

Paul in Ephesus

Contents

Arrival of St. Paul at Ephesus ¹

But now the Apostle himself is about to arrive in Ephesus. His residence in this place, like his residence in Antioch and Corinth, is a subject to which our attention is particularly called. Therefore, all the features of the city its appearance, its history, the character of its population, its political and mercantile relations possess the utmost interest for us. We shall defer such description to a future chapter, and limit ourselves here to what may set before the reader the geographical position of Ephesus, as the point in which St. Paul's journey from Antioch terminated for the present.

We imagined him about the frontier of Asia and Phrygia, on his approach from the interior to the sea. From this region of volcanic mountains, a tract of country extends to the Aegean, which is watered by two of the long western rivers, the Hermus and the Meander, and which is celebrated through an extended period of classical history, and is sacred to us as the scene of the Churches of the Apocalypse. ² Near the mouth of one of these rivers is Smyrna; near that of the other is Miletus.

The islands of Chios and Samos are respectively opposite the projecting portions of coast, where the rivers flow by these cities to the sea. ³ Between the Hermus and the Meander is a smaller river, named the Cayster, separated from the latter by the ridge of Messogis, and from the former by Mount Tmolus. Here, in the level valley of the Cayster, is the early

cradle of the Asiatic name, the district of primeval Asia," not as understood in its political or ecclesiastical sense, but the Asia of old poetic legend.

And here, in a situation pre eminent among the excellent positions which the Ionians chose for their cities, Ephesus was built, on some hills near the sea. For some time after its foundation by Androclus the Athenian, it was inferior to Miletus ; but with the decay of the latter city, in the Macedonian and Roman periods, it rose to greater eminence, and in the time of St. Paul it was the greatest city of Asia Minor, as well as the metropolis of the province of Asia.

Though Greek in its origin, it was half oriental in the prevalent worship, and in the character of its inhabitants; and being constantly visited by ships from all parts of the Mediterranean, and united by great roads with the markets of the interior, it was the common meeting place of various characters and classes of men.

Among those whom St. Paul met on his arrival, was the small company of Jews above alluded to, (see Acts 19:1 7) who professed the imperfect Christianity of John the Baptist. By this time Apollos had departed to Corinth. Those "disciples" who were now at Ephesus were in the same religious condition in which he had been, when Aquila and Priscilla first spoke to him, though doubtless they were inferior to him both in learning and in zeal. ⁴ St. Paul found on inquiry, that they had only

¹This article is from Conybeare and Howson, *The Life and Epistles of St. Paul, Chapter 14.*

²Rev. 1, 2, 3. Laodicea is in the basin of the Meander. Smyrna, Thyatira, Sardis and Philadelphia are in that of the Hermus; Pergamus is further to the north on the Caicus. For a description of this district, see Arundell's *Visit to the Seven Churches*, and Fellows' *Asia Minor.*

³In the account of St. Paul's return we shall have to take particular notice of this coast. He sailed between these islands and the mainland, touching at Miletus (Acts 20).

⁴It is impossible to know whether these men were connected with Apollos. The whole narrative seems to imply that they were in a lower state of religious knowledge than he was.

received John's baptism, and that they were ignorant of the great outpouring of the Holy Ghost, in which the life and energy of the Church consisted. They were even perplexed by his question. He then pointed out, in conformity with what had been said by John the Baptist himself, that that prophet only preached repentance to prepare men's minds for Christ, who is the true object of faith. On this they received Christian baptism; and after they were baptized, the laying on of the Apostle's hands resulted, as in all other Churches, in the miraculous gifts of Tongues and of Prophecy.

After this occurrence has been mentioned as an isolated fact, our attention is called to the great teacher's labors in the synagogue. Doubtless, Aquila and Priscilla were there. Though they are not mentioned here in connection with St. Paul, we have seen them so lately instructing Apollos (Acts 18), and we shall find them so soon again sending salutations to Corinth in the Apostle's letter from Ephesus (1 Cor. 16), that we cannot but believe he met his old associates, and again experienced the benefit of their aid. It is even probable that he again worked with them at the same trade: for in the address to the Ephesian elders at Miletus (Acts 20:34) he stated that "his own hands had ministered to his necessities, and to those who were with him;" and in writing to the Corinthians he says (1 Cor. 4:11, 12), that such toil had continued "even to that hour." There is no doubt that he "reasoned" in the synagogue at Ephesus with the same zeal and energy with which his spiritual labors had been begun at Corinth. (Acts 18:4) He had been anxiously expected, and at first he was heartily welcomed. A preparation for his teaching had been made by Apollos and those who instructed him. "For three months" Paul continued to speak boldly in the synagogue, "arguing and endeavoring to convince his hearers of all that related to the kingdom of God." (Acts 19:8) The hearts of some were hardened, while others repented and believed; and in the end the Apostle's doctrine was publicly calumniated by the Jews before the people.⁵ On this he openly separated himself, and withdrew the disciples from the synagogue; and the Christian Church at Ephesus became a distinct body, separated both from the Jews and the Gentiles.

⁵"Before the multitude," verse 9.

⁶Those who are apt to see a Jewish or Talmudical reference almost everywhere, think that Tyrannus may have been a Jew, and his "school" a place for theological teaching.

⁷See the chapters containing the two Epistles to the Thessalonians and the two Epistles to the Corinthians.

⁸"So that all they which dwelt in Asia ...", Acts 19:10. There must have been many Jews in various parts of the province.

⁹What is said of his continued residence at Ephesus by no means implies that he did not make journeys in the province.

¹⁰It is thought by many that Epaphras was converted by St. Paul at Ephesus and founded the church at Colossae. See Col. 1:7; 4:12-17; Philemon 23.

The School of Tyrannus As the house of Justus at Corinth (Acts 18:7) had afforded St. Paul a refuge from calumny, and an opportunity of continuing his public instruction, so here he had recourse to "the school of Tyrannus," who was probably a teacher of philosophy or rhetoric, converted by the Apostle to Christianity.⁶ His labors in spreading the Gospel were here continued for two whole years. For the incidents which occurred during this residence, for the persons with whom the Apostle became acquainted, and for the precise subjects of his teaching, we have no letters to give us information supplementary to the Acts, as in the cases of Thessalonica and Corinth:⁷ inasmuch as that which is called the "Epistle to the Ephesians," enters into no personal or incidental details. But we have, in the address to the Ephesian elders at Miletus, an affecting picture of an Apostle's labors for the salvation of those whom his Master came to redeem. From that address we learn, that his voice had not been heard within the school of Tyrannus alone, but that he had gone about among his converts, instructing them "from house to house," and warning "each one" of them affectionately "with tears!" (Acts 20:20,31) The subject of his teaching was ever the same, both for Jews and Greeks, "repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ." (Acts 20:21) Labors so incessant, so disinterested, and continued through so long a time, could not fail to produce a great result at Ephesus. A large Church was formed over which many presbyters were called to preside. (Acts 20:17) Nor were the results confined to the city. Throughout the province of "Asia" the name of Christ became generally known, both to the Jews and the Gentiles;⁸ and doubtless, many daughter churches were founded, "whether in the course of journeys undertaken by the Apostle himself,⁹ or by means of those with whom he became acquainted, as for instance by Epaphras, Archippus, and Philemon, in connection with Colossae, and its neighbor cities Hierapolis and Laodicea."¹⁰

Ephesian Magic It is during this interval, that one of the two characteristics of the people of Ephesus comes prominently into view. This city was

renowned throughout the world for the worship of Diana, and the practice of magic. Though it was a Greek city, like Athens or Corinth, the manners of its inhabitants were half Oriental. The image of the tutelary goddess resembled an Indian idol rather than the beautiful forms which crowded the Acropolis of Athens: and the enemy which St. Paul had to oppose was not a vaunting philosophy, as at Corinth; but a dark and Asiatic superstition. The worship of Diana and the practice of magic were closely connected together. Eustathius says that the mysterious symbols, called "Ephesian Letters," were engraved on the crown, the girdle, and the feet of the goddess. These Ephesian letters or monograms have been compared by a Swedish writer to the Runic characters of the North. When pronounced, they were regarded as a charm; and were directed to be used, especially by those who were in the power of evil spirits. When written, they were carried about as amulets. Curious stories are told of their influence. Croesus is related to have repeated the mystic syllables when on his funeral pile; and an Ephesian wrestler is said to have always struggled successfully against an antagonist from Miletus until he lost the scroll, which before had been like a talisman. The study of these symbols was an elaborate science: and books, both numerous and costly, were compiled by its professors.¹¹

Miracles This statement throws some light on the peculiar character of the miracles wrought by St. Paul at Ephesus. We are not to suppose that the Apostles were always able to work miracles at will. An influx of supernatural power was given to them, at the time, and according to the circumstances, that required it. And the character of the miracles was not always the same. They were accommodated to the peculiar forms of sin, superstition, and ignorance they were required to oppose.¹² Here, at Ephesus, St. Paul was in the face of magicians, like Moses and Aaron before Pharaoh;

¹¹The lives of Alexander of Tralles in Smith's *Dictionary of Biography* and in the biography of the U. K. Society, contain some important illustrations of Ephesians magic.

¹²The narrative of what was done by St. Paul at Ephesus should be compared with St. Peter's miracles at Jerusalem, when "many signs and wonders were wrought among the people ... insomuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them." Acts 5:12-16.

¹³Both the words used here are Latin. The former, *sudarium*, is that which occurs in Luke 19:20; John 11:44; 20:7, and is translated "napkin." The latter, *semicinctium*, denotes some article of dress – shawl, handkerchief, or apron – as is easily laid aside. Baumgarten's remarks on the significance of these miracles are well worthy of consideration. He connects the *sudaria* and the *semicinctia* with St. Paul's daily labor in his own support.

¹⁴See Exod. 22:18; Lev. 20:27; Deut. 18:10,11; 1 Sam. 28:8,9.

¹⁵A knowledge of magic was a requisite qualification of a member of the Sanhedrin, that he might be able to try those who were accused of such practices. Josephus (*Ant.* xx. 7, 2) speaks of a Cyprian Jew, a sorcerer, who was a friend and companion of Felix, and who is identified by some with Simon Magus. Again (*Ant.* viii. 2, 5), he mentions certain forms of incantation used by Jewish magicians which they attributed to King Solomon.

and it is distinctly said that his miracles were "not ordinary wonders;" (Acts 19:11) from which we may infer that they were different from those which he usually performed. We know, in the case of our Blessed Lord's miracles, that though the change was usually accomplished on the speaking of a word, intermediate agency was sometimes employed; as when the blind man was healed at the pool of Siloam. (John 9:6,7)

A miracle which has a closer reference to our present subject, is that in which the hem of Christ's garment was made effectual to the healing of a poor sufferer, and the conviction of the bystanders. (Matt. 9:20) So on this occasion garments¹³ were made the means of communicating a healing power to those who were at a distance, whether they were possessed with evil spirits, or afflicted with ordinary diseases. (Acts 19:12) Such effects, thus publicly manifested, were a signal refutation of the charms and amulets and mystic letters of Ephesus. Yet was this no encouragement to blind superstition. When the suffering woman was healed by touching the hem of the garment, the Savior turned round and said, "Virtue is gone out of me." (Luke 8:46) And here at Ephesus we are reminded that it was God who, wrought miracles by the hands of Paul" (verse 11), and that "the name," not of Paul, but "of the Lord Jesus, was magnified" (verse 17).

These miracles must have produced" a great effect upon the minds of those who practiced curious arts in Ephesus. Among the magicians who were then in this city, in the course of their wanderings through the East, were several Jewish exorcists. (Acts 19:13) This is a circumstance which need not surprise us. The stern severity with which sorcery was forbidden in the Old Testament¹⁴ attests the early tendency of the Israelites to such practices: the Talmud bears witness to the continuance of these practices at a later period;¹⁵ and we have already had occasion, in the course of this history, to notice the spread of Jewish magicians

through various parts of the Roman Empire.

It was an age of superstition and imposture an age also in which the powers of evil manifested themselves with peculiar force. Hence we find St. Paul classing witchcraft among the works of the flesh (Gal. 5:20), and solemnly warning the Galatians both in words ¹⁶ and by his letters, that they who practice it cannot inherit the kingdom of God; and it is of such that he writes to Timothy (2 Tim. 3:13), that "evil men and seducers ¹⁷ shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived." This passage in St. Paul's latest letter had probably reference to that very city in which we see him now brought into opposition with Jewish sorcerers. These men, believing that the name of Jesus acted as a charm, and recognizing the Apostle as a Jew like themselves, attempted his method of casting out evil spirits. But He to whom the demons were subject, and who had given to His servant power and authority over them (Luke 9:1), had shame and terror in store for those who presumed thus to take His Holy Name in vain.

The Exorcists One specific instance is recorded, which produced disastrous consequences to those who made the attempt, and led to wide results among the general population. In the number of those who attempted to cast out evil spirits by the "name of Jesus," were seven brothers, sons of Sceva, who is called a high priest, either because he had really held this office at Jerusalem, or because he was chief of one of the twenty four courses of priests. But the demons, who were subject to Jesus, and by His will subject to those who preached His Gospel, treated with scorn those who used His Name without being converted to His truth. "Jesus I recognize, and Paul I know; but who are ye?" was the answer of the evil spirit. And straightway the man who was possessed sprang upon them, with frantic violence, so that they were utterly discomfited, and "fled out of the house naked and wounded."

This fearful result of the profane use of that Holy Name which was proclaimed by the Apostles for the salvation of all men, soon became notorious, both among the Greeks and the Jews. Conster-

nation and alarm took possession of the minds of many; and in proportion to this alarm the name of the Lord Jesus began to be revered and honored. Even among those who had given their faith to St. Paul's preaching, some appear to have retained their attachment to the practice of magical arts. Their conscience was moved by what had recently occurred, and they came and made a full confession to the Apostle, and publicly acknowledged and forsook their deeds of darkness.

Burning of the Books The fear and conviction seem to have extended beyond those who made a profession of Christianity. A large number of the sorcerers themselves openly renounced the practice which had been so signally condemned by a higher power; and they brought together the books that contained the mystic formularies, and burnt them before all the people. When the volumes were consumed, they proceeded to reckon up the price at which these manuals of enchantment would be valued. Such books, from their very nature, would be costly; and all books in that age bore a value which is far above any standard with which we are familiar. Hence we need not be surprised that the whole cost thus sacrificed and surrendered amounted to as much as two thousand pounds of English money. ¹⁸ This scene must have been long remembered at Ephesus. It was a strong proof of honest conviction on the part of the sorcerers, and a striking attestation of the triumph of Jesus Christ over the powers of darkness. The workers of evil were put to scorn, like the priests of Baal by Elijah on Mount Carmel; (1 Kings 18) and the teaching of the doctrine of Christ "increased mightily and grew strong."

With this narrative of the burning of the books, we have nearly reached the term of St. Paul's three years' residence at Ephesus. Before his departure, however, two important subjects demand our attention, each of which may be treated in a separate chapter: the First Epistle to the Corinthians, with the circumstances in Achaia which led to the writing of it, and the uproar in the Ephesian Theatre, which will be considered in connection with a description of the city, and some notice of the worship of Diana.

¹⁶Observe the phrase in verse 21, "as I told you in time past," perhaps on the very journey through Galatia which we have just had occasion to mention.

¹⁷The word here used is the customary term for these wandering magicians.

¹⁸The "piece of silver" mentioned here was doubtless the *drachma*, the current Greek coin of the Levant: the value was about ten pence. There can be no reason to suppose with Grotius that the shekel is meant.