

Acts 18:18-19:7

18-21 Paul was thoroughly Jewish. (Galatians 1:13-14; Philippians 3:5-6). He loved the Scriptures. So, ingratitude for the mercy he received in Corinth, for the ruling of Gallio that allowed him to stay there 18 months, for the blessing of good friends, Aquila and Prisca, Paul showed his gratitude with a Jewish vow of separation. He wanted to declare that he was completely available to God. His life was not his own. God had initiated this vow in Numbers 6:2-5. The vow could be for life, as it was for Samson, Samuel, and John the Baptist, or it could be for a period of time (often 30 days). The rest of Numbers 6 tells of the sacrifice that is to be offered at the completion of the vow and how the hair is to be shaved again and put on the sacrificial fire.

On the way to Jerusalem where the vow would be completed, Paul stopped in Ephesus (16:6) in the early spring of 52 A.D. Paul was asked to stay longer. He promised to return. This was like the Berean response. They were hungry for more, but Paul wanted to complete his vow. Some manuscripts say he was trying to get there before the feast (presumably Passover). Paul left Aquila and Prisca there to strengthen the young church. They purchase a home and have a fruitful ministry until Paul's return (1Cor 16:19).

22 He went through the port city of Caesarea Maritima, the closest major port to Jerusalem. He went up to Jerusalem (in the hills) fulfilling his vows, and down to Antioch to finish his second missionary cycle and give a report to those who had sent him out. (Acts 15:36) The journey in these few verses was a 1500 mile journey. We surely only have just a few of the highlights recorded.

It seems strange to us that Paul would act out that Jewish ritual. We all express our sincerity and commitment in ways that are consistent with our culture. He loved the Scriptures and wanted to express his gratitude in a way that was consistent with the Word. The complete separation from Judaism was coming, but for now, the Jewishness of believers held at bay the wrath of Rome. Many still met in synagogues, went to the temple, and still observed the dietary laws, which in Roman eyes made them part of one of the religions tolerated by Rome, Judaism.

23 Paul went back through the churches he had helped to start making sure they were strong and healthy. Going overland, he probably went to those cities that had persecuted him, even stoned him. Part of that work was surely appointing elders and helping them understand Biblical truth, keeping them on track theologically.

24-25 While Paul was traveling (the journey could have taken up to a year) a believer in Jesus as Messiah came to the Ephesus synagogue. Eloquent (perhaps trained in the art of rhetoric) and very knowledgeable of the Scriptures, though he only knew of the baptism of John. Perhaps he had come to John's baptism on a trip to Passover in Jerusalem. He knew John's proclamation that Jesus was the Lamb of God, but he probably didn't know of the crucifixion and resurrection or the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Many Egyptian businessmen came to Ephesus to conduct business. This may have been the case with Apollos.

26 Prisca and Aquila must have been excited to hear this man speak and probably couldn't wait to tell him the rest of the story. Imagine believing in Jesus but hearing for the first time the cross, resurrection and Pentecost! He must have been thrilled to understand his sins were atoned for through Jesus' sacrifice.

27-28 Apollos went on to Achaia perhaps challenged by the stories of the resistance of some Jews in Corinth. He was a powerful tool to convince the Jews that the Scriptures pointed to Jesus. He returned to Ephesus after Paul returned and ministered with him. (1Cor 16:12)

9:1 Ephesus called "the first and greatest metropolis of Asia". The population was approximately 250,000. It was large enough that Paul could run into believers that hadn't met Aquila and Prisca. Like Apollos, they had only a part of the message and yet were followers of Jesus as Messiah.

2-5 Paul wants to know if they have entered into the New Covenant by being baptized into Christ and received the Holy Spirit. John's baptism was repentance, whereas being baptized into Jesus is to die to self and live in the Spirit. If someone has truly repented, the Lord will lead them into all truth. The debate is whether or not they were saved. (1Cor 6:19; 12:13; 2Cor 6:16; Eph 1:13) The Epistles teach that the indwelling of the Spirit happens at the point of salvation. Yielding our life to the Spirit is another matter.

6 -7 They are filled with the Spirit which was evidenced by speaking in tongues and prophecy. God gives the gifts as He determines. (1Cor 12:11) Paul will stay here in Ephesus for three years, the longest of any of his missionary endeavors.