



Question: "What happened on Paul's third missionary journey?"

Answer: Paul's first missionary journey established churches in southeast Asia Minor. In his second, he had intended to build up those churches, but the Holy Spirit led him further afield, across the Aegean Sea into Greece and back home through Ephesus. In his third, Paul got the chance to touch back with many of the churches he'd established his first two trips, and he started a couple of new churches.

The account of Paul's third missionary journey begins in Acts 18. Paul spent some time at his home church in Syrian Antioch before going northwest over land again and traveling through Galatia and Phrygia in Asia Minor, visiting the churches in Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and Pisidian Antioch—churches he'd established during his first trip (Acts 18:23). Meanwhile, in Ephesus, on the southwest coast of Asia Minor, Priscilla and Aquila met Apollos, an educated and eloquent speaker who enthusiastically spoke of Jesus. Unfortunately, he only knew the story up to John's baptism. Priscilla and Aquila took Apollos aside and taught him of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection, and Apollos became a powerful Christian teacher, at times rivaling the influence of Paul (Acts 18:24–28; 1 Corinthians 3:4–5).

Apollos traveled to Corinth in Achaia, and Paul arrived at Ephesus where he apparently met some of Apollos's students (Acts 19:1). These twelve men only knew of John's baptism unto repentance (see Mark 1:4); they had not been born again by faith in Christ and had not received the Holy Spirit (Acts 19:2–3). Paul explained the complete gospel to them, pointing them to Jesus Christ as John had done (see Mark 1:7–8). The men were baptized, and Paul laid his hands on them. They immediately received the Spirit and, as a sign of their new life, began speaking in tongues and prophesying (Acts 19:4–7).

Paul spent three months teaching in the synagogue in Ephesus, reasoning from the Jewish Scriptures, but some in his audience not only rejected his message but they became abusive toward "the Way" (Acts 19:8–9). Paul took those who believed and moved from the synagogue to a school owned by a man named Tyrannus. There Paul preached daily to Jews and Greeks for two years (verses 9–10).

Despite the opposition in Ephesus, the Holy Spirit worked mightily through Paul. Luke says that "extraordinary miracles" were being performed (Acts 19:11) as people were being healed and evil spirits were being expelled (verse 12). Trying to get in on Paul's work, the "Sons of Sceva," seven traveling Jewish exorcists, tried to expel demons in Jesus' and Paul's names (verse 13). The demons responded that they recognized the authority of Jesus and Paul but did not know these men. The demons then attacked the men, beating, stripping, and chasing them out of the house (verses 14–16). After this incident, Jesus' name was even more respected in Ephesus, Paul saw a great increase in his ministry, and many former magicians burned their magic arts books (verses 17–20).

After his extended stay in Ephesus, Paul realized that the Holy Spirit was leading him to travel on. Continuing his third missionary journey, Paul sent Timothy and Erastus ahead to Macedonia (Acts 19:21–22). But before Paul left, a silversmith named Demetrius, who made shrines of Artemis and resented the decrease in business he'd seen since Paul's arrival, gathered other workmen and started a riot (verses 23–34). Eventually, the town clerk arrived and dispersed the crowd, telling them that, if they had something against Paul, they should bring him to court (verses 35–41). Paul left town quietly and went across the Aegean Sea to Macedonia where he traveled to Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea to encourage the churches there; then he went to Greece (Achaia) and spent three months there (Acts 20:1–3).

Paul had planned to board a ship in Corinth and set sail for Jerusalem via Syria, but he discovered that some Jews were plotting to waylay him on the voyage, so he returned to Macedonia by land. Paul retraced his steps from Corinth to Berea, Thessalonica, and Philippi, where he caught up with Luke again and observed Passover. From Philippi, Paul and Luke set sail for Troas, arriving there five days later and meeting Paul's traveling companions who had gone ahead of them: Timothy, Sopater, Aristarchus, Secundus, Gaius, Tychicus, and Trophimus. These men represented various churches and were probably helping bring a monetary gift to the Jerusalem church (cf. 1 Corinthians 16:1). They all stayed in Troas for one week (Acts 20:1–6).

Paul made the most of his short stay in Troas. On Sunday when the believers met, Paul preached long into the night (Acts 20:7–8). A young man named Eutychus sat on a windowsill of the third-story room. About midnight, he fell asleep and fell out the window to the ground below (verse 9). Eutychus was declared dead, but Paul raised him, served communion, and resumed speaking until daylight (verses 10–12).

Instead of traveling inland to visit the established churches of Asia Minor or sailing more directly to Jerusalem, Paul continued his third missionary journey by taking a coastal route. Paul walked to Assos, while the rest of the party sailed to that port and picked Paul up there. Then they all traveled to Mitylene, Trogyllium, and Miletus, along the southwest coast of Asia Minor (Acts 20:13–15). Paul bypassed Ephesus because he knew if he stopped there he'd be kept longer than he liked, and he wanted to reach Jerusalem by Pentecost (verse 16). Paul asked the Ephesian elders to meet him in Miletus, and they did. Paul prayed with them, encouraged them, warned them against false teachers, and predicted the hardships he would face in Jerusalem (verses 17–35). After tearful good-byes, the Ephesian elders saw Paul to the ship (verses 36–38).

From Miletus, Paul and his entourage sailed to Patara, then to Tyre in Syria, where they stayed a week (Acts 21:1–6). The disciples there begged Paul, for his own safety, not to go to Jerusalem. But he sailed on, stopping briefly in Ptolemais before landing in Caesarea and staying with Philip the evangelist (verses 7–14). While in Caesarea, the prophet Agabus declared that Paul would be imprisoned if he went to Jerusalem, but Paul was resolute in completing his mission. After several days, a group escorted Paul to Jerusalem and to the home of Mnason, who hosted Paul and his companions (verses 15–16). Thus Paul's third missionary journey came to an end.

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