

To The Ends Of The Earth

LESSON 20: PAUL'S THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEY, PART 2 (ACTS 20:1-38)

After the gospel had experienced great successes during the time Paul was in Ephesus, there had been a great riot. This riot involved praising the Ephesian goddess Artemis. Thankfully, this riot had been calmed, but Paul would soon leave Ephesus and continue his journey.

PREACHING IN MACEDONIA AND GREECE (ACTS 20:1-6)

20:1-6. After the uproar in Ephesus, Paul encouraged the disciples (after having spent about three years there, Acts 19:10; 20:31). He then left for Macedonia (where he had previously traveled, Acts 16-17), encouraging the brethren there. After Macedonia, Paul went to Greece (commonly used to reference Achaia, including Corinth and Athens, Acts 17-18). Some of the letters Paul wrote during this time (2 Corinthians and Romans) give further description of the work that was done and the challenges Paul faced (e.g. 2 Corinthians 7:5; 8-9; Romans 15:25-27). Paul stayed three months in Greece and planned to sail to Syria (likely to Antioch and then Jerusalem). Evidently, Paul had been joined by brothers to represent various congregations and take the collected funds to Jerusalem (1 Corinthians 16:1-4; 2 Corinthians 8:16-24) – Sopater (Berea), Aristarchus and Secundus (Thessalonica), Gaius (Derbe/Galatia), Timothy (perhaps Lystra/Galatia, Acts 16:1), Tychicus and Trophimus (Asia), and Paul (perhaps representing Corinth). However, as Jews plotted against Paul, Paul changed his plans and traveled back through Macedonia. The other men sailed to Troas and waited for him. Paul traveled later from near Philippi (likely Neapolis) to Troas. This was after the Festival of Unleavened Bread (Passover, early spring). Perhaps the trip from Philippi to Troas took longer than expected (five days, Acts 20:6, compared to the previous two-day trip, Acts 16:11). Perhaps missing the previous assembly on the first day of the week resulted in them spending seven days in Troas.

TRAVELING TOWARD JERUSALEM (ACTS 20:7-16)

20:7-12. It was the practice of New Testament Christians to assemble on the first day of the week (1 Corinthians 16:1-4), where the breaking of bread (the Lord's Supper) was emphasized (1 Corinthians 11:23-

26; Acts 2:42; Matthew 26:26-29). The implication is that the practice of New Testament churches was to assemble on the first day of every week for the sharing of the Lord's Supper (no other day for its observation is given in Scripture). During this assembly, Paul also spoke (preached) to them (Acts 2:42). Paul continued his message until midnight as he prepared to leave them the next day, likely having much to say to them. As many assembled on this occasion in a third-story room, a young man (Eutychus) fell asleep, fell out of the window, and died. However, Paul went down to him, embraced him, and pronounced the boy to be alive – raising him from the dead (Acts 9:36-42)! After going back to the upstairs room, Paul prepared to leave by eating a meal (Acts 27:35; separate from the assembly and Lord's Supper, 1 Corinthians 11:17-34), talking a long time with the disciples until dawn. Then he left. The boy went home alive, and everyone was greatly comforted.

20:13-16. Paul's traveling companions (including Luke) boarded a ship and sailed for Assos (about 40 miles), while Paul traveled by land (about 20 miles). Paul was then taken on board, and they sailed in a mostly southernly direction off the coast of Asia Minor to Mitylene (on the island of Lesbos), then to Chios, then to the island of Samos, and then to Miletus over a few days. As Paul was trying to avoid spending time in Asia in his effort to make it to Jerusalem for Pentecost, he did not stop in Ephesus. Miletus was about 30 miles south of Ephesus.

MEETING WITH THE EPHESIAN ELDERS (ACTS 20:17-38)

20:17-24. From Miletus, Paul sent word for the elders (overseers, shepherds, v. 28; Acts 14:23) of the Ephesian church to meet with him. After they arrived, Paul reminded them how he had worked among them while in Asia (for three years, Acts 19:10; 20:31). He served the Lord with humility and tears, even enduring great trials (Acts 19:23-41), specifically due to the plots of the Jews (not mentioned in Acts, 1 Corinthians 15:32; 2 Corinthians 1:8-11). Thus, his work had not been about himself, but about sacrificially serving the Lord and working for the good of others! Paul had not withheld anything that was profitable from them and had worked to teach the gospel publicly (Acts 19:8-10) and from house-to-house (Acts 5:42). The message of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus was made known to both Jews and Gentiles. Now, Paul was convicted to go to Jerusalem despite being uncertain about what he would experience there, other than the assurance that chains and afflictions were awaiting him (as the Spirit revealed in every city, Acts 21:10-14). Yet,

Paul was determined to go, regardless of what might happen to him so he could finish his ministry received from Christ in testifying to the gospel of God's grace (Philippians 1:20-24; 2 Timothy 4:6-8)!

20:25-31. Paul did not anticipate ever seeing the Ephesian elders again. So, he addressed a few things with them. First, he declared that he was innocent of the Ephesians' blood if they would be lost because he had declared the entire plan and purpose of God to them (v. 20; Ezekiel 3:16-21; 33:1-9). Second, he urged them to be on guard for themselves and the flock God had (through the work of the Holy Spirit, 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9) made them overseers and shepherds of. Note that elders in the New Testament were the same as overseers (bishops) and shepherds (pastors, 1 Peter 5:1-3). They needed to watch over themselves (1 Corinthians 10:12; Galatians 6:1) and the others in the church God purchased with His blood so they would not fall away (Galatians 1:6-10; 5:4). Specifically, Paul knew there would be savage wolves come in among the flock who would seek to destroy it by distorting the truth and drawing people to follow after them (Matthew 7:15-20; 2 Peter 2:1-3; 3:14-18). These threats would come from those who would come into the church and from those who were already among the church (possibly even from among the elders). Therefore, Paul pleaded for the elders to be on the alert, remembering Paul's diligence and tear-filled work among them over three years!

20:32-38. Paul concluded by commending the elders to God and the word of God's grace (the gospel). This alone is what would result in their salvation (Romans 1:16). Now, they needed to be diligent in it! They needed to remember Paul's selfless example, as he was not greedy and worked hard to provide for himself and others with him (Acts 18:1-3; 2 Thessalonians 3:7-10). Certainly, they were not to use their role to become greedy for money or covet (1 Timothy 3:3; 5:17-18; 1 Peter 5:1-3). Paul remembered Jesus's teaching (only directly mentioned here) that it is more blessed to give than to receive – and practiced that by working hard to help the weak! After this, they knelt down and prayed together, loudly wept, embraced, and kissed (a standard greeting or farewell, Romans 16:16). Their sorrow was primarily over the thought of not seeing Paul again (v. 25). They then accompanied Paul to the ship to leave.

CONCLUSION

Paul has now journeyed from Ephesus through Macedonia and Greece, and back into Asia to Miletus. Paul is heading with great determination and purpose toward Jerusalem. But he first spent time encouraging and warning the elders from Ephesus.

DISCIPLESHIP QUESTIONS

Where did Paul travel after leaving Ephesus, and what was accomplished in these places?

When did churches in the New Testament assemble?

What did they do during these assemblies?

Who did Paul meet with in Miletus, and why did he meet with them there?

What did Paul say about his work in Ephesus and Asia?

What work were the Ephesian elders responsible for doing?

What was waiting for Paul in Jerusalem, and how did he respond?

What dangers did the church in Ephesus face?

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