

In the steps of St. PAUL

Have you ever heard a travelog without also seeing it? If not, this is for you a first. Certainly it's the first such that Loree & I have given. Our first eye-&-ear was a travelog series 1½ hours each nine Wednesday evenings 43 years ago, projecting a thousand slides I'd taken in the lands of the Bible earlier in the year. Our people (it was in the church I'd by that time been pastoring for eight years) turned out en masse: television was primitive, & only B&W (black & white). But now you can have color & motion, as in Rick Steve's excellent PBS series titled "Travels in Europe." He's expert, accurate, & especially interested, in his Greece & Turkey segments, in dwelling on our theme in this session, "in the steps of St. Paul."

The design of this session is that I'll lead & Loree will interrupt me whenever I'm wrong: her younger synapses don't play as many tricks on her as mine do on me. Also, she'll take over when I come to our experiences with a Greek Orthodox nun who grew up in Kansas as a Lutheran farm girl, taught developmental psychology at Harvard, became G.O., was almost killed in the 1981 balconies collapse in Ks.City, & with six others founded a monastery (where she now lives) in Athens. Me? In preparation for this discussion, I worked my way through the 200+ photos I took this spring on our 12-day pilgrimage "in the steps of St. Paul" (or, if you prefer, the Apostle Paul). As I looked at each photo & the notes on its back, my question was "What comes to mind that might be of enjoyment/enlightenment/inspiration for this clergy group?" Here goes:

1 Yesterday I talked with a Cape Cod ship captain whose license is for "100 tons [ships's empty-weight, not more] inland [including ferries & seacoast]." Called "coasters," these were the ships Paul [& Loree & I] used to sea-hop from landport to landport & from island to island. But on the open sea, we sailed on a large ship, Olympic Countess--which paralleled Paul's large-ship (disastrous) journey, narrated in the most navigation-informative account we have from the ancients: Ac.27: "an Alexandrian [grain] ship bound for Italy....sailing was now dangerous," for it was the winter-run (& therefore later than Oct.25, the end of the navigable season, which began May 5, the day we sailed from Athens to Istanbul). A huge ship for those times, 276 passengers, none lost in the shipwreck on Malta (having sailed from Crete). The western Mediterranean is always rougher, so why chance winter sailing? Rome needed a steady stream of grain ships from Egypt, & the emperors (beginning with Claudius) provided the marine insurance. This time, the crew "lightened the ship by throwing the wheat into the sea." You won't find a better sea-story than Ac.27; give it another go!..... Paul suffered three shipwrecks: 2Cor.11.25. We've no details on the other two but can assume that Paul's religion was as decisive in them as in Ac.27.

2 While Paul was a man of seven major cities (Tarsus, Jerusalem, Syrian Antioch, Ephesus, Athens, Corinth, Rome), his journeys took him to many minor ones--in one of which, Lystra, he was stoned & left for dead (Ac.14.8-20) after Jewish opponents caught up with him. A Roman colony settled by Italian veterans, pagan Lystra--after a healing miracle by him--had taken Paul as Hermes & Barnabas as Zeus: "The gods have come down to us in human form!" Well, in a Greek myth--a favorite of mine--originating in that area, those two Olympians **did** come down "disguised as mortals." In his METAMORPHOSIES, Ovid (less than 20 years before Paul's visit) tells the story, which I can't resist reading to you. The sky hung low over the biblical world, & incarnations were believable; today, God's coming as the man Jesus Christ, though an essential Christian doctrine, seems extremely implausible, & impossible without divine aid (1Cor.12.3: "no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit": true even then, more true now).

3 Politics? After the monster Caligula & before the monster Nero (under whom Paul was martyred, ca.AD/CE 62) came relatively good, mild Emperor Claudius (41-54), during whose reign occurred the bulk of Paul's missionary journeys (1st

journey, ca.47-48 [Cyprus, southern Anatolia including Galatia]; 2nd journey, ca.49-52 [Galatia, Ephesus, Athens, Corinth]; 3rd journey, ca.53-57 [Galatia, Ephesus, Greece, Jerusalem]]. Not trusting the Jerusalem authorities for a fair trial, Paul appealed to the Emperor & was taken to Rome (where he was under house arrest, at his own expense, for two years before his execution).

Our 2001 journey did not, of course, touch everywhere he touched, & touched some places he didn't.

4 Much of Paul's extant correspondence was written on the Ephesus-Corinth axis, so we spent major time in the ruins of those two ancient cities--the 1st in Asia/Asia Minor/Turkey, the 2nd in Greece a 40-mile busride westward from Athens. In both cities--in Ephesus for three years--Paul probably worked making tents & awnings mornings (I sat in the Ephesus stall where he's said to have worked) so nobody could have accused him of pushing Jesus for the money, then preached in the agora (market place, central city) afternoons & evenings. In both cities the authorities had a Hyde-Park-London liberal attitude toward street preachers, so he wasn't bothered except when Jews or pagans caused riots to prevent his evangelizing (Ac.19; 2Tim.4.14)--in which cases the city authorities clamped him briefly into the slammer. (jailings unmentioned in Acts).

You've asked the traveler a superficial question when you ask "What did you see?" Not so when you ask "What were your feelings when you saw what you saw?" Walking around Ephesus & Corinth on paths I'm certain Paul walked, I felt awe, privilege, love, faith, hope, joy. How wonderful that this octogenarian on his unsteady legs, with all his decades of gratitude to God for what was accomplished through the Apostle St.Paul, could walk "in his steps"! In my life, the only superior experience was many decades earlier when (to use an H.V.Morton title of a book--IN THE STEPS OF THE MASTER--I read as a teener about Jesus in Palestine, where) I walked with Loree *in extenso* in 1958 "where He walked."

5 One of the few photos I've posted is of schoolchildren descending from having seen the Sounion temple of Poseidon, on the southernmost tip of Greece (Attica). Erected during the life of Socrates, it directed ships to Athens & the Bosphorus. The Dardanelles (Hellespont, bridged at one point to connect Europe & Asia), the Gallipoli monuments, Istanbul (blue mosque, Hagia Sophia [for a millenium, Christendom's largest church], Topkapi Palace [residence of the Ottoman Empire's sultan; in the pilgrimage area, six visible hairs from the beard of Muhammad], lunch in former pasha's home across the street from Hagia Sophia; Loree signing her rug in Bazaar 54).

6 Almost all our travel-companions were C.E. (Church of England), our director being the Venerable "Bill" Thomas (Inter-Church Tours), who led prayers (Compline) each evening & prayed publicly appropriate to particular sites. Twice the prayers came (pointedly, it seemed to me) after a Muslim guide had said "God has no son or daughter" (Istanbul & Ephesus; on Turkish Crete, the Muslim guide was more concerned to contrast liberal Turkish Islam [from the West-leaning revolution of 1923] with the unenlightened religion-&-culture elsewhere in the Arab world). In Ephesus, I had to ask guide Ali twice for the site of the Council of Ephesus (AD/CE 431), where Jesus as God's Son was resoundingly affirmed (two natures [divine & human] in one person). Grudgingly, he obliged.

7 Patmos (where, probably AD/CE 96, John "the Theologian" wrote the Bible's last book), Mykonos, Rhodes (Ac.21.1; an excellent archeological museum), Knossos (3,500-year-old palace) & Heraklion on Crete, Santorini.

8 Athens this time was mainly three faces: the nun Ameiliané (2nd ¶ of this Thinksheet), the iconographer she took us to, & the Pope (who arrived our 2nd day in Athens & was called [in Greek] on evening television an "enemy" we treat well because Jesus says "Love your enemies" [#3060]). Stone-masons are restoring interior columns in the Parthenon (in preparation for the Olympics!): built when Socrates was living (the Golden Age, 5th-C.^{BC/BCs} Athens), it was engineered with optical corrections but without knowledge of the (Roman) arch. Through an opening, one can see stoneworks of the Acropolis a millenium before the Golden Age: how old, though how young in earth-time & God's time!