

## 27. Paul leaves Macedonia and Stops in Ephesus: Acts 20

Acts 19:21-22

21 After all this had happened, Paul decided to go to Jerusalem, passing through Macedonia and Achaia. "After I have been there," he said, "I must visit Rome also." 22 He sent two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, to Macedonia, while he stayed in the province of Asia a little longer.

This passage begins the final leg of Paul's third journey as he turns to Jerusalem once more. 1 Cor 16:5-9 shows the projected itinerary with Paul passing through Macedonia, perhaps to raise support for the saints in Jerusalem

5 After I go through Macedonia, I will come to you – for I will be going through Macedonia. . . . 8 But I will stay on at Ephesus until Pentecost, 9 because a great door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many who oppose me.

Romans 15:25-26, which most think he penned from Ephesus at about this time (58 AD), makes clear that Paul planned to raise support for the poor and also to carry it to them in Jerusalem.

25 Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the saints there. 26 For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem.

After making plans, Paul sent his companions on to Macedonia, while he stayed in Ephesus.

### Paul Leaves Ephesus for Macedonia

Acts 20:1-6

20 When the uproar had ended, Paul sent for the disciples and, after encouraging them, said good-bye and set out for Macedonia. 2 He traveled through that area, speaking many words of encouragement to the people, and finally arrived in Greece, 3 where he stayed three months. Because the Jews made a plot against him just as he was about to sail for Syria, he decided to go back through Macedonia. 4 He was accompanied by Sopater son of Pyrrhus from Berea, Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica, Gaius from Derbe, Timothy also, and Tychicus and Trophimus from the province of Asia. 5 These men went on ahead and waited for us at Troas. 6 But we sailed from Philippi after the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and five days later joined the others at Troas, where we stayed seven days.



were out of order. Paul traveled back to Macedonia, going through various places in Greece, where he stayed three months, having heard that the Jews had a plot against him. He determined to go back through Macedonia, instead of going to Syria. His companions sailed from Philippi to Troas, where they were joined five days later and where they stayed seven days.

### ***Meeting on the First Day of the Week to Break Bread***

Acts 20:7-12

*7 On the first day of the week we came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight. 8 There were many lamps in the upstairs room where we were meeting. 9 Seated in a window was a young man named Eutychus, who was sinking into a deep sleep as Paul talked on and on. When he was sound asleep, he fell to the ground from the third story and was picked up dead. 10 Paul went down, threw himself on the young man and put his arms around him. "Don't be alarmed," he said. "He's alive!" 11 Then he went upstairs again and broke bread and ate. After talking until daylight, he left. 12 The people took the young man home alive and were greatly comforted.*

The disciples met on the first day of the week to break bread. The use of the infinitive *to break bread* signifies a common practice—the very purpose for their coming together. If they met, according to purpose, on the first day of the week, one must necessarily infer that they met on every first day of the week. This conclusion runs counter to the contemporary practice of meeting at times other than on the first day of the week; for example, on Thursday evening, monthly, or on a holiday such as Easter. Other passages support the contention that the early churches met every first day of the week.

When the Lord instituted of the Lord's supper, he taught that he would participate with the disciples in the Lord's supper in the father's kingdom. In Matt 26:28-29, he said:

28 This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. 29 I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom.

Immediately after the kingdom had come, the disciples of the early church continuously participated in the Lord's supper. Acts 2:42-43 teaches: "42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." In 1 Cor 11:18-21, Paul teaches that the very purpose of their coming together to take the Lord's supper:

18 In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it. 19 No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval. 20 When you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat, 21 for as you eat, each of you goes ahead without waiting for anybody else.

1 Cor 16:1-3 teaches clearly that the coming together was on the first day of every week:

16 Now about the collection for God's people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. 2 On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made.

From these Scriptures, one must conclude that true Christians meet every first day of the week and have communion with the Lord through his supper. At this same time, they gave as they prospered.

## **Paul Leaves Troas and Arrives in Miletus**

Acts 20:13-16

*13 We went on ahead to the ship and sailed for Assos, where we were going to take Paul aboard. He had made this arrangement because he was going there on foot. 14 When he met us at Assos, we took him aboard and went on to Mitylene. 15 The next day we set sail from there and arrived off Kios. The day after that we crossed over to Samos, and on the following day arrived at Miletus. 16 Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus to avoid spending time in the province of Asia, for he was in a hurry to reach Jerusalem, if possible, by the day of Pentecost.*

Paul's companions met him at Assos and took him aboard. From there, they sailed down the west coast of Asia past Mitylene, Kios, Samos to Ephesus. Paul clearly was in a hurry to go on to Jerusalem, reaching there by the day of Pentecost.

## **Paul Addresses the Elders from Ephesus**

Acts 20:17-21

*17 From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church. 18 When they arrived, he said to them: "You know how I lived the whole time I was with you, from the first day I came into the province of Asia. 19 I served the Lord with great humility and with tears, although I was severely tested by the plots of the Jews. 20 You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house. 21 I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus.*

However, Paul did want to talk to the elders of the church at Ephesus. He began his speech by telling them how that they were well aware of his work. They would remember how he had served the Lord with humility and tears. All of this was true even though the Jews plotted against him. All Paul's teaching was public and house to house, and in that teaching he declared that both Jews and Greeks must turn to God in repentance and have faith in the Lord Jesus. This was the same message preached on the day of Pentecost, and in the third chapter of Acts, and in the eighth chapter, and so on throughout Luke's book. This gospel message has not changed throughout Acts, nor has it changed in the centuries since.

## **Paul Warned by the Spirit of Hardships and Prison**

Acts 20:22-24

*22 "And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. 23 I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. 24 However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me – the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace.*

As Paul came to the central part of his message, he reminded them that he was going to Jerusalem not knowing fully what was going to happen to him. The Holy Spirit had warned him repeatedly that he would face prison and hardships. As always in the life of Paul, he considered his life nothing. He wanted only to finish the work that the Lord had set out for him – testifying to the gospel of God's grace. Paul voiced the courage with which he met these challenges to the Philippians in Phil 1:20-21: "20 I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death." It was later in life and to Timothy, when Paul could speak to his accomplishments in 2 Tim 4:7-8:

7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous

Judge, will award to me on that day – and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

## Keep Watch over the Flock

Acts 20:25-29

25 "Now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about preaching the kingdom will ever see me again. 26 Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of all men. 27 For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God. 28 Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.

In this part of his speech, Paul said that none of the elders would see him again. That he was completely innocent of the blood of all men, because he had not hesitated to proclaim the whole will of God, should be an object lesson for all Christians.

## Elders, Overseers, and Shepherds All Refer to the Same Office in the Local Church

In the next several verses, he addresses the elders using three different terms: *elders*, *overseers*, and *shepherds*. These three terms have become obscure in their meaning in our time. For example, many people use the word *bishop* or *overseer* to refer to a cleric, who oversees several congregations. Others use the word *pastor* in the place of *shepherd* to refer to the evangelist or preacher working with a congregation. In fact, in the scripture these terms refer to the same elders that Paul called. They are, in fact, synonyms—each represent the same nominal designation, but with a different characteristic. This becomes clear when one views the words in context. Paul first calls them *elders*: "17 From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the **elders** of the church." Next, he used overseer and shepherd interchangeably: "28 Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you **overseers**. Be **shepherds** of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. [Emphasis added.]

Peter uses these three words in this same powerful and undeniable way in 1 Peter 5:1-4:

5 To the **elders** among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: 2 Be **shepherds** of God's flock that is under your care, serving as **overseers** – not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; 3 not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. [Emphasis added]

According to the *Webster Online Dictionary*, modern terminology uses the word *pastor* without scriptural support to mean a clergyman serving a local church or parish. The New Testament uses the word many times but translates it pastor (s) only one time in Eph 4:11. In modern denominations, the word indicates a single person in a congregation serving as overseer and preacher. Modern denominations also pervert the word *bishop* which modern translations appropriately render *overseer*. The literal translation of the word used for bishop in the older translation is overseer. W. E. Vine explains:

BISHOP (OVERSEER) 1. episkopos (e)pi/skopos, lit., an overseer" (epi, "over," skopeo, "to look or watch"), [the English] "bishop". . . has precisely the same meaning, . . . found in Acts 20:28; Phil 1:1; 1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:7; 1 Peter 2:25.

Vine also explains the interplay among the words *elder*, *shepherd* (*pastor*), and *overseer* (bishop):

Note: Presbuteros, "an elder," is another term for the same person as bishop or overseer. See Acts 20:17 with verse 28. The term "elder" indicates the mature spiritual

experience and understanding of those so described; the term "bishop," or "overseer," indicates the character of the work undertaken.

Vine also aptly explains that the divine will calls for a plurality of men to hold this office in the local churches:

According to the divine will and appointment, as in the NT, there were to be "bishops" in every local church, Acts 14:23; 20:17; Phil 1:1; Titus 1:5; James 5:14. Where the singular is used, the passage is describing what a "bishop" should be, 1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:7. Christ Himself is spoken of as "the... Bishop of our souls," 1 Peter 2:25.

[All references to Vine come from Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words, Copyright © 1985, Thomas Nelson Publishers.]

According to Webster Online Dictionary, modern denominationalism has lost the meaning of bishops as overseers of local congregations:

1. one having spiritual or ecclesiastical supervision: as a : an Anglican, Eastern Orthodox, or Roman Catholic clergyman ranking above a priest, having authority to ordain and confirm, and typically governing a diocese b : any of various Protestant clerical officials who superintend other clergy c : a Mormon high priest presiding over a ward or over all other bishops and over the Aaronic priesthood

Peter confirms the teaching that the words *elder*, *shepherd (pastor)*, and *overseer* (bishop) refer to the same office in the local church where those so selected are always more than one (plural) in 1 Peter 5:1-4

5 To the **elders** among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, . . . 2 Be **shepherds** of God's flock that is under your care, serving as **overseers** — not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; 3 not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. [Emphasis added]

Paul is specific in telling the Ephesian elders what they must do to protect the church from the impending apostasy. They are to be *shepherds of the church of God*; and they are to *keep watch over yourselves and all the flock*. Paul tells Titus how elders are to protect the church in Titus 1:9: "9 He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it."

### **Warning of an Impending Apostasy**

Acts 20:29-31

29 I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. 30 Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. 31 So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.

Paul's analogy between savage wolves and false teachers echoes the words of the Lord in Matt 7:15-16: "15 "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves." From the Lord's opening sermon on the mountain to the Revelation, the scriptures foretell false prophets and false teachers in their individual, collective, and institutional capacities. Paul foretells an apostasy of worldwide dimensions, powers by Satan himself in 2 Thess 2:8-12:

8 And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming. 9 The coming of the

lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, 10 and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. 11 For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie 12 and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness.

Peter and Paul agree that the falling away will be eminent and catastrophic. Paul wrote in 1 Tim 4:1-3:

4 The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. 2 Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron. 3 They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods.

Peter concurred in 2 Peter 2:1-2:

2 But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them — bringing swift destruction on themselves. 2 Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute.

The end of this lawlessness and the institutions that it spawns will be as Paul said, “Whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming.” Rev 19:20-21 vividly portrays that end:

20 But the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur.

## **Paul’s Farewell to the Ephesians**

Acts 20:32-35

32 *"Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. 33 I have not coveted anyone's silver or gold or clothing. 34 You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. 35 In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"*

Paul’s valedictory blesses the Ephesians to the inheritance of the saints, testifies to Paul’s own purity and benevolence, and encourages all to help the weak. That he worked to support his co-workers reveals the dedication that Paul had to spread the gospel. The quotation of Christ, “It is more blessed to give than receive,” is only in this passage and not in the gospels. Yet, we quote it far more than most scriptures.

## **Paul’s Departure From Ephesus**

Acts 20:36-38

36 *When he had said this, he knelt down with all of them and prayed. 37 They all wept as they embraced him and kissed him. 38 What grieved them most was his statement that they would never see his face again. Then they accompanied him to the ship.*

The final scene with its sorrow and tears speaks for itself. Paul is off to Jerusalem.