

>>>>>> *Acts - Lesson 31* <<<<<<<

- 1) We pick up in chapter 20 as he begins saying goodbye to churches and people.
- 2) The third missionary journey is over and Paul and several companions from the churches who are providing relief to the poor in Jerusalem are headed there.

**Acts 20:1–6 (NIV)**

- 3) The riot in Ephesus is over and the crowd has been dispersed.
  - a) One can truly say here that all is well that ends well.
- 4) Luke sets the incident aside with no further comment and proceeds to describe the beginnings of the end of this missionary journey and the trip to Jerusalem.
- 5) After encouraging those precious members of the church there in Ephesus, Paul begins his trek.
- 6) Before we go further, there are some things we need to unpack in this passage.
- 7) First, the men who are traveling with Paul.
  - a) They are representatives of all the churches in the various areas where one assumes the donations originated.
    - i) Sopater, Aristarchus and Secundus represent the Macedonian Churches.
    - ii) Gaius and Timothy represent the Galatian Churches
    - iii) Tychicus and Trophimus are from the Asian Churches.
  - b) These men probably served two other purposes:
    - i) First, having the them deliver the gifts to Jerusalem gave the gifts a personal touch and strengthened the unity of the universal church.
    - ii) Second, security. Paul is traveling in perilous times compared to today. Always threats of robberies etc. so here we would have strength in numbers for sure.
    - iii) Here is a link to a paper from the Biblical Archaeology Society on the perils and other interesting facts about traveling in the Roman Empire during the first century.
    - iv) Link to ***“On the Road and on the Sea with St. Paul”***  
<https://library.biblicalarchaeology.org/article/on-the-road-and-on-the-sea-with-st-paul/>
- 8) Next, we should make note of letters that were written in this period.
  - a) The letter to the Romans (as we mentioned last time).
  - b) The second letter to the Corinthians.
    - i) In this letter Paul definitely pushes the Corinthians to get their donation together before he arrives there. This is covered in 2 Cor 8:1-9:15.

- c) We also learn from the second Corinthian letter some of the details of the trouble he is having during this portion of the trip. Here's a couple of passages...

**2 Corinthians 2:12–13 (NASB 2020)**

<sup>12</sup> Now when I came to Troas for the gospel of Christ and when a door was opened for me in the Lord, <sup>13</sup> I had no rest for my spirit, not finding Titus my brother; but saying goodbye to them, I went on to Macedonia.

**2 Corinthians 7:5–7 (NASB 2020)**

<sup>5</sup> For even when we came into Macedonia our flesh had no rest, but we were afflicted on every side: conflicts on the outside, fears inside. <sup>6</sup> But God, who comforts the discouraged, comforted us by the arrival of Titus; <sup>7</sup> and not only by his arrival, but also by the comfort with which he was comforted among you, as he reported to us your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me; so that I rejoiced even more.

- 9) We should also note that Paul does visit Corinth on this trip and actually stays there three months. (20:2-3)
- 10) This also brings in view the timeline we are dealing with.
- a) Paul stays in Corinth 3 months then goes on to Philippi.
  - b) Now, obviously based on verse 6, they left after the Feast of Unleavened bread.
  - c) This puts them about 40 days (give or take) from the day of Pentecost which, we will see that it is Paul's goal to be in Jerusalem before that.
  - d) Rather a tight schedule.
- 11) We must also note that it is at this point that Luke rejoins the group.
- a) As you may recall, we left him in Philippi back in chapter 16.
  - b) We cannot be sure that he stayed in Philippi this entire time but we do know that he is back there now.
- 12) So, he rejoins the group as they sail from Philippi to Troas.

**Acts 20:7–12 (NIV)**

- 1) Of course, no one (besides me) has ever fallen asleep during a sermon so it is probably hard for us to identify with Eutychus.
- 2) I will say that there are certain preachers/teachers I have known that I would really not have sat in a window if they were speaking.
- 3) All joking aside, Paul was, as the NIV puts it, “talking on and on.”
- 4) After the fall, the young man is definitely dead but Paul was able, undoubtedly with God's help, to raise him from that state.
- 5) Paul had much to say to these folks because as the passage says, even after breaking bread and eating, he continued to talk until daylight.

- 6) Something to keep in mind as we go through this section of Acts is that Paul suspects this will be the last time he will see these folks.
- 7) This is stated clearly when Paul meets with the Ephesian elders in this next passage.

**Acts 20:13–16 (NIV)**

- 1) Here is another of these little tidbits that I mentioned last time – little facts that the Holy Spirit and Luke insert with no real explanation as to the why of the circumstances.
  - a) Paul travels on foot to Assos – about 20 mi. south and east of Troas.
  - b) There are several possible reasons he might have preferred to do this: (Information from Gemini AI app)
    - i) The journey would have given Paul solitude for introspection and prayer.
    - ii) Some scholars suggest Paul may have received a message about future imprisonment, making him want time for reflection.
    - iii) Walking could have been quicker than the ship depending on wind conditions, allowing Paul more time for ministry in Troas.
- 2) Regardless of the reason, once he meets the ship, they sail on past Ephesus to Miletus.
  - a) Two reasons why Paul sails past Ephesus – first as stated here – “to avoid spending time in Asia”.
    - i) But, also, we must recall that Paul had just left Ephesus about 3 months before after preaching and teaching there for almost three years.

**Acts 20:17–21 (NIV)**

- 3) Paul calls for the Ephesian elders and begins by reminding them of how he had served.
  - a) Humility – to me in this case absolutely not a boast only a reminder to think about his character.
  - b) Standing up to the tests that were presented to him by his own Jewish brothers.
    - i) We don’t often think of it or talk about it but you know that Paul had to feel the pain of the rejection by the very people he had claimed to be his religious family all his life.
    - ii) Those very people he wanted to help first and foremost to see his glorious Messiah whom he loved so dearly.
- 4) Without saying so in a direct way, I also think Paul is trying to explain to these men how they should now be preaching and teaching if they were not already doing so.
  - a) In public – in their communal gatherings
  - b) From house to house – as the opportunity presented itself, in one-on-one sessions in homes or perhaps house churches, or elsewhere.

5) One commentator had this evaluation of where Paul was really going with this:

Paul had **one message** for all. Both **Jews and Gentiles** alike were included in his mission, and both needed the central message of **turning from sin and turning to God**.<sup>24</sup>

*Do you think this is the overarching message of the church today?*

*Should it be? In other words, has the mission of the church changed?*

*How about you and me?*

### Acts 20:22–24 (NIV)

- 1) This is one of those passages that we wish the Greek of the New Testament was written using capital and lower-case letters instead of originally in all caps – assuming, of course, that they would have capitalized Spirit meaning Holy Spirit.
- 2) The question arises here as to what or who is directing Paul so strongly to go to Jerusalem.
- 3) Most translations do capitalize the first occurrence of Spirit in this passage indicating of course that it is the Holy Spirit is binding or compelling Paul to go to Jerusalem.
- 4) However, John MacArthur in his translation does not capitalize the word spirit.

And now, behold, bound in spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me.<sup>25</sup>

- 5) His take is that Paul is committed in his own spirit to go to Jerusalem – not by the Holy Spirit directly.
- 6) In MacArthur’s commentary he writes:

As an excellent servant of Jesus Christ, Paul had a single-minded devotion to his one life’s purpose. He described himself as **bound in spirit** by his strong compulsion to fulfill his ministry ... Paul’s sense of duty and responsibility to his Master drove him on his **way to Jerusalem, not knowing** specifically **what would happen to him** once he arrived **there**. He did know, however, that the **Holy Spirit solemnly testified to him in every city** he visited **that bonds and afflictions** awaited him (cf. Rom. 15:31). It was revealed to Paul that he faced persecution in Jerusalem, though what that specifically would entail had not yet been disclosed. That would later be made

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<sup>24</sup> Bruce Barton et al., [\*Life Application New Testament Commentary\*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 2001), 546.

<sup>25</sup> John F. MacArthur Jr., [\*Acts\*](#), vol. 2, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 217.

clear to him by the prophet Agabus when he arrived in Palestine (21:10–11).<sup>26</sup>

- 7) If we assume the first reference is a direct reference to the Holy Spirit then we have the Holy Spirit commanding Paul to go.
- 8) Then, in the second, we hear in this passage something we do not often if ever hear – the Holy Spirit directly leading one to a situation that He knows will result in “prison and hardships.”
- 9) Taken at face value, this would be a mixed message.
  - a) At a minimum, a little odd.
- 10) So, is it simply the Holy Spirit being straight up with Paul and what he is headed for?
- 11) This would beg the question – why is He (the Holy Spirit) telling Paul repeatedly?
  - a) Not to mention the several warnings which we will see later in Acts 21 – both of which are, according to Luke, directly from the Holy Spirit.
  - b) And, as pointed out by MacArthur, the one from Agabus is even visual and very graphic – a true prophesy.
- 12) There is I think a slightly different way to look at this which may clarify matters.
- 13) If we consider MacArthur’s comment:

“He (Paul) described himself as **bound in spirit** by his strong compulsion to fulfill his ministry”
- 14) This could mean simply that Paul was committed to going to Jerusalem because he felt it was what the Lord wanted him to do – simply put, he was living the Spirit filled life that he has always preached.
- 15) In that case, the decision to go to Jerusalem despite the warnings could be no different than his compulsion on the second missionary journey to go into Asia or Bithynia.
  - a) In both cases, he was stopped – by the Holy Spirit and by the Spirit of Jesus.
  - b) Again, we do NOT know how he was stopped.
- 16) The idea I am attempting to convey here is that this does NOT have to be a contradiction.
- 17) Paul can be truly convicted with all good motives that he needs to go to Jerusalem without being directed specifically to do so by the Holy Spirit.
- 18) The difference here is that instead of being stopped as in the cases of Asia or Bithynia he is being told and warned of what lies ahead.
- 19) In this situation, the Holy Spirit could be giving Paul an out so to speak but, not really saying don’t go!

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<sup>26</sup> John F. MacArthur Jr., *Acts*, vol. 2, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 217–218.

20) If we think about this in a big picture manner, Paul's decision here and the Holy Spirit's not stopping him in this plan, absolutely determines what the rest of his life will be.

21) This is basically the beginning for the rest of the book of Acts.

***Was this all the Holy Spirit telling Paul to go to Jerusalem or was it really Paul's idea?***

***Have you ever felt like you were given such a message of warning from the Holy Spirit?***

22) Perhaps, we might best look at this as a situation similar to what Joseph describes to his brothers in the end.

**Genesis 50:19–20 (NASB 2020)**

<sup>19</sup> But Joseph said to them, “Do not be afraid, for am I in God's place? <sup>20</sup> As for you, you meant evil against me, *but* God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to keep many people alive.

23) In this case, though there could have been a different outcome to all this, perhaps, the Holy Spirit was allowing Paul to pick this one – meaning it for good as well.