

Wednesday Evening Bible Study

October 18, 2023

Series - The Life and Writings of the Apostle Paul

The Conclusion to the Third Journey

Text – Acts 20

Introduction

Text – Acts 20:1 - 38

Map of Paul's Third Journey



Introduction

In this chapter, we see the conclusion of Paul's third missionary journey, which was spent for the most part in Ephesus. After staying there for three years, Paul will make a quick trip back into Macedonia and Greece. He will then head back to Jerusalem but will make a few stops along the way. On one of these stops he will preach to the people at Troas, and then just before he sets sail to Jerusalem, he will stop in Miletus where he will summons the elders at the church in Ephesus to meet with him one last time before he leaves the area.

I. Paul's Round Trip to Macedonia and Greece (vs. 1 – 6)

"after the uproar was ceased" – the reference here is to the uproar in chapter 19 that was caused by the silversmith Demetrius. (see Acts 19: 23 – 41)

“embraced them” – Paul was saying “good-bye” to the saints at Ephesus. In Acts 19:21, it is mentioned that Paul had already determined to go to Macedonia, but for some reason delayed his trip. (see notes from Acts 19). The word for embrace (ἀσπάζομαι - ä-spä'-zo-mī) is the translated “salute” most of the time. Sometimes it is translated “greet”. In Acts 21:6, it is translated into the phrase “when we had taken our leave of”. Here in our text, it simply means that Paul was saying an affectionate good-bye to the saints at Ephesus.

His original purpose seems to have been:

1. to quickly visit and strengthen some of the places that he had previously ministered to.
2. to collect the offerings that had been taken up on behalf of the saints at Jerusalem, (Rom. 15:25–27; 1 Cor. 16:1–9; 2 Cor. 8–9) The men who accompanied him (Acts 20:4) were representatives of the churches, appointed to travel with Paul and help handle the funds (2 Cor. 8:18–24).¹
3. and then after he had visited Achaia (Greece), he would set sail for Jerusalem. Unfortunately, the Jews had set a trap of some sort for him, so he escaped them by retracing his steps back through Macedonia. (see map)

There is a lot of information regarding this little trip that is not given here in this account from Acts, but by carefully reading Paul’s letters to the Corinthians, we can fill in some of the gaps.

According to Warren Wiersbie:

After the riot, Paul left Ephesus and headed toward Macedonia and Achaia (see Acts 19:21). He expected to meet Titus at Troas and get a report on the problems in Corinth, but Titus did not come (2 Corinthians 2:12–13). The men finally met in Macedonia and Paul rejoiced over the good news Titus brought (2 Corinthians 7:5–7). Paul had originally planned to make two visits to Corinth (2 Corinthians 1:15–16), but instead he made one visit that lasted three months (Acts 20:3; 1 Corinthians 16:5–6). During that visit, he wrote his Epistle to the Romans.²

Paul wrote 2 Corinthians from Macedonia, after he had met up with Titus.

We really do not know exactly what route Paul took to get to Greece, save that we know he went through Troas and Macedonia. It appears that during this trip Paul visited Illyricum,

¹ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Ac 20:1). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

² Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Ac 20:1). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

which is on the eastern shore of the Adriatic Sea, just opposite Italy, and is the further place of Paul's travels thus far. (Romans 15:19)

Vs. 4 - 5 tell us about the men who would be Paul's travelling companions back to Jerusalem. It would make sense that these men were with Paul in Corinth (Achaia). Notice that Timothy is with him again. Paul had sent Timothy and Erastus into Macedonia. Erastus may have stayed in Macedonia, and possibly stayed in Corinth, as he is mentioned two other times in relation with Corinth (Romans 16:23 – mentioned as the chamberlain of the city of Corinth; 2 Timothy 4:20). The men mentioned in vs. 4 – 5 sailed ahead of Paul and Luke into Troas.

Notice – it was Aristarchus and Gaius that were caught by the mob back in Ephesus (Acts 19:29). Aristarchus is later mentioned as a fellow prisoner to Paul in Colossians 4:10, and Philemon 24.

Sopater of Berea is not mentioned elsewhere in Scripture, but Tychicus is mentioned in relation to Paul's first imprisonment (in Ephesians 6:21 and Colossians 4:7); and he is also mentioned as being sent to Ephesus during Paul's second imprisonment (2 Timothy 4:12). He is also a possible messenger to Titus in Crete. (Titus 3:12)

Trophimus, the Ephesian (according to Acts 21:29) is mentioned as being seen with Paul in the city of Jerusalem. In fact, it was because the Jews thought that Paul had brought Trophimus into the temple that Paul was arrested. He is also associated with Paul years later when Paul was in prison the second time. (2 Timothy 4:20)

Notice that the word "we" is used in vs. 6 indicating that Luke is back with Paul. It seems like Paul and Luke first joined company in Troas back in Acts 16:10. Luke travels with him into Macedonia but appears to go no further than Philippi. Here in our text, Luke will rejoin Paul as he travels back to Jerusalem.

I have belabored the point of mentioning all these men, because it is important to remember that it takes a lot of good men and women to bring success to any ministry.

1. These men were **faithful**.

"Most men will proclaim every one his own goodness: but a faithful man who can find?"
(Proverbs 20:6)

"Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful." (1 Corinthians 4:2)

2. These men were **fearless**.

Anybody associated with the Apostle Paul knew he was risking his life. As we have already seen in Acts 19, Aristarchus and Gaius had already gotten in trouble in Ephesus, and Aristarchus will later be put in prison with Paul. These men were not afraid to risk their lives for the cause of Christ.

3. These men were **fruitful**. Though they were not the center of attention, if it were not for these men, and others, Paul would not have been able to do what he did.

Note – A curious thought hit me while preparing this – what ever happened to Silas (Silvanus)? He is not mentioned after his time in Corinth back in Paul’s second journey (Acts 18:5); unless he is the “Silvanus” mentioned as the writer of 1 Peter (1 Peter 5:12)

II. Paul’s “Revival” at Troas (vs. 7 – 12)

This was not a revival as we would normally think of in the context of the ministry of the Apostle Paul. This was a physical revival. There was a man who fell asleep when Paul was preaching late into the night. He was up in a window, in a third loft, and apparently fell a good distance, and was “taken up dead”. Paul “embraced” him, and then proclaimed that he was alive. The Lord caused this young man to physically pass from death unto life.

v. 7 – Notice that they met on the first day of the week, not the Sabbath. This is the day of the resurrection, and this is also the day that the church was empowered at Pentecost. In 1 Corinthians 16:2, Paul instructed the Church at Corinth to collect an offering when they gathered on the first day of the week. Early Christians maintained some of the worship from Judaism, but eventually they developed their own pattern.

This preaching service took place at night. They most likely all worked during the day. Sunday was not a day off for either Jews or Gentiles at this time.

“to break bread” – it is believed that the early church shared a meal together when they gathered, but then would also observe the Lord’s Supper. In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul straightened out the Church at Corinth because of the abuses that were going on involving the Lord’s Supper. In v. 11, the “broken bread” was most likely a reference to a meal, not the observance of the Lord’s Supper.

v. 9 – The whole group was gathered in “an upper chamber”. Eutychus was sitting in a “third loft”. It is not clear from the text as to whether Eutychus fell out of the window, or just fell to the floor, but it would make sense that he fell out since they were in an upper chamber. Paul “embraced” him, which reminds us of how Elijah raised the widow’s son in 1 Kings 17:21 – 22; and also, Elisha with the Shunamite woman’s son in 2 Kings 4:34 – 35)

We shouldn't be too hard on Eutychus for falling asleep, as it was very late, and he probably had worked all day. We also cannot be too hard on the Apostle for preaching so long. First, Paul was their only source for New Testament doctrine. The custom for a regular church service was that someone would read a passage from the Old Testament; and possibly a letter from Paul that had been circulating. The pastor would preach a message from the passage.

"Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine." (1 Timothy 4:13)

Notice they continued to preach after this event until the break of day. This was obviously a special meeting, but we must keep in mind that these people held a special reverence to the preaching and teaching of the Word of God, and they were not the least bit upset about long services.

Practical thoughts regarding preaching and church services:

1. Sometimes, services will go a little longer than usual.
2. Sometimes, God will mix things up a little bit. (guest speaker, special situations, etc.) You must learn to be flexible. God may have sent it your way for a particular reason.
3. If longer preaching bothers you, you may have a spiritual problem.
4. If a guest preacher comes who is different from what you're used to – don't be too critical, and don't be overly enamored. God's messengers are all different, but God's message is always the same.

III. Paul's Rest Stop in Miletus (vs. 13 – 16)

From Troas, Paul will travel on foot for a while, and will meet up with the rest of his team in Assos. Why did Paul walk? Maybe, he wanted to clear his head a little. Maybe, he just wanted to get alone with God. Maybe, he wanted to take some time one on one with one of the members of his team. Maybe it was a better way to meet more people. These are all speculations, but we really don't know why.

They will sail to Mytelene, and then travel to Trogyllium, and finally down to Miletus where he will send for the leaders of Ephesus to come and meet with him before he leaves for Jerusalem. This trip from Troas to Miletus took 4 days. He had already spent 12 days travelling from Philippi to Troas, including his time spent in Troas. He has 34 days left to get to Jerusalem. Remember, he left Philippi after the days of Unleavened bread were ended. Pentecost was fifty days after the Passover.

IV. Paul Reaches Out to the Leaders from Ephesus (vs 17 – 38)

A. He Addresses Them (vs. 17 – 27)

Notice something very important in this passage:

Paul calls the elders - πρεσβύτερος (pres-bü'-te-ros), which literally means older, or more mature. In the church setting, these were spiritually mature men that were ordained:

"And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed." (Acts 14:23)

Later in v. 28 he uses the word “flock”, which indicates that these men were pastors, or shepherds – again in a spiritual sense.

The word “overseers” in v. 28 is ἐπίσκοπος (e-pē'-sko-pos). This word is translated “bishop” in most places where it is used. Bishop means overseer.

Here in this passage, the words, “elder, pastor, shepherd, and bishop are all used interchangeably referring to the same people.

Peter speaks about this in 1 Peter 5:1 – 4:

"The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away." (1 Peter 5:1-4)

1. Paul reminds them of their past together. (vs. 18 – 21)

He was faithful to his calling – “at all seasons” (v. 18)

"Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine." (2 Timothy 4:2)

He served them. (v. 19)

He sacrificed for them. Vs. 19 – 20)

He did not hold back anything that they needed. (v. 20)

He taught them the gospel. (v. 21)

He taught them all the counsel of God. (vs. 26 – 27)

2. Paul forewarns them of his future. (vs. 22 – 25)

Paul was not sure exactly what the future held for him, but he definitely knew that bad things were awaiting him in Jerusalem. I personally do not believe Paul should go to Jerusalem, and we will discuss that when we get the next chapter, but for now, consider Paul's statement in v. 24:

"But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God." (Acts 20:24)

Paul was saying that nothing in this world could veer him off of his course of preaching the gospel.

He said that nothing could move him.

What moves people away from fulfilling the will of God in their life?

The Fear of Persecution – hardship – sickness – etc.

The Pursuit of Pleasures – this has been far more effective in the days that we live in. This includes possessions, drunkenness, greed, laziness.

B. He Admonishes Them (vs. 28 – 31)

1. Feed the Church (v. 28)

Notice very careful who owns the church, and how he paid for it. He purchased you and I as individuals as well:

"What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's." (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

We feed the church through the preaching and teaching of sound doctrine. In order for the elders/pastors/bishops to preach sound doctrine, they must first learn sound doctrine. Preachers and teachers of the Word of God must continuously be students of the Bible:

"Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." (2 Timothy 2:15)

2. To Protect the Church

- a. from those without
- b. from those within

The church is protected primarily the same way it is fed, through sound doctrine. However, there will be times when disciplinary measures must be taken to protect the flock.

Illustrate – man who was coming to our church years ago that an older, wiser pastor counseled me to ask to leave.

3. To love the church of God (v. 31 – with tears)

Paul's example for three years showed the elders of the church at Ephesus how to love God's people.

C. He Appeals to God for Them (vs. 32 – 38)

In verse 32, Paul said:

“And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace,”

He was telling these people that he was the pastor of for over three years, that I am giving you to God, or I am placing you in the hands of God; and to God's word.

Note – a pastor can only do so much. A teacher can only do so much. There comes a time when we must acknowledge that the people we care for and minister to do not belong to us, they belong to God.

Vs. 33 – 35 show us that Paul worked for his needs (with Priscilla and Aquila as a tentmaker) while he was at Ephesus. He took nothing from them, and he gave them everything. Now, he was encouraging them to do the same.

Finally, Paul prays for them, and says good-bye.