



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

## Missiology

### Lesson 12 – Paul’s Journey from Ephesus to Jerusalem

Finally, **“after the uproar (in Ephesus) had ceased, Paul called the disciples to himself, embraced them, and departed to go to Macedonia”** (Acts 20:1). What Paul was chiefly concerned with at this point was the reaction in Corinth to his letter called 1 Corinthians. He needed to know their reaction so that he would know how to talk to them when he arrived in Corinth. As he wrote in his letter: **“What do you want? Shall I come to you with a rod, or in love and a spirit of gentleness?”** (1 Corinthians 4:21).

As Paul left Ephesus, he was still waiting for a report from his assistant Titus. His original travel plan was to go to Corinth first, then to Macedonia, and then back to Corinth again before heading to Jerusalem to deliver the gift of money. But he changed his mind to give the Corinthians more time to straighten out their problems among themselves before he visited them. He wrote to them later why he changed his plans: **“I call God as witness against my soul, that to spare you I came no more to Corinth”** (2 Corinthians 1:23). So instead of going to Corinth first, Paul went to Macedonia first. On the way he hoped to meet Titus at Troas and hear his report from Corinth, but that did not happen: **“When I came to Troas to preach Christ’s Gospel, and a door was opened to me by the Lord, I had no rest in my spirit, because I did not find Titus my brother; but taking my leave of them, I departed for Macedonia”** (2 Corinthians 2:12-13). He was so concerned about hearing from Titus that he did not stay long in Troas, even though the door was open for the Gospel.

So Paul went from Troas to Philippi in Macedonia, where he was still troubled by the fact that there was no report from Titus: **“When we came to Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were troubled on every side. Outside were conflicts, inside were fears”** (2 Corinthians 7:5). But then Titus showed up with good news from Corinth, and Paul was very happy. He says: **“God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, and not only by his coming, but also by the consolation with which he was comforted in you, when he told us of your earnest desire, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced even more”** (2 Corinthians 7:6-7). Paul’s severe letter (1 Corinthians) had had its desired effect. After he got the report from Titus, Paul wrote to them: **“Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing. For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted. ... We have been comforted in your comfort. And we rejoiced exceedingly more for the joy of Titus, because his spirit has been refreshed by you all. ... Therefore I rejoice that I have confidence in you in everything”** (2 Corinthians 7:9-16)

Included in the good news from Corinth was the good news that the man who had been living with his father's wife had repented of his sin. Paul had urged the congregation in 1 Corinthians to excommunicate the man, but now, since the man had repented of his sin, Paul urged the congregation to forgive him and take him back: **"You ought rather to forgive and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow. Therefore I urge you to reaffirm your love to him"** (2 Corinthians 2:7-8). Just as the prophet Nathan told David his sins were forgiven as soon as he confessed them, so also a Christian congregation should not delay in forgiving someone who has repented of his sin.

Titus brought back to Paul a good report. Most of the congregation had accepted Paul's admonitions and warnings in 1 Corinthians. The man who had been guilty of fornication had repented of his sin. The congregation wanted to see Paul again and renew their friendship. Nevertheless, there was still a minority who had not listened to Paul's instructions. They claimed to belong to Christ, but they had no love for Christ's apostle Paul. They said of Paul: **"His letters ... are weighty and powerful, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible"** (2 Corinthians 10:10).

This group claimed that Paul was not a true apostle because he did not accept pay for his work. Paul responds to this charge: **"Did I commit sin, ... because I preached the Gospel of God to you free of charge? ... In everything I kept myself from being burdensome to you, and so I will keep myself. ... Why? Because I do not love you? God knows!"** (2 Corinthians 11:7-11). At this point in his letter Paul showed that he was a true apostle of Christ by reminding them of all the persecutions and hardships he had faced because of the Gospel he preached. He wrote: **"I ought to have been commended by you; for in nothing was I behind the most eminent apostles, though I am nothing. Truly the signs of an apostle were accomplished among you with all perseverance, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds. ... Now for the third time I am ready to come to you. ... and I will very gladly spend and be spent for your souls; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I am loved. ... We speak before God in Christ. But we do all things, beloved, for your edification"** (2 Corinthians 12:11-19).

After meeting Titus in Philippi in Macedonia, Paul wrote the letter we call 2 Corinthians. This letter reveals the hardships, the trials, the joys, and the strong feelings of a missionary of Christ. He was expecting to be in Corinth soon, and so he urged them to have their offering of money for the poor Christians in Jerusalem ready for him by the time he got there. There are two chapters (2 Corinthians 8 and 9) that teach us still today about the spirit of stewardship we need. A careful study of these chapters will help congregations grow in their understanding of how God gives His people earthly blessings that they can then use in spreading the Gospel of Christ. The most important thing is that the gifts given for the Lord's work are given willingly. In Paul's words: **"If there is first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what one has, and not according to what he does not have"** (2 Corinthians 8:12). **"So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for**

**God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work”** (2 Corinthians 9:7-8).

Very likely Paul wrote 2 Corinthians while he was in Macedonia, on his way to Corinth. Luke reports: **“When he had gone over that region (Macedonia) and encouraged them with many words, he came to Greece and stayed three months”** (Acts 20:2-3). Luke reports nothing of his activity during these three months. It is very likely that Paul wrote his letter to the Christians in Rome during this 3-month stay in Greece.

The book of Acts gives the general outline of Paul’s mission work. As we read the book of Acts, it is good that we also read and study the letters that Paul wrote during this time. One present-day missionary has written about these letters: “Paul is truly a ‘missionary’s missionary.’ His letters deserve constant restudy as one is faced with new situations in countries where the Gospel is first being planted.” Regarding Paul’s two letters to the Corinthians that deal with so many problems, this missionary has written: “How often do we not experience many of these same outward excesses in our young congregations in the mission fields!”

Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians is an honest account of the human weakness of God’s ministers in the face of serious responsibilities and grave difficulties. There is nothing more glorious than the Gospel ministry. **“We are ambassadors for Christ”** (2 Corinthians 5:20), **“but we have this treasure in earthen vessels”** (2 Corinthians 4:7). We are slandered, persecuted, misunderstood. We are burdened with concern for the spiritual welfare of those entrusted to us. We are so weak, and God does not always seem to answer our prayers – for example, Paul’s prayer concerning his thorn in the flesh (2 Corinthians 12:7-9), but God says: **“My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness”** (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Paul's letter to the Romans is a summary of the Gospel he preached everywhere. He had never been to Rome, the capital of the huge Roman Empire. He knew some of the Christians there, as we learn from the greetings he sent to them at the close of his letter. Among them were Aquila and Priscilla, his former tentmaking partners. Paul wanted the Christians in Rome to be his partners in a new mission project: proclaiming the Good News of Christ in Spain. Notice what Paul considered to be his particular calling: **"I have made it my aim to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build on another man's foundation"** (Romans 15:20). We cannot all be pioneer missionaries working in a new area, but we can all share Paul's zeal for preaching the Gospel in all the world to every human being.

He tells the Romans his plans: **"Having a great desire these many years to come to you, whenever I journey to Spain, I shall come to you. For I hope to see you on my journey, and to be helped on my way there by you, if first I may enjoy your company for a while"** (Romans 15:23-24). This was not the first time that God had other plans for Paul, however, as we shall see. Paul did eventually get to Rome, but as a prisoner. Whether he ever reached Spain we do not know for sure, although there are some historical accounts that say that he did.

Paul's immediate plans were clear, however: **"But now I am going to Jerusalem to minister to the saints. For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem. ... When I have performed this and have sealed to them this fruit, I shall go by way of you to Spain"** (Romans 15:25-28). Paul asked them to pray for God's blessing on his plans: **"I beg you, brethren, ... that you strive together with me in prayers to God for, that I may be delivered from those in Judea who do not believe, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, that I may come to you with joy by the will of God"** (Romans 15:30-32).

Paul's plans changed already after he arrived in Corinth. His planned to sail from Corinth to Syria and then go to Jerusalem. But Luke tells us that **"when the Jews (in Corinth) plotted against him as he was about to sail to Syria, he decided to return through Macedonia"** (Acts 20:3). So back to Macedonia he went, and on his subsequent trip to Jerusalem he was accompanied by delegates from some of the congregations he had founded: **"Sopater of Berea accompanied him to Asia – also Aristarchus and Secundus of the Thessalonians, and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy, and Tychicus and Trophimus of Asia. These men, going ahead, waited for us at Troas"** (Acts 20:4-5). Did you notice the word **"us"**? This means that Luke, the author of the book of Acts, was now traveling again with the group.

Paul's companions were already at Troas. Luke continues: **"But we sailed away from Philippi after the Days of Unleavened Bread, and in five days joined them at Troas, where we stayed seven days"** (Acts 20:6). It was the spring of the year, probably in the year 55 AD. By this time there was a group of Christians in Troas, and Paul took this opportunity to speak to

them: **“Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight”** (Acts 20:7). Notice that the group met on Sunday evening, not on the Sabbath, and that Paul talked a long time.

During that church service something remarkable took place. **“There were many lamps in the upper room where they were gathered together. And in a window sat a certain young man named Eutychus, who was sinking into a deep sleep. He was overcome by sleep; and as Paul continued speaking, he fell down from the third story and was taken up dead. But Paul went down, fell on him, and embracing him said, ‘Do not trouble yourselves, for his life is in him.’ Now when he had come up, had broken bread and eaten, and talked a long while, even till daybreak, he departed. And they brought the young man in alive, and they were not a little comforted”** (Acts 20:8-12). Even though the service was interrupted by this man’s death and miraculous healing, Paul continued talking, and the believers in Troas continued listening. It is wonderful when missionaries are full of such zeal to preach the Gospel, and the listeners are eager and willing to listen to what God’s messengers have to say.

Paul, Luke, and their associates traveled onward – Paul by foot, and the others by ship. Luke reports: **“Then we went ahead to the ship and sailed to Assos, there intending to take Paul on board; for so he had given orders, intending himself to go on foot. And when he met us at Assos, we took him on board and came to Mitylene. We sailed from there, and the next day came opposite Chios. The following day we arrived at Samos and stayed at Trogyllium. The next day we came to Miletus”** (Acts 20:13-15). Luke gives us many historical and geographical details. Historical and archeological search has shown that they are all accurate, although at one time many so-called experts questioned the information Luke provided. Since it was the Holy Spirit who gave Luke the words he used, we can be sure that everything happened just as he said it happened.

Since he was in a hurry to get to Jerusalem by Pentecost, **“Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus so that he would not have to spend time in Asia”** (Acts 20:16). At the same time, he wanted to see the leaders of the Ephesian congregation, where he had labored for three years. Therefore **“from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church”** (Acts 20:17). He recalled with them the blessing of God on the work he had done in their midst. His ministry among them was **“to testify to the gospel of the grace of God”** (Acts 20:24). He warned them that they would be troubled by false teachers who would lead some of them astray. He reminded them of a sentence that Jesus spoke that is not recorded in the four Gospels: **“It is more blessed to give than to receive”** (Acts 20:35).

Paul also told the Ephesian elders that he expected trouble in Jerusalem. It seems that in all his stops along the way the Holy Spirit was giving messages to Paul through various prophets about what was going to happen him in Jerusalem, but Paul was determined to go in any case. He told the Ephesian elders: **“Now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing**

the things what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me” (Acts 20:22-23). **“And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. Then they all wept freely, and fell on Paul’s neck and kissed him, sorrowing most of all for the words which he spoke, that they would see his face no more”** (Acts 20:36-38). Paul had a close relationship with his fellow-workers in Ephesus, and they loved him deeply. **“They accompanied him to the ship”** (Acts 20:38), and Paul continued on his way, together with his companions.

Luke reports: **“Now it came to pass, that when we had departed from them and set sail, running a straight course we came to Cos, the following day to Rhodes, and from there to Patara. And finding a ship sailing over to Phoenicia, we went aboard and set sail. When we had sighted Cyprus, we passed it on the left, sailed to Syria, and landed at Tyre; for there the ship was to unload her cargo. And finding disciples, we stayed there seven days”** (Acts 21:1-4). The Christians in Tyre repeated the warnings that the Holy Spirit had given to Paul in other cities. **“They told Paul through the Spirit not to go up to Jerusalem”** (Acts 21:4).

The parting scene at Miletus was repeated in Tyre. **“When we had come to the end of those days, we departed and went on our way; and they all accompanied us, with wives and children, till we were out of the city. And we knelt down on the shore and prayed. When we had taken our leave of one another, we boarded the ship, and they returned home”** (Acts 21:5-6). They had only known Paul and his companions for a few days, but in that short time the Holy Spirit had brought about a bond of unity and mutual love. Wherever we go throughout the world, confessing Christians share a bond with each other that is even stronger than family ties. As Jesus once said: **“‘Who is My mother, or My brothers?’ And He looked around in a circle at those who sat about Him, and said, ‘Here are My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother’”** (Mark 3:33-35).

After leaving Tyre, Paul and his companions came to Ptolemais where there was also a group of Christians. They stayed with them one day and then traveled to Caesarea, one of the chief cities of that land. **“Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven”** (Acts 21:8) lived in Caesarea. This is the Philip who had brought the Gospel to the people of Samaria and had encountered the man from Ethiopia riding in a chariot. We are told that Philip **“had four virgin daughters who prophesied”** (Acts 21:9). Whatever kind of prophesying these women did, we can be sure they did not do it in a way that was contrary to God’s order that women should not teach or have authority over men. Nevertheless; women are to use their gifts from God for the good of the Gospel ministry.

Paul and his companions stayed in Caesarea **“many days”** (Acts 21:10). While they were there, a Christian prophet named Agabus arrived from Judea. This is the same Agabus to whom the Spirit had earlier revealed the famine that had struck the land (Acts 11:28). This time Agabus had a special message for Paul: **“He took Paul’s belt, bound his own hands and**

**feet, and said, ‘Thus says the Holy Spirit, “So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this belt, and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles”’ (Acts 21:11).**

Paul had heard this warning from the Holy Spirit through other prophets before. His friends and associates believed that this was God’s telling Paul to change his plans and warning him not go to Jerusalem. Luke writes: **“Now when we heard these things, both we and those from that place pleaded with him not to go up to Jerusalem”** (Acts 21:12). But Paul believed it was his duty as God’s missionary to the Gentiles to bring the gift from the Gentile churches personally to the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem to show the unity of the Christian Church, which was made up of both Jews and Gentiles. So Paul did not listen to the advice of his friends. **“Paul answered, ‘What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus’”** (Acts 21:13).

Since they were unable to change his mind, his friends stopped their pleading and said: **“The will of the Lord be done”** (Acts 21:14). They were then ready to go the rest of the way up to Jerusalem. Some of the Christians from Caesarea accompanied them, and among them was **“a certain Mnason of Cyprus, an early disciple, with whom we were to lodge”** (Acts 21:16). We can imagine Luke, the physician and historian, asking Mnason many questions about the early days of the Church, since apparently he had been a Christian for a long time.

## **Questions**

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1. For whom was Paul waiting as he left Ephesus on his third journey?
2. Why was Paul concerned about the letter, 1 Corinthians, he had written?
3. Why did Paul change his travel plans?
4. What good news did Paul receive when he got to Macedonia?
5. What happened after the adulterous man in Corinth was excommunicated?
6. Why is it important to forgive a repentant sinner at once?
7. Why were there still some in Corinth who did not accept Paul’s ministry?
8. What did Paul write about offerings of money in 2 Corinthians?
9. What were Paul’s plans as he wrote his letter to the Romans?
10. What strange thing happened during a church service in Troas?
11. Whom did Paul meet with in Miletus? What did he tell them?
12. Why did Paul’s friends urge him not to go to Jerusalem?
13. Why was Paul determined to go to Jerusalem?
14. How can we tell that Paul was a missionary who was greatly loved?