

THE ACTS

OF THE APOSTLES

Chapter 20:1 – 21:16 The Road to Jerusalem

*What did Paul say in his final goodbyes to the brethren?

*When did the early Christians meet and what did they do?

*What awaited Paul in Jerusalem?

Introduction

Remember that in Acts 19 we saw Paul and his companions busy in the city of Ephesus for two years. There, the gospel spread widely, despite the prevalence of paganism. During this time, Paul made plans for the future months (Acts 19:21): he wanted to go to Macedonia (where Philippi was, Acts 16) and Achaia (where Corinth was, Acts 18), then to Jerusalem, and ultimately to Rome. He would eventually get the chance to do these things, but not in the way he first planned!

Acts 20:1-12

Paul in Troas

According to his plan, Paul went to Macedonia and then to Greece (Achaia) to encourage the brethren. But because of a plot against his life, he couldn't go straight to Jerusalem, and had to return the same way he came. He and his companions stayed in a city called Troas for a week. On Sunday the disciples gathered for worship. Paul preached to them and, knowing he'd leave the next day, made his sermon longer than usual. He preached all the way to midnight! One young man, Eutychus, got so tired that he fell asleep. Unfortunately, he had been sitting on the window sill, and the fall from the third floor killed him. But Paul went down and raised him from the dead.

Note: Early Christian meetings

This account gives us some important information about when the first Christians met and what they did in their meetings. On the first day of the week (Sunday), they met together to break bread — that is, partake of the “Lord’s Supper.” According to the pattern that Jesus Himself instituted, they shared unleavened bread and grape juice to represent both the wounded body and shed blood of Christ’s sacrificial death on the cross (Mark 14:22-25; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26). They also heard a message from the Scriptures (Acts 20:7). As we continue to read in the New Testament, we see that they also did several other things: they sang (Ephesians 5:19), prayed together (Acts 4:23-31; 1 Thessalonians 5:17), and took up a collection of money for needy saints and for evangelism (1 Corinthians 16:1-2). In fact, the men with Paul (Acts 20:5) were probably members of different churches carrying their church’s contribution to the poor Christians in Jerusalem (Acts 24:17; Romans 15:25-26). It is extremely important for us today to do things just the way they were approved of by God in the first century (2 Tim. 1:13).

Acts 20:13-38

Paul in Miletus

Continuing on his journey to Jerusalem, Paul went from place to place until he and his companions arrived in Miletus. They had purposefully passed by Ephesus, apparently because Paul knew he would be tempted to spend a long time with the brethren there, and he wanted to hurry to Jerusalem. So he called just the elders (recall that elders were specially appointed leaders in each church; Acts 14:23; 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Acts 20:28) to come to Miletus for one last visit.

Paul talked to them about both the past and the future. He exhorted them to continued dedication by reminding them of his own example: during the two years he was with them, he was constant and humble, he endured difficulties, and he gave them

all the teaching they needed, whether in public services or in houses. Yet he also knew that even more difficult things awaited him down the road; the Spirit had revealed to him that he would be arrested and would suffer. Still, he was more concerned for these disciples than for himself. He knew that false teachers would come both from the outside and from among the church itself to lead people away from the truth. Paul must have felt so limited; since he would not be there with them, all he could personally do was give the elders a warning about the future. But there was Someone greater who could protect them better; Paul commended the brethren “to God and to the word of His grace.” If they followed God and His word with diligence, and if they served others and worked hard, He would protect them.

Note: “Innocent of the blood of all men”

Paul, while talking to the elders, made a bold statement: “I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men” (verse 26). That is, if men were lost to Satan, he had no guilt in it. How could he say that? Because of verse 27: “For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God.”

Can we say the same thing? Do we talk to others about salvation in Jesus, despite potential persecution?

And when we do, do we speak the “whole purpose of God”? Some people want to tell the easy things, but not talk about responsibilities, belief changes, and sacrifices of discipleship. They preach a partial gospel. Some say we only have to believe, and then we can never be lost. Others promise that we will be rich if we obey Christ. Many will leave out concepts that are “difficult to swallow.” With these messages, they get more people to come to their churches — but they have also made themselves the “savage wolves” that “draw away the disciples after them” (verses 29-30). Watch out for those false teachers! Many things in the Scriptures won’t be the easiest to accept, but they are all “profitable” (verse 20). The only way to know if someone is teaching the truth is to see if they are following the pattern that the New Testament provides, as was mentioned above.

Acts 21:1-16 Warnings on the way to Jerusalem

When Paul and his companions left their loved ones in Miletus, they took a ship straight to Palestine. The boat had to stop in Tyre, so the group took the opportunity to visit the brethren there. The Spirit also revealed to those Christians that Paul would suffer for Christ’s sake when he reached Jerusalem, so they begged him not to go. But Paul still left when the time came. The disciples expressed their love for this man by coming with him all the way to the beach where the ship was. They asked for God’s blessings together, and Paul and the others were off once again.

When the ship landed, the group visited brethren in a couple different places on the way to Jerusalem. In Caesarea, they stayed with Philip the evangelist (recall him from Acts 8). While they were there, Paul received an even more graphic warning about the suffering awaiting him in Jerusalem. A prophet named Agabus (also seen in Acts 11:27-28), using Paul’s own belt, illustrated how he would be arrested. The brethren, of course, begged Paul not to go to the city. But Paul was determined to defend Christ’s name, even if it meant dying. Though it was hard to accept, the brethren knew that the Lord’s will was more important than theirs. So, Paul and his friends went on to Jerusalem.

Choose the right answer:

- ___ 1. What did the disciples NOT do in Troas on the first day of the week? a) met together, b) shared the Lord’s Supper, c) heard a message from the gospel, or d) praised God by dancing.
- ___ 2. What happened to Eutychus? a) he was stoned by the Jews, b) he brought money to the poor Christians in Jerusalem, c) he received the gifts of the Holy Spirit, or d) he fell asleep during Paul’s sermon and died.
- ___ 3. What did Paul NOT talk to the elders from Ephesus about? a) his good example

of working hard and teaching the truth, b) his future sufferings in Jerusalem, c) how he was looking forward to seeing Peter, or d) how they needed to be on guard against false teachers.

___ 4. Who bound himself with Paul's belt to signify what would happen to Paul in Jerusalem? a) Agabus, b) Philip, c) an elder from Ephesus, or d) Eutychus.

True or false:

___ 1. The way that the Christians worshipped God doesn't apply to us; we can do whatever we think is best and God will be pleased.

___ 2. Paul was fully aware that he was going to suffer in Jerusalem, but he went there anyway.

___ 3. Paul declared that he was innocent of the blood of all men.

___ 4. Not everything in the Scriptures is easy for us to accept.

___ 5. Only the elders from Tyre came to the beach to say goodbye to Paul and the others.

___ 6. The brethren in Caesarea didn't want Paul to go to Jerusalem, but finally decided that the Lord's will was more important than their own.

After you've filled out the answers, send this lesson back to the person who sent it to you with your name and address. They will correct your answers and discuss any questions or comments you have on the text.

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