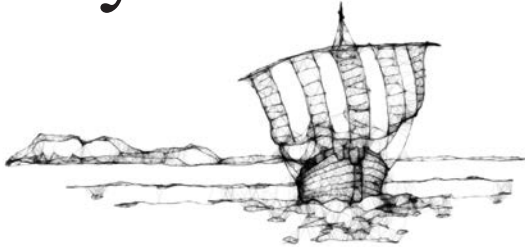


The Third Missionary Journey



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Acts 18:24–28; Acts 19; Acts 20:7–12, 15–27; 2 Cor. 4:8–14; Acts 21:1–15.*

Memory Text: “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, NRSV*).

Luke’s account of Paul’s third journey starts rather abruptly. The text says only that after spending some time in Antioch, the center of Paul’s missions, the apostle set out on another journey, passing successively “through the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples” (*Acts 18:23, NRSV*). So, the first 1,500 miles of the journey are covered in one sentence.

This is because the focal point of the journey was Ephesus, where Paul spent more time than in any other city in the course of his journeys. From the evangelistic standpoint, the ministry in Ephesus was very fruitful; the impact of Paul’s preaching reached the whole province of Asia (*Acts 19:10, 26*). It was probably during this time that the churches of Colossae, Hierapolis, and Laodicea were founded, perhaps through Epaphras (*Col. 4:12, 13*), one of Paul’s co-workers (*Col. 1:7, Philem. 23*).

A remarkable thing about this journey is that it is the last one of Paul’s recorded in Acts. Paul undertook it as a free man. Luke records yet another journey, this time to Rome, but as a prisoner.

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 8.

Ephesus: Part 1

Acts 18:24–28 records that while Paul was still on his way to Ephesus, a Jewish believer named Apollos came to that city. He was an eloquent man and well-versed in the Scriptures. That Apollos was a follower of Jesus is clear from the way Luke describes him: “he had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately” (*Acts 18:25, NIV*). Yet, he knew only John’s baptism. Having been baptized by John the Baptist, Apollos became acquainted with Jesus during Jesus’ earthly life, but he must have moved away from the area—probably back to Alexandria—before the Passion/Pentecost events.

This explains why Aquila and Priscilla would give him further instruction. Though being able to show from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah of Israel (*Acts 18:28*), Apollos needed to be updated as to the developments of Christianity since Jesus’ ministry. However, Aquila and Priscilla did more for Apollos: with the other believers in Ephesus, they gave him a recommendation letter addressed to the churches in Achaia (*Acts 18:27*), which allowed him to have an effective ministry in Corinth (*1 Cor. 3:4–6, 4:6, 16:12*).

Read Acts 19:1–7. What happened to Paul when he arrived in Ephesus?

Apollos’s story is connected to the account of the twelve men Paul met in Ephesus upon his arrival in that city, because their situation was very similar. Their description as “disciples” (*Acts 19:1*) and Paul’s question to them (*Acts 19:2*) clearly indicate that they were already believers in Jesus. At the same time, their answer to Paul shows that, similar to Apollos, they were former disciples of John the Baptist who had become followers of Jesus without having experienced Pentecost. They were to have an opportunity to enjoy a deeper experience with the Lord.

“On his arrival at Ephesus, Paul found twelve brethren, who, like Apollos, had been disciples of John the Baptist, and like him had gained some knowledge of the mission of Christ. They had not the ability of Apollos, but with the same sincerity and faith they were seeking to spread abroad the knowledge they had received.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 282.

We should view their new baptism in light of this unique situation. They were not coming from another Christian denomination, nor were they experiencing conversion. They were only being integrated into mainstream Christianity. That they received the Spirit and spoke in tongues probably means they, like Apollos, were Christian missionaries who now were being empowered fully to witness about Jesus Christ wherever they went.

Ephesus: Part 2

In Ephesus, Paul followed his practice of preaching in the synagogue first. When opposition arose, he and the new believers moved to the lecture hall of a certain Tyrannus, where Paul preached daily for two years (*Acts 19:8–10*). Luke’s summary of Paul’s Ephesian ministry is that the entire province was intensely evangelized (*Acts 19:10, 26*).

In *Acts 19:11–20*, Luke adds a few miracle stories describing the triumph of God’s power in a city where magic and other superstitious practices were rather common. There is no doubt that God could heal through Paul, but that even handkerchiefs and aprons touched by the apostle had healing power (*Acts 19:12*) may sound strange to some, though this bears resemblance to Jesus’ healing of the woman with the hemorrhage (*Luke 8:44*). The Ephesian superstitious beliefs may have led God to perform “extraordinary” miracles, as Luke says (*Acts 19:11, NIV*). This is, perhaps, an example of God’s meeting the needs of the people at their own level of understanding.

Satisfied with the results of his mission in Ephesus, Paul decided to go to Jerusalem (*Acts 19:21*). Luke does not give a reason for this trip, but we know from Paul’s own writings that he wished to deliver the funds he had collected to relieve the poverty of the Jerusalem church (*Rom. 15:25–27, 1 Cor. 16:1–3*). The pooling of goods of the first years, and a severe famine in the days of Claudius, impoverished the Judean believers, and Paul saw in their appeal for help (*Gal. 2:10*) an opportunity to strengthen both their trust in his apostleship and the unity of a now transcultural church, despite knowing the risks to which he would be exposed (*Acts 20:22, 23; Rom. 15:31*).

Read Acts 19:23–41. What was the real reason for the opposition to Paul that arose in Ephesus at the end of his stay there?

The opposition had to do with pagan worship, which severely was threatened by Paul’s ministry. Demetrius’s real motivation was clearly financial, but he was able to turn it into a religious matter because the temple of Artemis (or Diana), reckoned as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, was located in Ephesus.

Read Acts 19:27. Notice how artfully Demetrius was able to bring in religious “piety” in his attempt to keep the money flowing in. Why must we as Christians be careful not to use our faith, or a pretended piety in regard to our faith, in the same way?

Troas

After the riot (*Acts 19:23–41*), Paul resolved to leave Ephesus. But he took an extended detour through Macedonia and Achaia instead of going straight to Jerusalem (*Acts 20:1–3*). On this journey, representatives of some Gentile churches were with him (*Acts 20:4*).

Read Acts 20:7–12. What’s wrong with the common argument that these verses help prove the Sabbath was changed to Sunday?

Paul’s stopover in Troas ended with a church meeting “on the first day of the week” (*Acts 20:7*). They gathered together “to break bread,” which probably refers to the Lord’s Supper, with or without the fellowship meal that often was combined with it since the early days of the Jerusalem church (*Acts 2:42, 46*). That there is no mention of a cup nor of any prayers does not rule out this possibility. The point, however, is that this episode often is mentioned as evidence that in Paul’s time, at least Gentile churches already had replaced Sabbath with Sunday as a day of worship.

Yet, before making such a claim, it is necessary to establish the precise day on which the meeting took place, as well as the nature of the meeting. The reference to the use of lights (*Acts 20:8*), together with the fact that Paul’s message continued until midnight (*Acts 20:7*), and then until daybreak (*Acts 20:11*), not to mention the deep sleep of Eutychus (*Acts 20:9*), makes it clear it was a night meeting.

The question, though, is whether it was the night before Sunday or the night after Sunday. The answer depends on what system of time reckoning Luke is using, whether the Jewish system from sundown to sundown or the Roman one from midnight to midnight. If it is the former, then it was Saturday night; in case of the latter, it was Sunday night.

Either way, the context of Acts 20:7–12 indicates that, even if the meeting was on a Sunday night, it was not a regular church meeting but a special one due to Paul’s departure the following morning. It is hard to see, then, how this isolated and exceptional episode affords support for Sunday keeping. The fact is, it doesn’t.

Dwell more on all the reasons for the validity of keeping the seventh-day Sabbath. How does the powerful biblical support for the Sabbath help affirm us in our identity as Seventh-day Adventist Christians and the calling that we have been given to spread the three angels’ messages to the world?

Miletus

On his way to Jerusalem, Paul made another stop, this time at Miletus, where he had the opportunity to convey his farewell address to the Ephesian church leaders.

Read Acts 20:15–27. What was Paul’s emphasis in the introductory part of his speech?

Since he already had made plans for a new journey, which included Rome and Spain (*Rom. 15:22–29*), Paul believed that he would never return to Asia. So, he started his speech with a kind of accountability report of the years spent in Ephesus. Such a report, however, aimed not only at the past, that is, the way he had lived among the Ephesians, but also at the future, for he feared what could happen to him in Jerusalem.

Paul’s fear was not unfounded. The Jerusalem church viewed him with some skepticism, if not hostility, due to his past as persecutor and the circumcision-free gospel he preached (*Acts 21:20–26*). To the Jewish authorities, he was nothing but a traitor and an apostate from their religious traditions (*Acts 23:1, 2*). By mid-first century, especially on account of Roman misrule, Judea also was gripped by revolutionary and nationalistic ideals. This atmosphere influenced all segments of Jewish society, including possibly the church. In such context, the activities of that former Pharisee among the Gentiles must have made him a figure of notoriety (*Acts 21:27–36*).

Paul also had more concerns. In Acts 20:28–31, Paul focused on how the church leaders in Ephesus should handle the subject of false teachers, whom he compared to savage wolves who would try to misguide and pervert the flock. So even in the church itself, and even in the earliest days of the church, the danger of false teachers was real. As Solomon said in another time and another context: “There is nothing new under the sun” (*Eccles. 1:9, NKJV*). A history of the Christian church reveals the incredible damages that false teachers have brought to the church. The problem will exist until the end (*2 Tim. 4:3*), too.

No question, Paul had a lot of things on his mind, a lot of concerns; and yet, his faithfulness and his diligence never wavered.

Read 2 Corinthians 4:8–14. What is Paul saying here that we need to apply to ourselves, especially when trials come? Where does Paul put his ultimate hope?

Tyre and Caesarea

After Miletus, Luke records Paul's journey in some detail. Still en route to Jerusalem, the apostle spent a week in Tyre, on the Phoenician coast, where the ship was to be unloaded (*Acts 21:1–6*). However, while he was there, the believers urged him not to go to Jerusalem. That the believers were led by the Spirit to warn Paul not to go to Jerusalem is not necessarily in contradiction to the apostle's earlier guidance. The Greek *etheto en tō pneumati* in *Acts 19:21* likely should be rendered as “resolved/purposed in the Spirit” (*ESV, NRSV, NKJV*), rather than as if Paul had come to this decision all by himself. The point is that the Spirit may have shown the Tyrean Christians the dangers that lay ahead of Paul; and so, out of human concern, they recommended that he not proceed with his intent. Paul himself was not sure about what would happen to him in Jerusalem (*Acts 20:22, 23*). Divine guidance does not always make everything clear, even for someone like Paul.

Read *Acts 21:10–14*. What special incident took place in Caesarea concerning Paul's trip to Jerusalem?

Agabus was a prophet from Jerusalem who had already been introduced in the famine episode in *Acts 11:27–30*. In a way similar to some Old Testament prophecies (for example, *Isa. 20:1–6, Jer. 13:1–10*), his message was an acted one; it functioned as vivid illustration of what would happen to Paul when he arrived in Jerusalem and how his enemies would hand him over to the Gentiles (the Romans).

Those who were with Paul apparently took Agabus's message as a warning, not as a prophecy, and so they tried by all means to convince the apostle he should not go up to Jerusalem. Though deeply touched by their reaction, Paul was determined to accomplish his mission, even at the cost of his own life. For him, the integrity of the gospel and the unity of the church were more important than his own personal safety or interests.

“Never before had the apostle approached Jerusalem with so sad a heart. He knew that he would find few friends and many enemies. He was nearing the city which had rejected and slain the Son of God and over which now hung the threatenings of divine wrath.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 397, 398.

Misunderstood, maligned, mistreated, and often reviled, Paul nevertheless pressed on in faith. How can we learn to do the same in discouraging circumstances?

Further Thought: “The success attending the preaching of the gospel aroused the anger of the Jews anew. From every quarter were coming accounts of the spread of the new doctrine by which Jews were released from the observance of the rites of the ceremonial law and Gentiles were admitted to equal privileges with the Jews as children of Abraham. . . . His [Paul’s] emphatic statement, ‘There is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision’ (*Colossians 3:11*), was regarded by his enemies as daring blasphemy, and they determined that his voice should be silenced.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 390.

“And he could not count upon the sympathy and support of even his own brethren in the faith. The unconverted Jews who had followed so closely upon his track, had not been slow to circulate the most unfavorable reports at Jerusalem, both personally and by letter, concerning him and his work; and some, even of the apostles and elders, had received these reports as truth, making no attempt to contradict them, and manifesting no desire to harmonize with him.”—Page 398.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 The twelve disciples Paul met in Ephesus were former followers of John the Baptist who already had become disciples of Jesus (*Acts 19:1–7*). Why do you think that it is correct to use this passage to require rebaptism of Christians—already baptized by immersion—from other denominations who join the Adventist faith? Is there any significance in the fact that Apollos was not rebaptized?
- 2 Think about Paul’s situation. He is rejected by his own countrymen who don’t believe in Jesus. Even of the Jews who do believe in Jesus, many view Paul with great suspicion, even distrust, because they think he is perverting the “landmarks.” Many of the pagans hate the gospel he is proclaiming. And yet—what? Why did Paul press on, despite all this opposition? Though we are not Paul, what can we take away for ourselves from his story?
- 3 Think about some of the other arguments that people use to try to prove either that the Sabbath was changed to Sunday or that it is no longer binding. How do we answer those arguments and do it in a way to show that obedience to the Sabbath is no more legalism than is obedience to any of the other nine commandments; that is, if we obey by faith and with the understanding of where our only hope of salvation lies?

“Just Go!”

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY, Adventist Mission

Kiyong Kwon, owner of a private accounting business, is known in South Korea for leading more people to Christ than perhaps any Seventh-day Adventist pastor. But he almost didn't.

The story started in late 2000 when Kwon began to study Bible prophecy. He realized with new urgency that each prophecy in Daniel had been fulfilled except Jesus' second coming. He wondered what Noah would do if he were alive today. Perhaps Noah, regardless of his career, would dedicate his life to a single mission: to proclaim Jesus' return. Kwon grew convinced that he should devote his life to proclaiming Jesus' return by becoming a church planter.

One morning as he prayed, he felt God say, “Just go!” The command scared him. He began giving excuses: “I don't have any experience. I am not a pastor. I'm already 40. I'm afraid I'll fail.”

“But every morning God's calling was so clear that it was painful for me,” Kwon said.

So, he prayed, “If You really want me to go, show me what to do from beginning to end. Then I'll go.”

Kwon thought this was a reasonable prayer, but he didn't receive an answer. He prayed for seven days straight. On the seventh day, after praying, he opened *Church Compass*, the magazine of the Adventist Church's Korean Union Conference. He saw a quotation from the book *Life Sketches of Ellen G. White* that shocked him. It read: “God will have men who will venture anything and everything to save souls. Those who will not move until they can see every step of the way clearly before them, will not be of advantage at this time to forward the truth of God. There must be workers now who will push ahead in the dark as well as in the light, and who will hold up bravely under discouragements and disappointed hopes, and yet work on with faith, with tears and patient hope, sowing beside all waters, trusting the Lord to bring the increase. God calls for men of nerve, of hope, faith, and endurance, to work to the point” (pages 213, 214).



“That was my answer from God!” he said. “I was not supposed to pray to know what to do from the beginning to the end. I had to push ahead.”

Kwon gave up and planted a church. “Surprisingly,” he said, “I didn't have to do anything. When God works, there are miracles.”

KIYONG KWON, 56, left, has planted three churches in South Korea. Part of this quarter's Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help plant the first Adventist church in Sejong, South Korea. Read more about Kwon next week.