

As in Corinth, God had used the local Ephesian government official to intervene in a way that incidentally protected Paul from great bodily harm. As always, Paul was more than ready to step up and use any gathering as an opportunity to proclaim Christ, even if tumultuous and out of control. Wiser heads prevailed. But the long open door in Asia was closing.

Deprived of his opportunity to preach there, but graciously, providentially preserved to preach elsewhere, Paul left the city of Ephesus never to return. Luke provides a rather detailed record of their travels but few details of their reception or of incidents at stops along the way. Why?

A number of brethren from various assemblies of the Roman provinces of Macedonia and Asia accompanied them. Natural, clannish and provincial differences among them were transcended by the uniting bonds of Christ's love. His Assembly was indeed one body worldwide though separated by natural and geographic borders. Having come together at Philippi they embarked to Troas on their way to Jerusalem. They remained there seven days joining the disciples there on the first day of the week for "breaking of bread," a term used both for the Lord's Supper and for common meals. In this instance (7,8) it was the Lord's Supper, observed the evening of the first 24 hour day of the week (time reckoned as in Genesis 1:3) and an ordinary breakfast meal the next morning the same day. Note there is no apostolic decree recorded as to the day or hour or place the saints should be gathered to remember the Lord. In early days following the descent of the Holy Spirit they met to do so daily from house to house, Acts 2. Decades later, though leaving no decree, the Spirit has left a clear pattern for faith and devotion, even referring specifically to the Lord's Day as a familiar term to all believers, Revelation 1:10. So we have the Lord's Supper, 1Corinthians 11:20, to be taken together at the Lord's Table, 1Corinthians 10:21, on the Lord's Day, the first day of the week. The time of day is left to the discretion of local assemblies. Despite their worldwide unity, national or international uniformity or coordination of meeting times between assemblies is never an issue in scripture. The Lord is there when and where believers are locally gathered unto His name, Matthew 18:18-20.

After the breaking of bread the Apostle then preached to the gathered saints. This was not part of the breaking of bread. It was simply a convenient time and opportunity for the Spirit to teach or encourage or warn the locals. We have liberty to do that then too, or some other activity involving the saints together. It was a long meeting, all night in fact. A sleepy young man sitting in an open window fell to his death. The consternation of the apostle and of all there was genuine with no hint of criticism of the lad or of his parents for his sleepiness. (One brother preaching once said he would rather see sleepy souls present than not there at all.)

The incident of the revival of the sleepy young man who

fell out of the window to his death is reminiscent of others granted revival after death, see 1Kings 17:22; 2Kings 4:32; Matthew 9:18-26. They give solid witness to the power of the Prophets, the Apostles and the Lord Himself

So Paul set forward upon another arduous journey, involving hardships and dangers like those he had experienced. But this one was destined to be his last as a free man that is recorded in scripture. The account here in this part of Acts clearly closes out what might be considered the spread of the truth of Christ and His Assembly establishing Christianity in the civilized Roman world. As far as any inspired record shows, Paul's personal public ministry seems to have been effectively closed down as he set out for Jerusalem even though He continued his travels and labors. We do have and value his epistles written after this.

On his way to Jerusalem.

Paul had set his heart upon Jerusalem for one last attempt to turn his beloved countrymen to Christ. In his haste he did not stop to visit his beloved assembly at Ephesus, but did call a brief meeting with their elders at Miletus a port about 50 miles south. His farewell message to them is preserved for us by the Holy Spirit, for **it is for us as well as them**. He reminded them of His simple, selfless, faithfulness toward them while among them. They were a much favored assembly. We know he would later write a letter to them and two letters to Timothy while he was representing Paul among them. The apostle John is reported to have resided there for years after the destruction of Jerusalem and was later used to convey the letter the Lord dictated for them, Revelation 1 & 2. Ephesus now is an ancient, deserted ruin. Its candlestick gone. But sadly its history has been repeated over and over around the world wherever the Lord's name has become a center for gathering. Yet its decline was not irreversible and removal was not inevitable. One cannot say the Lord didn't lovingly support them or warn them. Or us. They didn't take Him seriously. Do we? Do we know of any assembly that has survived from the beginning? As Paul predicts, Satan seeks to draw us astray from without and within. If nothing else works he will destroy the city or nation where a testimony to Christ has survived his wiles or assaults.

Paul was going to be out of circulation and later martyred. Who would replace him? Who would have such tender care over the assemblies as he? Note in his epistles his tender loving care for them. Who would wield the authority to receive or expel? The Holy Spirit did not move Paul to appoint a successor. Peter was aging and soon to be out of the picture as well. He left his farewell reminders in his second letter, but no word as to succession. Jerusalem was about to be destroyed and organized Judaism with it. No succession from there. Were all the assemblies simply to be set adrift with no central earthly leadership?

Men have gamely tried to fill the "gap" even though

they have no authority from the Lord. There really is no “gap.” Paul would leave Jerusalem a prisoner and arrive in Rome a prisoner. Neither of these cities had any scriptural authority to become an earthly center for the Assembly. There was to be none for it is a heavenly body. Christ in Heaven is the center. The Lord gave each local assembly, gathered unto His name, necessary authority to govern His business on earth. For He is in our midst. . There is no mention of a central assembly authority on earth. He acts through each local assembly. They were all in one fellowship together. He coordinated them and their actions, still will if we let Him. He ministers to the local assemblies through multiple individual gifts, some who travel among them. He leads the various meetings in the midst of a local priesthood comprising all believers, 1Peter 2:5, 9. There He

moves us through the Holy Spirit. Scripture has established no formal hierarchy in the church locally, nationally or internationally. Locally, the Lord simply seeks older men to shepherd His sheep as guides and guards devoted to Him and His assembly in each locale. 1Timothy 3 gives the necessary qualifications to guide conscientious brothers and their peers to step up to do the oversight for the Lord.

In sum, once the Apostles were gone the authority to appoint was gone. There was no transfer of that authority to anyone else as successor nor to a local assembly. The present local and worldwide hierarchy of authority in professing Christendom is entirely without authority from scripture.

By Ronald Canner, December 9, 2009