



Minutes With Messiah

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THAT SUKKOS

When he retires from the Air Force, my son plans on being a nomad. He has already bought a large trailer and made a cross country trip towing it. The advantage of the nomadic life is that he can go where he wants and spend as long as he wants when he gets there. He may purchase a permanent residence so that he always has somewhere to go to and where he can get such necessities as mail and banking. It is anybody's guess how long that lifestyle will last.

The Israelites chose the nomadic lifestyle when they left Egyptian slavery. They didn't have trucks and trailers. They did have tents and wagons, with livestock to tow and carry. They only planned on a two-year trip. It ended up like Gilligan's three-hour tour, lasting forty years instead. They only had themselves to blame, having rejected entry into the Promised Land (Num 13) when they first had the chance. They didn't have a local Allsup's (that's a New Mexico/West Texas chain of service stations for those that don't know the joy of an Allsup's burrito) or 7/11. They had to rely on God's manna and quail for their food. They didn't have hook-ups at a KOA campground. On the other hand, they had a cloud for air conditioning every day, a pillar of fire as a night light, and clothes and shoes that never wore out. (Deut 29:5) Still, with a whole generation dying out before their eyes, it could not have been the most pleasant life.

When they entered the land, God provided a reminder of that time. The holiday of Sukkos (also spelled Sukkot) required that the Jewish people live in temporary shelters for one week a year. (Sukkos begins at sunset October 9 in 2022.) This serves to remind them of a couple of things. First, it calls to mind the forty years of unnecessary wandering. They disobeyed God, and suffered for it. Thus, Sukkos reminds them that God is the one to whom to listen.

Also, it reminds them that even when they disobeyed, God provided for them in the wilderness. The *sukkah*, the temporary dwelling, is to be open to the elements. It could rain (or in some places snow) on them. It could be hot with no air conditioning but the breeze. (Jonah complained of the sun while in his *sukkah* outside Nineveh. (Jonah 4)). They may have wandered in the

wilderness for forty years, but they were fed. They may not have entered the land right away, but when the doubters were all dead they did enter the Promised Land. Sukkos reminds them of God's goodness.

In his final sermon, Stephen called the Israelites the "church in the wilderness." (Acts 7:38) Christians and Jews alike are still the church in the wilderness. They entered the land, but never fully received the promise. The writer to the Hebrews says of the Messianic Jews of his day, "here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come." (Heb 13:14) That still applies today.

We are all nomads. Some may travel better than others. Some may be headed in the wrong direction. But we all are wandering in the wilderness, outside the land of promise. God has prepared us a permanent dwelling.

In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. (Jn 14:2-3)

In this world we may tow a 48-foot trailer or sleep under the stars. We may live in a house, but even houses are temporary. Just ask the people of Ukraine or the victims of various hurricanes in the Caribbean. Everything we think we own could be taken away in moments. Or we could be taken.

We are the church in the wilderness. We must learn the lessons of Sukkos. Obedience and reliance. Follow God and trust Him. The wilderness is temporary. Nearly a million and a half people died in the wilderness. We could die, too. For them, death was a punishment. For us it is the way home.

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IN THE SECOND CITY

I am boy from the second city. Yes, Ephesus. The second largest city in the Roman Empire. We are currently even bigger than Athens, so I guess that makes us the largest city in the Greek Empire. We might be even larger if we had room to spread out, but we are surrounded by mountains. There is no room to build outward unless we were to find a way to recover land from the sea.

Ephesus has a long history. We have been conquered, destroyed, rebuilt, and conquered again and again. One time we were ruled by Croesus of Lydia. Yes, that Croesus which everybody wishes they were as rich as. Then came Cyrus the Great. When Darius raised taxes, Ephesus united with the Greeks and caused that great war where the Greeks finally defeater Persia. Think battles of Marathon and Thermopylae. Alexander the Macedonian (he called himself The Great) visited Ephesus. After he died the city changed hands between his generals Seleucus, Ptolemy, and the Antiochus family. Because of all the internal intrigues, Greek control over the world

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faded and Rome took over. When they also raised taxes we called for help from Mithridates, who slaughtered everyone in the city with a Roman accent. Yes, that Mithridates. The guy who was so afraid of being poisoned that he took daily small doses of poison to build up immunity. Didn't do him much good. When he lost to the Romans he tried to commit suicide by poisoning, which, of course, failed. But you can't build up an immunity to a sword in the back. So now Ephesus is part of the Roman Empire.

Our real claim to fame has also a checkered past. Croesus helped build, or rebuild, the temple to our city goddess Artemis, whom the Romans call Diana. That temple was destroyed and rebuilt. Then a crazy guy burnt it down again. The Ephesians started rebuilding the temple. When Alexander came through, he offered to pay for the completion of the partially-built temple. Our leaders declined, saying, "Why should a god build a temple for another?" Eventually we got it rebuilt and now it is a wonder. In fact of the list of the Seven Sights of the World, one writer said "the sun himself has never looked upon its equal." The temple is 450 feet long, 225 feet wide, and 60 feet high. It contains more than 127 columns, and an image of the goddess that reportedly fell from the sky. Since we get people from all over the world visiting our magnificent temple, a portion of our economy is tourist and souvenir based. That recently caused some disturbance in the city.

A man named Paul came to Ephesus. He didn't come as a tourist. He was a traveling preacher of a group called the Way. At first we figured it was just another Jewish offshoot, since he went first to the synagogue. That's where I met him.

Before he even got to the synagogue, though, a marvel happened. There were some other Jews who were already followers of a man named John, who had prophesied about Jesus, the founder of the Way. Paul had asked them if they had received the *Ruach ha-Kodesh*, the Holy Spirit of God. When they said they had not, he asked about their immersion. Immersion is an ancient Jewish practice of purification. This John had preached immersion, and the followers of Jesus also preached it for the purpose of forgiveness of sin. These men had only been immersed into John's preaching. When Paul immersed them again by the authority of Jesus he laid his hands on them. They began speaking in other languages they had not previously known! What an introduction to the synagogue.

Paul preached three months in the synagogue. He wasn't much of a speaker, but he had a compelling knowledge of scripture. I sat at his feet for most of those three months, and he convinced me easily that this Jesus was our long-awaited Messiah. Not everybody was convinced, though, and he had to leave the synagogue. So we began meeting at Tyrannus' place. This was a sort of club where people came after work to relax. We were there for a whole two years. People from all over Asia came to learn from Paul, and Ephesus became known as a center for the Way. Then came trouble.

It all started with the miracles. People would send items such as sweat-cloths or narrow aprons. After Paul touched the items people took them back to the sick or demon possessed and they were healed. That was marvelous, but not a problem. That is, until some Jews tried it.

Particularly, Sceva, who was the senior priest in the area, had seven sons. Maybe they thought that because there were seven of them they were special. Maybe they thought that their father's position made them more important than the traveling exorcists that were trying to use the name of Jesus. Anyway, they tried casting out evil spirits. They used the formula, "We bind you by oath by the name of Jesus whom Paul preaches." The first one they tried this on did have an evil spirit. (Sometimes the "victim" didn't, and it made them look good when he went on his way normally.) The evil spirit answered, "I know Jesus and I know Paul, but who are you?"

That should have been enough to make them run, but they just stood there. Then the man who had the evil spirit jumped on them and beat them up. One man against

seven brothers, and he bloodied them good. Not only that, he tore all their clothes off, so they had to run home through the streets naked.

The word about this incident spread, not just among the Jews. More and more people came to Paul to hear about Jesus. Many believed. Some of them had been practitioners of the curious arts. They gathered information about people and used it to look like they were magically reading their minds. Some of these charlatans became believers. To prove their faith they brought their magic books and burned them. What a glorious bonfire that made! And an expensive one. Someone calculated that the value of the books was about fifty-thousand pieces of silver. That was enough that if they used it to buy wood instead of books they could have lighted the roads from here to Laodicea.

I mentioned that Ephesus had a thriving economy surrounding the Temple of Artemis. Well, Paul's preaching finally started affecting that. Demetrius the silversmith hired a number of us kids to shill for the shop where he sold copies of the temple. He didn't care if we were Jews, Romans, unbelievers. He paid us to go out and get tourists to come to his shop. He got so rich that he even supplied silver temples to his competition. Several of us who were employed by him quit after we became followers of the Way. That cut into his business. Also, many tourists were coming to see Paul instead of the temple. Two years in the city had made Paul famous. This also cut into Demetrius' profits. You can disagree with a man's faith (and I'm not sure Demetrius had any faith), but don't mess with his income.

Demetrius called together all the businessmen of the Artemis Guild. "This man Paul is becoming a problem. We make our living by our craft, and he is telling people not to worship things made by the hands of men. To make it worse, he tells people that our great temple should be destroyed. Imagine that! Ephesus is the Temple of Artemis. People come from all over the world to worship at our temple. It is even listed in all the tour guides and travelogues about the whole Mediterranean region. Those making the Seven Sights tour stop here between Greece and that island 250 miles south with the big statue. Are we going to let this man Paul destroy our temple? Are we going to let him destroy our business?"

With these and many other words he stirred up the guild members. They went out into the street chanting "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians." Naturally, people joined them. Many in the mob didn't even know what it was about. They just knew it was a mob and they wanted a part of it. Just as naturally, some of us boys infiltrated the mob to find out what we could. I learned what it was about and went to warn Paul and his companions. I was too late.

The mob couldn't find Paul, but they took Gaius and Aristarchus. They carried them to the theatre. We may be most famous for our temple, but our Amphitheatre was also impressive. It seated twenty-five thousand people,

making it the largest theatre in the world. Ephesus is nothing if not big.

Paul wanted to go to the theatre to defend his friends. Some of the chief men of the city, and not a few of us kids, barely restrained him. Had he gone in, his life would have been forfeit.

I got back to the theatre in time to see some of the Jews push Alexander up on the stage. He motioned for quiet, but the crowd saw that he was a Jew. They shouted him down. For a full two hours all you could hear was the crowd chanting, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians." I suspect at least half of them had no idea why they were there. They shouted just as loudly as the Artemis Guild.

The city clerk, one of the most prominent

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officials, finally got the crowd quiet. He was a reasonable man, and a politician. Once he had calmed the crowd, he warned them.

"Who here is not aware that Ephesus is the home of the Temple of Artemis, and the image which it houses. That very image came to us from Jupiter himself. I am not telling you anything you don't already know. The whole world knows it. Since that is true, you should not do something rash that will damage the honor of our temple.

"You have brought these men here. They have not robbed temples. They have not blasphemed the goddess. They spoke of a different god, but we even called Alexander a god when it suited our purpose. Have they committed a criminal offense? If so, let Demetrius and his follower bring a formal accusation. The courts are ready to take such accusations. But if you cannot formally charge them, then beware. Every one of you is liable to have charges brought against you for riot. The authorities are waiting outside the theatre. They will want to know the reason for this uproar, and I can't give them one. Go home peaceably. Let these men go without harm. Go home."

The crowd dispersed slowly. I was able to get to Gaius and Aristarchus, along with some other believers. We escorted them out. We avoided passing by Demetrius. That would have been wrong. I could see he was still upset. There was no reason to make him feel any worse.

Paul had already sent Timothy and Erastus ahead to Macedonia. It had been in his mind to leave Ephesus anyway. This riot just made him leave quicker than he had anticipated. We all embraced and put him on a ship to Macedonia. Fortunately, this was not our last contact with Paul. He corresponded with the church, and later met with the elders as he passed by on the way to Jerusalem. I hope he had fond memories rather than just the bad.

(Based on Acts 19)

THE END OF THE ROAD

Route 66 has been called “America’s Main Street.” Before the interstate highway system, it was the main artery from Chicago to Los Angeles County (specifically Santa Monica). What Steinbeck called “the Mother Road” inspired a popular song and a television show. Here in Albuquerque, the main non-interstate east-west road, Central Avenue, is considered part of “historic Route 66.” Interestingly, even though traffic ran both ways, it is commonly considered to run westward to the Pacific. Thus, even though some would think it would end at Lake Michigan, it is considered to end at the Pacific Ocean, at Santa Monica Pier. Santa Monica, then, is proof that all good things must come to an end.

After some consideration, I have decided that the monthly publication of *Minutes With Messiah* will also come to an end with this issue. After 23 years, there will be no more monthly issues.

Twenty-three years is 276 issues. With almost three articles per issue, that means I have written almost 800 articles. I have had eight articles by guest authors, and have published 32 songs.

Articles on Jewish holidays make up 113 of the total, including one in this issue. Another 32 articles are retellings of Bible stories, 26 of them from the gospels. Eight articles specifically address issues related to selecting elders for a congregation. Fifteen articles give lessons from sports, mainly track and baseball. I also did a series of articles about traditions in the church, and another series on Calvinist doctrines.

All in all, it has been a good 23 years. There were times that deadlines were barely met, or not met at all. There were times that people objected to the content of

certain articles, which is to be expected. Because sometimes those people went directly to the elders of my local congregation rather than talking to me about the articles like they should have, and because some in the local congregation might feel that it was a publication of that congregation rather than just my own, I have agreed over the past few years to have the elders or deacons pre-screen each issue. This has actually allowed for good feedback about some errors or timing issues.

A couple of years into publication of *Minutes With Messiah*, I learned how to code a web site. All of the articles, including those written before the web site started, are available online. Many are available in audio format. They will continue to be available, as will the over 800 questions I have answered that were submitted through the web site.

Although I will no longer be publishing monthly issues, I will occasionally publish articles to the web site as something strikes my fancy. As I continue writing hymns I will publish them on the web site as well.

The Levitical priests were required to retire at age 50. Obviously if I followed that requirement I would have quit after two years. Instead, I hit 71 this month. While I still feel, Lord willing, that I have a few more years left, I think that since this issue completes another full year of publication it is time to reach my Santa Monica Pier. The end of the road for the monthly publication.

Some of you have been loyal and vocal supporters of this publication. I appreciate the compliments. As a result of the accompanying web site, I have made friends across the country. I truly appreciate you. All of you who have supported this publication. Thank you.

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