

The Acts of the Apostles

“A study of the application of theology to the work of the church as a group”

Continuing the Third Missionary Trip of Paul

Paul in Macedonia and Greece

“Sleeping During a Sermon Can Be Hazardous for Your Health”

“Warnings of Dangers both Within and Without the Church”

Chapter Twenty

Leon Combs, Ph.D.

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Acts 20:1 “And after the uproar had ceased, Paul sent for the disciples and when he had exhorted them and taken his leave of them, he departed to go to Macedonia.

Acts 20:2 And when he had gone through those districts and had given them much exhortation, he came to Greece.

Acts 20:3 And there he spent three months, and when a plot was formed against him by the Jews as he was about to set sail for Syria, he determined to return through Macedonia.

Acts 20:4 And he was accompanied by Sopater of Berea, the son of Pyrrhus; and by Aristarchus and Secundus of the Thessalonians; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy; and Tychicus and Trophimus of Asia.

Quite an uproar that ended according to God’s plan A! Two times in succession the Jews attempt to bring charges against the missionaries met in failure, which strengthened the spread of Christianity for years until a major uprising would occur after the church had obtained a foothold that would allow it to succeed until now. I would love to have been there to hear the exhortation by Paul! He had these two events to bring before them as well as his vision from Jesus so that he could encourage them to continue without fear. He then must have felt very secure in his mission there as he left them for Macedonia where he continued to encourage other disciples in their work while he waited for Titus.

A lot happened during his two years in Ephesus. He had heard about the problems in the church at Corinth where he had taught for about 1.5 years. They had developed the Party of Apollos, the Party of Peter, the Party of Paul, and the Party of Christ. They had severe immorality problems, lawsuits among believers, and poorly conducted communion services. Paul had left Titus there and he wrote his first letter to them while he was at Ephesus. He was then to meet Titus at Troas after he left Ephesus but Titus did not come. Paul then was very upset and imagined all sorts of severe problems at the Corinthian church as he reported in his second letter to them. He then left Troas to go into Europe as he intended to go to Corinth himself. But he met Titus in Macedonia and was very relieved to hear that the problems at Corinth had been resolved (2 Cor 2:12-13; 7:5-16). Paul was greatly encouraged by Titus and so he spent the summer in the Macedonian area (Rom 15:19). He then spent the winter in Corinth probably with his friend Gaius where he wrote the letter to the Romans (Rom 1: 9-15; 15:22-29). The seas

were too rough to travel in December, January, and February so Paul waited to travel to Jerusalem in the spring of A.D. 56.

Delegates from churches gathered support to take to the church at Jerusalem and they would have met to travel together. Some of these delegates are mentioned in verse 4. It seemed that Paul may have been a little rough-handed in his getting people from various Gentile churches to make collections for the mainly Jewish church at Jerusalem but he wanted to help produce unity between the two groups. The men are named so we should make a bit of an effort to develop their names. Sopater was from the church of Berea, which was a strong church made up of people who were Bible scholars (Acts 17:11). Aristarchus and Secundus were both from Thessalonica. Aristarchus is the name of an aristocrat and so of the upper status of people at that church. Secundus is the name of a slave, meaning “second”. Such a name was common among slaves rather than having a formal name they would be called “two of five”! So it seems that the church at Thessalonica was sending two people to represent the entire social stratus of the people at that church. Gaius represented one of the cities of Galatia and Timothy came to the group from the church at Lystra. So if these are representatives of the great Gentile churches in the area where are the representatives from Philippi and Corinth? Scholars think that Luke was actually the representative from Philippi and that is why we see the word “we” in Acts 20:6. Also since Paul was so instrumental in developing the church at Corinth, it is likely that the church decided that he should be their representative.

He then found out that the Jews planned another plot against him just as he was about to sail to Syria. The boat was a commercial boat that would have been filled as much as possible with goods for sale so it would have been easy for an assassin to kill him and push his body into the water during a night travel. So he traveled by land to another port where he could then take a boat from Macedonia to Jerusalem to rejoin with his group.

Acts 20:5 But these had gone on ahead and were waiting for us at Troas.

Acts 20:6 And we sailed from Philippi after the days of Unleavened Bread, and came to them at Troas within five days; and there we stayed seven days.”

Note that Luke now starts using “we” so he has now joined the group probably as the Philippi representative and he now has a direct remembrance of events. The feast of Unleavened Bread lasted from April 7 to 14 in A.D. 57 and at this time the trade winds would have been against them for the trip from Neapolis to Troas, which would account for the trip being over 2 times longer than their previous trip from Troas to Neapolis (Acts 16:11).

Acts 20:7 “And on the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul began talking to them, intending to depart the next day, and he prolonged his message until midnight.

Acts 20:8 And there were many lamps in the upper room where we were gathered together.

Acts 20:9 And there was a certain young man named Eutychus sitting on the window sill, sinking into a deep sleep; and as Paul kept on talking, he was overcome by sleep and fell down from the third floor, and was picked up dead.

Acts 20:10 But Paul went down and fell upon him and after embracing him, he said, "Do not be troubled, for his life is in him."

Acts 20:11 And when he had gone back up, and had broken the bread and eaten, he talked with them a long while, until daybreak, and so departed.

Acts 20:12 And they took away the boy alive, and were greatly comforted."

Verse seven is the earliest text we have for the inference that the Christians met together on Sunday of each week to worship. For many years the Jews had been programmed to worship God on the Sabbath, but to commemorate a new beginning the worship of all Christians was changed to be on the Lord's Day, Sunday the first day of the week. Probably breaking bread would have been the ceremonial time and probably April 24 of A.D. 57. The opportunity to listen to Paul meant that nobody would have been anxious to cut his talk short and Paul was so glad to be with his fellow Christians that he had not seen in a long time that he continued his talk until midnight. Why did the physician Luke tell us about the lamps in the upper room? He knew that the smoke from the lamps would have made the air very heavy and also heavy with gases that he knew tended to make people sleepy. He is giving this young man a bit of an excuse for falling asleep! Indeed the young man did fall asleep as he was sitting on the window sill and he fell three stories to the ground, where he was picked up dead. The physician said that Eutychus was picked up dead but Paul said that his life was still in him. So was the young man really dead or had he just been knocked out? We cannot know for sure. Paul's "technique" of reviving him was similar to that of Elijah and Elisha:

1Kings 17:21 "Then he stretched himself upon the child three times, and called to the Lord, and said, "O Lord my God, I pray Thee, let this child's life return to him.""

2Kings 4:34 "And he went up and lay on the child, and put his mouth on his mouth and his eyes on his eyes and his hands on his hands, and he stretched himself on him; and the flesh of the child became warm.

2Kings 4:35 Then he returned and walked in the house once back and forth, and went up and stretched himself on him; and the lad sneezed seven times and the lad opened his eyes."

I note that Paul said that the young man's life was still in him and Elijah asked God to let the child's life return to him. I am not going to try to read too much in all of this but I think that I will take the physician's diagnosis of physical death but not brain death so that Paul was able to continue working miracles by bringing the boy back from death.

Paul then went back to the room, broke bread with them and then continued his message until daybreak! This interruption was just part of another day's work for Paul! So about six hours after the boy had fallen to his death he was taken out of the house alive!

Acts 20:13 “But we, going ahead to the ship, set sail for Assos, intending from there to take Paul on board; for thus he had arranged it, intending himself to go by land.

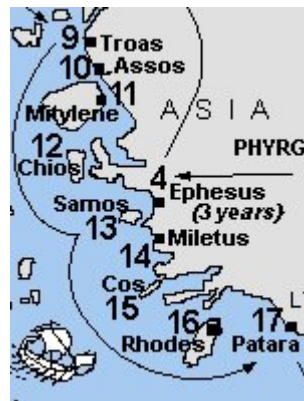
Acts 20:14 And when he met us at Assos, we took him on board and came to Mitylene.

Acts 20:15 And sailing from there, we arrived the following day opposite Chios; and the next day we crossed over to Samos; and the day following we came to Miletus.

Acts 20:16 For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus in order that he might not have to spend time in Asia; for he was hurrying to be in Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost.

Acts 20:17 And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church.”

Since these towns are not so clear in our minds, here is a map of this travel sequence of Paul:



We see that Paul was almost directly south of Ephesus by about 30 miles. Pentecost was on May 29 in A.D. 57. The ship would have stayed several days in port at Miletus so he had plenty of time to meet with the group from Ephesus. Paul then gives them his farewell speech and his last will and testament to the churches that he had planted in this area.

Paul's Farewell to the Ephesian Elders

In chapter 20 we see Paul leading the church service at Troas and now we see him in a private meeting with a group of elders. In this latter meeting Paul has a three part message:

1.) His personal testimony to them.

Acts 20:18 “And when they had come to him, he said to them, You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time,

Acts 20:19 serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews;

Acts 20:20 how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house,

Acts 20:21 solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Acts 20:22 And now, behold, bound in spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there,

Acts 20:23 except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me.

Acts 20:24 "But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, in order that I may finish my course, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God."

[I skip here to stay with the flow of his personal testimony.]

Acts 20:33 "I have coveted no one's silver or gold or clothes.

Acts 20:34 "You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me.

Acts 20:35 "In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

Paul tells the elders how he ministered to the people brought to him by God. He preached publicly and privately to many people as God was bringing them to him for salvation and for instruction. He was always humble as he pointed people toward Jesus Christ and not toward him. Such is always a problem for a teacher or preacher as people tend to tell the person how wonderful the talk was or how deeply they were touched by his message. I have had that problem on several occasions and I know how tempting it is to take the praise personally rather than pass it on to the Lord. Note that he clearly states that a striving for self preservation was not a driving motive of his as it would be for anyone who was without any sense of the reality of the supernatural. He did not have a secular mindset as do most of the people of the world. His motives were not for self comforts but only for the completion of his assigned tasks by his Lord. He is told by the Holy Spirit that he is heading into dangerous territory and that he will have personal afflictions as an integral part of his assignment. Although he is not stoic about his coming and past situations, he does totally submit himself to the will of God regardless of the personal consequences ahead. He states that he is bound in the spirit, which means that he has allowed himself to be bound as though by chains to the total will of God and that regardless of what lies ahead he is bound to complete the tasks.

Paul goes on to say that he also is totally dependent upon the Holy Spirit for the deliverance of his daily needs whether that means working with his hands or in the acceptance of gifts that he did not covet. He could show them his hands that were scarred and calloused from the years of working with needles and materials in his tent making profession. His hands would have clearly shown that he was a hard worker and not a person who constantly depended upon the generosity of others. He was not bragging but merely stated the facts that he indeed wanted to help others, especially the weak in body and mind. He constantly was emphasizing with people where they were in their lives so that they could understand that his motives were pure and that all that he did was for the glory of God and for being a source through whom the Holy Spirit to work in bringing people to the Father through the Son. This brilliant, resourceful man was willing to bring all of his talents and gifts to work for God and for no glory for himself.

2.) His specific charge and warning to them.

Acts 20:25 "And now, behold, I know that all of you, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, will see my face no more.

Acts 20:26 "Therefore I testify to you this day, that I am innocent of the blood of all men.

Acts 20:27 "For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God.

Acts 20:28 "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

Acts 20:29 "I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock;

Acts 20:30 and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them."

Acts 20:31 "Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears.

Acts 20:32 "And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified."

He knows that these people will never see him again on this earth so he now gives them his specific charges to them as elders from their churches. To say that he is innocent of the blood of all men is a very comprehensive statement by this man who had taken Christians to prisons where many lost their lives, who had been probably the major witness at the stoning of Stephen, and who had brought the Gospel message to many people, some who had accepted the message personally and some who had rejected it and Paul. To those whose death he had caused either directly or indirectly in his Jewish quest to rid the world of Christians, this blood had been taken on the cross by his Lord and Savior Jesus. To those who rejected his faithful message of the salvation plan of God, he had been a faithful watchman for them. To those who accepted the message of salvation and thus became part of the family of God, his message had played an important part in the removal of their blood debts.

He then tells them to be faithful watchmen over the flock given them by God. The Holy Spirit has made them shepherds over a particular flock and they have an awesome responsibility to teach and warn the people who had been purchased with the precious blood of Jesus. He warns them of dangers without and within their flocks. People from outside will try to ravage their flock and people from within the flocks will try to mislead them away from the flocks. Note that Paul tells them that these wolves from within the flock will use perverse sayings to draw away the people. Paul warns people in other flocks of these same sorts of dangers that occurred to him.

2Cor 11:26 "I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren;"

There will be people within the flock who are really not of the flock as John told us.

1John 2:19 “They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, in order that it might be shown that they all are not of us.”

There are few events in life that are as painful as seeing people whom you thought were sincere in their faith turn from God and serve the world. I have had people turn on me when I thought that they were my friends and the remembrances of such are still painful. Paul reminds them of his ministering times when he did not cease to pray for them and to admonish each of them with tears [meaning with great empathy of the possible dangers of each person being weak and straying from their tasks.].

Lastly Paul commends them to God, meaning that he relinquishes his personal commitments to them into the care of God and God will be faithful to provide them with their needs for the tasks of taking care of their assigned flocks. This does not mean that Paul will forget them but that he knows from experience that the same God Who called these people to their assignments will also provide the grace to carry them through with their worldly tasks. God’s grace is just remarkable in that He first gave us the faith so that we could believe and then He gives us the Holy Spirit to maintain us in a life devoted to His service. He also tells them that God will provide their inheritance in their totally sanctified state, or in their glorification when they are among the saints of all time. Glory to God!

3.) His prayer for them.

Acts 20:36 “And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all.

Luke does not give us any specifics of this prayer session. It likely involved his prayer, the prayers of some or all of the elders, and then ended with Paul’s closing prayer. I am sure that many of you have been included in some such rich prayer sessions when someone was leaving. I can certainly understand this next verse as the prayer session ends with tears of gratitude and praise for the person and mainly for God’s rich blessings on all the people because He had brought them all together for such a rich time.

Acts 20:37 And they began to weep aloud and embraced Paul, and repeatedly kissed him,

Acts 20:38 grieving especially over the word which he had spoken, that they should see his face no more. And they were accompanying him to the ship.”

How sad they would have been indeed if they could see what lay in store for Paul in Jerusalem!

The Third Missionary Trip of Paul

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