

What's the Message – Lesson 120

Today we will travel along with Paul as he begins his third missionary journey.

Greetings in the name of Jesus, our Savior. Lord, as we walk with Paul today, we ask that You would help us to see not merely names on the pages of our Bible, but real . . . live people . . . with the same concerns and problems that we have. And help us along our earthly walk, to share the wonderful message of Jesus with the people we meet. Amen.

Last time we saw Paul carry the message of Jesus into the Roman world, as far west as Corinth, then return to Jerusalem to inform the Disciples that remained there the good news of the outreach to the Gentiles. He then went back to his home base of Antioch and spent some months there, but soon was on the road again to visit the churches he planted at Derbe, Lystra, and Iconioum, to strengthen all the members. This meant that Paul walked north through his hometown of Tarsus, through the Cilician Gates in the 12,000 foot-tall Tarsus mountains, and through the provinces of Pisidia, Galatia and Phrygia.

It also meant that he would at least skirt a fringe of the fantastic other-worldly area known as Cappadocia. It is a region unlike any other on this planet . . . a fantasy-land more in keeping with the imagination of a Disneyland than reality. Yet it is quite real, the result of the output from a chain of volcanoes. Lava, tuff, and ashes have been sculpted by the eroding forces of wind, rain, ice, and sharp temperature changes into columns called “fairy chimneys.” The fearsome nature of this region has been used by men for centuries to hide from their enemies. People have dug into the relatively soft tuff and built not only homes, but entire underground cities. In later years, Christians built fabulous churches here, elaborately decorated with beautiful fresco artwork, to hide from the invading Turks. I hope you recognize that this is rugged country, and that Paul was not enjoying the comfort of an air-conditioned automobile.

The province of Pisidia was particularly known for two things: its geography, and certain kinds of people. The geography included notably rugged mountains, swift rivers, and sizeable lakes. It was also noted as being a haven for robbers and

slave traders. This was probably what Paul was referring to when later he wrote in 2 Corinthians 11:26 about facing “dangers from rivers, and dangers from bandits.” From Antioch in Pisidia it is approximately 400 miles, almost due west, along a primary trade route in the Meander River valley to Ephesus. On the south side of this valley were two cities that would become better known later in the ministries of Paul and John, the cities of Laodicea and Colassae.

Paul’s route may not have taken him through those two towns, but in all likelihood he did stop at another city, one right on the trade route known as The King’s Highway, even though Luke does not mention it in his account. This city is Hieropolis, and it can still be visited today. In fact, people do come from many nations to enjoy the baths in the natural mineral waters there. It is reasonable to assume that Paul, after walking for weeks over mountains and dusty countryside, would have wanted to stop for a moment to regenerate himself in these healing waters. I can personally attest, that after swimming and soaking in them, these waters do have a positive influence on tired bodies, relaxing muscles and regenerating an exhausted attitude. Paul was not taking an easy trip, and it is only logical that he would have wanted these same refreshing benefits for his tired body.

Paul’s destination is Ephesus, established by Caesar Augustus in the year 27 B. C. as the capital of the Roman province of Asia. It was one of the five great cities of the Roman empire, and the site of one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, the temple of Artemis, the goddess of abundance and fertility. This temple, also called the Artemision, was the largest temple ever built that was made entirely of marble. It was 165 feet wide and over 345 feet long – longer than a football field – with a double row of columns that were nearly 60 feet tall. It was definitely a sign of the wealth of this great center of commerce.

Although Paul walked into Ephesus from the west, most people arrived by ship. The street from the harbor docks to the main marketplace was over 1,500 feet long and 33 feet wide, paved with marble plate . . . and lit at night. Only three cities – Rome, Antioch, and Ephesus – could afford to light their streets at night. It must have been an impressive sight to a traveler arriving at the port in the evening, to walk up the lighted street from the harbor toward the great amphitheater that dominates the city, with all the colonnades and beautiful statuary displaying the wealth of Ephesus around him.

The amphitheater had begun construction under the emperor Claudius only a few years before Paul's arrival, and wasn't completed until 60 years later. I can also personally attest that it would easily seat 24,000 people, and still has such amazing acoustics that a person standing on the stadium floor and speaking at a normal conversational level can be clearly understood at the top row of seats – even without a PA system. Please keep this acoustic feature in mind. It becomes an important factor in an event Luke does record for our benefit.

But most of all, Ephesus meant people. Around 250,000 of them at its peak. This meant homes and families and children, all with the same eternal problems and needs that we have today. According to one Turkish guide book, “To a Roman, his family and home were considered sacred, and each home had its household gods. The family would have simple religious ceremonies which adapted to new needs. Everyday prayers would be said and the gods called on for help. Meals were eaten in a religious atmosphere when libations of a few drops of wine were poured on the floor and incense burned.”

But Luke is not presenting a travelogue, nor does he give us a complete account of all the difficulties Paul had to deal with. So why did I give you all this historical and geographical background, instead of a study of the Biblical account? There are two things I hope you have seen. First, Paul is not just some name of a plastic figure in the Bible. He was a real, live person, with all the limitations, pains, and struggles everyone of us have. His work to spread the Gospel was not easy – in fact, it was hard work, and often dangerous – but he persisted. And secondly, the people of Ephesus were real people – just like you and me – but they were trusting in false idols. That is why Paul came to bring them the good news of Jesus.

The thing that drove home to me the reality of these people, and their needs, was something in the museum in the modern-day city of Seljuk, just north of the site of Ephesus. It was a collection of children's toys that had been recovered from the ruins. And these were toys very much like the kind most of us used when we were kids, or by your children now. They

included simple pull-toys, and one was in the figure of a chicken; and there were spinning tops that you wound a string around and then threw.

Remember watching a top spin when you were a youngster? How close I felt to those people of so long ago when I looked at those toys.

Yes, these were real people, and they needed Jesus . . . but did not yet know of Him.

Next time we will see Paul in action, bringing the news of Jesus to the people of Ephesus.