



The Life and Writings of St. Paul

Lesson 4

Lesson 4 Commentary

The Remainder of the Third Journey and Paul's Return to Jerusalem

Lesson 5 Questions

Imprisonment in Caesarea and Travel to Rome

Introduction

When we left off last session, Paul left Antioch (the last time he would see this city) traveled through the northern part of Galatia and arrived in Ephesus. Paul will stay here for a while.



As I will explain below, arguably Paul wrote five of his letters from Ephesus. Unrelated to Paul there is an interesting aside in Acts. Luke called the followers of Jesus “the Way.” I do not know if there is a connection, but, according to John, Jesus calls himself the “way:” “Thomas said to him, “Master, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?” Jesus said to him, “I am **the way** and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.””¹

Ephesus

At some point in time during Paul’s stay in Ephesus, “a serious disturbance broke out.”² Ephesus was known as the center for the Artemis cult. Artemis was the Greek goddess of hunting, the wilderness and wild animals. She was also a fertility goddess. The local silversmiths made money by making silver statues of Artemis and they saw Paul as a threat to their livelihood. The silversmiths saw Paul’s preaching that idols were not gods at all as a problem. The Ephesians began rioting and chanting “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!”³ They ran to the theatre, grabbing two of Paul’s traveling companion on the way. Luke paints an amazing picture where you can almost feel the frenzy. Paul wanted to go and help his companions or address the accusations but is warned not to get involved. Finally, the town clerk comes in and talks the crowd down. Luke tells us next that, when the disturbance was over, Paul left Ephesus. But what does Luke not say?

Many scholars believe that more happened in Ephesus than what Luke records. We must put some things together to come to this conclusion. First, four of Paul’s letters are referred to as the “captivity letters.” Those are Philippians, Philemon, Colossians and Ephesians. Based on the wording in the letters, you see that Paul is writing from prison. The majority opinion is that Paul must have wrote these letters from Caesarea or Rome, because these are the two places where Luke records Paul in prison for an extended period. We know Paul spent a great deal of time in Ephesus, but no prison time was mentioned by Luke. Second, in Philemon, Paul tells Philemon to “prepare a guest room for me, for I hope to be granted to you through your prayers.”⁴ Third, we know that Philemon lives in Colossae. We know this because Onesimus lives in Colossae⁵ and that Onesimus is the slave of Philemon.⁶ Fourth, if you look at a map, Colossae is only 125

¹ John 14:5–6, emphasis added. All Biblical citations are from the NABRE.

² Acts 19:23.

³ Acts 19:28.

⁴ Phlm 22.

⁵ Col 4:9.

⁶ Phlm 10-16.

miles from Ephesus and Rome or Caesarea not close at all. Given the amount of time that Paul spent in Ephesus, many scholars believe that Paul spent a significant amount of time in prison there. Returning to the silversmith disturbance cited above, in order to end the uprising, the town clerk said, “If Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen have a complaint against anyone, courts are in session, and there are proconsuls. Let them bring charges against one another. If you have anything further to investigate, let the matter be settled in the lawful assembly”⁷ Now go back to Philippi. Remember in Philippi when Paul cast the demon out of the slave girl? Paul and Silas were stripped, beaten and thrown into jail on the same charge. It seems possible that after an investigation, Paul was thrown in prison.

I believe that Paul wrote an initial letter to the Corinthians warning them “not to associate with immoral people.”⁸ Then he followed it with, as we call it, 1st Corinthians. These two letters occurred before his imprisonment. After Paul’s departure from Corinth, the congregation there began falling apart. Paul found out that things were not going well from “Chloe’s people.”⁹ There were several issues including, but not limited to, internal divisions, incest, sexual immorality, denial of the Resurrection, and improper celebration of the Eucharist. Paul addresses the issues and wants them to get back to the basics of Christian doctrine. Evidently the Corinthians wrote Paul a letter asking him specific questions related to marriage, celibacy and food offered to idols. Subsequent to the writing of 1st Corinthians, Paul must have taken a quick trip to Corinth in “painful circumstances.”¹⁰ Sometime after this, Paul was imprisoned and penned the “captivity letters.”

Philippians is a letter of encouragement and thanks to a congregation that had supported him while in prison.¹¹ Luke’s rendition of Paul’s time in Philippi seems to suggest that his time there was very short. However, based on the love of the congregation for Paul, it must have been a longer period than the brief stay suggested by Acts. Paul urges two members of the congregation to resolve a disagreement between them¹² and warns the congregation about the Judaizers.¹³

In Colossians, Paul references a letter he sent to the Laodiceans.¹⁴ This letter has not survived, but the letter must have been read in the Church in Colossae. I have placed it here as it is apparent that it was written before Colossians and I suggest below that both the letters to Philemon and to the Colossians were delivered at the same time.

Philemon is so short that it was not separated into chapters, only verses. Onesimus, a runaway slave of Philemon, has come to Paul in prison. It appears that Onesimus may have stolen from

⁷ Acts 19:38–39.

⁸ 1 Cor 5:9.

⁹ 1 Cor 1:11.

¹⁰ 2 Cor 2:1.

¹¹ Phil 4:18.

¹² Phil 4:2-3.

¹³ Phil 3:2-3.

¹⁴ Col 4:16.

Philemon before he ran away.¹⁵ Onesimus has become a Jesus follower and now Paul wants Philemon to accept Onesimus back as a fellow Christian. Did Philemon stay a slave? According to N.T. Wright, maybe not. “Fifty years later the bishop of Ephesus is a man called Onesimus. The young slave, now an elderly Christian leader? Or a name already respected within the early community?”¹⁶ As mentioned above, he closes the letter asking Philemon to prepare a room for him. Note at the end of Philemon, several co-workers are mentioned including Mark and Luke. It appears that Mark and Paul reconciled after the fallout in Acts related to Mark’s “desertion.”

Remember from above, that Philemon is in Colossae and that Onesimus is going back there, probably with the letter to Philemon and the Letter to the Church in Colossae in hand. Colossae was an industrial city along a major trade route between Ephesus and Tarsus. There is no evidence that Paul visited the church in Colossae prior to writing the letter. If I am correct on Paul’s imprisonment in Ephesus, it would seem reasonable to think he went to his prepared room at Philemon’s house after his release. It appears that the church in Colossae may have been founded by one Epaphras and it is this person who came to visit Paul in prison. Paul reassures the Colossians of the Gentile inheritance through Christ. “Apparently the local Colossian Jews were outspoken critics of the new Christian movement and dismissed the claim that Gentiles could enjoy full membership in God’s covenant family apart from the legal observances handed down through Moses.”¹⁷ This would account for Paul’s focus on Jewish legal rites like circumcision and dietary restrictions.

Prior to writing what we know as Ephesians (maybe even prior to his imprisonment), he must have penned a brief letter either to the Ephesians or as a circular that has not survived.¹⁸ After that letter he penned the letter we know as Ephesians. In many of the most ancient transcripts of this letter the words “in Ephesus”¹⁹ are missing. This has led many to speculate that Ephesians was a letter meant to be a circulating letter to be passed through many churches. Unlike other Pauline letters, it does not appear that Paul is responding to specific questions which supports the thought that the letter was meant to be circulated. It should also be noted that Colossians and Ephesians share many themes. Ephesians sets forth a vision of Christ sitting at the right hand of the Father in heaven²⁰ and the wisdom of God being revealed through the Church.²¹ He also stresses that the Church is the body and the bride of the Son.²²

¹⁵ Phlm 18.

¹⁶ N. T. Wright, *Paul: A Biography* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2018), 284.

¹⁷ *The Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The New Testament* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2010), 363.

¹⁸ Eph 3:2-3.

¹⁹ Eph 1:1.

²⁰ Eph 1:20.

²¹ Eph 3:10.

²² Eph 5:22-32.

Leaving Ephesus and Going to Greece

At some point, Paul was released from prison in Ephesus and, as stated above, he may have gone to Colossae to visit Philemon and Onesimus before heading to Macedonia.²³ He probably visited the Churches on Philippi and Thessalonica and then headed for Greece. It is possible that he went to Corinth. If Paul did go to Corinth, then he wrote two letters to the Corinthians before he arrived. In, as we call it, 2nd Corinthians, Paul cites a letter later called the Severe Letter.²⁴

Subsequent to the Severe Letter, which has not survived, he pens 2nd Corinthians. 2nd Corinthians has a different feel from 1st Corinthians. “He was a spiritual father going through the painful experience of his own children rising up against him and going their own way.”²⁵ This is one of the reasons why some scholars do not believe that Paul wrote 2nd Corinthians. I believe that there is a supportable reason for the different tone. Paul had just gone through imprisonment in Ephesus and now he hears how the church he founded in Corinth is falling apart. “He sounds exhausted.”²⁶ Paul spends a great deal of ink supporting his own apostolic authority. “[E]arly on Paul is bursting with joy to hear that some of the Corinthians are turning back to him (chaps. 1–7), but later his anger and frustration return when he remembers that others are still acting in defiance (chaps. 10–13).”²⁷

Under the assumption that Paul made it to Corinth and stayed for three months, it was here that Paul wrote the letter to the Romans. “Romans is in a different category from Paul’s other letters for many reasons, but particularly because of its careful and powerful structure.”²⁸ The letter to the Romans is probably Paul’s most cited book during the Reformation. Martin Luther used certain parts of Romans to support his “faith alone” position. There were three different primary reasons for his letter to the Roman Jesus followers. First, Paul wanted to introduce himself and articulate his teachings before he arrived for a planned visit.²⁹ Second, Paul had plans to move his missionary work into Spain and his wants to use Roman church as his base.³⁰ Third, there were tensions between the Jewish followers of Jesus and their non-Jewish brethren. The Jews were boasting about the Old Covenant not involving the Gentiles. The non-Jews thought that they have replaced the Jews as the people of God. Paul spends a great deal arguing the equality of all Jesus followers.³¹

²³ Acts 20:1.

²⁴ 2 Cor 2:4, 7:8-9.

²⁵ *The Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The New Testament*, 311.

²⁶ Wright, *Paul*, 238.

²⁷ *The Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The New Testament*, 311.

²⁸ Wright, *Paul*, 317.

²⁹ Rom 1:11-13.

³⁰ Rom 15:23-24.

³¹ Rom 3:28-30.

Jerusalem

After three months in Greece (maybe Corinth), Paul starts making his way back to Jerusalem. We read a funny story about Eutychus who falls out of a window when he falls asleep because Paul is long-winded! Paul decided to sail past Ephesus to Miletus and then summoned the elders of Ephesus to say goodbye. You almost feel that he was avoiding Ephesus. Could it be that Paul was no longer welcome in Ephesus? He sailed with several stops to Caesarea where he is warned to not go to Jerusalem. Paul will not hear of it. “The Lord’s will be done.”³²

Paul arrives in Jerusalem and goes to James. This James is not the apostle. He was beheaded by King Herod.³³ This is James, “the Lord’s brother,”³⁴ a kinsman of Jesus. Tradition refers to him as “James the Just” who was the leader of the Jesus followers in Jerusalem. He was the James referred to as one of the pillars, along with Peter (Kephas) and John.³⁵ Then you hear what appears to be concern on the part of the elders in Jerusalem that many of the local Jews are upset with Paul’s message to the Gentiles. They developed a scheme to show the local Jews that Paul was still faithful to the law, but it did not work. He is seized and accused of violating Jewish law by taking a Gentile past the court of the Gentiles, a fabricated charge. They started beating Paul but were stopped when the Roman soldiers arrived. Paul once again related the events on the road to Damascus. Upon finding out that he was a Roman citizen, the soldiers protected him. He now must go before the Sanhedrin but pulled a coup by coaxing the Sanhedrin into arguing among themselves about the differences between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, taking the focus off Paul. Forty Jews conspired to kill Paul, but Paul’s nephew found out and let the soldiers know what the Jews were planning. As a result, the soldiers changed plans and took Paul out of Jerusalem to be heard by Felix, the governor in Caesarea. Felix held Paul in prison until his accusers arrive.

³² Acts 21:14.

³³ Acts 12:1.

³⁴ Gal 1:19

³⁵ Gal 2:9.

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 5

Imprisonment and Travel to Rome

Day 1 – Scan the lecture notes. Write down one or two points that you consider most interesting.

Day 2 – Read Acts 24:1-27

It seems that no one is in a hurry to get to Paul's situation, so Paul is just sitting there waiting to plead his case. Think of a time when God tested your patience. How must Paul have felt?

Day 3 – Read Acts 25:1-27

Paul appeals to Caesar. Why would Paul do this, as opposed to just letting Festus decide his fate? (Hint: think about Acts 26:32 and Acts 27:24)

Day 4 – Read Acts 26:1-32

No questions for this day

Day 5 – Read Acts 27:1-28:31

How would you characterize Paul through these two chapters? Bossy? Overbearing? Ideal prisoner?

Day 6 – Read the handouts on First and Second Timothy and Titus (attached). Scan First and Second Timothy and Titus.

Write down one or two things that jumped out to you about First Timothy.

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Write down one or two things that jumped out to you about Second Timothy.

Write down one or two things that jumped out to you about Titus.

THE FIRST LETTER OF SAINT PAUL TO TIMOTHY

Themes The bulk of the letter, which is personal in tone and informal in arrangement, covers the gamut of Timothy’s pastoral responsibilities. Paul was counting on him to stabilize the Church with sound doctrine (4:6–7; 6:20) and the appointment of reliable pastors to shepherd the flock (3:1–13; 5:22). Among the congregation, he was to encourage prayer (2:1–8), set limits on the dress and conduct of women (2:9–15), attend to his liturgical duties (4:13), show respect for parishioners of all ages (5:1–2), manage the support of widows (5:3–16), take a public stand against wrongdoers (5:20), and, above all, keep himself unstained by sin (4:12; 5:22; 6:11–14). As a loyal friend and traveling assistant of the apostle, Timothy was well suited for this task, as he had been sent on previous assignments to other young Churches in Corinth (1 Cor 4:17), Philippi (Phil 2:19), and Thessalonica (1 Thess 3:2).³⁶

³⁶ *The Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The New Testament*, 385–386.

THE SECOND LETTER OF SAINT PAUL TO TIMOTHY

Purpose Paul writes this letter to encourage his younger colleague Timothy and to summon him to Rome. At this point, Timothy is still in Ephesus, where Paul has stationed him to help reform the local Church (1 Tim 1:3). Since problems once facing this congregation have steadily worsened, the apostle urges Timothy to fulfill his teaching mission with all the zeal and endurance he can muster (2 Tim 2:1–3; 4:2–5). Youthful and reserved by nature, Timothy must now be manly and strong in the grace of God (1:7; 2:1). Paul himself is learning that loyalty is a rare commodity in times of distress. In fact, the earliest persecution of Christians in Rome (beginning in ca. A.D. 64) is so fierce that many of his companions have deserted him outright (1:15; 4:10–11). Abandoned and on trial for his life, the aged apostle wants a trusted companion like Timothy at his side (4:9, 21).

Themes and Characteristics In many ways, 2 Timothy reads like a last will and testament. It is a moving account of how Paul, like a runner crossing the finish line, has reached the end of his apostolic career, with only the crown of martyrdom awaiting him (4:6–8). Young Timothy, instructed by the apostle for more than 15 years, is now asked to take up the mantle of his mentor and continue his ministry of preaching. With death at his doorstep, Paul hurriedly sends a letter filled with fatherly wisdom and warnings to prepare Timothy for the struggles ahead.

Of particular concern for Paul is the transmission of sound doctrine (1:13–14; 4:2–3). The apostle assures Timothy that he will have to contend with new and novel teachings that spread confusion and erode the faith of otherwise strong believers. Timothy’s mission is to guard the gospel (1:14) and to continue in earnest the responsible work of an evangelist (2:2; 4:2–3). The Ephesian congregation under Timothy’s care has already faced controversies and quarrels (1 Tim 1:3–7), and the spread of falsehood has taken its toll on certain housewives (2 Tim 3:6–7) and others whom Paul mentions by name (2:17–18). So, too, as Christian persecutions begin to intensify and spread more widely in the Empire, Timothy is assured that suffering is inevitable for an outspoken defender of truth (2:3; 3:12). Nevertheless, Paul urges Timothy to find courage in the apostle’s own endurance (3:10–14) and in the inspired Scriptures he has known since childhood (3:15–17). The time will come when Timothy, too, must pass the torch to others who will teach and defend the gospel for future generations (2:2).

In all of this, Paul gives a sense of what is most important in Christian ministry. The truth of the gospel was for him a sacred gift entrusted to the apostles and their successors by the Holy Spirit (1:14). It is therefore not to be tampered with or falsified by those whose ears cannot endure what is contrary to their personal liking (4:3). Paul himself has defended the Lord for years in the face

of persecution (3:11) and is now ready to give his life for him who has empowered him to preach the Christian message (4:6, 17).³⁷

³⁷ *The Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The New Testament*, 395.

THE LETTER OF SAINT PAUL TO TITUS

Destination and Purpose The letter was sent to Titus on the Mediterranean island of Crete. Although Crete had an established Jewish community (1:10; Acts 2:11), its inhabitants were mostly Gentiles and pagans infamous for their moral decadence (Tit 1:12). Paul and Titus had previously evangelized parts of the island together, but Titus was left behind while Paul continued to travel. Titus was charged with organizing the converts into communities and ensuring that elders or presbyters (i.e., priests) were appointed to lead the flock (1:5). Paul now writes to encourage Titus and to authorize his spiritual and organizational efforts (2:15). He places full confidence in Titus, who has already proven himself a capable delegate in even the most sensitive situations in Corinth (2 Cor 7:6, 13–15; 8:16–23). Once Titus fulfills his mission and is relieved of his duty by a replacement, he is to rejoin Paul in Nicopolis for the winter (Tit 3:12).

Themes and Characteristics The letter to Titus shares much in common with 1 Timothy, although its instructions are less detailed and its tone is less personal. Still, both letters are addressed to young bishops on temporary assignment: Titus on the island of Crete (1:5) and Timothy in the city of Ephesus (1 Tim 1:3). Both of these men have been handed the challenging task of supervising communities that are threatened by false teaching (Tit 1:10–16; 1 Tim 1:3–7), in need of sound doctrine (Tit 2:1; 1 Tim 4:11–16), and lacking in qualified leadership (Tit 1:5–9; 1 Tim 3:1–13). These are men Paul can trust. These are the men he is grooming to continue his ministry after his death. The themes of the letter follow the instructions that Paul is giving to Titus, whose mission is to organize both the pastoral leadership and the personal lives of the believers on Crete. **(1) Pastoral Leadership.** The first assignment given to Titus is to ordain qualified elders (priests) in every town, lest Christians on the island be like wandering sheep without shepherds to lead them (1:5). This is not to be done arbitrarily but with discernment. In Paul’s mind, the only fitting candidates for spiritual leadership are men of proven character and deep convictions (1:7–8). A practical element is also involved in this, and so Titus must take account of how well a prospective clergyman manages his own family and household when considering his selection (1:6). As a final note, Paul stresses that candidates must be competent instructors and defenders of the truth, able to lead the faithful as teachers and apologists (1:9). This is all the more necessary in Crete, where dangerous teachings are already taking hold in the Christian communities spread across the island (1:10–16). **(2) Personal Living.** Paul reasons that because Christianity is advertised to the world through our actions, it is important that our behavior be consistent with our beliefs, lest the Church of God be discredited in the eyes of nonbelievers. There is thus a strong emphasis in Titus that believers should be zealous for every good work (2:7, 14; 3:1, 8, 14). This includes not only acts of charity toward fellow Christians (2:2–10), but also a respectful posture toward government authorities and fellow Cretans more generally (3:1–2). The immediate aim of such works is to assist the needy (3:14), while their ultimate purpose is to honor the Lord Jesus in anticipation of his glorious return (2:11–13).³⁸

³⁸ *The Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The New Testament*, 403.