

The Church of the Servant King

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Survey of the Bible Series – The Book of Acts

(SB_Acts 20A_Paul Concludes the Third Missionary Journey)

Paul Determines to Go to Rome (19:21-22)

Evidently, Paul desired to continue to Gentile areas not yet reached. What better climax to his journeys than the very seat of the Roman Empire itself? Paul might have reasoned that if Gentiles in Rome came to faith, certainly smaller cities within the Roman empire might be more easily persuaded. Also, Rome was a logical step if he were to make it to Spain (Rom 15:23-24). Regardless, eventually, in ways Paul didn't necessarily intend, he did make it to Rome and was there "two full years in his own rented quarters...preaching the kingdom of God and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered" (Acts 28:30-31).

This passage (19:21-22) introduces us to a section of Luke's narrative that includes one-third of the total material of the book of Acts. It is characterized by several important things to note:

- The prominence given to the speeches of Paul in his defense (chapters 22-26)
- There is a greater dominance of the "we" sections in the narrative portions (cf. 20:5-15; 21:1-18; 27:1-28:16)
- The length of the section is not due to its theological significance; rather, it seems to have a more apologetic purpose
- The events in this section span the date range of circa A.D. 56 to A.D. 62

By the use of the phrase "Paul purposed in the Spirit," Luke was emphasizing the point that Paul's desire to go to Rome was just as much under the Spirit's direction as had been the preceding missionary activity of Paul. In the interim, Paul desired to collect money from the relatively more prosperous Gentile believers in the Aegean region and deliver the collection to the saints in Judea. Paul knew that returning to Jerusalem would be dangerous for him (Rom 15:30-32), but he thought it necessary to go anyway since he believed it to be God's will. Paul never let the possibility of danger hinder him from doing God's will.

Now I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in prayers to God for me, that I may be delivered from those in Judea who do not believe, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, that I may come to you with joy by the will of God, and may be refreshed together with you. (Rom 15:30-32)

Brief Summary of the Remainder of Paul's Journeys – In Acts 20, Paul departs from Ephesus to complete his third missionary journey with the purpose of traveling to Jerusalem and then Rome. Paul wrote 1 Corinthians from Ephesus in the Spring of A.D. 56 and announced his intention of leaving Ephesus soon to visit Corinth and perhaps spend the winter in Corinth (1 Corinthians 16:5-8). Paul had heard of all of the troubles in the Corinthian church through members of the family of Chloe who had come to Ephesus (1 Cor 1:11) and Paul had written a letter to the Corinthians known as the lost letter which addressed these problems (1 Cor 5:9-10). The lost letter was written prior to 1 Corinthians since it is mentioned in 1 Corinthians. Paul sent Titus to Corinth and it is most likely that Titus carried the letter we know as 1 Corinthians with him. In this letter, Paul announces his intentions to come to Corinth as we have seen.

Paul travels to Macedonia where he wrote 2 Corinthians (circa A.D. 56) – probably from Philippi. From 2 Corinthians 2:12-13, we learn that Paul traveled from Ephesus to Troas where

he had a great opportunity to preach, but he was troubled because he did not find Titus there. Later in 2 Corinthians 7:5-6, we learn that Titus did link with Paul and brought good news to Paul. He continued south from Macedonia and spent the winter of A.D. 56-57 in Corinth.

While in Corinth he wrote the Epistle to the Romans and sent it by Phoebe (16:1-2) to the Roman church. Paul departed from Corinth by land and traveled clockwise around the Aegean Sea back to Troas in Asia where he boarded a ship and eventually reached Jerusalem. In Jerusalem, the Jews arrested Paul and imprisoned him (A.D. 57). He arrived in Rome as a prisoner and ministered there for two years (60-62 A.D.). During this time he wrote the Prison Epistles (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon). The Romans freed Paul, and he returned to the Aegean area. There he wrote 1 Timothy and Titus, experienced arrest again, suffered imprisonment in Rome a second time, wrote 2 Timothy, and died as a martyr under Nero in A.D. 68.

Further Thoughts on the Concluding Events in Ephesus (19:23-41) – This riot and mob scene might have been the backdrop for references Paul makes in his epistles to certain scenes. Paul mentions in Romans 16:4 that Aquilla and Priscilla risked their lives for Paul. Paul also referred to fighting the “wild beasts” at Ephesus (1 Cor 15:32) and of despairing for his life as he faced a deadly foe (2 Cor 1:8-11). We are forced to wonder if the reason that the resurrected Lord rebukes Ephesus in His revelation given to the Apostle John that is recorded in Revelation 2:1-7 is in some way related to the economic influence in that region that was wielded by the infrastructure that surrounded the Temple to Artemis.

To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this: “I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false; and you have perseverance and have endured for My name’s sake, and have not grown weary. But I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Therefore, remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds your did at first; or else I am coming to you and I will remove your lampstand out of its place – unless you repent. Yet this you do have that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God. (Rev 2:1-7)

The Conclusion of The Third Missionary Journey (20:1-21:14)

SEQUENCE OF PAUL’S ACTIVITIES ON THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEY ¹		
Date	Event	Reference
53-57	Third missionary journey	Acts 18:23—21:19
53	Ministry in Galatia	Acts 18:23; 19:1
53	Apollos’ ministry in Ephesus	Acts 18:24
53	Aquilla and Priscilla’s ministry to Apollos	Acts 18:26
53	Apollos’ ministry in Achaia	Acts 18:27-28
53-56	Ministry in Ephesus and Asia	Acts 19:1—20:1
53-56	Writing of the “former letter” to Corinth	1 Cor. 5:9
56	Writing of 1 Corinthians	
56	The “painful visit” to Corinth and return	2 Cor., 2:1; 12:14; 13:1-2

¹ Extracted from a larger table in Thomas Constable, “Notes on the Book of Acts,” www.soniclight.com

SEQUENCE OF PAUL'S ACTIVITIES ON THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEY¹		
Date	Event	Reference
56	Writing of the "severe letter" to Corinth	2 Cor. 2:3-4; 7:8-12; 12:18
56	Sending of Timothy and Erastus to Macedonia	Acts 19:22
56	Trip to Troas from Ephesus	
56	Wait for Titus	
56	Trip to Macedonia from Troas	Acts 20:1
56	Reunion with Titus in Macedonia	
56	Writing of 2 Corinthians	
56	Ministry in Macedonia	Acts 20:2
56	Ministry in Greece (Achaia and Corinth)	Acts 20:2-3
56-57	Writing of Romans	
57	Return to Macedonia and Philippi with Sopater, Aristarchus, Secundus, Gaius, Timothy, Tychicus, Trophimus, and Luke	Acts 20:3-4
57	Trip of his companions except Luke to Troas	Acts 20:5
57	Trip to Troas with Luke	Acts 20:6
57	Ministry at Troas	Acts 20:7-12
57	Trip to Assos by land while Luke and another brother travel by ship	Acts 20:13
57	Trip to Miletus by ship with Luke and the other brother	Acts 20:14-16
57	Ministry at Miletus	Acts 20:17-38
57	Trip from Miletus to Caesarea with Luke and the other brother via Tyre	Acts 21:1-7
57	Ministry at Caesarea	Acts 21:8-14
57	Trip to Jerusalem	Acts 21:15-16

Paul's Journeys in Macedonia and Greece (20:1-6)

This summary of Paul's ministry in Macedonia and Greece is probably the briefest account of an extended ministry in all of Luke's narrative. We derive much of our understanding of this portion of Paul's third missionary journey from 2 Corinthians and Romans which were written during this time period.

Evidently soon after the riot in Ephesus (19:23-41), Paul departed from Ephesus with the goal of returning to Jerusalem through Macedonia and Achaia (19:21). His journey to this region was preceded by Timothy and Erastus who he sent as an advance party (19:22) and probably with the "severe letter" to the Corinthian church (2 Cor 7:8-12 cf. 2 Cor 2:3-4; 12:18).

His first layover on his way to Greece was probably Troas located in the northwestern corner of Asia. He probably stayed at Troas for a brief period because "a door was opened" for him there (2 Cor 2:12). However, he remained uneasy about the trouble in the Corinthian church since as we've noted previously, he had not linked up with Titus yet.

So rather than staying in Troas, Paul moved west into Macedonia where he met Titus who was returning from Corinth (2 Cor 7:5-8). After receiving Titus' favorable report of affairs in Corinth, Paul wrote 2 Corinthians from somewhere in Macedonia, probably in the fall of A.D. 56 (cf. 2 Cor 12:14; 13:1-2).

In Acts 20:2, Luke mentions that Paul had gone over the “region” on his way to Greece. Paul's ministry to the province of Illyricum, which lay to the northwest of Macedonia, may have taken place while he was in this area or during his three-year ministry in Ephesus (cf. Rom. 15:19).

Paul's stay in Greece lasted three months (20:2) on this portion of his third journey. The “three months” appears to have been the winter months of A.D. 56-57. Paul probably spent most of this time in Corinth where Gaius (Titus Justus?) was his host (Rom. 16:23; cf. Acts 18:7). There he wrote the Book of Romans as he anticipated visiting Rome. (You may recall that in the book of Romans, Paul documents the fact that God's plan for Israel had been temporarily suspended and a new Gentile-centric dispensation had been inaugurated. See Romans 9-11, esp. 9:30-33; 10:1-4, 12; 11:11-36).

From Rome Paul disclosed his plans to move farther west into Spain (Rom. 15:24). During his time in Macedonia and Achaia Paul was also busy collecting a gift for the poor believers in Jerusalem (Rom. 15:26) – a predominantly, if not exclusively, believing community of Jews led by some of the Twelve Apostles (i.e. Peter and John) as well as others.

During his three month stay in Greece, Paul had three great burdens on his heart. First, Paul was very concerned about the immorality which was apparently tolerated by many in the churches, especially Corinth. The second was the Judaizers who continued to follow in his path and cause division in the churches over the doctrine he taught.

Another burden was that caused by the Judaizers who dogged his steps wherever he went. They caused divisions in the churches; they brought the believers into bondage, and they threatened the very existence of the Church by making it just another sect of the Jewish religion. They denied Paul's apostleship, they accused him of insincerity and dishonesty, and thus alienated his own converts. They denied the fact that a new dispensation of the grace of God had been committed to Paul by the risen Christ and insisted on a continuation of the dispensation of the Law. See how Paul defended his apostleship in such passages as 1 Cor. 9:1-27; 2 Cor. 10:1 11:33.²

Finally, the third burden Paul carried was the collection that he wanted to gather for the believers in Jerusalem from the Gentile believers throughout Greece and Asia Minor.

Paul was apparently afraid that the Judaizing element in Jerusalem might so poison the minds of the saints that they would not receive him favorably. Paul no doubt had a two-fold motive in taking this gift for the poor saints in Jerusalem. It was first of all his nature to minister to the poor. He saw it as a duty. But also he was striving to heal the schism which the Judaizers had caused, and he hoped that this kindly gesture on the part of the Gentiles might be the means of cementing the Jewish and Gentile elements in the Church.³

Paul evidently planned to travel on a ship from Cenchrea to Caesarea and Jerusalem to celebrate one of the spring Jewish feasts there (vv. 6, 16). However when he learned of the Jews' plot to kill him on the way, he changed his plans and decided to go to Jerusalem by way of Macedonia.

In verse 4, Luke identifies several men who accompanied Paul back to Macedonia from Greece. They traveled with Paul to Philippi where they met up with Luke and others for the trip

² Charles F. Baker, *Understanding the Book of Acts* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Grace Bible College Publications, 1981), 127.

³ *Ibid.*, 128.

back to Jerusalem. (Luke may have remained in Philippi since the earlier visit there by Paul and his team which included Luke – 16:10ff). Paul's companions included the following individuals as identified by Luke:

- Aristarchus and Secundus of Thesalonica
- Sopater of Berea
- Timothy, Tychicus and Trophimus of Asia

These men were the representatives of the churches of Macedonia, Galatia and Asia who accompanied Paul with the financial gift for the Jerusalem church. In that day and age, currency was actually denominated in the precious metal that backed it, i.e. gold coins, silver coins, etc. One individual carrying any purse of any size with such coinage would be a target and extremely susceptible to being robbed or worse.

This group then proceeded in two waves from Philippi in Macedonia to Troas in northwestern Asia Minor. Paul, Luke, perhaps Titus and two other representatives of the churches of Achaea (2 Cor 8:6-24) remained in Philippi briefly to celebrate the feasts of Passover and Unleavened Bread in the Spring of A.D. 57. Then they sailed from the port of Philippi (Neapolis) to Troas to link with the other members of the party.

Note: Doing the Lord's work and executing His Will is not easy. These travels required extensive logistical planning.

Paul's Ministry at Troas (20:7-12)

From this point in Luke's narrative through the end of Acts (28:31), Luke provides the type of details regarding ports of call, layovers, and anecdotes of Paul's travels consistent with the type of details found in a travel journal. Note Luke's use of 'we' in 20:5-15; 21:1-18; and 28:16 which indicates the eyewitness nature of his account.

One of the first things to note about this passage is the fact that the believers had begun to gather on the first day of the week, i.e. Sunday versus the Jewish-centric practice of meeting on the Sabbath. This denotes a significant break with Jewish tradition which continued to influence the behavior and practice of Jewish believers in Jerusalem and elsewhere. For instance, please keep in mind Paul's accommodation and flexibility in regard to the Jews and their continuance in Jewish traditions wherever he went, including Jerusalem (Acts 21:17-26).

Important Point: Luke's narrative in the book of Acts provides us with (among other things) evidence and narrative concerning the different behavior of Jewish believers and Gentile believers. Jewish believers continued to observe elements of the Law; however, the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:1-29) made it clear that the observance of these Jewish traditions and rituals were not a requirement to be imposed upon Gentile believers. Some who recognize this distinction have taken it too far. They believe that God had two separate programs in place – one for the Jews and one for the Gentiles. Some even question whether there were two separate bodies of faith or two separate groups of the Body of Christ – one Jew and one Gentile. I believe that is totally incorrect. It is really quite simple. Prior to the gospel being preached by Paul and others that Jesus was in fact the Messiah/Redeemer whose death was in fulfillment of prophecy and who was to return again to initiate the Kingdom on earth, the Jews have over 1500 years of history filled with tradition and the observance of the Law. Their entire culture was shaped by the observance of the Law and its rituals as well as traditions associated with the Law and its rituals. While Paul was traveling on his missionary journeys during the late A.D. 40's to early A.D. 60's, there was no one else receiving and communicating in Jerusalem any doctrines peculiar to the new dispensation. The only thing the Jerusalem leadership knew was that Jesus was in fact the Messiah/Redeemer who was crucified in fulfillment of prophecy. They continued to teach and prove that fact from an examination of Hebrew Scriptures. To Paul, if a Jewish believer wanted to continue to observe elements of the Law, then that was a non-essential. Paul was flexible and could be accommodative to ignorance as long as the essential of the faith was not distorted or rejected. All of these believers, Jews and Gentiles, were members of the same Body of Christ

and the beneficiaries of the same spiritual blessings whether they fully understood that fact or not. This principle is no less true of the believer today who never receives or avails himself or herself to teaching and understanding of the spiritual assets available to them. They may be entirely ignorant of the totality of God's provisions and plan for them individually, the church universally, and human history; however, ignorance of the realm of doctrine available to us does not mean we are not beneficiaries of the Father's provisions to us through Jesus' death once we enter into the family of God through faith in Christ's work.

Eutychus was a "young man" and the Greek word used here indicates that he was a young lad between the ages of 8 to 14 years of age (based upon other usages of the Greek word *meanus*.⁴ The church in Troas (of unknown origin) met with Paul and his companions to hear his words of encouragement prior to his departure. These people were probably only able to meet at night since they probably consisted of slaves and employees. They ate a meal together which was probably concluded with the Lord's Supper or celebration of the Eucharist. There are certain parallels here between Paul's "last supper" with these Gentile believers in Troas and Jesus' "last supper" with His disciples the night before He was betrayed and crucified. Soon, when Paul reached Jerusalem, he would have his teaching and ministry totally distorted by Jewish unbelievers from Asia and they will incite a riot against him. At any rate, the meeting of the believers in Troas continued throughout the night until morning. The fact that it was night and a meal had been eaten and the oxygen consuming lamps in the room contributed to Eutychus' sleep.

It is extremely interesting that these believers were so anxious and dedicated to their faith (their only hope in life which reflects their simple lifestyle without the allure and distraction of worldly possessions and status) that they would stay up all night to hear Paul speak. Scripture does not indicate that Paul was an eloquent speaker. Scripture attributes that characteristic to Apollos. However, Paul possessed an incredible grasp of Hebrew Scripture, sound logical thinking abilities and a bulldog determination that made him God's man for God's purpose. This should be extremely encouraging to pastors and teachers who may be excellent students of the Word, but who may not possess the oratorical abilities of Ravi Zacharias or other Bible teachers and Christian apologetic speakers.

Paul Journeys from Troas to Miletus (20:13-16)

While there is history surrounding many of the towns and cities Luke mentions here (e.g. Chios was the major town on a small island on which the poet Homer had been born), the most important thing to note about this passage is the fact that Luke documents Paul's desire to arrive in Jerusalem by Pentecost, the Jewish festival that was 50 days after Passover. Therefore, Paul's time in Miletus with the elders of the Ephesian church(es) probably took place in late April of A.D. 57.

We will continue in the next session by examining Paul's Exhortation of the Ephesian Elders (20:17-38).

⁴ Thomas Constable, "Notes on the Book of Acts," www.soniclight.com