

Study 32: Paul's Missionary Years

Introduction

Paul's missionary years – *the first, second, and third journeys* – take up a substantial portion of Paul's life. This period closes early in Acts chapter 21, when Paul arrives in Jerusalem. Much had been accomplished during this thirteen-year period (AD 45 – 58).

Luke records the establishment of 20 churches, and there was no doubt many many more that were not recorded. Further, most of those that were established had been revisited and strengthened, and leaders were appointed.

Body of the Study

Introduction

The First Missionary Journey

The Second Journey

The Third Journey

Homework and preparation for next week:

- *Read the notes as a review of the study*
- *Think through the drive and motivation that Paul had, to commence such an arduous task and undertake the journeys that he did in what was relative "old age". Read 2 Cor 11 and see the things that Paul went through BEFORE he completed the third journey.*
- *Paul was not married. How could he have dealt with and accomplished what he did if he had have had a wife and family to support?*
- *Read chapter 21 in preparation for the next study*

Notes for study 32: Paul's Missionary Years

Paul's missionary years – *the first, second, and third journeys* – take up a substantial portion of Paul's life. This period closes early in Acts chapter 21, when Paul arrives in Jerusalem. Much had been accomplished during this thirteen-year period (AD 45 – 58).

Luke records the establishment of 20 churches, and there was no doubt many many more that were not recorded. Further, most of those that were established had been revisited and strengthened, and leaders appointed. The churches that we know about were Paphos (13:12); Pisidian Antioch (13:34); Iconium (14:1); Lystra (14:6); Derbe (14:6); Perga (14:25); Troas (16:8); Philippi (16:12); Thessalonica (17:1); Berea (17:10); Athens (17:34); Corinth (18:1-4); Cenchræa (18:18, Rom 16:1); Ephesus (18:19); Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea (19:10).

As Paul begins the second journey, it marks a new phase in his life, where he no longer has a place to call "home". The bond that he has with Antioch will continue throughout his life, as time and again that church sends him out on his journeys, and he returns back – sometimes for a short stay, but sometimes for "...a long time..."

Introduction

Paul was in his mid 40's when he began the missionary phase of his life. The first Journey began in AD 45 – so Paul could even have been as old as 52, or as young as 31 – but the younger age is unlikely, and the extreme latter age is also unlikely – so around mid 40's seems to be about right.

He knew what it is to travel without having many possessions. He knew the persecutions that were encountered along the way. He even knew what it is to have brethren forsake him (as John Mark did at Perga in Pamphylia (Acts 13:13)). And he knew what it is to be stoned and left for dead – for that had happened in Lystra (Acts 14:19).

But Paul also knew what it was to convert people to Christ, to have them leave their lives of sin behind and turn to the true and living God. And that is what motivated and drove him to continue on his work, and to go again and visit the brethren...

The First Missionary Journey

The first missionary journey is sometimes called the mission to the Galatians, and began in AD 45, not too long after the death of Herod in AD 44. Initially, Paul, Barnabas, and John Mark went to Cyprus, Barnabas' home country (Acts 4:36). It is interesting that they began the missionary journey in familiar territory, and then branched out from there.

The tour of Cyprus lasted several months, since "...they had gone through the whole island..." (Acts 13:6), and they had been quite thorough in their tour of the land. At the Western end of the island at Paphos, Elymus the magician was rebuked and struck blind by Paul. This was a turning point in Paul's life – up until this time it was "*Barnabas and Paul*", but after this powerful demonstration, it was "*Paul and his party*".

After leaving Cyprus, Paul, Barnabas, and John Mark headed into Pamphylia. At Perga, John Mark left and went back (probably to Jerusalem). It is thought that Paul became sick (possibly Malaria) as he wrote to the Galatians how he was sick (it was *because of* his sickness) when he first came to Galatia (Gal 4:13-15). The time described was at his first visit.

The Galatian mission really began at Antioch in Pisidia. Whilst the Gentiles were eager to hear the word of God, the Jews rejected the gospel, so they shook the dust off their feet and went to Iconium where they stayed a long time (Acts 14:3). The people of the city were split between

obeying the gospel and following the Jews, and eventually the Jews made a move to stone Paul and Barnabas, so they left and went to Lystra.

It was during this time in Lystra that Timothy must have been converted. Paul was actually taken out and stoned and left for dead. The next day he and Barnabas left the city and walked to Derbe. They must have spent some time in Derbe, and then doubled back and re-visited the churches again (Paul's second visit to the Galatian churches). They returned to Antioch about AD 48, after nearly three years away, and they stayed there for "...a long time..." (Acts 14:28).

The Second Journey

The second Journey began in AD 52, and Paul had spent the intervening periods in Antioch (14:28;15:33,35-36). At Paul's initiative, he and Barnabas decided to embark on a mission that was (at least initially) directed at revisiting the churches that they established on the first visit. Their purpose was "...to see how they are doing..." (15:36) essentially one of encouragement and ensuring that they were grounded in the faith as they grow in Christ.

The dispute over taking John Mark with them was so strong that Barnabas and Paul split up and went in different directions – Barnabas and John Mark to Cyprus, whilst Paul took Silas and went to Galatia via Syria and Cilicia. This would naturally take him through Tarsus. Very little is said about Paul's sojourns in Tarsus, so it would appear (perhaps) that Paul's family had not obeyed the gospel and may well have rejected Paul. Perhaps by this time his family had died (Paul was around 50 years old) and he may have had no particular family reason to go to visit and stay in Tarsus, other than going to visit his "old haunts".

As they made their way from Tarsus through the Cilician gates, they first came to Derbe, and then Lystra. At Lystra they found young Timothy whom Paul regarded as "...my own son in the faith..." (1 Tim 1:2). Paul took him and circumcised him, and he accompanied Paul and Silas on the journey. Timothy was already a christian, and well reported of by the brethren, so he must have been converted on the first journey.

As they went through Galatia on their visit, "...they delivered to them the decrees to keep that were determined by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem..." (Acts 16:4 NKJV). This is of particular relevance when considering the Galatian letter, as the Galatians had been persuaded by the Judaizers to embrace the Jewish religion. This was the very thing that the decree said not to do, and the Galatians had no excuse for doing it.

After leaving Galatia, the Holy Spirit forbade them from going into Asia, and directed them to Macedonia. The natural course for Paul would have been to go to the great city of Ephesus (the 4th largest city in the world at that time). Luke joined them at Troas, where they found a boat heading exactly where they wanted to go, and they made the journey in double-quick time. Paul headed straight for Philippi, which was a Roman Colony and a significant city in the region. In Philippi, Lydia was converted by the riverside, and after casting out a demon from a young girl, Paul and Silas were thrown onto prison. At midnight, there was a great earthquake, and Paul and Silas were freed from their chains. The event resulted in the conversion of the jailer after midnight.

Paul appealed to his Roman citizenship, and demanded that the Magistrates who wrongly threw them into jail come down and release them.

After leaving Philippi, Paul and Silas came to Thessalonica, and they stayed there for a short time (probably a couple of months), whilst Luke remained in Philippi.

Paul was forced to leave Thessalonica, and went to Berea, where he had a much better reception from the Jews, but was eventually forced to leave by the Jews who came down from

Thessalonica. He then went to Athens, and summonsed Timothy and Silas to come to him. Timothy was sent back to Thessalonica to find out how the brethren were doing.

Paul spoke to the Greeks in Athens, and we have an outline of his lesson to the unbelieving Gentiles who believed in every god except the true and living God (17:22-31).

After Athens, Paul came to Corinth, and found Aquilla and Priscilla. He hooked up with them because they were of the same trade as Paul. They had left Rome because the Emperor had commanded all of the Jews to leave Rome. Timothy returned with Silas (who had stayed in Berea) and he wrote the first letter to the church in Thessalonica, and sent it with Timothy as the courier. This was the first letter that we have that Paul wrote, and was written almost immediately after his visit there because of his forced and early departure. Timothy again returned with news from Thessalonica, and Paul then wrote the second letter to the Thessalonians straight away, and sent it back with Timothy again.

Paul came to Corinth with “...*weakness and fear, and much trembling...*” (1 Cor 2:3 NIV) which is not surprising, when we consider the reception and persecution that he had faced everywhere he had been. The Lord appeared to him, and told him to “...*stop being afraid, ... for I have many people in this city...*” (18:9-10)

Paul continued there for another 18 months. He had already been there for some time, so it is likely that the total time that he spent in Corinth on this journey was about 2 years.

As he left to go back to Jerusalem and Antioch, Paul sailed via Ephesus, and found one of the best receptions that he had anywhere. They wanted him to stay longer.

It had been around three years since he left on the journey, and it was time to go back to Jerusalem to keep the Passover feast and / or Pentecost. Paul promised that he would return.

After coming back to Caesarea, and then Jerusalem he headed “home again” to Antioch (18:22). Paul stayed there “...*for some time...*” (vs 23), and continued his life-long relationship and association with the church.

The Third Journey

Paul had promised that he would return to Ephesus. As he made his way there, he went again via the churches of Galatia. This was the fourth time that he had visited many of the Galatian churches. The time to reach Ephesus would have been several (probably about 9) months.

On reaching Ephesus, Paul found some disciples who had been taught by Apollos, but they only knew of John’s baptism. He straightened them out on their misunderstanding and baptised them into Christ.

The stay in Ephesus was nearly three years (the longest that Paul stayed anywhere, that we know of). The strong reception continued and Paul initially taught in the synagogue for a period of three months (19:8). After the Jews hardened against him, he moved next door to “...*the school of Tyrannus...*” where he taught for another two years (19:9-10).

During the time in Ephesus, Paul write the 1st letter to the Corinthian church, and possibly made a short visit across to Corinth to correct some of the problems that were occurring in the church. Paul had already been there for about two years on the second journey, so they were well known to each other. Paul was finally forced to leave Ephesus after the riot when “...*the whole city was in uproar...*” (19:25).

After leaving Ephesus, he went to Macedonia. He had sent Titus to sort out some of the problems in Corinth, and was concerned when he had not come to meet him at Troas. (2 Cor 2:12-13).

When he finally caught up with Titus in Philippi (or Thessalonica), he then wrote the 2nd letter to the Corinthians.

Paul came back to Greece (almost certainly to Corinth) where he stayed for another three months. During that time he wrote the letters to the Galatian churches, and to the church at Rome.

Paul was gathering a large sum of money to take to the poor saints in Jerusalem. He had brethren from other churches (or at least groups of churches) come with him back to Jerusalem with the gifts.

On the way back, he met with the church in Troas (20:6-12), and then sailed by Ephesus where he called for the elders of the church to come and talk with him (20:17-38). The warning that he gave them about the departing from the faith, sets the scene for the Ephesian letter that followed a few years later.

When he came back to Palestine, Paul was warned (by prophecy) that he would be bound when he got to Jerusalem (21:11). But Paul said that he would go regardless (21:13).

The third journey had taken a period of around 5 years, and Paul was around 60 years old when he returned after being “on the road” for around 15 years.

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The Return to Jerusalem

When Paul returns to Jerusalem, he was only there for a few days whilst he visited James and the elders (21:18). He went to the Temple as a purification rite to show to the Jews that he had not failed to observe the Jewish Law and customs. In the Temple, Paul was seen by some of the Jews from Ephesus, and because he had previously seen Paul with a Gentile the previous day, they had (wrongly) assumed that Paul had taken him into the Temple. (21: 26-29).

This event set the scene for the things that happened to Paul over the following 5 years. The Jews rioted at the thought of Paul having defiled the Temple, and were rallying to take him out and have him stoned. It was only when the authorities intervened that Paul was rescued. He was thrown into protective custody, and the next day gave an account of what he was doing. However that started another riot, and so he was taken into custody again (21:21-24).

Paul then appeared before the Sanhedrin, exactly as the Lord himself had done (Lk 22:16-71), as Peter and John had done (4:5-8), and as all of the apostles had done (5:27). Paul had probably known many of the members of the Sanhedrin when he was “*a young man*” around 30 years before. But that did not help his “current” position. He sided with the Pharisees, the Sanhedrin divided against itself, and Paul was freed – at least for a while – and was again taken into protective custody (Acts 22:30-23:10).

The Roman commander Claudius Lysias heard what Paul had to say, but didn’t know what to do with him. Learning of a plot to kill Paul, he sent him by night to Caesarea to keep him safe. (23:12-24).

Five days later, the Jews came down to Caesarea to accuse Paul and brought with them a hired lawyer. Paul made his defence before the governor Felix, who didn’t know what to do. Had he released Paul, the Jews would probably have killed him anyway, but he knew that Paul was innocent. Because Felix was corrupt, he left Paul in prison for two years hoping that he might receive a bribe to have him released (24:22-27).