

MISSIONS IS CHURCH PLANTING

Paul's Third Missionary Journey

Acts 18:22b-20:38

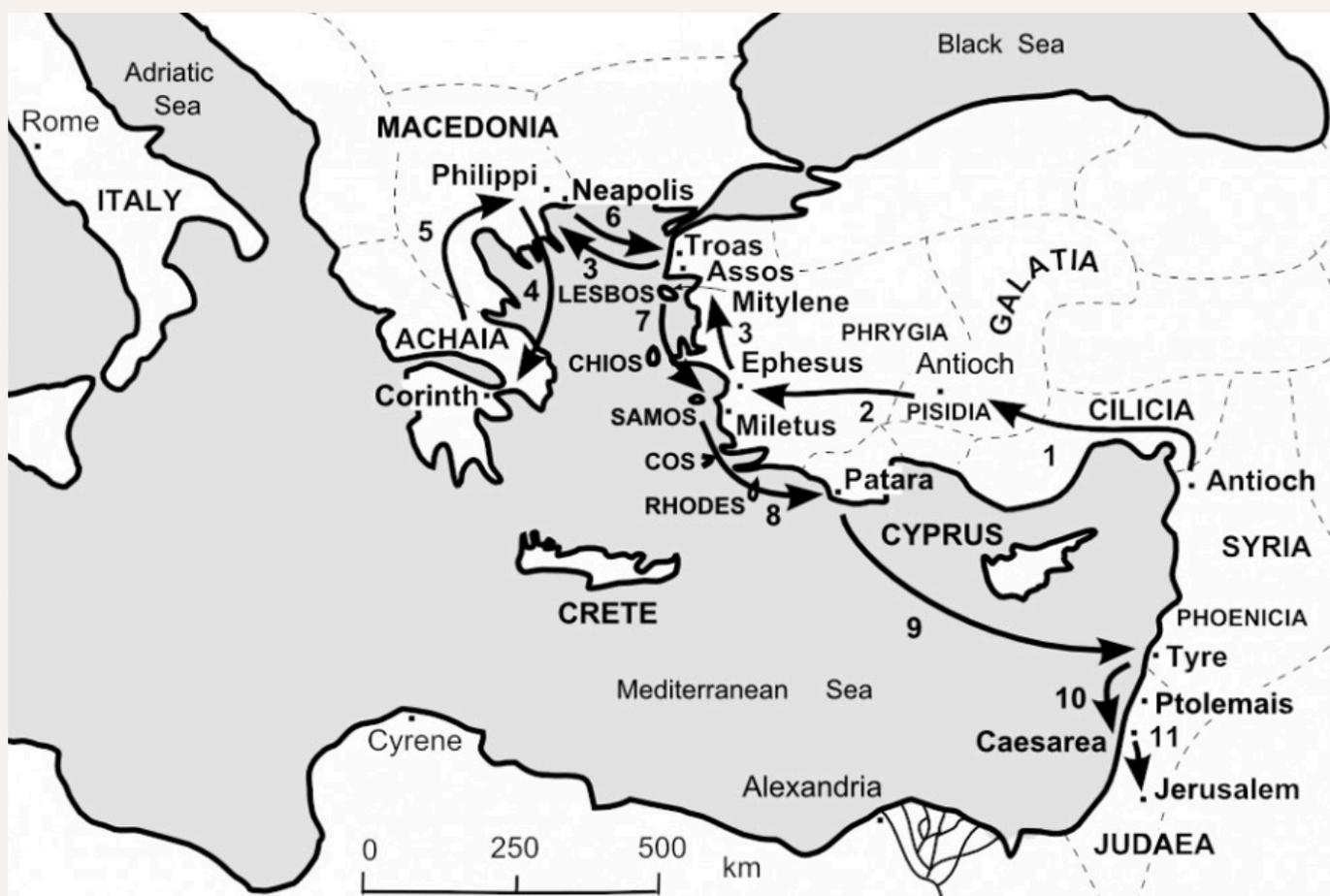
Week 4 - August 4



Questions

1. What does a church planting movement reveal about the heart of God?
2. Are you willing to go anywhere the Lord leads? Are you willing to work in God's designed ways. How might that look?
3. How can you prepare for the spiritual warfare that is sure to come?

PAUL'S THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEY





Commentary

Missions is church planting means that new believers cannot survive, much less thrive in isolation. So, wherever Paul went he planted churches for the new believers. This is the biblical model.

As Paul planted churches he built into their spiritual DNA church planting. For Paul it was not just about planting a church, it was about the multiplication of churches, churches planting more churches for Kingdom advancement. A vital part of his missionary strategy, therefore, was training leaders for the churches. Church planting and leadership training go hand and hand.

On Paul's first missionary journey persecution was the theme. On his second journey households, oikos, being saved and formed into churches was the theme. On his third journey spiritual warfare is the theme. All three were part of his leadership training.

Revisiting the Churches, Acts 18:23

As Paul embarked on his third missionary journey, he revisited the churches he had planted in Galatia and Phrygia. The care for the churches was foremost in the heart of Paul. He strengthened them in the word, dealt with any issues that hinder the gospel, trained leaders, and encouraged them to increase through church planting.

Church Planting in Ephesus and a Church Planting Movement, Acts 18:21-19:41

When Paul headed back to Antioch at the end of his second missionary journey he left Aquilla and Priscilla in Ephesus. They started a fledgling church. They met Apollos, a gifted preacher who knew only the baptism of John the Baptist. Priscilla and Aquilla took him aside and explained the gospel to him. He wanted to go to the province of Achaia (where Corinth and Athens are located). The church commended him and sent letters to the disciples in Achaia. Apollos had a powerful ministry there preaching Jesus. God used Aquilla and Priscilla to prepare the ground for Paul's coming to Ephesus.

In Acts 19:1 Paul arrives at Ephesus. The background of Paul's time in Ephesus is important in two ways.

The first is God's perfect timing. On the second missionary Paul wanted to go into Asia but the Holy Spirit would not let him. Now on the third missionary journey he comes to the gateway of Asia, Ephesus, and spends two and a half years there. The result was a church planting movement that covered the province of Asia.

The second is spiritual warfare. The temple of Artemis was the central point in Ephesus. It was so ornate that it was one of the Seven Wonders of the World. All false religions are demon inspired and demon empowered. Artemis was a Greek goddess of fertility. The worship of Artemis included temple prostitutes. It was the source of embedded immorality in the city.



Commentary

Ephesus was also the occult center of Asia if not of the whole Roman Empire. The dominate practice of the city was magic. It was not magic like we think of illusions used to trick people. This was dark, demonic magic arts used in people's everyday lives. It included such things as casting spells and curses on others, to ward off bad luck, to appease the spirits in time of illness or other crisis, making everyday decisions such as in business or marriage, and trying to see the future.

Both the temple of Artemis and the dark magic arts were Satan's in your face work to fill people with fear and hold them captive. So, when Paul entered Ephesus, he was entering Satan's seat, a place of great spiritual darkness. Satan does not give up his territory easily. So, when Paul entered Ephesus, he was entering the arena of spiritual warfare. It is no wonder that in his letter to the Ephesian church that he wrote the most extensive passage on spiritual warfare reminding them that we don't wrestle against flesh and blood but against principalities and powers and spiritual powers in high place, to put on the whole armor of God to protect from Satanic attacks, and to take the offensive weapons of the Word of God and praying in the Spirit to defeat the wiles of the devil.

As was his usual practice in any city, Paul began his gospel ministry to the Jews in their synagogue. He reasoned with the Jews for three months about King Jesus, but the Jews resisted him. So, he left them and reasoned daily at a large public lecture hall, the Hall of Tyrannus, for two years. The end results is found in verse 10, "all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord." What a remarkable statement!

People from all over Asia would come to Ephesus. Those who heard and believed were discipled and would return to their home city and share the gospel. It was a church planting movements as churches were planted in the six other churches in Revelation 2-3, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. Churches were planted in Colossi and Hierapolis. These churches planted more churches in surrounding villages and in rural areas. The demonic darkness in Asia was shattered by this rapid multiplication of churches. Such church planting movements give insight into the heart of God for the gospel to go everywhere to everyone. No place is too dark or too hard for the gospel. God desires captives to be set free and people transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of Jesus.

In the rest of Acts 19 starting in verse 11 there are three more pictures of spiritual warfare in missions. The first is in verses 11-12 where "God did extraordinary miracles by the hand of Paul." Anyone who touched a part of handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched Paul's skin were taken to the sick and they were healed, or demons came out of them. This is the only time that miracles were used in Paul's missionary journeys. Why did God do this at Ephesus? To demonstrate the supremacy of Jesus over the demonic powers of darkness.



Commentary

The second picture of spiritual warfare is in verses 13-20 and the seven sons of Sceva. These were traveling exorcists who traveled from one place to another casting out demons for a fee. In the magic arts of Asia, they would invoke the name of a strong spirit to cast out lower spirits. In Ephesus seeing the miracles Paul was working, they added the name of Jesus, whom Paul was preaching, in their incantations to cast a demon out of a man. But the demon replied, "Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?" The demon possessed man beat the seven exorcists and they fled naked. When this news became known, the citizens of Ephesus were filled with fear and the name of Jesus was exalted. The hypocrisy of the new believers who secretly kept their magic books was exposed. They repented and confessed their sin. They brought their magic books, valued at five million dollars and burned them publicly. Following Jesus requires a radical break with the old. This was true then and it is true today.

The third picture of spiritual warfare is in verses 21-20:1. So many had been saved and so many house churches planted in Ephesus that it was hurting business at the temple of Artemis. Demetrius a silversmith who made shrines of Artemis started a riot against Paul and his missionary team.

Paul had already planned to revisit the churches in Macedonia and Greece. After the uproar was over, he called the disciples, the new believers, encouraged them in the word and departed.

Revisiting the Churches in Macedonia and Greece, Acts 20:1-3

Little is said about these visits other than Paul visited the churches in Macedonia, then spent three months in Greece (Achaia) and returned visiting the church in Macedonia again. He strengthened and encouraged them in the Word and trained and raised up leaders.

Leadership Training, Act 20:4-38

Leaving Macedonia Paul is compelled by the Holy Spirit to go to Jerusalem knowing that it will result in his arrest and imprisonment. Throughout his missionary church planting ministry he had gone wherever the Lord led in faith-filled obedience. Now, he does the same thing even knowing what the result would be. Following where He leads is faith in the infinite wisdom of God, even when He leads to hard places.

As Paul left Macedonia to travel to Jerusalem, he made two stops for leadership training. The first was at Troas. Paul spent seven days there training church leaders from Macedonia, Galatia, and Asia. On the last day Paul taught until midnight and a young man fell asleep and fell three stories and died. Paul raised him, ate a little and continued training until day break when he departed. That Paul gave such intense time speaks about how important training leaders was to him.



Commentary

The second training occurred in Miletus where he sent for and met with the Ephesian elders. We do not know how long he met with them. But the substance of his training is given in verses 12-28. He taught from his own example. He had lived among them. He had taught them publicly at Hall of Tyrannous and from house church to house church the whole counsel of God. He taught the importance of the church as bought with the blood of Jesus. He taught them their responsibilities given by the Holy Spirit to give careful attention to the flock of God, feeding the church with the Word, leading the church in God's will, and protecting the church from false prophets.

The training ended in a tearful parting. Paul sailed to Jerusalem. His mission church planting work was over. He had preached the gospel over a large part of the Roman Empire. In prison he would write to some of the churches. He even planted a church in Caesar's household through his witness to the Praetorium Guard. But he would never travel again. But the story does not end here. The churches Paul had planted and the leaders he had trained would take the gospel and plant churches throughout the world.

Prayer Time

Close with a time of prayer:

1. For our Acts 1:8 Partners who are traveling to be with us next week.
2. That we will be both encouraged and challenged by the reports of our Acts 1:8 partners.
3. That we each will commit:
 - To praying more consistently and fervent for our Acts 1:8 partners.
 - To being sensitive and obedience to the Lord in our giving to support our Acts 1:8 partners.
 - To going on short term missionary trips; and that the Lord of the Harvest will call our people from our church to long-term missions.