

Devoted Spiritual Leaders

Key Text:	Acts 18:23-28, 19 & 20
Key Verse(s):	“And when he had thus spoken, he kneeled down, and prayed with them all. And they all wept sore, and fell on Paul’s neck, and kissed him, sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more. And they accompanied him unto the ship.” (Acts 20:36-38)

Background to the Study

The final verses of chapter 18 begin the account of Paul’s third and last missionary journey, which started on the same route he had taken on his second one. On this approximately four-year trip through Asia Minor, he visited churches that he had planted during his first travels and had revisited on his second journey. Chapter 19 concludes with a riot in Ephesus, which indicated to Paul that it was time to move on (Acts 20:1). Acts 18:24-28 is an account of the Bible teacher, Apollos, who is described as “an eloquent man” in verse 24. In addition to being well-educated, Apollos was also “mighty in the Scriptures” and “fervent in the spirit.” However, though Apollos “taught diligently” (or accurately) the things of the Lord, he knew “only the baptism of John.” Aquila and Priscilla (Jewish Christians who had first met Paul in Corinth and shared in his work), taught him what was lacking in his understanding of the Gospel. Three significant events occurred during the Apostle’s two-year stay in Ephesus. First, the Holy Ghost was poured out upon believers who had not previously heard about the Holy Spirit (vs. 1-7). Next, Paul’s effective ministry was met by a group of traveling exorcists who were assaulted by the demons they tried to cast out (vs. 13-20). Then, a riot was caused by silver craftsmen who felt Paul’s preaching threatened their livelihood of making shrines (vs. 21-41). Ephesus was a centre for occultism, and its people were very superstitious. The “curious arts” mentioned in verse 19 were the magic, spells, enchantments, and exorcisms that were commonplace in that society and thought to bring wealth, happiness, and protection. Demetrius the silversmith (vs. 24), who stirred up the opposition to Paul, was evidently an important man in the trade. Making shrines to honour Diana had been a flourishing industry, and Paul’s preaching must have caused a perceptible lessening of demand, given that the craftsmen were so easily stirred to anger over a threat to their financial security.

Chapter 20 details Paul’s travels from the city of Ephesus in Asia, through the Roman province of Macedonia, to the city of Corinth in Achaia and then back toward Jerusalem on his third missionary journey. After the riot in Ephesus, Paul moved forward his planned travel through Macedonia. After exhorting the churches in Macedonia, Paul travelled on to Achaia (today’s southern Greece), and probably spent the next three months in Corinth, writing the Epistle to the Romans during that time. Perhaps in the springtime when sailing was better, Paul

planned to set out for Jerusalem. However, he learned of a plot against him. The Jews may have determined to arrest or kill him while on the ship or to throw him overboard. To thwart their plan, Paul travelled by land, going back the way he had come. Some of the men who were to travel with Paul went on by ship and waited for him at Troas. The men of this group are thought to have been carrying money donated by the churches for the persecuted believers in Jerusalem. Not long after the church in Philippi had been established, Paul had left Luke there, probably to be the pastor of this new group. Now he sailed with Paul from Philippi to Troas, where they spent seven days. Verse 7 says that the believers assembled on “the first day of the week,” which could be an indicator that they had changed their meeting day from the Jewish Sabbath to Sunday, the day that Jesus rose from the dead. Eutychus sat in this opening, and sleep overcame him. He fell from the third floor. God’s miraculous power was demonstrated once again when he came back to life. Verses 17-38 give Paul’s farewell to the elders of the church at Ephesus. When the elders arrived, Paul eloquently exhorted them. His concern for these people was evident as he reviewed his years at Ephesus and how he had lived among them. He had preached publicly and privately (in homes), to Jews and Gentiles (Greeks), the message of repentance and faith. Paul knew difficulties were ahead of him, but he felt compelled by the Holy Spirit to go to Jerusalem. He urged these men to be good and watchful leaders, and then he commended, or committed, them to God’s sovereign care.

Testimony from Our Day

Effective spiritual leaders hold a special place in the hearts of the people in their congregations. This can be seen in the attitudes of the leaders of the Ephesian church toward Paul. And it can also be seen in the testimony of Jung Ok You regarding Harold and Sally Barrett, who were missionaries to Korea. Jung Ok’s father was a merchant mariner, and she says, “Every time his ship pulled into the Portland harbour, Apostolic Faith people visited and invited the crew members to church and to their homes. My father wrote letters, telling us that these people were wonderful and very kind to all the Koreans. “In 1967, missionary ‘Papa’ Harold Barrett and his wife, ‘Mama’ Sally, moved to Korea to preach this true Gospel. They began holding church services in a second-floor room of their house. When I was sixteen years old, my family went there because my father wanted us to go. “At the time, I didn’t know about the Gospel or Jesus. I only wanted to learn English from Mama Barrett. However, one day the Holy Spirit spoke to my heart and I realized I was a sinner. That day I confessed and repented of all my sins, and God saved me. I was one of the first converts in the Apostolic Faith Church in Korea. “In time, my mother was saved. About one year after that, my father repented of his sins and was saved too. My younger brother and sister also were saved. “In 1975, Papa and Mama Barrett left Korea to return to Portland, and most of the church members went to the airport to say goodbye. We were crying when they left, and we were so sad. We felt like children without a mother or father, so when they were gone, we went back to the church and prayed to the Lord. Then the Holy Spirit began to fall on the people. Day by day, the revival continued. During that time, I received my sanctification and the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The revival went on for some weeks, and around fifty people received the baptism of the Holy Ghost. That really established the church and gave it a strong foundation.” Similarly, the elders from Ephesus were sad when the Apostle Paul told them he would not see them again. He had laboured in Ephesus for about three years, preaching, instructing, and nurturing. The believers were understandably sad at saying goodbye. In the course of life, separation comes to us all. Mentors and teachers are called to other locations or on to their rewards in Heaven. Parents, grandparents, or others who have been strong spiritual influences in our lives will move or pass away. Yet when we turn to God for comfort and guidance in our sorrow, He can use the situation as an opportunity for spiritual growth.

A Closer Look

Question 1	What question did Paul ask the disciples he met at Ephesus upon his arrival there (Acts 19:2)? What was their response?
Question 2	Why do you think the Word of God “mightily grew . . . and prevailed” (Acts 19:20) in Ephesus despite heated opposition?
Question 3	What can we learn from Paul’s time in Ephesus that might apply to evangelizing in our day?
Question 4	In his farewell address to the Ephesian elders, recorded in Acts 20:18-35, Paul warned of grievous wolves and false prophets who would attempt to destroy the church. The admonition Paul gave is good today. What two key words in verse 31 give us a vital clue regarding how to avoid being led astray by any “grievous wolf”?
Question 5	What are some ways it is “more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35)?
Question 6	With reference to Acts 20, how can we know that we are doing God’s will even though we experience difficulties?

Take Home

Spreading the Gospel may involve hardship, opposition, and persecution. However, a genuine and heartfelt love for souls will help us not to back away from the challenges that come with evangelizing. Those who may have been of a strong spiritual help to you may no longer be available, but God is still with you, you can commit yourself and your ways to Him. He has good planned for you.