

WESTERN WISDOM BIBLE STUDY

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Journeys of Paul; Letters to the Churches

The Three Degrees of Paul's Ministry

The course of Paul's ministry divides itself into three clearly separate and distinct journeys, which bear an initiatory as well as an historical significance, correlating with the Three Degrees of the Mysteries.

There are always three steps leading to the final culmination of the Great Work. These are outlined in every School of Initiation. The early Christians named these steps: (1) Preparation, (2) Purification, (3) Perfection. They outline the work of probation, discipleship, and Initiation. Paul has veiled these steps in his description of three journeys and various works accomplished therein.

The first journey occupied two years; the second, three years; the third, four years — which totals to nine, again a mystic key referring to the nine steps or degrees of Apprenticeship, Fellowcraft and Master in Masonry. In the life of the Supreme Initiator, these steps are represented by His birth, baptism, and Transfiguration. After these experiences follows the Great Work, ministry to others. The "trials" which confront every neophyte upon the Path find historical correspondence in the life of Paul: his trials before Felix, before Festus and before Agrippa. It was the manner in which Paul passed these tests that gave him authority to declare: "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness . . . and not to me only, but unto all them that love his appearing."

The first journey dates from 47 to 49 A.D.; the second, 50 to 53 A.D.; the third, 53 to 56 A.D.

The first journey or Degree was largely preparatory for deeper or esoteric work.

I and II Thessalonians correlate with the second journey and Degree and are concerned primarily with the illumination of the mind, and the resulting knowledge of inner planes in all their varied and colorful activities.

The Epistle to the Thessalonians contains the message of resurrection to the new life in its subtler implication — ability to function consciously apart from the physical body — an attainment which no one has described more perfectly than this great Christian Initiate.

I Thessalonians 4:13, 17

But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.

Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

I and II Corinthians, Galatians and Romans correlate with the third journey or Degree and teach primarily discipline of the soul or "living the life," by means of which Law is transmuted into Love. The First Epistle to the Corinthians teaches the neophyte to *die*

daily in subjugation of the body or lower nature.

The First Journey

It was near the beginning of March, A.D. 47, that Paul, Barnabas and Mark left Antioch for Cyprus, the place chosen for the initial work of the first journey.

Cyprus is an island, the coast line of which measures three hundred and ninety miles. In the time of Pliny, according to Strabo, the island contained fifteen cities. Salamis, one of the most important of these cities, was the birthplace of Aristos, the famous historian. In its environs Zeno, the founder of the School of Stoic Philosophy, first saw the light of day. At Salamis Paul began the work laid upon him by the Master.

Paphos, the Roman capital of Cyprus, was located in the extreme southwest area of the island and was noted for its famous Temple of Aphrodite. This city was the seat of the pro-consul Sergei Paulus, who became Paul's most notable convert. Barnabas was a native of Cyprus, where he and his family were held in general esteem. Hence, the two exponents of the new teaching were everywhere received with respect and kindness.

After Paphos, the next step was the province of Pamphylia in Asia Minor. Pamphylia has been described as a "level crescent encircling the Pamphylian Sea and backed by the lofty range of the Taurus Mountains." Perga, the capital and most populous city, was the city of a large temple dedicated to Artemis.

It will be observed that Paul endeavored to make these temple cities the principal foci of Christian activity. The culminating orgies of the disintegrating Taurean religion were centered in these places and Paul endeavored to counteract their evil influence with emanations of the new Piscean regime. Taurus is a feminine sign. Originally the worship of the great Feminine principle was high, beautiful and sacred. Its "fall" was correspondingly low. Christianity came to replace this unspeakable moral debasement with a torch light and a life. Those who derived their live-

lihood from service to the temples were naturally among the most vindictive of Paul's persecutors, as exemplified by Alexander, the coppersmith, in Ephesus.

After Pamphylia came the Province of Galatia with its cities of Iconium, Lystra and Derbe, in each of which Paul, despite almost unendurable persecutions, succeeded in establishing flourishing centers. To these centers the Epistle of the Galatians was later addressed.

In order to reach the province of Galatia it was necessary to climb over the tortuous peaks of the Taurus Mountains. The prospect of this arduous journey, so intimidated the youthful Mark that he deserted his companions and returned to the comparative safety and comfort of his Jerusalem home.

It was late summer when Paul and Barnabas arrived in Pisidian Antioch, so called to distinguish it from several other cities of that same name. It was in this city that Paul first met Luke, "the beloved physician."

All of these cities had one or more synagogues where the custom was observed of inviting qualified visitors to discuss temple readings. It was in such services that Paul was introduced to the people. When driven from the synagogues by conservative and irate rulers, he would speak in market places, public squares or on street corners until a nucleus was formed, then the group would assemble in the home of one of his converts.

In the words of Paul are to be found a complete verification of the teachings of mystic Christianity. In his first discourse before the people of Pisidian Antioch he traces the lineage of the Master Jesus through the line of David, thus corroborating the teachings of Matthew and Luke that Jesus, high and holy though He was, was born of human parentage.

The keynote of Paul's teachings is found in the emphasis he placed upon the establishment of a new regime inaugurated with the coming of Christ Jesus. (Acts 13:16-23)

(To be continued)