedonia soon after Paul's departure from Ephesus, he writes:

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.

– 2Corinthians 1:8

Though we have no evidence that Paul was in prison during this period, there are those who, with good reasons, suggest that Ephesus is the most likely place from which he wrote some of his letters from prison.

Luke has already told us that when Paul discerned that it was time to leave Ephesus and go to Jerusalem, he ‘resolved in the Spirit to go through Macedonia and Achaia’ (19:21). From Paul’s own writing, we know that he went first to Troas. It was there that he received the call some six years previously to go over to Macedonia (see Acts 16:9-10). However, as he wrote to the Corinthians:

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.

– 2Corinthians 2:12-13

We can assume that Paul revisited Philippi, Thessalonica and Beroea (for his first visit, see 16:11 - 17:13). Luke wants us to see Paul’s journey to Jerusalem as his following in the footsteps of Jesus who went up to Jerusalem to undergo his passion. From Paul’s so-called Second Letter to the Corinthians, composed in Macedonia on his way to Corinth, we find another reason for his intended visit to Jerusalem. He is taking up to Jerusalem a collection which he has been organising throughout the Gentile Churches for the needy Christians in Judea (see 2Corinthians 8-9; see also Romans 15:25-28; see Acts 24:17). Paul wants this collection to be a sign of the communion between the Jewish and the Gentile communities.

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). Paul arrives in Corinth towards the end of 56AD. To this point Luke has used the formal provincial name, Achaia (18:12,27; 19:21). Here he uses an informal territorial description, referring in fact to southern ‘Greece’. Paul spends the winter of 56-57AD in Corinth. At last he is able to fulfil a promise which he had made to the Corinthians some two years earlier in a letter written from Ephesus:

I will visit you after passing through Macedonia — for I intend to pass through Macedonia — and perhaps I will stay with you or even spend the winter, so that you may send me on my way, wherever I go. I do not want to see you now just in passing, for I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits.

– 1Corinthians 16:5-7

While wintering at Corinth, Paul writes his Letter to the Romans. He is also preparing himself for his arrival in Jerusalem, so that he can present his gospel to the Jerusalem community and receive their blessing on his journey to Rome, as he had received it before setting out on the mission which he has just now completed (see 15:4,12).

2When he had gone through those regions and had given the believers much encouragement, he came to Greece, 3where he stayed for three months.

He was about to set sail for Syria when a plot was made against him by the Jews, and so he decided to return through Macedonia.

Map 7. Ephesus to Corinth to Miletus



The seven people mentioned here by Luke represent the fruit of his missionary labours. They may also be accompanying Paul as representatives of the various Gentile churches who are contributing to the collection which Paul has been organising for the needy communities in Judea (see 24:17). The Western text informs us that the Derbe mentioned here is in the vicinity of Philippi. Aristarchus and Gaius have already been mentioned by Luke as the two who were dragged by the mob into the theatre in Ephesus (see 19:29). We will meet Aristarchus again when he is a fellow prisoner with Paul on the sea voyage to Rome (see 27:2). He is mentioned as Paul's fellow prisoner in the letter to the Colossians 4:10, and as his fellow worker in Philemon 24. Tychicus, who is mentioned by Paul in Colossians 4:7 and Ephesians 6:21, is from Asia, as is Trophimus, who is with Paul in Jerusalem (see 21:29), and who is mentioned in what appears to be Paul's final letter as being in Miletus (see 2Timothy 4:20).

4He was accompanied by Sopater son of Pyrrhus from Beroea, by Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica, by Gaius from Derbe, and by Timothy, as well as by Tychicus and Trophimus from Asia.

Timothy first joined Paul in Lystra (see 16:1). He accompanied Paul to Philippi, Thessalonica and Beroea, where he remained with Silas while Paul went on to Athens (see 17:14). On Paul's instructions he went back to Thessalonica (see 1Thessalonians 3:2) and then rejoined Paul in Corinth (see 18:5). Both letters written from Corinth to Thessalonica bear his name.

He was with Paul during Paul's three-year mission in Ephesus. In his First Letter to the Corinthians, written from Ephesus, Paul mentions that he has sent Timothy, 'my beloved and faithful child in the Lord' to Corinth (4:17). He asks the Corinthians to welcome him and to send him back to Paul at Ephesus (16:10). Before leaving Ephesus, Paul sent Timothy on ahead to Macedonia (see 19:22), and they were together in Macedonia when Paul wrote his Second Letter to the Corinthians (see 2Corinthians 1:1). Timothy journeyed with Paul from Philippi to Corinth and was in Corinth with Paul when the letter to the Romans was written in early 57AD. The last time we hear of him in Acts, is in this present text in which he is named as one of the seven who accompany Paul on his journey from Corinth to Macedonia.

The letters to Philemon and to the Colossians are addressed from Paul and Timothy, and in his letter to the Philippians Paul mentions that Timothy is with him (1:1), and that he hopes to send Timothy to them (2:19): 'I have no one like him ... His worth you know, how like a son with a father he has served with me in the work of the gospel' (Philippians 2:20,22). We also have two letters written to him by Paul which belong to the period after the conclusion of his Roman detention, and so after the period covered by *Acts*.

⁵They went ahead and were waiting for us in Troas; ⁶but we sailed from Philippi after the days of Unleavened Bread, and in five days we joined them in Troas, where we stayed for seven days.

⁷On the first day of the week, when we met to break bread, Paul was holding a discussion with them; since he intended to leave the next day, he continued speaking until midnight.

⁸There were many lamps in the room upstairs where we were meeting. ⁹A young man named Eutychus, who was sitting in the window, began to sink off into a deep sleep while Paul talked still longer. Overcome by sleep, he fell to the ground three floors below and was picked up dead.

¹⁰But Paul went down, and bending over him took him in his arms, and said, 'Do not be alarmed, for his life is in him.'

¹¹Then Paul went upstairs, and after he had broken bread and eaten, he continued to converse with them until dawn; then he left.

¹²Meanwhile they had taken the boy away alive and were not a little comforted.

The first time we heard the narrative in the first person was when 'we' crossed from Troas to Philippi (see 16:10). Luke seems to have stayed on in Philippi when Paul departed (compare Acts 16:16-17 and 16:40). It is from Philippi seven years later that Luke once again finds himself with Paul and he is with him now till the end of *Acts*.

Paul would have liked to have stayed on in Troas on his way to Corinth (see 2Corinthians 2:12-13). He can now stay for five days. Everything about this scene speaks of Easter and the commemoration of Jesus' passion, death and resurrection. Luke speaks of the 'days of Unleavened Bread' (see 12:3; also Luke 22:7). He speaks of 'the first day of the week' (see Luke 24:1; 1Corinthians 16:2). He speaks of a gathering 'to break bread' (see 2:42,46; 27:35; also Luke 22:19; 24:30,35). He speaks of a young man who falls, seemingly to his death, and of Paul who goes down and embraces him, assuring the others that 'his life is in him'. We think of Elijah (see 1Kings 17:21) and Elisha (see 2Kings 4:34-35). Above all we think of Peter in Joppa (see 9:36-42).

Luke's description of the meal which Paul shared with the community in Troas reminds us of Paul's words to the Corinthians:

I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.'

– 1Corinthians 11:23-24

Paul was speaking about the whole life of a disciple. Our 'body', that is to say, the way we spend our time and energy, including all the ways in which we relate to the world and to others, is to be like the body of Jesus: given, however broken, as a gift of self-giving love. Here at Troas, this communal sharing is expressed in the intimacy of table fellowship in which the risen Jesus continues to give himself to his assembled disciples, to nurture, strengthen and encourage them. The communion continues throughout the night, ending only with the dawn.

It was not uncommon for people to choose to go overland from Troas to Assos, cutting across the narrow peninsula. Paul rejoins the ship at Assos, and they head south for Miletus, a sea voyage of some three hundred kilometres, calling in on the way at the islands of Lesbos (Mitylene), Chios and Samos.

Paul is in a hurry. He had intended to leave Corinth by ship. Having to head north has eaten into his time and he is 'eager to be in Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost'. He sends a message for the elders of the church of Ephesus to meet him at Miletus. It would appear that he has organised leadership in the community, as he did when on his initial missionary journey with Barnabas (see 14:23), in ways borrowed from synagogue practice.

In summing up Paul's ministry in Asia, Luke draws out the parallels between Paul and Jesus. In his farewell discourse, Jesus, too, spoke of his 'trials' (see Luke 22:28), and of himself as being among the apostles 'as one who serves' (Luke 22:27).

Paul speaks also of his testimony 'to both Jews and Greeks', a testimony which is 'about repentance towards God' (see 5:31; 11:18), and 'faith toward our Lord Jesus' (see 3:16; 14:23.27; 15:11; 16:31; 19:4).

It is noteworthy that Luke speaks here of the specifically Christian virtue of 'humility' (Greek: *tapeinophrosunē*). Sharing in the humility of the heart of Jesus, Christians are delighted to think of themselves in a lowly way, because of the confidence of knowing that, with Jesus, we have God as our Father. Paul is totally dependent on God, and pleased to be so because God is love. There is no place for self-reliance.

¹³We went ahead to the ship and set sail for Assos, intending to take Paul on board there; for he had made this arrangement, intending to go by land himself.

¹⁴When he met us in Assos, we took him on board and went to Mitylene.

¹⁵We sailed from there, and on the following day we arrived opposite Chios.

The next day we touched at Samos, and the day after that we came to Miletus.

¹⁶For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus, so that he might not have to spend time in Asia;

he was eager to be in Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost.

¹⁷From Miletus he sent a message to Ephesus, asking the elders of the church to meet him.

¹⁸When they came to him, he said to them: 'You yourselves know how I lived among you the entire time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, ¹⁹servng the Lord with all humility and with tears, enduring the trials that came to me through the plots of the Jews. ²⁰I did not shrink from doing anything helpful, proclaiming the message to you and teaching you publicly and from house to house, ²¹as I testified to both Jews and Greeks about repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus.

²²And now, as a captive to the Spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, ²³except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and persecutions are waiting for me. ²⁴But I do not count my life of any value to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the good news of God's grace.

Paul speaks as one who is a 'captive to the Spirit'. This is only the third time that Luke has spoken of people being 'bound' (Greek: *deō*). The first was when he was referring to the disciples whom Paul bound and brought before the chief priests prior to his conversion (see 9:2,14,21). The second was when Peter was thrown into prison (see 12:6). In letters written from prison, Paul sees his chains as binding him to his risen Lord. He speaks of himself as a 'prisoner of Christ Jesus' (Philemon 1; Ephesians 3:1), and as 'our Lord's prisoner' (2Timothy 1:8). Again and again he refers to himself as the 'slave of Christ' (Galatians 1:10), bound body and soul to the one to whom he has committed his life: a prisoner of love.

It is the Spirit of Jesus who has been guiding him throughout his ministry, and now is leading him in the footsteps of his Master who freely 'set his face to go to Jerusalem' (Luke 9:51). Paul does not know what is to happen to him in Jerusalem, except that he will follow his Master along the road of persecution and suffering (see Luke 18:31-32).

When Paul says: 'I do not count my life of any value to myself', we think of his words written to the Galatians some years earlier:

I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

– Galatians 2:19-20

To the community in Philippi he writes: 'To me, living is Christ and dying is gain' (Philippians 1:21). Paul's only desire is to finish his course. We recall his words when he is facing death in Rome: 'I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith' (2Timothy 4:7). Paul speaks of his ministry as being one of 'reconciliation' (2Corinthians 5:18). The 'good news of God's grace' is that God's judgment, exercised through Jesus, is not one of condemnation, but of pardon (see 10:42-43). Paul is continuing the ministry of Jesus, who declared, quoting Isaiah:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.

– Luke 4:18-19

Paul is convinced that he will not return. He has been among them ‘proclaiming the kingdom’(compare 19:8), demonstrating in word and deed the presence and activity of God’s amazing love and what happens when we welcome that love into our lives. This was the subject of Jesus’ whole life and ministry, prior to his death (see Luke 8:1; 16:16) and after (see 1:3). It was to proclaim this kingdom that Jesus sent out his apostles (see Luke 9:2,60), and it is for the coming of this kingdom that we are to pray (see Luke 11:1).

Paul has ‘declared the whole purpose of God’. Peter spoke of this purpose in relation to Jesus’ crucifixion (see 2:23). The Jerusalem community prayed that God’s purpose would be fulfilled (see 4:28). Let us listen to Paul as he writes of God’s purpose in a letter written for the Gentile communities which he had founded:

The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ ... destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, so that we [the Jews], who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. In him you [the Gentiles] also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God’s own people, to the praise of his glory.

– Ephesians 1:3-14

Paul’s responsibility is over. It must be taken up now by the elders of the church.

²⁵And now I know that none of you, among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom, will ever see my face again. ²⁶Therefore I declare to you this day that I am not responsible for the blood of any of you, ²⁷for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God.

²⁸Keep watch over yourselves and over all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God that he obtained with the blood of his own Son.

The elders must look to their own lives. We recall Jesus warning his disciples to take care lest they get caught up in the same kind of hypocrisy that characterised some of the Pharisees (see Luke 12:1). He told them of their responsibility to correct members of the community who sinned, and if they repented to be sure to forgive them (see Luke 17:3). He also warned them: ‘Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life’ (Luke 21:34).

Besides looking to their own lives, they are to take care to carry out the responsibilities placed on them by the Holy Spirit. In their position as elders in the church, they are overseers and shepherds of the flock. The word ‘overseer’ (Greek: *episkopos*) was to become the title for the person with overall organisational responsibility for the local church (our word ‘bishop’ derives from it). Though this is the only time Luke uses *episkopos* he has spoken of God’s *episkopē* (see Luke 19:44), and of the ministry of *episkopē* entrusted to the apostles (see 1:20). We recall God’s warning to Ezekiel to whom he had given the responsibility to keep his eyes on (Greek: *skopos*) the community:

Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me. If I say to the wicked, ‘You shall surely die,’ and you give them no warning ... their blood I will require at your hand. But if you warn the wicked, and they do not turn from their wickedness ... you will have saved your life.

– Ezekiel 3:17-29

Those responsible for religious leadership in the community of Israel are frequently spoken of as shepherds (‘pastors’). God promised through Jeremiah: ‘I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding’ (Jeremiah 3:15); and warns: ‘Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture’ (Jeremiah 23:1). Ezekiel chapter thirty-four develops the image at some length. Paul, too, speaking of the various gifts poured out over the church by the risen Jesus, includes the gift of ‘pastors’ (Ephesians 4:11).

Paul reminds the elders, whose ministry comes from the Holy Spirit, that the church is precious to God: it cost God ‘the blood of his own Son’, the ‘beloved Son’ sent by the Father to reveal his love (see Luke 20:13). We recall Jesus’ words at the last supper: ‘This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood’ (Luke 22:20). As Paul wrote to the Colossians: ‘through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross’ (Colossians 1:20).

In Jesus' farewell discourse to his disciples the night before his death, he spoke of the trials which they had been through together and spoke of their responsibilities:

You are those who have stood by me in my trials; and I confer on you, just as my Father has conferred on me, a kingdom, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

– Luke 22:28-30

Earlier he had said: 'I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves' (Luke 10:3). Paul warns the Christians of Colossae:

See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ.

– Colossians 2:8

As early as his letter to the Galatians he was forced to write:

If anyone proclaims to you a gospel contrary to what you received, let that one be accursed.

– Galatians 1:9

As servants of the Lord, the elders are to be 'alert' (see Luke 12:37). As overseers, it is their responsibility to unmask false teachers, not only by their teaching but, more importantly, as Paul will add in the following sentences, by the example of their lives, given over entirely to grace. Paul's concerns about false teaching find expression in his letters (see Colossians 2:8; Ephesians 5:6; 1 Timothy 1:19-20; 4:1-3; 2 Timothy 1:15).

Just as Jesus commended his life into his Father's hands (see Luke 23:46), so Paul commends the elders to God. Note that he does not entrust the word to the elders; rather, he entrusts the elders to the word, for the word is the word of the risen Lord. It is not only a 'message'. It is the very fount of life.

Paul's final remark is made clearer later when he speaks of the mission given him by the risen Jesus, who said to him:

I am sending you to the Gentiles to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.

– Acts 26:17-18

²⁹I know that after I have gone, savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.

³⁰Some even from your own group will come distorting the truth in order to entice the disciples to follow them.

³¹Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to warn everyone with tears.

³²And now I commend you to God and to the message of his grace, a message that is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all who are sanctified.

³³**I coveted no one's silver or gold or clothing.**

³⁴**You know for yourselves that I worked with my own hands to support myself and my companions.**

³⁵**In all this I have given you an example that by such work we must support the weak, remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, for he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'**

³⁶**When he had finished speaking, he knelt down with them all and prayed.**

³⁷**There was much weeping among them all; they embraced Paul and kissed him,**

³⁸**grieving especially because of what he had said, that they would not see him again.**

Then they brought him to the ship.

In the narrative concerning Ananias and Sapphira, Luke alludes to the story of Achan, who was the first to break the covenant upon entry into the promised land. He was seduced by silver, gold and costly clothing (see 5:1-11; Joshua 7:16-26). Paul can claim to have been faithful to the covenant which he has with the risen Lord, even to working with his own hands to support himself and his companions.

Luke has already referred to Paul working with Aquila and Priscilla in Corinth in their trade as tent makers (see 18:3). Writing back to Thessalonica from Corinth, Paul can claim: 'we worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God' (1 Thessalonians 2:9; see also 1 Corinthians 4:12).

Like Paul, the elders are to work also in order to be able to care for the needy. This last is not simply an exhortation. It is something which we *must* do according to the command of Jesus himself who was among us 'as one who serves' (Luke 22:27):

Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again ... do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return ... give.

– Luke 6:30,35,38

Paul ends on this note, and, like Jesus in his agony (see Luke 22:41), he kneels and prays. The weeping recalls the weeping of the women as Jesus carries his cross to Calvary (see Luke 23:28). Expecting that they will not see him again, with heavy hearts they embrace and kiss him. He boards the ship which will take him to Caesarea and Jerusalem.

Luke has been with Paul since Philippi (20:6). He is with Paul as they stop over at the island of Cos, and then at Rhodes. Their next stop is at Patara, a port for the mainland province of Licia. Hadrian will have a granary built there. Here they board a larger vessel for the six hundred fifty kilometres voyage in open sea to Phoenicia. They pass to the south of Cyprus and put ashore at Tyre.

While the ship is unloading its cargo, Paul takes the occasion to visit the Christian community there. Once again the Holy Spirit speaks of the suffering that awaits him. The community take this as a warning for Paul not to go to Jerusalem. Paul knows better. He is following his Master. The scene on the beach at Miletus (see 20:36-38) is repeated here at Tyre.

¹When we had parted from them and set sail, we came by a straight course to Cos, and the next day to Rhodes, and from there to Patara.

²When we found a ship bound for Phoenicia, we went on board and set sail. ³We came in sight of Cyprus; and leaving it on our left, we sailed to Syria and landed at Tyre, because the ship was to unload its cargo there.

⁴We looked up the disciples and stayed there for seven days. Through the Spirit they told Paul not to go on to Jerusalem.

⁵When our days there were ended, we left and proceeded on our journey; and all of them, with wives and children, escorted us outside the city. There we knelt down on the beach and prayed ⁶and said farewell to one another.

Then we went on board the ship, and they returned home.

⁷When we had finished the voyage from Tyre, we arrived at Ptolemais; and we greeted the believers and stayed with them for one day.

⁸The next day we left and came to Caesarea; and we went into the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the seven, and stayed with him. ⁹He had four unmarried daughters who had the gift of prophecy.

¹⁰While we were staying there for several days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. ¹¹He came to us and took Paul's belt, bound his own feet and hands with it, and said, 'Thus says the Holy Spirit, "This is the way the Jews in Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles.'"

¹²When we heard this, we and the people there urged him not to go up to Jerusalem.

¹³Then Paul answered, 'What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.'

¹⁴Since he would not be persuaded, we remained silent except to say, 'The Lord's will be done.'

They disembark at Ptolemais (Acco), stay with the community for a day, and then travel the fifty kilometres either by ship or overland to Caesarea, the administrative capital of Palestine under the Roman governors. They go to the house of Philip. His four daughters enjoy a special communion with the Holy Spirit (see 2:17). They are consecrated to the risen Lord 'and had the gift of prophecy'(see 8:40). Assuming that Luke has already by this time conceived the idea of 'investigating everything carefully'(Luke 1:3), with a view to chronicling 'the events that have been fulfilled among us'(Luke 1:1), it is interesting to imagine the kinds of discussions that he would have had with Philip on this occasion.

At Miletus Paul said: 'the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and persecutions are waiting for me'(20:23). It happened again in Tyre, and now Agabus (see 11:28) comes down from Judea. Gentile Caesarea was not considered part of Judea by the Jews. With prophetic gestures Agabus announces what is awaiting Paul. Like Jesus he will be handed over to the Gentiles (see Luke 18:32). Like Jesus he is ready to die in Jerusalem (see Luke 13:33). As he said to the elders at Miletus:

I do not count my life of any value to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the good news of God's grace.

– Acts 20:24

Paul is living the advice which he has given to others:

Be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

– Ephesians 5:1-2

Hearing Paul's words, the others cease trying to persuade him. They are at peace, knowing that they are in God's hands. Like Jesus in the agony, they want only the will of God (see Luke 22:42).

