

Paul's Third Missionary Journey

Topic

Ministry mindedness

Theme

Paul served God with focus, dedication, and sacrifice.

Desired Learner Response

The learner will determine whether he is ministry minded and will consider ways to take advantage of the edifying ministry of the Word.

Materials

• Resources 1, 2, and 14

Scripture Focus

Acts 18:23–20:38

Summary

Lesson 11 focuses attention on the lengthy ministry of Paul on his third missionary journey. Paul's focus on this journey was to bring glory to God. In doing so, he showed an attitude of dedication and sacrifice. His message to the Ephesian elders reveals what it means to be ministry minded.

Outline

I. Ministry in Galatia and Phrygia (18:22, 23)

II. Ministry in Ephesus (18:24–19:41)

- A. Work of Apollos (18:24–28)
- B. Encounter with John's disciples (19:1–7)
- C. Triumph of the gospel (19:8–20)
- D. Paul's plan to visit Jerusalem and Rome (19:21–23)
- E. Riot in Ephesus (19:24–41)

III. Ministry in Macedonia and Greece (20:1–5)

IV. Ministry in Troas (20:6–12)

V. Ministry at Miletus to the Ephesian Elders (20:13–38)

- A. Paul reviews (20:17–21)
- B. Paul testifies (20:22–27)
- C. Paul warns (20:28–38)

Memory Verse

"And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified" (Acts 20:32).

GETTING STARTED

Full of Himself

ASK: How do you know when someone is full of himself?

ASK: Why do we normally not like to be around someone who is full of himself?

The Apostle Paul was not full of himself. We could say he was *full of Christ*. This lesson will cover his third missionary journey, including his personal testimony about his focus on Christ and his dedication to sacrificially serving Him.

Send Me Your Money

ASK: How do you respond when you hear a wealthy television evangelist plead for people to support his ministry? (Q1)

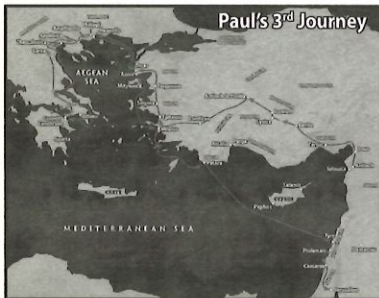
ASK: What do you conclude about his character? (Q2)

The Apostle Paul made sure he served God with pure intentions. This lesson shows his Christ-focused, humble example and examines his personal testimony of dedication and sacrifice.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

Luke's narrative of this third journey focuses primarily on Paul's three-year ministry in Ephesus. This journey occurred approximately from the spring of AD 53 to the spring of AD 57.

MAP: Display resource 14 to point out Paul's route as you cover his third missionary journey.



I. Ministry in Galatia and Phrygia (18:22, 23)

While Luke did not actually record Paul's activities at the church in Antioch after Paul returned from his missionary journeys, one can safely assume that Paul stationed himself in that church. He certainly returned to it after his second missionary journey.

Most scholars suggest Paul departed for his third missionary journey during the spring of AD 53. After leaving the church at Antioch, Paul apparently followed a route similar to the one he followed on his second missionary journey. He most likely traveled through the province of Galatia and through the district of Phrygia (18:23). No doubt he traveled that route to encourage the churches in that region.

II. Ministry in Ephesus (18:24—19:41)

As Paul pressed westward, he eventually entered Ephesus, the capital and most populated city of Asia Minor. Ephesus was the political, religious, and commercial hub of the entire area. The city lay on a main highway connecting the

Aegean Sea with various trade routes. Its attractions included a natural harbor, a huge stadium, and a theater. The theater had a capacity of about twenty-four thousand. The street connecting the theater and stadium stretched approximately thirty-five feet wide and was flanked by huge colonnades.

In Ephesus was the ancient shrine to Artemis, known to the Romans as Diana. Artemis was the goddess of motherhood. The temple stood approximately 425 feet long by 220 feet wide and 60 feet high and could accommodate approximately fifty thousand people. Ephesus was a hotbed of superstition, philosophy, and cultic activity.

A. Work of Apollos (18:24–28)

Luke presented a snapshot of Apollos, an important individual who later assumed key roles of leadership in the church (Acts 18:24–28). Luke used this snapshot to share what happened in Ephesus prior to his own arrival.

Apollos, a Christian Hellenistic Jew, had a thorough understanding of the Old Testament (18:24). Luke described him as *mighty in the scriptures* and reported that Apollos *was instructed in the way of the Lord* (18:24, 25). In spite of his Biblical knowledge, he did not know about the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

READ: Acts 18:24. **ASK:** What skills did Apollos have? (Q3) *He was eloquent and well-versed in the Scriptures.*

READ: Acts 18:25–28. **ASK:** How did Apollos respond to being pulled aside by Aquilla and Priscilla for further instruction in the way of God? (Q4) *Apparently he humbly received the instruction and was eager to be able to teach others.*

Apollos, though highly skilled, was able to take criticism because he was not focused on magnifying himself. His desire was for the world to know Jesus is the Christ (18:28). Aquilla and Priscilla also showed humility. They were glad to help Apollos in his ministry, and they even recommend him to the believers in Achaia. They were not threatened by his strong ministry skills.

Although Priscilla and Aquila had left their residence in Italy involuntarily because of a decree by Claudius (18:2), they never grew bitter or strayed from the faith. Paul referred to them as *my helpers* in Romans 16:3. This phrase, *my helpers*, actually indicates special *fellow workers* in the gospel. Paul also said that this couple *laid down their own necks* for him (Rom. 16:4). They hosted a church in their own house (1 Cor. 16:19) as well as worked in the leather trade to help support the gospel (Acts 18:3). They were flexible and open to the Lord's leading.

After Priscilla and Aquila disciplined him, Apollos traveled into Achaia and used the Old Testament to demonstrate that Jesus is indeed the Messiah (18:27, 28). That the brethren in Ephesus wrote Apollos a letter of introduction clearly indicates that a church had been established in Ephesus.

ASK: How successful was Apollos once he understood the way of God more accurately? (Q5) *He greatly helped believers.*

The believers in Corinth received Apollos, and he had a powerful ministry among them (1 Cor. 3:6). In fact, the Corinthian believers developed a strong personal following of Apollos (1 Cor. 1:12; 3:4). Eventually Apollos returned to Ephesus.

When Paul wrote 1 Corinthians from Ephesus, Apollos was with him (1 Cor. 16:12).

B. Encounter with John's disciples (19:1–7)

As Paul moved through the upper region of Ephesus, he encountered some disciples of John the Baptist (19:1–3). He recognized the incompleteness of their teaching, so he asked them about the Holy Spirit. The disciples explained that they had not yet heard of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. These men were unaware not only of Pentecost but also of the Messiahship of Jesus Christ. But after Apollos spoke with them, they believed and were baptized (19:5).

As with the converts in Samaria, the Ephesian converts received the Spirit at the hands of an apostle (19:6). The men *spoke with tongues* and *prophesied* after the *Holy Ghost came upon them*. This is the last occasion of tongue-speaking recorded in Acts. Perhaps the separate conversion and Spirit baptism occurred among those former disciples of John to highlight the fulfillment of the Spirit's ministry.

The episodes with Apollos and John the Baptist's disciples illustrate the transitional nature of that time in the church's history. Only during that limited period could individuals repent at the message of John the Baptist and then believe in the earthly Jesus and His resurrection, without yet hearing of the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The transition is from Old Covenant belief into a New Covenant era.

C. Triumph of the gospel (19:8–20)

To illustrate the power of the gospel, Luke recorded a brief section of a two-year ministry of Paul. As the Jews grew unresponsive to Paul's ministry within the synagogue, Paul turned to the Gentiles (19:8, 9). Specifically, he went to the school of Tyrannus.

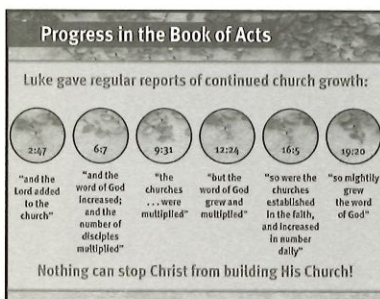
In addition to *disputing daily*, Paul faced deep demonic opposition while in Ephesus. Luke was careful to illustrate how through the ministry of the Spirit, Paul achieved victory in that occult center. Paul was so successful, that he had to be careful not to think highly of himself.

READ: Acts 19:11–16. **ASK:** What happened when the sons of a Jewish priest tried to harness the power that Paul used to cast out demons? (Q6) *The demons used the body of the one they possessed to attack the sons and send them fleeing for their lives.*

If the itinerate Jewish exorcists had been successful, they would have diminished the name of Christ. Instead God used the account of their failure to convict numerous people of their involvement with the occult. They were converted and gathered together to burn their magic books (19:17–19). The cost of the books was enormous, equaling the yearly salaries of 150 men.

Luke ended with an incredible progress report in Acts 19:20: *So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed*. Note that he didn't say anything about Paul's fame or fortune. As Paul noted later, he was very careful not to use his power and position as a means to gain wealth (cf. 20:33, 34). He was focused on magnifying Christ.

RESOURCE: Display resource 2 to note Luke's latest progress report.



D. Paul's plan to visit Jerusalem and then Rome (19:21–23)

Toward the end of Paul's ministry in Ephesus, Paul made a major decision to travel to Rome. This decision marked a major transition both in his own ministry and in Acts. The phrase *Paul purposed in the spirit* (19:21) could refer to the work of the Holy Spirit and not to Paul's human spirit.

READ: Acts 19:21. **ASK:** What evidence do you see in this verse that Paul was concerned about being able to take a vacation and maybe even retire after such a long, demanding ministry? (Q7) *None! Paul was consumed with serving the Lord rather than looking out for himself and fulfilling selfish desires. There is nothing wrong with vacations and retirement as long as we don't lose our focus on serving the Lord.*

Paul planned to use Rome as a platform to evangelize the western portion of the empire. He mentioned that he must first travel to Jerusalem. Most likely Paul wanted to return to Jerusalem so he could minister to the needs of poor saints (Rom. 15:25–31; 1 Cor. 16:1–4).

E. Riot in Ephesus (19:24–41)

In Ephesus the opposition against Paul and the gospel continued. One incident of opposition involved a silversmith named Demetrius. Luke presented a vignette featuring Demetrius to clearly illustrate the power and progress of the gospel.

READ: Acts 19:24–27. **ASK:** What was the main reason Demetrius was concerned about the diminishing popularity of the worship of Diana? (Q8) *He was losing money due to reduced demand for his hand-crafted idols.*

ASK: How would you describe Demetrius' approach to his religion? (Q9) *Self-centered, greedy, and shallow.*

The gospel had made such an impact that the silversmith trade was declining. Ephesian silversmiths made small idols for the worship of Artemis (19:23–27). While Paul remained at the school of Tyrannus, little opposition erupted. However, once his teaching began to actually affect societal and religious movements, Demetrius stirred up trouble, and a riot occurred.

As the mob formed, they rushed into the open-air amphitheater. The town clerk was the chief administrative officer of the town, the equivalent of a modern mayor. This man quieted the crowd and restored order. The greediness of the silversmiths stood in stark contrast to Paul's humble service for the Lord.

III. Ministry in Macedonia and Greece (20:1–5)

Paul next traveled into Macedonia. Most likely he wrote 2 Corinthians while he was there. Luke gave only an abbreviated report of Paul's ministry in Macedonia. Second Corinthians 1–7 seems to overlap some of the events recorded by Luke. After writing 2 Corinthians, Paul again visited the church at Corinth. While there, he wrote the epistle to the Romans. So on his third missionary journey, he wrote three epistles.

IV. Ministry in Troas (20:6–12)

After Paul departed Corinth, he apparently traveled to Philippi and then sailed to Troas (20:6). While at Troas, he raised a young man from the dead. The young man died when he fell out of a window after falling asleep listening to Paul's sermon.

ASK: Why might God have allowed a young man to fall to his death while Paul was preaching? Think about what the people would have learned about God when Paul raised him from the dead. (Q10) *Raising the young man from the dead would have been a memorable illustration both of God's power and love. No doubt the incident made Paul's message even more impactful.*

V. Ministry at Miletus to the Ephesian Elders (20:13–38)

A. Paul reviews (20:17–21)

From Troas Paul went to Miletus. While there, Paul met with the elders from the church at Ephesus (20:17). In this farewell address Paul emphasized his ministry and concern for the church.

READ: Acts 20:17–19. **ASK:** What motivated Paul's ministry? (Q11) *Serving God.*

ASK: Why was humility so essential to Paul's ministry success? (Q12) *Paul's humility opened the door for God to work through him. Pride would have killed Paul's ministry. He would not have been willing to endure persecution and his message would have been dictated by what benefited him the most.*

Paul was a model servant of the Lord. He had lots of opportunities to make his successes all about himself. But he chose instead to serve humbly. His humble dependence on God helped him endure painful persecution from the Jews.

Paul was also true to God's message (20:20, 21). He never compromised his preaching to placate his hearers. He preached the truth even when he knew it might cost him his life. Paul expected the elders at Ephesus to follow his example.

B. Paul testifies (20:22–27)

Paul next testified concerning his present standing. He knew the Spirit was directing him to Jerusalem even though the Spirit testified that chains and tribulations awaited him there (20:22, 23).

READ: Acts 20:24. **ASK:** How did Paul respond to his coming imprisonment in Jerusalem? (Q13) *He looked forward to finishing the course God laid out for him. He anticipated the joy that would result from his obedience.*

Paul shared his passion to finish his course and ministry (20:24). He reflected on how he had declared to the Ephesians the entire counsel of God (20:25–27). The phrase *counsel of God* refers to the broad scope of God's plans and purposes.

Paul likened his faithfulness to God's message to the faithfulness of a watchman (20:26). Paul could say that he declared the whole counsel to those under his watch. That meant he was innocent of their blood.

C. Paul warns (20:28–38)

Notice how Luke interchanged the term *elders* with *overseers* in verse 28. Paul clearly affirmed that the Holy Spirit had made these men elders/overseers to feed, or pastor, the church. Also Paul reminded these pastors that God, not the elders/overseers, bought and owns the church.

Paul made clear that opposition would come from both without and within the church. The opposition would be like savage wolves who seek to destroy Christ's ministry (20:29).

READ: Acts 20:30. **ASK:** What would the savage wolves try to do? (Q14) Draw disciples to themselves.

Since the savage wolves would infiltrate the church, Paul commended the elders to God's Word. The Word would help them spot the false teachings of the savage wolves. It would also build them up spiritually and help them avoid falling suspect to sins such as covetousness (20:31, 32).

All church leaders are susceptible to the desire to gain power and money. Paul had many opportunities to gain financially through his ministry. He refused to do so (20:33, 34). Instead, he served those in need and focused on what he could give (20:35).

As Paul departed from the Ephesian elders, they prayed together and experienced an outpouring of emotion (20:36–38). Paul's life was already an incredible testimony of what God could do through someone surrendered to Him. But God was not yet done with Paul. He had plans to use Paul in Jerusalem and then in Rome.

MAKING IT PERSONAL

Focus Examination

ASK: How do you approach the ministries you are involved in? Do you complain about having to participate? Or do you rejoice in the opportunity? (Q15)

ASK: What does your approach to ministry say about your focus in life? (Q16)

Encourage your learners to spend time examining their hearts and thinking about who or what has captured the focus of their lives.

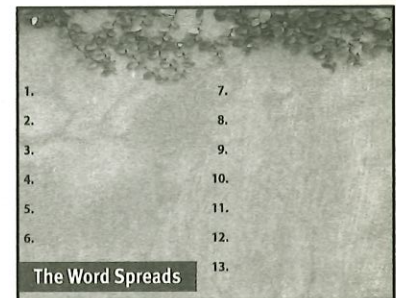
The Word of His Grace

ASK: What role does God's Word play in your life? (Q17)

ASK: What might you need to do to avail yourself of the edifying ministry of the Word? (Q18)

Review Resource

Use resource 1 to review the response for this lesson: Focus on serving God, not self.



Paul Remains Steadfast



Topic

Steadfastness

Theme

Even when treated unfairly, God's servants must remain steadfast.

Desired Learner Response

The learner will analyze his or her own attitude toward unfair situations and will determine to honor God in action and attitude in life's unfair situations.

Materials

- Resources 1 and 16

Scripture Focus

Acts 21–26

Summary

Lesson 12 draws attention to the steadfast witness of the apostle during his trials. This lesson focuses on Paul's two major speeches and his continual and faithful witness before powerful rulers.

Outline

I. Paul's Journey to Jerusalem (21:1–14)

- A. Paul warned in Tyre (21:1–6)
- B. Paul warned in Caesarea (21:7–14)

II. Paul's Reception in Jerusalem (21:15–23:35)

- A. Meeting with the Jerusalem elders (21:15–26)
- B. Seizure of Paul in the temple (21:27–36)
- C. Paul's defense before the people (21:37–22:29)
- D. Paul's appearance before the Sanhedrin and the conspiracy (23:1–35)

III. Paul's Steadfastness before Powerful Rulers (24:1–26:32)

- A. Imprisonment under Felix (24:1–27)
 1. The charges against Paul (24:1–9)
 2. Paul's defense (24:10–21)
 3. Felix's indecision and Paul's detention (24:22–27)
- B. Imprisonment under Festus (25:1–26:32)
 1. Paul's defense before Festus (25:1–12)
 2. Paul's case discussed with Herod Agrippa II (25:13–26:32)

Memory Verses

"Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come: That Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should shew light unto the people, and to the Gentiles" (Acts 26:22, 23).