**Acts 20:1-38**



This section of Acts contains a round-trip circuit through Macedonia, and back past Ephesus again. In chapter 20 there are two ‘travel’ sections and two ‘meeting’ sections - first, around to Troas, and then from there to Miletus where he meets the Ephesian elders.

Luke’s account is brief during much of the trip, but other texts help us with indicating what Paul was doing and where (for example, Romans was written during his stay in Corinth, in the province of Achaia). Though few details are known of this trip, Luke slows down the narrative at certain points—the resurrection of Eutychus and Paul’s lengthy farewell message to the elders of Ephesus. This speech, and the events of chapter 19, have caused this section of the book (18:23-21:17) to be called the ‘Ephesian’ section. The dates of these events are helpfully spelled out by Schnabel below.

These travels constitute the realization of Paul’s plan (19:21; cf. 1 Cor 16:5) to visit the churches in Macedonia before visiting Achaia, in particular Corinth (2 Cor 2:13) where he spends three months during the winter of AD 56–57 (20:3). During his stay there he writes the letter to the Christians in Rome (cf. Rom 16:23). Because of a plot of the Corinthian Jews he is unable to sail from Corinth to Syria (and Jerusalem); instead, he travels overland north to Macedonia, where he spends Passover in Philippi (April 15, AD 57; 20:3–6). The journey via Troas, Miletus, Tyre, Ptolemais, and Caesarea—cities in which he meets with the local church—takes Paul finally to Jerusalem, which he reaches in time for the Feast of Pentecost (May 29, AD 57).[[1]](#footnote-2)

DAY ONE

In v. 1, Paul’s experience in Ephesus comes to an end. Prior to leaving he gathers the disciples in order to encourage and exhort them. This is a brave thing for him to do, since there were likely threats to his life. Nevertheless he does so, and this sets up the reader for the longer speech later in the chapter.

The verb *parakalein* is used extensively in Acts, sometimes with the context suggesting more specifically the meaning ‘exhort’ (e.g., 14:22) and sometimes ‘comfort’ (e.g., 20:12). The more general rendering *encouraging them* is appropriate here, though a second use of this term in v. 2 *(parakalesas)* is specifically explained in terms of ‘much speaking’ *(logō pollō)*.[[2]](#footnote-3)

Having encouraged the saints, he departs and makes his way to Macedonia. This is significant. According to 1 Cor 16:8, Paul’s intention was to remain in Ephesus until Pentecost. However, the riot had likely caused him to depart a bit earlier (perhaps March or April—see note below[[3]](#footnote-4)), and his departure meant an early arrival at Troas.

This corresponds to him having sent Titus to Corinth with his ‘painful letter’ to confront the Corinthian problems. Paul had planned to meet Titus in Troas on his way back from Corinth, but after waiting until after the sailing season had passed, and being convinced that Titus was not coming, Paul departs Troas in despair (see 2 Cor 2:3ff), but heads toward Macedonia, likely hoping to meet up with him on his way back by land. This event must have caused him deep discouragement because he continues north into Macedonia, but does not preach the Gospel in Troas, though a ‘door’ was opened to him.

Luke records very little of this information, and it must be pieced together from other accounts. He was not apparently with him again until v. 5 when they meet in Troas.

According to v. 2, Paul remained in the Macedonia region for some time. This is likely due to the fact that he did, in fact, meet Titus in Philippi, returning from Corinth with good news which comforted Paul greatly (see 2 Cor 5:7-16). This meant that he had both time and spirit to continue in his exhortative ministry to the churches in that region.

Further, Paul likely wrote 2 Corinthians from Philippi after hearing the good news from Titus. There were still problems, but his heart was comforted that they had not abandoned him or the Gospel, and so he both encourages and continues to direct them in the letter. His references to the generosity of the Macedonia churches (see 2 Cor 8-9) are most likely linked to these times.

Apparently his ministry there in Macedonia was predominantly exhortation. This is likely also the time when Paul visited and preached in Illyricum.

Just how long Paul stayed in Macedonia we do not know. Luke’s words seem to suggest a fairly prolonged period. It was probably during this time that the gospel entered the province of Illyricum in the northwest corner of the Balkan peninsula (Rom 15:19; cf. also 2 Tim 4:10, where Titus is mentioned as returning to Dalmatia, the southern district of the province of Illyricum). Perhaps Paul himself traveled across the Balkan peninsula on the Via Egnatia to the city of Dyrrhachium, from which the southern district of Illyricum (i.e., Dalmatia) would have been readily accessible.[[4]](#footnote-5)

It is, without question, that Paul spent some time there, but it is difficult to determine just how long. Regardless, though, the time was spent ministering and encouraging the people.

From Macedonia, Paul departs and goes to Greece. He likely visited a number of cities, but spent the majority of his time in Corinth.

In v. 3, Luke tells us that Paul was in Corinth for just three months. It is certain that he wrote the epistle to the Romans during this time.[[5]](#footnote-6) The Jews in Corinth had already tried to put him to death (see Acts 18:12-17) when Gallio had protected him, and so Paul was likely an object of their wrath. Luke gives us no details, but simply tells us that he was thinking to travel by ship to Syria, but instead goes over land back through Macedonia, due to a plot that was formed against his life.

This departure also included the plan to travel to Jerusalem with gifts from the Gentile churches to relieve their suffering (see 2 Cor 8-9; Rom 15:25), and is probably why Paul was so anxious to be personally in Jerusalem, in spite of the danger (see more later).

In v. 4, we discover that Paul has with him a large number of men as traveling companions back to Macedonia. This is important because these are likely the delegates carrying the gifts back to Jerusalem mentioned by Paul in 1 Cor 16:3-4.

1. Sopater of Berea, son of Pyrrhus may well be Sosipater, mentioned as a companion of Paul in Rom 16:21.
2. Aristarchus and Secundus - these are men of Thessalonica, and Aristarchus appears a number of times in later Pauline writings as well. Secundus is only mentioned here.[[6]](#footnote-7)
3. Gaius of Derbe - This is not the same man who houses Paul in Corinth (see 18:7), but is from Derbe, from the region of Galatia in Asia Minor.
4. Tychicus and Trophimus from Asia - These fellows are from the Phrygian region of Asia Minor, near Galatia, and both figure prominently in the coming narrative, as well as other Pauline writings.[[7]](#footnote-8)
5. Timothy - Luke does not give his regional derivation, likely because he is Paul’s constant companion, rather than a representative carrying the gifts.

This group represents a fairly broad swath of the regions that Paul had likely made collections for the saints in Jerusalem, and were a sign that the Gentile churches en masse were supportive of the Jerusalem church.

These men meet Luke and Paul possibly others in Troas, having left earlier.

In v. 5, Luke rejoins the party, as is evidenced from the change to ‘us’. He has been absent until now, but there is no clear historical basis for why. He may well have gone as the representative from Philippi, though, which would complete the group.

They dock in Troas and pick up their traveling companions, having left during the days of Unleavened Bread, according to v. 6. This is the time during the Passover, but before the Feast of Pentecost, which Paul wanted to be in Jerusalem for. This meant that Paul and his companions likely observed this feast with the church in Philippi, and then departed.[[8]](#footnote-9) They spend a week in Troas, which gives rise to the events that follow.

DAY ONE QUESTIONS:

1. When have you experienced discouragement over another believer’s struggles, like Paul? What did that feel like? What might have been a Spiritual solution to those struggles?
2. What things can we learn from Paul’s desire for gathering so many representatives from other churches to travel with him?
3. Can we emulate Paul’s desire for unity among the churches? What are some of the encouragements and cautions we should consider?

DAY TWO

Paul’s ministry in Troas is brief but follows a similar trajectory as the ministry in Greece. He apparently preaches to the gathering during a normal Sunday gathering of the saints. There is some question as to whether this is an ordinary meal during an informal gathering of the saints, or a formal gathering of the church and a meeting that would reflect the Lord’s Supper. The mention of the day of the week, along with the language of ‘gathering’ and ‘breaking bread’ seems to indicate a formal gathering.

The reference to the meeting for the breaking of the bread on “the first day of the week” is the earliest text we have from which it may be inferred with reasonable certainty that Christians regularly came together for worship on that day. The breaking of the bread was probably a fellowship meal in the course of which the Eucharist was celebrated (cf. 2:42). It is plain from the narrative that members of the church at Troas (“they”) were present as well as the travelers of Paul’s company (“we”); the occasion was probably the church’s weekly meeting for worship.[[9]](#footnote-10)

Luke includes the detail that Paul prolonged his message (literally ‘word’) until midnight, though he’d already told them that he would leave the next day. Apparently late night fellowships were common in this day as well! The fact that they met in the evening is likely due to the need for many of them to have come from work.

Speaking “until midnight” provides a concrete example of what Luke means when he reports in 20:2 that Paul spoke “many words of encouragement.” The time Paul could stay with them was limited, and he took advantage of what time he had to teach the churches. Paul’s stamina to undergo an exhausting travel schedule and to speak through the night is amazing and a testimony to his dedication to his calling and the power of the Spirit.[[10]](#footnote-11)

In v. 8, Luke adds the interesting detail that there were many lamps in the room where they were gathered. These were small bowls carrying oil, with a floating wick, and would have produced some smoke. With many lamps in the small room, the air would have been heavy. Eutychus (which means ‘Lucky’[[11]](#footnote-12)) may well have moved to the window sill (just an opening in the wall) and sat there to get access to fresh air, and to leave space for the crowd that was likely there.

We meet this unfortunate fellow in v. 9 where Luke introduces him as a young man (possibly between 9-18 years—of youth group age, but perhaps on the upper end of that range). Regardless of what judgment we might tempted to feel, he was likely coming from a hard day’s work, and the warm room, the flickering candles, the dense air, and Paul’s long-windedness must have caused him to sleep. We’ve all been there, I think.

Luke’s own description of Paul’s preaching is, perhaps, laced with humor. He says that Paul ‘kept on talking’ (literally ‘*in much conversation*’). Paul must have felt the urgency of addressing the crowd in great detail, believing this to be his last time in the city.

Luke states that the young man was ‘overcome’ with sleep—the passive voice indicates that Eutychus was fighting the feeling of falling asleep, which might make sense of his movement to the window. Also, in such houses, the windows would have provided the coolest air in the room. Nevertheless, the passive voice indicates that he wasn’t bored, or trying to fall asleep, but was unable to stay awake, even with Paul’s interesting sermon!

That he fell from the third floor is an interesting detail as well. Roman villas were generally single story, or two stories if built on a hill. Three story buildings were usually tenement buildings.[[12]](#footnote-13)

The statement that he was picked up dead is not hyperbole. The point of the story’s inclusion is to show Paul’s ability to raise the dead.

The boy was picked up *dead*. There can be little doubt that Luke intended to portray Paul as being able to raise the dead (like Peter, 9:36–43); Paul’s comment that the boy’s *life* was *in him* refers to his condition after he had ministered to him. Luke would not have devoted space to the raising up of somebody who was merely apparently dead.[[13]](#footnote-14)

This must have been a startling moment. The language of v. 10 is very graphic. Paul goes down, with the rest of church presumably, throws himself on the boy, and embraces him. His statement, “Do not be troubled, for his life is in him” is the result of Paul’s miraculous resurrection, rather than a medical diagnosis.

The importance of this act is, at least in part, it’s connection between the ministries of Peter and Paul. The parallels in healings and resurrections (Tabitha for Peter, Eutychus for Paul) reveal Luke’s intention of showing the connection of the power of God in the Gospel ministry of both men.

Similarities between this narrative and the raising of Tabitha in 9:36–42 suggest parallel ministries, whereby ‘both Peter and Paul enable the Christian community to discover life in the face of death’. This life is clearly the gift of God, though Peter and Paul are God’s instruments in bringing it about.[[14]](#footnote-15)

The resurrection of the dead also connects Paul with the larger Biblical accounts of the true prophets of God.

Biblically literate readers would be reminded of resuscitations of dead people by Elijah and Elisha (1 Kings 17:19–22; 2 Kings 4:34–35); Christian readers would be reminded of resuscitations effected by Jesus (Luke 7:11–15, the son of the widow of Nain; 8:49–56, the daughter of Jairus; John 11:38–44, Lazarus); readers of Acts would be reminded of a resuscitation in the ministry of Peter (9:36–41, Dorcas). The resuscitation of Eutychus places Paul in the line of the prophets from the Old Testament to Jesus and to Peter, demonstrating that the life—giving power of God (cf. Rom 4:17) was present in Paul’s ministry in similar ways.[[15]](#footnote-16)

In an almost nonchalant way, in v. 11 we hear that Paul returns to the third floor, and breaks the bread. The inclusion of the article (‘the bread’) lends credence to the suggestion that the gathering was a formal meeting of the church. Paul had been preaching a sermon, with the intent that the Lord’s Supper should follow. The near-tragedy of Eutychus puts that sermon to an end, and they break bread and eat together.

However, this is not the end of Paul’s conversation. He continues to talk with them for an extended time, and the meeting doesn’t break up until dawn when he has to leave for Assos! This detail suggests that Paul was wanting to share much with them, but also that their fellowship was sweet, and no one wanted to trade sleep for time with the church body.

He “conversed” (ὁμιλήσας) with the believers, an activity that is emphasized by two temporal qualifications (“for a long time” [ἐφʼ ἱκανόν] and “until dawn” [ἄχρι αὐγῆς]). The description implicitly characterizes the meeting as lasting probably twelve hours; then Paul “departed” (ἐξῆλθεν), leaving the meeting room, perhaps to catch a few hours of sleep or to embark on his overland journey to Assos.[[16]](#footnote-17)

Luke’s final comment in v. 12 is also clear evidence that Eutychus had really died. Apparently he is taken away alive. The literal term is ‘led away’—an indicator that he is doing fine physically and is able to walk on his own. A fall from three stories that resulted in near-death would require a miraculous healing for the boy to be walking fine on his own.

Further, Luke’s statement that they were greatly comforted (‘not a little’) is a helpful summary. Their comfort would be very much less if his recovery was partial. Further, had the recovery been only partial, or simply a medical act, Paul’s return to the worship service would have been callous, at best! Luke’s inclusion of this verse indicates that was not the case.

DAY TWO QUESTIONS:

1. What are similarities between this gathering and events we still do in the modern church? How is that encouraging? Are there ways we can grow?
2. Why do you suppose it is crucial for Luke to show Theophilus God’s work through Paul in this way? How does this relate to the overall structure of the book?

DAY THREE

The narrative continues in v. 13 as Paul departs over land for Assos while his companions depart by ship. The route by ship was 43 miles, and over land was approximately 20 miles. Paul’s route was not difficult, but Luke is not clear why he decided to go over land. Some suggest that he wanted to spend time with God. Others, that he was visiting small churches in the region or seeking to evangelize in places he had not yet traveled.

There is no time indicator, so any of these could be the case. However, with no information from Luke, conjecture is pointless. Regardless, just as in the travels to Corinth, Paul chose the land route rather than the sea route again.

The language of v. 14 seems to indicate that they were there already when Paul arrived (lit: “he met with us at Assos”). Since they were also on board a ship that must have had a series of ports to reach, a long gap of time seems impossible.

To get to Assos from Troas, the ship had to round Cape Lectum (Bababurun), thus requiring longer time than the 20-mile land journey, especially since the prevailing wind was the stormy northeaster’.[[17]](#footnote-18)

Like a modern day cruise ship, the vessel docks in towns each night, and the list of locations is given with specific detail. The first port is Mitylene.

Assos (modern Bahram Koi) was twenty miles south of Troas, on the Gulf of Adramyttium. It was on the Roman coastal road and faced south toward the island of Lesbos. The boat went on to Mitylene, a splendid port on the southeast coast of Lesbos and the chief city of this largest of the islands of western Asia Minor.[[18]](#footnote-19)

The next ports are given in quick succession — they sail between islands and then land finally at Miletus[[19]](#footnote-20), where the narrative continues.

The Greek expression *antikrys Chiou* ‘probably means that they sailed between the island of Chios and the mainland (“right through”)’. *The day after that*, they crossed over to *Samos*, which was another of the Ionian islands, separated from the mainland by a channel which was just over a mile wide. It was between Chios and Samos that the ship sailed past Ephesus, *and on the following day* they came to *Miletus*, which was on the south coast of the Latmian Gulf.[[20]](#footnote-21)

Luke explains in v. 16 that Paul had desired to sail past Ephesus. This isn’t because he doesn’t want to see the Ephesian church, of course, but because he is in a hurry to get to Jerusalem before Pentecost. This could, of course, have been related to Paul’s desire to celebrate the feast as a Jew. It could also have been a knowledge that many of the surrounding believers would be in the city during that time. Finally, Ephesus was still likely dangerous, which could have delayed travels due to persecution, though this seems less likely a reason for Paul to bypass it. We don’t hear from Luke about what leads Paul to desire this timing, and so we’re left to conjecture. Regardless, we see Paul’s heart to reach Jerusalem at all costs on display.

He wanted, if at all possible, to get to Jerusalem for Pentecost on the fiftieth day after Passover (cf. comments on 2:1). This was the second of the great pilgrim festivals of Judaism. (Sukkoth or Tabernacles, some four months after Pentecost, was the third.) Paul had previously decided not to take a boat that stopped at Ephesus, for he evidently preferred to forego the emotional strain of another parting with the entire Ephesian church and to avoid (possibly) some local danger. The Aegean crossing had taken five days, Paul and his companions had remained at Troas seven days, the trip along the western coast of Asia Minor would have taken at least another ten days, and they had yet to sail across the Mediterranean and then travel by land from Caesarea up to Jerusalem. So Paul was content to sail past Ephesus.[[21]](#footnote-22)

In v. 17-18a, Luke tells us that Paul summons the Ephesian elders with a desire to see and encourage them. The trip from Ephesus to Miletus was approximately 30 miles over land, and a message could have easily been dispatched by Paul upon docking, and a meeting arranged within a day or two. The ship likely had business there before departing eastward, and Paul takes advantage of that time to set up this meeting.

The second half of v. 18 begins Paul’s discourse with the Ephesian elders, which is the only speech to believers in the book. While difficult to outline, we’ll consider the speech in four parts:

1. Previous Ministry - vv. 18-21
2. Probable Suffering - vv. 22-27
3. Potential False Teachers - vv. 28-31
4. Prayer and Appeal for Them - vv. 32-35

Previous Ministry - vv. 18-21

He begins with an emphatic statement about their awareness of his life and ministry in Asia. His statement is a summary of his whole experience with them, from the very moment he put a single foot in Asia until that time.

In v. 19 he explains, in summary form, what ministry had been like for him during those months and years. First, the term for ‘serving’ here is from the word for the slave. Paul served the Lord as a slave to his master. This idea is closely linked to his affirmation of his humility. This isn’t a back-handed boast. Paul is simply stating that he had served for the sake of the Lord, rather than himself. His willingness to provide for himself, and to continue to preach in spite of dangers should have proven this fact to them.

Paul’s ministry had been marked by tears and trials, and any reader of Acts would affirm this. The Ephesians had been personal witnesses of the complexities that faced Paul in ministry. However, Paul links these primarily with the plots of the Jews. This is an interesting addition, since his sufferings in Ephesus were of Gentile origin.

The narrative of his Ephesian ministry in Acts does not relate any specific Jewish plot against him, although such plots occur frequently in the overall story of Paul’s mission—at Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Thessalonica, Berea, and Corinth. The most recent plot was ultimately responsible for his presence at Miletus at this time, causing him to change his original plan to sail directly to Syria from Corinth (20:3).[[22]](#footnote-23)

Though often battered, Paul never failed to preach truth, as he states in v. 20. The word means to hold back, or to shrink back in fear. It appears that Paul means the former—it wasn’t that Paul was unafraid of any circumstance, but that he did not hold back in his teaching.

The verb translated *hesitated* could have the sense of ‘shrink back’ in fear (cf. Heb. 10:38), but the context rather suggests no withholding of the truth (cf. Plato, *Apol.* 24A). Use of the same verb twice in this speech suggests that some of the elders may have faced the temptation to water down the message. Paul’s refusal to dilute the truth is highlighted in several of his letters (e.g., 2 Cor. 2:17; 4:2–5; Gal. 4:16).[[23]](#footnote-24)

His teaching was not only publicly, but from house to house. This language indicates a willingness to proclaim the message of the Gospel wherever necessary. Records of home churches and public venues exist throughout the NT. (See for example 1 Cor 16:19-20)

His use of solemnly testifying is a link back with previous evangelists (see 2:40; 8:25; 10:42) but also to the theme of the book — that these men would be witnesses of Jesus (witness and testify are from the same root word - μαρτυς).

The message went to everyone - Jew and Greek, and contained commands for repentance toward God for sin, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The universal message of repentance and faith is what Paul witnessed to everyone he met, everywhere he went, all the time.

This section was not a defense, but an appeal to follow in this example of Gospel-ministry (see similar exhortations in 2 Timothy 3:11ff).

DAY THREE QUESTIONS

1. What can we learn about Paul’s heart for the Ephesians, in spite of his hurry? How can we apply this example?
2. What are some takeaways from Paul’s examples in ministry? What are some areas where you’d like to see yourself grow?
3. When we read accounts like this it can be discouraging because of our own weakness. What drove Paul to this type of ministry, and how can we have similar power for life? (See 2 Cor 5:14-15, written during this time.)

DAY FOUR

Paul now moves to the second of four parts of the speech.

Probable Suffering - vv. 22-27

In v. 22, having reviewed what has come before, Paul now transitions to his present journey. The phrase ‘bound by the Spirit’ could indicate his own spirit or the Spirit of God. However, the language of binding seems to indicate it was the Spirit of God who was compelling him forward toward Jerusalem (see commentary on 19:).

His own heart is unaware of what awaits him there in Jerusalem. He is certain that the Jews hate him, but he isn’t positive about what may happen.

However, according to v. 23, it is clear that Paul is anticipating suffering because of what the Holy Spirit testifies to him. The ‘solemn testimony’ of the Spirit is the same as Paul’s personal testimony in v. 21 — as Paul functions as a witness, so the Spirit witnesses to Paul that he will suffer in the proclamation of Christ.

The specific suffering that he is anticipating is in the form of imprisonment and persecution—bonds and afflictions.

The association of being constrained by the Holy Spirit in his missionary work and travels with a lack of knowledge is not really surprising. While God guides Paul’s movements and even gives him supernatural, revelatory insight into what he should do (cf. 16:6–7; 18:9–10), the precise sequence and nature of events are either the result of his own decisions or the result of powers that he cannot control. Guidance by God’s Spirit does not convey omniscience. As it turns out, the imprisonment and the trials he faces in Jerusalem do in fact not lead to his execution. Rather, he reaches the city of Rome, as he had planned, albeit as a prisoner.[[24]](#footnote-25)

In spite of the information regarding his affliction and imprisonment, Paul makes a point in v. 24 to place the proper level concern on his sufferings, compared to his ministry. He makes an iconic statement regarding how he considers ministry in light of suffering and even death.

His statement compares the value of his life to his ‘course’ of ministry (for other race comparisons from Paul see 1 Cor. 9:24–27; Gal. 2:2; Phil. 2:16; 2 Tim. 4:7). The wording of value is literally ‘*make a word of value for my life*’. There isn’t a word to speak to compare Paul’s life with the value of following Christ. (For a similar idea see 2 Cor 4:7–12; 6:4–10; 12:9–10; Phil 2:17; 3:8; Col 1:24). Paul understood that his life and ministry was primarily about the glory of Christ, rather than self-preservation.

The ministry (or service) which Paul had received from the Lord Jesus was the proclamation of the gospel of the grace of God. This was his duty—to proclaim the good news of a gracious God to sinners in every-widening spheres until his life was taken from Him by God. There was no end to that course, except through death (see, in particular, 2 Tim 4:7-8). The third repetition of ‘solemnly testify’ is important — this is clearly the centerpiece of the section. Paul has solemnly testified and will continue to do so, all the while receiving the testimony from the Spirit that he will suffer.

Interestingly, Paul saw his ministry as primarily Gospel-centered. This is not simply evangelism, but that he should be proclaiming God’s grace both to unbelievers and to believers (for examples see Rom 1:14-17; Titus 2:11ff).

In v. 25, the thought transitions slightly away from his own personal sufferings toward his ministry among them. He explains that they will likely never see his face again. This is obviously conjecture, since he cannot possibly know this. In fact, it is likely that Paul was freed from his first imprisonment and spent time near the city of Ephesus. It is unlikely that he would have been near there without going to see them.[[25]](#footnote-26) Nevertheless, this is his expectation.

He summarizes his ministry as a proclamation of the kingdom. This, tied with the statement at the end of v. 24 links the Gospel with the kingdom of God—a link we’d anticipate given the Gospel writers (see Mark 1:14-15 for example).

Based on this conjecture, he now clears his conscience before them, in a sense. In v. 26, he proclaims that he is innocent of the blood of all men. This has it’s background in the book of Ezekiel[[26]](#footnote-27), and is a way of expressing that Paul has discharged his duty in warning all whom he met and pointing them to the grace of God in Christ.

In v. 27, the basis for this affirmation, to which they are witnesses, is that he never hesitated or shrank back from declaring to them the whole purpose of God. The word translated ‘purpose’ is literally ‘plan’—when taken with the word kingdom in v. 25, and the gospel of God’s grace in v. 26, the summary of Paul’s ministry is apparent. He has proclaimed that God is calling all men everywhere to repent and to trust in the finished work of Christ who will someday establish His kingdom and judge the world (see especially 17:30-31).

Again, Paul is not defending himself, but rather expressing his manner of ministry in order to appeal to the Ephesian elders to walk in his footsteps.

Potential False Teachers - vv. 28-31

V. 28 represents a helpful summary of pastoral ministry, both in it’s positive and negative aspects. The negative aspects are summarized in the first line. Paul instructs them to be on guard for themselves and for all the flock (see 1 Tim 4:16, ironically written to Timothy during his time in Ephesus!). The assumption is that there will certainly be attacks.

The mention of ‘flock’ sends Paul into a discussion of their role as guardians. This is the positive aspect of the verse. They have been made ‘overseers’ (επισκοπος - *episkopos*, one who watches over) by the Holy Spirit. Their role of watching over the souls of the flock is given by God (Heb 13:17), and is their responsibility. This role Paul then summarizes with the term ‘shepherd’ the church of God. The care of the church—the flock—is a care of shepherding.

Thus, the Ephesian leaders were not designated as bishops but rather as elders who functioned to “watch over the flock of God.” This image of the leaders as shepherds of God’s flock permeates all of vv. 28–30 and is a common biblical theme.[[27]](#footnote-28)

Two other helpful considerations are made here. First, the church in Ephesus is called the church of God. This draws the attention away from the universal church and onto the local church. God’s church is localized into bodies led by shepherds who keep watch.

Second, the very important and very clear statement is that the church of God was purchased by *his* blood. The blood is Christ’s, but Paul refers to the blood as that of God—a clear statement of His divinity.

Likewise, his easy association of “God” with the one who obtained the church for himself “with his own blood” (i.e., Jesus) corresponds most closely in expression to the doxology of Romans 9:5 that speaks of “Christ, who is God over all, forever praised.” In addition, reference to the blood of Jesus (i.e., *hē haima tou idiou*, “his own blood”) as being instrumental in man’s redemption appears first in Paul’s writings at Romans 3:25 and 5:9 (thereafter Eph 1:7; 2:13; Col 1:20).[[28]](#footnote-29)

In v. 29-30, Paul predicts that savage wolves would enter the flock. It appears that the source of these false teachers would be from among the group of the elders present at that time! This dangerous circumstance came to pass after the departure of Paul, based on the events that are detailed in 1 and 2 Timothy.

Even more insidiously, destruction would come from within the church itself, ‘*even from your own number*’. This last expression suggests that heresy and schism might be caused by one or other of the elders themselves, who would ‘*distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them*’. The church at Ephesus certainly had to deal with heretical forces after Paul’s departure (cf. 1 Tim. 1:3; 2 Tim. 1:15; Rev. 2:1–7).[[29]](#footnote-30)

Paul now connects the two themes—his personal example, and his charge to them in v. 31. The admonition to be on the alert[[30]](#footnote-31) is based on his concern that savage wolves would arise, and that the church would be damaged. He reminds them that for three years he continually admonished them with tears. The point is that, with his heart and soul, he cared for the church, and they must as well!

DAY FOUR QUESTIONS

1. What is Paul’s motivation for service, in spite of suffering?
2. What is the root motivation for protecting the flock of God, based on Paul’s words?
3. Why do you suppose the church is always in danger? How can we protect it?

DAY FIVE

The final section of Paul’s departure speech occurs from v. 32-35.

Prayer and Appeal for Them - vv. 32-35

In v. 32 Paul now commends them to God and the word of His grace. The statement recalls the last time God’s grace was mentioned in v. 24, where it is tied explicitly to the Gospel. Paul commends them to God and His Gospel for their edification and their inheritance.

Once more the gospel is identified as a message of grace from God (cf. v. 24), which not only brings people to Christ in the first place but is also powerful enough to ‘*build you up*’ (cf. 9:31) ‘*and give you an inheritance*’ (cf. 7:5) ‘*among all those who are sanctified*’ (cf. 26:18).[[31]](#footnote-32)

Three important phrases are used here that are common in Pauline literature.

The first is edification (‘build you up’). The concept of edification is common in the NT, the word being used for a household, or a building. Paul’s use of the word is often in the context of spiritual edification (see, for example, Eph 4:12; 4:29; 1 Thess 5:11). His use of this term with the gospel also makes sense. The Gospel actively edifies the people of God because it communicates the love and forgiveness of God—the truths that Paul lived upon daily (Gal 2:20).

The second is inheritance. Paul’s reference here is again typical. He speaks about the inheritance the saints receive through Christ frequently (see Eph 1:14,18, 3:6, 5:5; Col 3:24; and non-Pauline Heb 9:24). These references all speak about the kingdom of God that saints will inherit. It is not the work of the overseers, but the word of the Gospel that will assure them a place in heaven. Though wolves and suffering may come, they will be protected for heaven by the good news of the Gospel.

The third term is sanctified. Interestingly, the freeness of the Gospel inheritance is directly linked to those who are being sanctified. This is both the passive sanctification received at salvation (1 Cor 1:31) and the progressive sanctification which Christ accomplishes in His people. Again, the language is typically Pauline (see Rom 15:16; 1 Cor 1:2; 6:11; 7:14; Eph 5:26; 1 Thess 5:23). Paul states that those who will inherit are those who are sanctified. It isn’t that the sanctification produces the inheritance, but that all those who will inherit glory will be sanctified by Christ. Again, the link to the Gospel is clear—sanctification is the work of the gospel through the glory of Christ (2 Cor 3:18).

Paul did not ultimately trust the church into the hands of the shepherds, because he knew that was fruitless—savage wolves would arise from among them! His ultimate confidence for these believers whom he had loved and discipled was the Gospel. Paul knew the Lord who loved them and sacrificed Himself for them would guard and protect them, and the church they cared for. For this reason, he commends them to Him and to His Gospel.

So here we have an important contribution to Luke’s theology of the gospel. This is the God-given ‘word’ by which the church grows in size and maturity and is protected from error and division. It is the message which God uses to convert and to sustain believers until they reach the inheritance which the gospel itself promises. When the gospel is faithfully preached and applied to believers, they are assured of their standing with God in Christ and are encouraged to press on in love, unity, and obedience.[[32]](#footnote-33)

In vv. 33-34 Paul reminds them of his manner of life among them again, but in regard to finances rather than simply his proclamation of the Gospel. He states that he coveted no one’s wealth (described in common terms of sliver, gold, and fine clothes) unlike Demetrius and the pagans (19:11ff). It isn’t just that Paul didn’t try to take them, but that even in his heart, he was free of coveting the possessions of others. His focus had been on the work of Christ more than his own finances.

As if furnishing proof that this is where his heart is at, he tells them that he served his own needs and the needs of his team through his own hands! This is undoubtedly a reference to his tent-making work (see 18:3, in Corinth). Though he had the right to claim financial support from the churches he planted (see 1 Cor 9:12-14), he chose not to in order to offer the Gospel freely (1 Cor 9:15-18).

In v. 35, he summarizes his ethical example for them. He explains that his actions—everything he did while he was among them—showed them how they should act as well. They should work hard with their hands, help the weak, and do so remembering that Jesus said it is more blessed to give than to receive.

Paul’s words reflect his concern that these men minister without regard to financial constraints. This isn’t a prohibition against paying a pastor! (In spite of the potential for a biased view. ;) ) Paul expresses the thought of payment for those who share the Gospel in 1 Cor 9:12-14 and 1 Tim 5:17. However, he wanted the Ephesian elders to follow his example of living for Christ rather than for money.

In his epistles he showed a similar concern that Christians help the weak and needy, that they share in one another’s burdens (cf. Rom 15:1; 1 Thess 5:14; Eph 4:28; Gal 6:2). Greed is a universal human problem, and church leaders are not exempt (cf. the exhortation in v. 28 for church leaders to “watch yourselves”). That avarice among church leaders was a real problem in Asia Minor seems to be attested by the Pastoral Epistles, in which Paul insisted that a major qualification for church leaders should be their detachment from the love of money (1 Tim 3:3, 8; Titus 1:7, 11).[[33]](#footnote-34)

The final words of the speech are a quote from Christ. These words do not appear in any Gospel account. Some have suggested that this is prophetic revelation given to Paul. It certainly could have been, but it seems better to assume that this is a summary of Christ’s teaching on giving, or perhaps something that He taught and the disciples recited, but was not recorded in the Gospels.[[34]](#footnote-35)

The logic of the sentence is helpful. The word for blessed (μακάριος) means happy or fortunate[[35]](#footnote-36). The argument of the sentence is that there is more happiness in giving than in receiving—giving produces greater joy than receiving. This is entirely contrary to everything that the world would teach (Demetrius in Acts 19 being a prime example). Paul uses this sentence to remind them that the benefits of self-sacrifice and generosity are greater than the benefits of the opposite behavior. His goal, and the goal of Christ in saying this, is to incentivize generosity with happiness.

The sentence serves as a fitting conclusion to the speech—Paul has exhorted them to mimic his behavior both in heart and in life, that suffering would certainly come, but that they should continue shepherding and protecting the people of God without being pulled away by greed or covetousness, and that in doing so, they would be happier.

The final scene of the chapter is heart-rending. Paul, along with everyone present, kneels down and prays (see 21:5 for a similar event). It is not recorded what he prays, but we can safely assume it includes a petition for God to protect these men in the ways that Paul has already exhorted them. They rise, and begin weeping and hugging Paul[[36]](#footnote-37) and even kissing him (a common sign of deep friendship in the ancient world[[37]](#footnote-38)), and accompanied him to the ship.

The finality of this departure, and Paul’s own words that they would likely never see him again, are the cause of this deep emotional response. This is understandable, given that he had likely brought most of these men to faith in Christ, and had spent a number of years discipling and training them in order to place them into these positions of ministry.

DAY FIVE QUESTIONS

1. How does the Gospel of the grace of God in Christ produce edification and sanctification in God’s people?
2. How do Christ’s words in v. 35 help us to turn from greed?
3. How might Paul’s example of faithful service and care for the church produce the response of vv. 36-38?

1. Eckhard J. Schnabel, 819. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. David G. Peterson, 554. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. “It has been conjectured that the riot took place about the time of the Ephesian festival of the Artemisia, held annually in March/April.” - F. F. Bruce, 381. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Richard N. Longenecker, 506. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. “Paul’s stay at Corinth for *three months* was probably during the winter months when travel would have been difficult. Among other profitable activities during his enforced stay he penned the Letter to the Romans.” - I. Howard Marshall, 341. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Aristarchus (Ἀρίσταρχος), who had been arrested in Ephesus (19:29), is also mentioned in 27:2 (accompanying Paul on his journey as prisoner from Caesarea to Rome), in Col 4:10 (as Paul’s fellow prisoner) and in Phlm 24 (as Paul’s coworker); he is described here as being a Christian from Thessalonica. A second “delegate” from the church in the Macedonian capital is Secundus (Σεκοῦνδος), who is mentioned only here in the New Testament. - Eckhard J. Schnabel, 833. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. Tychicus was later associated with Paul’s letters to Asia Minor (Eph. 6:21f.; Col. 4:7f; cf. 2 Tim. 4:12; Titus 3:12), and Trophimus was involved in the trouble that led to Paul’s arrest in Jerusalem (21:29; cf. 2 Tim. 4:20). - I. Howard Marshall, 342. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Paul’s departure from Philippi—i.e., from Neapolis, the port of Philippi (cf. 16:11–12)—is dated with reference to the Feast of Unleavened Bread (τὰ ἄζυμα), which was connected with the Feast of Passover (τὸ πάσχα; cf. Luke 22:1). Passover (the 14th day of Nisan) was celebrated in AD 57 on April 7, which left five weeks for the journey from Philippi via Troas, Miletus, Tyre, and Caesarea to Jerusalem, which Paul wants to reach in time for the Feast of Pentecost (May 29, AD 57; cf. 20:16). - Eckhard J. Schnabel, 834. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. F. F. Bruce, 384. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. David E. Garland, 206. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. The name “Eutychus” means “lucky” and probably is a slave name. Slaves were given names by masters that expressed their hope for them. - Ibid, 206. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. The building was evidently a tenement block like the one in Rome where Martial lived: “I live up three flights of stairs, high ones at that” (*Epigrams* 1.118.7). - F. F. Bruce. Often, the first floor would function as a stable/livestock holding, with living quarters on the second and third floors, or living quarters on the second, and an open common room in the hotter top floor. These were cheap accommodations. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. I. Howard Marshall, 345. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. David G. Peterson, 559. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. Eckhard J. Schnabel, 836. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. Ibidl, 836–837. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
17. David G. Peterson, 561. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
18. Richard N. Longenecker, 510. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
19. The city of Miletus (Μίλητος), established as a Greek colony in the 11th century BC, was one of the foremost centers of trade in western Asia Minor, due in part to its four harbors that were located on both sides of the peninsula on which the city had been built. The golden age of Miletus is linked with the philosophers Thales, Anaximander, and Anaximenes. The city continued to thrive under Roman rule. The Harbor Theater seated 15,000 spectators; other remains include the stadium, baths, gymnasia, the building of the city council (bouleuterion), several market places (agora), the temple of Athene, the monumental temple of Apollo Delphinios, and a temple of Asclepius. A graffito in the theater confirms the existence of a Jewish community in Miletus. The famous, monumental temple of Apollo in Didyma, situated 15 kilometers south of the city, connected by a *via sacra*, belonged to Miletus. - Eckhard J. Schnabel, 837. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
20. David G. Peterson, 562. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
21. Richard N. Longenecker, 510. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
22. John B. Polhill, 424. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
23. David G. Peterson, 564. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
24. Eckhard J. Schnabel, 842. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
25. It appears that Paul was released after two years of imprisonment in Rome, engaged in missionary work in Spain, and returned to the east, spending time on Crete (Titus 1:5), in Nicopolis in the province of Epirus (Titus 3:12), in Macedonia (1 Tim 1:3), and in Troas in the province of Asia (2 Tim 4:13). If he did not return to Ephesus during his last journeys in the Aegean regions, his premonition in v. 25 proved to be correct; if he did visit Ephesus, his premonition would have been premature. - Eckhard J. Schnabel, 843. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
26. Ezekiel 3:17–18 and 33:7–9 provide the backdrop for Paul’s concern about having blood guilt for failing to deliver the whole message from God. God has also appointed him as a “watchman” and given him a word to speak that is not only good news about the forgiveness of sins but also contains a warning: “When I say to a wicked person, ‘You will surely die,’ and you do not warn them or speak out to dissuade them from their evil ways in order to save their life, that wicked person will die for their sin, and I will hold you accountable for their blood” (Ezek. 3:18 [cf. 3:20]). - David E. Garland, 212. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
27. John B. Polhill, 427. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
28. Richard N. Longenecker, 513. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
29. David G. Peterson, 571. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
30. “Be watchful,” Gk. γρηγορεῖτε (v. 31), is a “pastoral word,” as Bengel calls it. Cf. 1 Cor. 16:13; Col. 4:2; 1 Thess. 5:6, 10; also the synonymous ἀγρυπνέω in a similar context in Heb. 13:17 (the leaders “keep watch” over the souls of those entrusted to their care). - F. F. Bruce [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
31. David G. Peterson, 572. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
32. David G. Peterson, 572. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
33. John B. Polhill, 429. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
34. Although this saying is not recorded in any of the Gospels, the command to give is found in Lk. 6:30, 38; 11:41; 12:33; 18:22. In the teaching of Jesus generosity to others is an antidote to covetousness and a way to escape the captivating deceit of riches. Witherington 1998, 626, discusses parallels to the saying in Acts 20:35 in extrabiblical writings. - David G. Peterson [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
35. Pert. to being fortunate or happy because of circumstances, *fortunate, happy. -* William Arndt et al., 610. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
36. Paul is sometimes misrepresented by his critics as a hard and austere man, lacking compassion and kindness. However, this passage is one of several challenging that distorted view (cf. 2 Cor. 2:4; 1 Thes. 1:7–8). - David G. Peterson, 574. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
37. The display of emotion with tears and kisses would be natural enough in the culture of that time. The kiss is here a sign of affection rather than the more formal ‘holy kiss’ of Christian worship. - I. Howard Marshall, 355. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)