



Completion of Paul's Third Missionary Journey Acts 20:1 - 21:17

Introduction

Paul had begun his third missionary journey by revisiting the churches he had established in Galatia and Phrygia. He then headed to Ephesus to keep a promise he had made: "*I will return again to you, God willing*" (Acts 18:21). Paul spent over two years in Ephesus preaching the gospel and building up the church. However, when angry silversmiths instigated a riot, Paul decided to move on. As he journeyed toward Jerusalem, he sensed in his spirit that trouble was in store for him there. This foreboding was confirmed by the Holy Spirit in cities along the way. Paul did not know what lay ahead for him, but he suspected "*chains and tribulations*" (Acts 20:23) and perhaps even death. In any case, he did not expect to return to the churches he had planted on his three missionary journeys. God willing, he longed to go to Rome and then on to Spain to preach the gospel (Acts 19:21; Romans 15:24, 28).

The final leg of Paul's third missionary journey was a farewell tour. "Throughout this last journey through Macedonia, along the Asian ports of the Aegean Sea, and then in Syria and Caesarea, there is all the dramatic urgency and poignancy of a final farewell. There are long final messages (such as at Troas); there are touching last appeals, tears and tender leave-taking (as with the Ephesian elders at Miletus); and the desperate attempts by those who dearly loved him to dissuade Paul from going to Jerusalem (as in Tyre and Caesarea)" ("Life and Letters of Paul," A. Wetherell Johnson).

Outline of Acts 20:1-21:17

- I. Revisiting Local Churches - Acts 20:1-12
- II. Reunion with the Ephesian Elders - Acts 21:13-38
- III. Returning to Jerusalem - Acts 21:1-17

I. Revisiting Local Churches - Acts 20:1-12

Paul had planned to stay in Ephesus until Pentecost (1 Corinthians 16:8-9), but left soon after the uproar caused by the silversmiths. He traveled up the coast to Troas (2 Corinthians 2:12-13) and then went by ship to Macedonia where he stayed for some time.

A. In Macedonia - Acts 20:1-2

While in Macedonia, Paul visited the churches and *encouraged them with many words*. During that time he wrote 2 Corinthians and possibly Galatians. It is

also probable that he traveled further west along the Via Egnatia and north as far as Illyricum to spread the gospel message (Romans 15:19).

B. In Greece - Acts 20:2-3

Paul's next stop was Greece (Achaia) where he spent three months, probably during the winter of A.D. 56. While there, he wrote his letter to the Romans (Romans 15:22-29) telling of his plans to visit Jerusalem with a contribution for the poor before traveling to Rome.

Paul was probably hoping to get to Jerusalem in time for the Passover celebration, as he planned to sail directly from Corinth's western seaport to Palestine. However, he learned of a plot by the Jews to kill him on board ship and decided to avoid the risk and take a longer route by land through Macedonia.

C. Through Macedonia - Acts 20:4-6

While Paul retraced his steps through Macedonia, a group of seven men gathered at Troas to meet him and accompany him to Jerusalem. These seven Gentile believers, 3 from Macedonia and 4 from Asia Minor, probably carried contributions from their churches for the needy believers in Jerusalem. Luke does not mention Paul's plan to deliver this donation, but Paul refers to it in his letter to the Romans as one of his main reasons for traveling to Jerusalem (Romans 15:25-27).

Luke had remained in Philippi when Paul departed from there on his second missionary journey. Now he rejoined Paul and together they left for Troas in the spring of A.D. 57, after the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

D. At Troas - Acts 20:6-12

Paul and Luke joined those who had been waiting for them and stayed in Troas seven days.

1. Meeting with the disciples - 20:7-12

This is the first Scripture reference to Sunday (*the first day of the week*) as the meeting day for the early church. Later, it was referred to as the Lord's Day (Revelation 1:10). Paul joined in the local church meeting on the day before he departed for Jerusalem.

a. Breaking bread - 20:7

The disciples in Troas met to *break bread*, referring to

a fellowship meal, similar to a modern day “pot luck.” It also included a celebration of the Lord’s Supper.

b. Midnight message - 20:7-9

The meeting was held in the evening, probably because many present were slaves who had to work during the day. Paul spoke, continuing his message until midnight. Does that seem like a very long sermon to you? The disciples at Troas had been anticipating Paul’s arrival and must have been eager to hear him preach. Their love for the word of God was not directed by a clock. Do you check the time in anticipation of weekly worship or in concern over when it will end?

The room where Paul spoke was crowded with people and lit by many smoky lamps which used up oxygen and made the room stuffy. It was late at night and Paul had been talking for hours. A *young man* (one commentator notes that this term refers to a lad of 8 to 14 years of age), named Eutychus, who was sitting at a window, was overcome by sleep and fell out of the third story window to the ground below. Doctor Luke noted that he was dead.

c. Miracle - 20:10, 12

Paul went down to the boy, *fell on him*, embraced him, and encouraged the disciples by announcing that “*his life is in him*.” It is interesting to note that what Paul did was very similar to Elijah’s raising of the widow’s son in 1 Kings 17:21-22 and Elisha’s raising the son of the Shunammite woman in 2 Kings 4:32-37. Eutychus, whose name means “fortunate,” was definitely a fortunate young man. He was alive and the disciples were greatly comforted.

2. Departure - 20:11

After caring for Eutychus, Paul and the disciples shared the Lord’s Supper (communion). Paul then continued talking until daybreak. It was Monday morning and time to continue the journey to Jerusalem.

II. Reunion with the Ephesian Elders - Acts 20:13-38

A. Traveling to Miletus - Acts 20:13-17

Paul’s eight traveling companions went by ship (the longer route, about forty miles, around a cape) from Troas to Assos, but Paul walked the twenty miles between the two cities. At Assos, he joined them on the ship and they sailed to Mitylene, the main town on the island of Lesbos. The next day they sailed past the island of Chios and the third day they arrived at Samos off the coast of Ephesus. They spent the night at Trogyllium, a promontory of land that juts out from

the mainland just opposite Samos. The following day they arrived at the seaport city of Miletus, about thirty miles from Ephesus. Paul wanted to be in Jerusalem for Pentecost and did not have time to go to Ephesus and greet his beloved converts there. But Miletus was close enough for the church elders of Ephesus to visit him during the ship’s layover. Paul sent for them.

B. Farewell to the Elders - Acts 20:18-35

Paul summoned the elders to bid them farewell, commend them to God, and call them to commitment as shepherds of the flock at Ephesus. He first reminded them of his own commitment to serving the Lord.

1. Paul’s manner of living - 20:18-21

From the first day they met him, they had seen that Paul served the Lord with humility, following the example of the Lord Jesus Christ who *humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross* (Philippians 2:8). Paul did not think more highly of himself than he ought (Romans 12:3), but faithfully endured the sorrows and suffering caused by the hostility of the Jews.

Paul had preached the gospel publicly so all could hear, but he was not content with just bringing souls to the Lord. He went from house to house (probably home churches as in 1 Corinthians 16:19) teaching “*the whole counsel of God*” (Acts 20:27). He didn’t keep anything back for fear of offending anyone. He spoke all the truth and only the truth. Furthermore, Paul did not discriminate. He eagerly declared the truth to both Jews and Gentiles.

2. Paul’s message - 20:21

The message was repentance toward God and faith in Christ. All are saved in the same way: by turning away from sin and turning to God through faith in His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

3. Paul’s ministry - 20:22-27

Paul relied upon the guidance of the Holy Spirit in his ministry (See Acts 16:6-10), and the Holy Spirit had filled him with an inner compulsion to go to Jerusalem. As he traveled from city to city, the Holy Spirit made known to him (probably through those with the gift of prophecy) that “*chains and tribulations*” awaited him there, but Paul was not moved. He was ready to lay down his life for the gospel. The important thing to Paul was that he finish his race with joy and complete the ministry entrusted to him by the Lord Jesus: to spread the news of the gospel of God’s grace. *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God* (Ephesians 2:8).

There is no doubt Paul was concerned about what would happen when he got to Jerusalem. In his letter to the Romans (written earlier from Corinth), he had asked for prayer, "*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*" (Romans 15:30-31). But Paul went forward to fulfill his ministry in the will of God and with joy. Serving God joyfully was one of the most important things in his life. What is the most important thing in your life? How are you using your life to serve God? Are you serving with joy? Will you make joy the byword of your life, as did Paul? (Look up "joy" in Paul's letter to the Philippians 1:4,18,25,26; 2:2,17,18,28; 3:1,3; 4:1,4,10.)

Paul was convinced he would not see the Ephesian believers again. He did not know what would happen in Jerusalem, but if he made it out alive, he was determined to journey further west to Rome, and then on to Spain (Acts 19:21 and Romans 15:28). His ministry in Ephesus was complete. He had been faithful to proclaim the gospel of abundant and eternal life. He never compromised or watered down the gospel message. He taught the full revelation of God. If anyone chose to ignore his message, he was not to blame. "Like Ezekiel's trustworthy watchman, he had sounded the trumpet so all the province of Asia could hear. If there were any who paid no heed, their blood would be on their own heads: Paul was free of responsibility for their doom" (The Book of the Acts, F.F.Bruce).

4. Paul's exhortation to the elders - 20:28-32

The elders had an enormous responsibility. The Holy Spirit had called them to be overseers of the church. As leaders chosen to care for the flock, they were to first look to themselves and make their lives faithful examples for others to follow. They were to "*shepherd the church of God*", guide it, guard it, and even lay down their own lives to protect each member of the flock. God had purchased the church with His own blood and had given the elders authority to care for it. The same responsibilities apply to those God has chosen to be pastors and church leaders today.

a. Concern for the church - 20:30-31

Paul had taught God's truth in Ephesus for three years. He wanted the believers to be strong and diligent in the truth when trouble came, as he knew it would. He foresaw danger arising from two sources: savage wolves would come from without and those "*speaking perverse things*" would rise up within the church. These would have no concern for the truth or for the flock. Their purpose would be to "*draw away the disciples after themselves*". It is the responsibility of pastors and teachers to speak only the *oracles of God* (1 Peter 4:11) and not personal, carnal knowledge that glorifies

themselves. Of course, it is also the responsibility of each one of us to be discerning of such things. That is why the study of God's word is so essential.

b. Commending the church to God - 20:32

Paul committed the elders and the entire church of Ephesus to God and to the "*word of His grace*". He had poured out his heart and his tears in an effort to establish the Ephesian believers in the truth. Now God and the power of His word would work in them as they believed and obeyed, building them up as individuals and as a church so they might enjoy the fullness of their inheritance. Paul wanted them to have the full experience of being *partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light* (Colossians 1:12), so that one day they would hear the voice of the King calling them to *inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world* (Matthew 25:34).

5. Paul's example - Acts 20:33-35

Paul had never sought symbols of status and wealth such as silver, gold, or fine clothes. He had worked with his hands, making tents to pay for his own needs and the needs of those who were with him. Anything extra had gone to "*support the weak*". His example made it clear that the shepherds of God's people are not to work for material reward. Christ had shown and taught that "*it is more blessed to give than to receive*."

C. Prayer Before Parting - Acts 20:36-38

When Paul finished speaking, he knelt and prayed with the elders. Their hearts ached (the word translated as *sorrowing* [Acts 20:38] literally means "suffering pain") because Paul had said they would *see his face no more*. They expressed their love for him with tears, signs of Christian affection, and by accompanying him to the ship. It is good for us to express love and appreciation to those who have led us and spoken the word of God to us. How will you express your love for a Christian teacher, pastor, mentor, or friend?

III. Returning to Jerusalem - Acts 21:1-17

Departing from Miletus, Paul's ship sailed south to Cos and on to Rhodes and Patara. At Patara, he and his companions transferred to a large cargo ship that took a direct route across the open sea to Phoenicia, a distance of about 400 miles. The only land they sighted on the journey was the island of Cyprus.

A. Warning at Tyre - Acts 21:3-6

The ship stopped at Tyre, a main town in Phoenicia in the region of Syria, to unload its cargo. This took seven

days. During that time, Paul enjoyed fellowship with believers there. The church in Tyre had probably been established by those who were scattered from Jerusalem after the martyrdom of Stephen (see Acts 11:19).

There were prophets in the church who knew *through the Spirit* that Paul would suffer if he went to Jerusalem. They tried to discourage him from going, but Paul was determined to press on. In seven days a close bond developed between Paul and the believers in Tyre and when it was time for him to leave, the whole church family went to see him off. "The love of Christ is the strongest of bonds,....and they were firm friends as if they had known each other all their lives" (The Book of the Acts, F.F. Bruce).

As at Miletus, Paul knelt and prayed with them before he left. The prophecy of what was to come was foreboding, but Paul's new friends at Tyre could return home with the assurance they had sent Paul off with prayer.

B. Warning at Caesarea - Acts 21:7-14

From Tyre, the ship sailed to Ptolemais where Paul and his companions took one day to visit with the believers there. The next day they traveled to Caesarea. It is not clear whether they went by sea or by land.

1. Staying with Philip - 21:8-9

In Caesarea, Paul's group stayed with Philip, the evangelist, one of the seven men who had been chosen to oversee food distribution in the Jerusalem church (Acts 6:1-5). He had also evangelized the Samaritans, an Ethiopian eunuch, and towns along the coast of Palestine, including Caesarea (Acts 8). Now, about twenty years later, Philip was still in Caesarea and had four virgin daughters who had the gift of prophecy.

2. Symbolic prophecy by Agabus - 21:10-12

Fifteen years earlier, a prophet named Agabus had gone from Jerusalem to Pisidian Antioch to warn of a great famine (Acts 11:28). That same Agabus now arrived in Caesarea to warn Paul of what would take place in Jerusalem. Agabus took Paul's belt, a long narrow piece of cloth which wrapped around the waist several times, and bound his own feet and hands proclaiming, "*Thus says the Holy Spirit, 'So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this belt, and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'*"

The Old Testament prophets often acted out prophecies (as in Isaiah 20:2 and Jeremiah 13:1-7) and that is what Agabus did, binding himself as a symbol of his prediction. When they heard the prophecy, all of Paul's friends wept and pleaded with him not to go to Jerusalem.

3. Paul's determination - 21:13-14

The grief of his friends broke Paul's heart. "It is hard for a man to make a sacrifice which is going to be unpleasant for himself; it is even harder when the people whom he loves are going to be hurt by his action and plead with him to act differently" (Acts, I. Howard Marshall). But Paul remained firm in his conviction that it was God's will for him to go. When they saw Paul could not be dissuaded, his friends prayed "*the will of the Lord be done.*"

C. Warm Reception in Jerusalem - Acts 21:15-17

Some of the disciples from Caesarea joined Paul's group as they made the sixty-five mile trip to Jerusalem.

One of Paul's major concerns must have been a place to stay in Jerusalem. He had the Gentile Christians from Asia and Macedonia with him and didn't know how they would be welcomed by the Jewish Christians. But God was faithful to provide the perfect place to stay. Mnason of Cyprus (also the home of Barnabas), one of the Hellenistic believers who lived in Jerusalem, gladly opened his home. This relieved the tensions for the time being.

Applications

1. Paul had been moved by the Holy Spirit to go to Jerusalem and there was nothing that could hold him back, neither foreboding prophecies nor tearful pleas from those he loved. Where is the Holy Spirit leading you? What is holding you back?

2. Paul went to Jerusalem even though he knew it would bring him suffering. Do you shy away from serving the Lord in situations you know will be difficult and possibly cause you suffering? The apostle Peter wrote: *for this you were called, because Christ suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow in His steps* (1 Peter 2:21). Christians are not called to a life of comfort and ease, but to a life of following in the steps of Jesus who was perfected through sufferings (Hebrews 2:10). We are bound for eternal glory, and the sufferings of this life are as nothing when seen in the light of eternity. In his letter to the Romans, Paul wrote, *For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us* (Romans 8:18). Will you courageously entrust your life to the Lord and move forward in His perfect will, not magnifying the small griefs here, but allowing Him to work in and through you to perfect you and shine His glory through you?

3. Mnason showed Christian hospitality to Paul and his Gentile companions. How can you show love and hospitality to those in need? Will you open your home and show Christ's love to someone who is new at your church or to a visiting missionary?