

# PAUL'S THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEY

Acts 18:23—21:16

## Opening Thought

1) If this Sunday, Jesus physically appeared during the middle of your church's morning worship service and walked to the pulpit or lectern, what do you think He might say to your congregation? What beliefs/actions do you think He might commend you for? What words of correction might He speak and why?

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2) Suppose that after this same service, Jesus approached you and asked to take you to lunch. What issues or situations do you think He might address in your life? What do you think He might say and why?

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## Background of the Passage

Evidence from Paul's epistles suggests the great apostle launched out on his third missionary trip in an attempt to undo the damage caused among the churches by numerous opponents of the gospel. Beginning at Antioch, Paul journeyed through Galatia and Phrygia (18:23), eventually coming to Ephesus on the west coast of Asia Minor.

Paul's ministry in Ephesus lasted more than two years and was marked by an obvious movement of God's Spirit. Luke records that "the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed" (19:20). Following a riot instigated by area tradesmen, who saw the spread of Christianity as a threat to their livelihood selling silver idols of the goddess Diana, Paul ventured through Macedonia and into Achaia. In Athens, Paul was again divinely protected from a murderous plot at the hands of the Jews.

Arriving at Miletus, Paul summoned the elders of the Ephesian church to bid them farewell. This emotional discourse reveals Paul's pastoral heart (verses 18–20, 31, 36–37), and it records the presence of a well-trained group of disciples who would be able to carry the message of Christ throughout Asia.

In Tyre Paul was urged by his fellow believers not to take a financial gift from the Gentile churches (1 Corinthians 16:1–3) to the needy in Jerusalem. Nevertheless, the apostle pressed on. At Caesarea, further prophecies were given to and about Paul, warning him of certain imprisonment if he journeyed to the Jewish capital. Unmoved, Paul determined to complete his mission even if it meant dying "for the name of the Lord

Jesus” (21:13). God’s sovereignty is the underlying theme in this section (and this truth becomes even more apparent when later chapters reveal how this Jerusalem visit ultimately paved the way for Paul’s “all-expenses-paid” trip to Rome!).

## Bible Passage

Read 18:23—21:16, noting the key words and definitions to the right of the passage.

### Acts 18:23—21:16

- <sup>23</sup> *After he had spent some time there, he departed and went over the region of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples.*
- <sup>24</sup> *Now a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus.*
- <sup>25</sup> *This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things of the Lord, though he knew only the baptism of John.*
- <sup>26</sup> *So he began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Aquila and Priscilla heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.*
- <sup>27</sup> *And when he desired to cross to Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him; and when he arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace;*
- <sup>28</sup> *for he vigorously refuted the Jews publicly, showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ.*
- <sup>19:1</sup> *And it happened, while Apollos was at Corinth, that Paul, having passed through the upper regions, came to Ephesus. And finding some disciples*
- <sup>2</sup> *he said to them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” So they said to him, “We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit.”*
- <sup>3</sup> *And he said to them, “Into what then were you baptized?” So they said, “Into John’s baptism.”*
- <sup>4</sup> *Then Paul said, “John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.”*
- <sup>5</sup> *When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.*
- <sup>6</sup> *And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied.*
- <sup>7</sup> *Now the men were about twelve in all.*
- <sup>8</sup> *And he went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God.*
- <sup>9</sup> *But when some were hardened and did not believe, but spoke evil of the Way before the multitude, he departed from them and withdrew the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus.*
- <sup>10</sup> *And this continued for two years, so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.*
- <sup>11</sup> *Now God worked unusual miracles by the hands of Paul,*
- <sup>12</sup> *so that even handkerchiefs or aprons were brought from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out of them.*
- <sup>13</sup> *Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists took it upon themselves to call the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, “We exorcise you by the Jesus whom Paul preaches.”*
- <sup>14</sup> *Also there were seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, who did so.*
- <sup>15</sup> *And the evil spirit answered and said, “Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?”*
- <sup>16</sup> *Then the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, overpowered them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.*
- <sup>17</sup> *This became known both to all Jews and Greeks dwelling in Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified.*
- <sup>18</sup> *And many who had believed came confessing and telling their deeds.*
- <sup>19</sup> *Also, many of those who had practiced magic brought their books together and burned them in the sight of*

all. And they counted up the value of them, and it totaled fifty thousand pieces of silver.  
20 So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed.  
21 When these things were accomplished, Paul purposed in the Spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, "After I have been there, I must also see Rome."  
22 So he sent into Macedonia two of those who ministered to him, Timothy and Erastus, but he himself stayed in Asia for a time.  
23 And about that time there arose a great commotion about the Way.  
24 For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Diana, brought no small profit to the craftsmen.  
25 He called them together with the workers of similar occupation, and said: "Men, you know that we have our prosperity by this trade.  
26 "Moreover you see and hear that not only at Ephesus, but throughout almost all Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away many people, saying that they are not gods which are made with hands.  
27 "So not only is this trade of ours in danger of falling into disrepute, but also the temple of the great goddess Diana may be despised and her magnificence destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worship."  
28 Now when they heard this, they were full of wrath and cried out, saying, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!"  
29 So the whole city was filled with confusion, and rushed into the theater with one accord, having seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians, Paul's travel companions.  
30 And when Paul wanted to go in to the people, the disciples would not allow him.  
31 Then some of the officials of Asia, who were his friends, sent to him pleading that he would not venture into the theater.  
32 Some therefore cried one thing and some another, for the assembly was confused, and most of them did not know why they had come together.  
33 And they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward. And Alexander motioned with his hand, and wanted to make his defense to the people.  
34 But when they found out that he was a Jew, all with one voice cried out for about two hours, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!"  
35 And when the city clerk had quieted the crowd, he said: "Men of Ephesus, what man is there who does not know that the city of the Ephesians is temple guardian of the great goddess Diana, and of the image which fell down from Zeus?  
36 "Therefore, since these things cannot be denied, you ought to be quiet and do nothing rashly.  
37 "For you have brought these men here who are neither robbers of temples nor blasphemers of your goddess.  
38 "Therefore, if Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen have a case against anyone, the courts are open and there are proconsuls. Let them bring charges against one another.  
39 "But if you have any other inquiry to make, it shall be determined in the lawful assembly.  
40 "For we are in danger of being called in question for today's uproar, there being no reason which we may give to account for this disorderly gathering."  
41 And when he had said these things, he dismissed the assembly.  
20:1 After the uproar had ceased, Paul called the disciples to himself, embraced them, and departed to go to Macedonia.  
2 Now when he had gone over that region and encouraged them with many words, he came to Greece  
3 and stayed three months. And when the Jews plotted against him as he was about to sail to Syria, he decided to return through Macedonia.  
4 And 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.  
5 These men, going ahead, waited for us at Troas.  
6 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.  
7 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.

8 *There were many lamps in the upper room where they were gathered together.*  
9 *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.*  
10 *But Paul went down, fell on him, and embracing him said, "Do not trouble yourselves, for his life is in him."*  
11 *Now when he had come up, had broken bread and eaten, and talked a long while, even till daybreak, he departed.*  
12 *And they brought the young man in alive, and they were not a little comforted.*  
13 *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.*  
14 *And when he met us at Assos, we took him on board and came to Mitylene.*  
15 *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.*  
16 *For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus, so that he would not have to spend time in Asia; for he was hurrying to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the Day of Pentecost.*  
17 *From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church.*  
18 *And when they had come to him, he said to them: "You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you,*  
19 *"serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews;*  
20 *"how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house,*  
21 *"testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.*  
22 *"And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there,*  
23 *"except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me.*  
24 *"But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.*  
25 *"And indeed, now I know that you all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, will see my face no more.*  
26 *"Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men.*  
27 *"For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God.*  
28 *"Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.*  
29 *"For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.*  
30 *"Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.*  
31 *"Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.*  
32 *"So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.*  
33 *"I have coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel.*  
34 *"Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me.*  
35 *"I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"  
36 *And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all.*  
37 *Then they all wept freely, and fell on Paul's neck and kissed him,*  
38 *sorrowing most of all for the words which he spoke, that they would see his face no more. And they accompanied him to the ship.**

21:1 *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.
- <sup>2</sup> And finding a ship sailing over to Phoenicia, we went aboard and set sail.
- <sup>3</sup> 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.
- <sup>4</sup> And finding disciples, we stayed there seven days. They told Paul through the Spirit not to go up to Jerusalem.
- <sup>5</sup> 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.
- <sup>6</sup> When we had taken our leave of one another, we boarded the ship, and they returned home.
- <sup>7</sup> And when we had finished our voyage from Tyre, we came to Ptolemais, greeted the brethren, and stayed with them one day.
- <sup>8</sup> On the next day we who were Paul's companions departed and came to Caesarea, and entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him.
- <sup>9</sup> Now this man had four virgin daughters who prophesied.
- <sup>10</sup> And as we stayed many days, a certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea.
- <sup>11</sup> When he had come to us, 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.'"
- <sup>12</sup> Now when we heard these things, both we and those from that place pleaded with him not to go up to Jerusalem.
- <sup>13</sup> Then 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."
- <sup>14</sup> So when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, "The will of the Lord be done."
- <sup>15</sup> And after those days we packed and went up to Jerusalem.
- <sup>16</sup> Also some of the disciples from Caesarea went with us and brought with them a certain Mason of Cyprus, an early disciple, with whom we were to lodge.

**Apollos** (18:24)—an Old Testament saint and follower of John the Baptist; following the further instruction of Priscilla and Aquila, he became a powerful Christian preacher

**the way of the Lord** (v. 25)— an Old Testament phrase describing the broad spiritual and moral commands of God, not necessarily the explicit Christian faith

**baptism of John** (v. 25)— John's baptism prepared people for the Messiah's arrival. Apollos accepted that message, but he did not grasp basic Christian truths like the significance of Christ's death and resurrection, the ministry of the Holy Spirit, etc.

**the way of God more accurately** (v. 26)—a fuller explanation of the Christian faith

**the brethren wrote** (v. 27)— Letters of commendation were common in the early church.

**some disciples** (19:1)—followers of John the Baptist, hence Old Testament seekers; the word "disciple" means learner or follower and does not always refer to one who possesses saving faith

**"Did you receive the Holy Spirit ... "** (v. 2)—The question reflects Paul's uncertainty about their spiritual state; they knew about John's baptism, but had not received Christian baptism.

**believe on ... Christ Jesus** (v. 4)—John instructed them about Jesus Christ, not how to receive the Spirit.

**baptized** (v. 5)—Although required of believers, baptism does not save.

**spoke with tongues** (v. 6)— During this transitional period in salvation history, such an experience (similar to the events of chapters 2 and 10) served as proof that the Spirit, of whom they had not heard, was now indwelling them.

**hardened** (v. 9)—The Greek word refers to defiance against God.

**the school of Tyrannus** (v. 9) —either the owner of the hall, or a philosopher who spoke there; the name means “our Tyrant” and may be a nickname given by weary pupils; Paul was allowed to use the facility when it was free in the afternoons

**two years** (v. 10)—Paul taught here for two of the three years he was in Ephesus (see 20:31).

**unusual miracles** (v. 11)—to confirm and validate Paul’s apostolic authority

**Jesus ... Paul I know** (v. 15) —The demon recognized that these charlatan exorcists had no authority over him (unlike Jesus and the Apostle Paul).

**books** (v. 19)—of magic spells, worth an astonishing sum of money; by burning them, the new believers would not be able to resume their secret rites

**I must also see Rome** (v. 21) —Paul understood the strategic importance of the imperial city; effective ministry there would result in worldwide impact.

**silver shrines** (v. 24)—household idols of the goddess Diana (also known as Artemis); the sale of these was quite lucrative

**assembly** (v. 32)—The frenzied mob gathered in the theater, while the Asian leaders and Ephesian believers tried to discourage Paul from speaking and inciting the crowd further.

**city clerk** (v. 35)—in effect, the mayor

**the image which fell ... Zeus** (v. 35)—a likely reference to a meteor, believed to be a divine sign

**Jews plotted against him** (20:3)—probably a plan to kill Paul on his journey to Palestine, resulting in a change of travel plans

**first day of the week** (v. 7)— Sunday, the day the church gathered to worship and celebrate Christ’s resurrection

**young man** (v. 9)—likely between 7 and 14; the fumes of the lamps (verse 8) may have induced his sleepy state

**with many tears** (v. 19)—Paul wept for the lost (Romans 9:2–3), for the immature (1 Corinthians 2:4), and for those endangered by false teachers (20:29–31).

**from house to house** (v. 20)— Paul’s ministry included personal instruction in individual homes.

**Holy Spirit testifies** (v. 23)— Paul knew he faced danger ahead, but he was marked by a deep sense of duty.

**whole counsel of God** (v. 7)— the entire plan and purpose of God for salvation in all its fullness

**overseers** (v. 28)—same as elders and pastors; those who protect and lead

**savage wolves** (v. 29)—the true nature of the false teachers

**build you up** (v. 32)—The Bible is the source of spiritual growth.

**these hands ... provided for my necessities** (v. 34)—Though Paul had every right to earn a living from the gospel, he often would support himself with his tentmaking skill.

**fell on Paul’s neck** (v. 37)—a common biblical way of expressing extreme emotion

**departed** (21:1)—literally, “to tear away,” describing the emotional anguish of Paul’s departure

**disciples** (v. 4)—The church at Tyre had been founded by the Jerusalem believers who had fled from the persecution instigated by Paul (see 11:19).

**virgin daughters ... prophesied** (v. 9)—That they were virgins may indicate a calling by God into special

ministry (see 1 Corinthians 7:34). The nature and extent of their prophetic gifts is not disclosed by Luke.

**belt** (v. 11)—Old Testament prophets often acted out their prophecies; here Agabus’s action foreshadowed Paul’s arrest and imprisonment.

**for the name** (v. 13)—The name of the Lord Jesus represents all that He is.

## Understanding the Text

3) Who was Apollos, what were his gifts, and what happened after Priscilla and Aquila heard him preach?

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4) What evidence suggests that the men encountered by Paul in 19:1–7 were not yet saved?

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(verses to consider: Mark 2:18; Luke 5:33; 1 Corinthians 6:19; 12:13; 2 Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 1:13; Romans 8:9; Jude 19)

5) How did Paul spend the bulk of his time in Ephesus? What were the results of his ministry there (19:9–41)? What happened when he said good-bye to the believers there (see 20:17–38)?

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## Cross Reference

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:1–12.

## Exploring the Meaning

6) What does Paul say in 1 Thessalonians 2 about his ministry motives and practices?

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7) What are some of the tangible, concrete, practical ways that the Apostle Paul demonstrated a pastor's heart for those to whom he ministered (chapters 19 and 20)?

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8) Why did Luke include the incident of Eutychus (20:7–12) in his record? What lessons are there for us?

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9) Re-read 20:22–23. How was Paul able to stay motivated in the face of such unrelenting opposition and certain persecution?

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## Summing Up ...

“The weapon Christians are to wield in their personal battle with the forces of darkness is ‘the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God’ (Ephesians 6:17). As it is through the power of the Word alone that the intellectual fortresses of Satan fall, so Christians by that truth can successfully battle Satan and his demon hosts. Even the Book of Acts, which records the apostles’ evangelistic ministry, emphasizes the preaching of the Word over signs, wonders, miracles, and exorcisms. And in 6:4 the apostles defined the priorities of their ministry in the church: ‘We will devote ourselves to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.’” —*John MacArthur*



## Reflecting on the Text

10) How well do you know the Bible? Do you have a good grasp of the Scripture? Why? What could you begin doing this week to become a better student of God's Word?

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11) Christianity did not face fierce opposition in Ephesus until its spread began affecting the sale of silver items. Suddenly things got very ugly! In many ways this attitude is still in place. Token religiosity is OK, so long as it does not result in an adverse financial effect. The minute it does, theological beliefs take a back seat to economic concerns.

In what specific ways are you sometimes tempted to value material prosperity over spiritual purity?

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12) The new believers in Ephesus wisely made a clean break with their past by burning occult objects from their old life before Christ (19:18–20). To what from your past are you hanging on that may be hampering your walk with the Lord? What do you need to do?

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## Recording Your Thoughts

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**For further study, see the following passages:**

Genesis 18:19

Isaiah 56:11

Ezekiel 33:7–9

Matthew 9:14, 21

Mark 5:1–4

Luke 1:16–17

Luke 3:8, 5:32–33

Luke 24:1

Acts 8:17

Romans 9:18

Romans 15:22–24, 31

Romans 16:1–2

1 Corinthians 1:12, 9:18

2 Corinthians 2:16, 3:1–2

2 Corinthians 11:26, 12:12

1 Thessalonians 2:13

2 Thessalonians 3:8–9

1 Timothy 4:16

2 Timothy 2:2

2 Timothy 4:3–4, 20

Hebrews 2:3–4

Hebrews 3:8, 13

Jude 3, 4, 10–13