

Luke, the beloved physician

Discussion Session 6

The Book of Acts

Chapters 18:23-21:16

Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible (pgs. 1916-1923)

Outline:

I. Home missions (Acts 1-12)

The witness to the Jews in Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria. Outstanding leader—Peter.

Important city—Jerusalem.

II. Foreign missions (acts 13-28)

The witness to the Gentiles, to the “uttermost parts!”

Outstanding leader—Paul.

Important cities—Antioch, Ephesus, and Rome.

Things to do:

1. Read all of the Book of Acts.
2. Answer the questions and fill out the outline. Use your own words. Do not quote unless the questions asks for that.
3. Be able to locate on the map, the places mentioned in Acts 1-12.
4. Draw Paul’s first and second journeys on the map, and Paul’s third and fourth on the maps provided.
5. Memorize Acts 1:8, 4:12, 16:31 (Optional)
6. Make a report on the life of at least one great missionary.

Opening Prayer

Loving Father, how amazing it is to read how the fledgling Church grew and multiplied in those early days of Christianity. What a privilege it is to receive the indwelling Holy Spirit, through faith in Christ, and to know that I have received forgiveness of sin and life everlasting, by faith in Him. Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in Your Word and teach me all that You would have me to learn. Thank You for the gift of the indwelling Spirit, Who has promised to guide us into all truth. Give me a teachable spirit, remove all traces of pride, and may I walk humbly before You, all the days of my life. In Jesus' name, AMEN.

**“He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost.”
(Acts 19:2)**

*Paul’s Third Missionary Journey—
Acts 18:23-21:17*

A. Again revisited the Asia Minor churches (18:23)

B. At Ephesus Holy Ghost/Spirit came (19:1-7) _____ Paul placed his hands on them and the Holy Spirit came upon them, they spoke in tongues and prophesied, and there were about twelve men in total. _____

In Synagogue (19:8) _____ entered the synagogue for about three months about the kingdom of God, they became obstinate with him and he departed.

In the school of Tyrannus (19:9-10) _____ Because they became obstinate with him, he moved his lectures to this hall, where he taught for about two years. _____

Paul’s miracles (19:11-17) _____ Everything that Paul touched cured and removed evil spirits. _____

Signs of true turning to Christ from idols (19:18-27) _____ 1. Confessed what they had done, 2. Brought scrolls and burned them publicly, 3. Burned paraphernalia, 4. Lord’s words spread widely, and grew in power, most if not all of them converted to Christianity. _____

Uprising concerning Diana (19:23-41) _____ The silver smiths, brought up the argument that Artemis would lose popularity, with what Paul is teaching. Magistrate/City clerk tells them that no crimes have been committed and that they need to calm down, or they be charged with rioting. _____

C. Revisited and encouraged churches in Macedonia and also in Southern Greece and returned to Philippi in Macedonia. Companions (20:4) Sopater _____
Timothy _____
Secundus _____
Gaius _____

Tychicus _____

Aristarchus _____

Trochimus _____

D. Troas (20:6-12)

_____ Eutychus, fell out the window, died, and was brought back to life. _____

E. Melitus (met elders from Ephesus) (20:17-38) _____ This is where he told them that they would not see him again, but to continue to spread God's word.

F. Landed at Tyre (21:3-6) _____ He met with disciples while the cargo was unloaded, sought out by the spirit, and was urged not to go to Jerusalem.

G. Ptolemais by sea (21:7) _____ Stayed one and greeted his brothers and sisters.

H. Caesarea by sea (21:8-16) _____ Stayed at the house of Phillip who had four daughters who prophesied.

Prophet Agabus, took Paul's belt tied his hand and feet, saying that the Spirit sent word that Paul would be bound like this in Jerusalem, and handed over to the Gentiles. _____

I. Jerusalem

Letters written on third journey: 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Romans.

Prayers of the People: Martha, Billy and family, Karissa, Uncle Dennis, Uncle David, Alexis, Patrick and family, Deb, those who are suffering from oppression, addiction, depression, lonely with no family for Christmas, those soldiers serving overseas and their families left behind, homeless and hungry, victims of war, a moral and upright government, those who suffer loss of any kind.

Heavenly Father, thank You for the Word of God which is profitable for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness. May we individually and collectively be on our spiritual guard, not only for our own well-being but also for those that You have seen fit to place in our lives. Give grace and wisdom to all who are called to be elders or overseers in local churches today, and protect all believers who have fallen prey to false teachers or who have been exposed to doctrines of demons. Protect the hearts and minds of all Your children, and guide each one of us into the way of truth. In Jesus' name, AMEN.

“Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.”
(Acts 20:28)

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Discussion Session 4

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*“He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost.”
(Acts 19:2)*

In this section, Luke does not tell us whether or not Paul was accompanied by anyone as he set out to revisit the churches of Asia Minor. It is mostly like that he travelled alone, and this must have been a long and lonely journey from Antioch to Ephesus. This journey would have been more than a thousand miles, a journey which may have taken forty days, which would not include the stops that would have been taken along the way.

It is possible that approximately six months may have passed from his departure until his arrival. The time it took is overlooked or merely left out of the story. Luke passes over this extended period of time in the Paul's ministry. Instead, we are taken back to Ephesus and introduced to a new character who may have been important in spreading the Gospel. This individual was named Apollo.

We would hope that Luke would have been more detailed, but about this remarkable man from Alexandria, however, we only read that, he was from Alexandria.

The city of Alexandria was important in a lot of ways, because it was an important place for education in the Jewish community. Philo states that it number approximately one million Jews. The city itself was the birthplace of the famous Greek Translation of the Old Testament. Which was instrumental in the spreading of Judaism and the Gospel of the Ancient world.

In the reading we see that it was mentioned that when they met Apollo, he was learned man through the knowledge of the Scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John. We would like to know how much he knew about John the Baptist's preaching and how he knew it. From Luke's remarks we know that his preaching was known in both Alexandria and Ephesus.

We may find it difficult to fathom spreading information or news via donkey or sailboat. It is not mentioned however, which parts of the history of salvation were missing from Apollo's understanding of the Gospel. We read shortly after this, that when Paul baptizes the twelve, they are immediately filled with the Holy Spirit. Without that experience, it is impossible to see how he could have played an important role in the early church.

Paul says that: “If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.” Paul does, however, give him credit for building up the church of Corinth. Paul states in his first Epistle: “I planted a seed, Apollos watered it, and God made it grow.” Apollos was one of three men with a brilliant mind in Acts, Paul and Luke being the other two.

It seems that Priscilla decided to take the great preacher aside and teach him what he did not know, to inform the uninformed. Aquila may have been too intimidated by Apollos to confront him about his teaching. Apollos took this to heart and was willing to learn what he did not know. This was an instance that showed he was willing to practice what he preached. He preached often about humility and the ability to consider other ideals, and so he was able to practice what he preached and accept that he did not know everything and learn from Priscilla, especially because she was a woman. “It was disgraceful for a man to be ignorant, when he may acquire wisdom, but it is no disgrace to acquire wisdom from the meanest person or thing.

One of the greatest downfalls that we see in history is that those who are very well versed in what they preach sitting in humility, and taking time to learn more about a topic, whether they were lacking or not. This ignorance is something that we see quite often. Those who are knowledgeable or held as a master teacher are usually unwilling to budge in their seat as the teacher, however, if the teacher does that and accepts that other may know a little more than we do, then we can also learn from others. It is important to note that humility and teachableness are the unfailing characteristics of sanctified learning, and those teachers and leaders who are prepared to learn from anyone, are sure to be rewarded with what their books have not taught them, from some who have studied in a place of education higher than what they have received. Apollos went from Ephesus to Achaia, particularly to Corinth, where he unintentionally, influenced the church to point that it almost caused a church split. Paul refers to this in his first Epistle with the following words: “For when one says, I follow Paul, and another says I follow Apollos, are you not mere men?” It pained Apollos to see the reaction to his ministry. However, by the end of the Epistle, Paul shares that Apollos was unwilling to return to Corinth. He was strongly urged to return, but he almost refused at this point to return, so he will return at his own will. When he was ready. It is mentioned by one commentator, that he remained in Crete until he heard that the divisions that had been created had been healed.

It is not mentioned whether Paul and Apollos actually met in person. However, Paul's urging Apollos to return may have been an indication of an in person meeting, or this may even have been down through letters. There also was is no indication that there was a sense of jealousy from Paul towards Apollos.

Many questions surround the encounter, with the ensuing dialogue and action, of Paul and the twelve disciples of John the Baptist. Some suppose that these were people who had come to Ephesus with Apollos, but there are no indications in the text that this is so. The similarity between their condition and Apollos', however, is undeniable. Paul's questions to them and their answers shed some light on what the lack in Apollos' understanding may have been. Their answer: "We have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit" can hardly be interpreted as if they didn't know about the existence of the Holy Spirit. Being disciples of John the Baptist, they must have been familiar with John's words: "I baptize you with water. But one more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire."⁴¹⁰ The most logical interpretation of their answer seems to be that they were unaware of the fact that the Holy Spirit had come down on believers in Jesus on the day of Pentecost. Any disciple of John must also have known that the Baptist had identified Jesus as "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"⁴¹¹ Having repented of their sins (which was the essence of John's baptism) and knowing that Jesus would take away their sin, they knew enough Gospel truth to have assurance of salvation. This does not necessarily mean that they knew about the cross and the empty tomb, and as we saw, they definitely did not know about Pentecost. These same areas of ignorance may have been the blank spots in Apollos' understanding. It is not clearly stated, we can almost assume that these people made a public confession of the surrender of their lives to the Lordship of Jesus Christ; otherwise, their baptism in the Name of Jesus Christ would have been inappropriate. Whatever the case may be the importance of baptism is very prominent in this message. This act of obedience to Jesus' command, as part of the Great Commission, is a necessary testimony subsequent to a personal surrender.

This does not mean that Paul's imposition of hand, after which these people experienced their personal Pentecost, is necessarily a paradigm for all who receive the Holy Spirit. Their receiving the gift of tongues and prophecy should not be interpreted as essential proof of the baptism in the Holy Spirit, as some people interpret it. This event marks the crossing of a specific threshold, as was

the case with the conversion of the Samaritans in chapter eight.⁴¹² The experience of these twelve people, as well as of Apollos, marked a transition from one dispensation to another: a major step in the history of salvation. It is not clear whether the incident about marked the beginning of Pauls' work in Ephesus or if it happened sometime later. It was often customary for Paul to begin his work in the synagogue and then later branch out. It shows us that the reception of his message was favorable because he preached in the synagogue for such a long period of time. Some, however, became obstinate or stubbornly refused to accept Paul's teaching. Paul refers to these individuals as stubborn or indurate. This disturbance of his teaching was so great that he relocated to "the lecture hall of Tyrannus," which moreover was probably a public lecture hall or room.

Now the city of Ephesus must have been the center of powerful demonic activity, very similar to Galilee in the early days of Jesus' ministry. This is mentioned by Matthew and Mark's Gospels, which record Jesus' reasons settling in that area: "Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali- to fulfill what was spoken by the Prophet Isaiah: 'Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, along the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles- the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of shadow of death a light dawned.'"

Indications of this demonic activity was evident through the practice of sorcery by a number of people, who could later confess their sins and burn their paraphernalia. There were also several exorcists who were practicing their trade in the city. This must have also been the reason that the Holy Spirit allowed Paul to perform such extraordinary miracles of healing, both physical and mental healing.

If Luke had not included the incidents of healing, we probably would have discounted the reports about the means that were used for healing as fold superstitions. Similar situations are recorded earlier, where God used Peter to draw public attention to the Gospel by endowing him with the remarkable gift of healing. Luke says: "As a result, people brought sick into the streets and laid them on bed and mats so that at least Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by. Crowds gathered also from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those tormented by evil spirits, and all of them were healed."

It is undeniable that God sometimes bestows gifts to certain individuals to tear down demonic strongholds.

Luke illustrates the effectiveness of Paul's preaching by citing an incident of some itinerant Jewish exorcists, seven sons of a certain priest named Sceva. The historian Josephus attests to the fact that exorcism was widely practiced at that time and that incantations were used that were attributed to King Solomon. However, this history of the incantations cannot be verified. The sons of Sceva decided to use words that Paul spoke when driving out demons speaks well of the apostle's ministry. When exorcisms are practiced there are always some who play tricks or are even charlatans to deceive people. Witch doctors are known to use such practices. However, this does not deny the reality of demons or even demonic possessions. Whether the sons of Sceva had spiritual powers or not cannot be determined, what can be determined is that their belief in the invocation of Jesus was not much stronger than the belief in their incantations. Since it is possible that they observed Paul use it, they felt themselves privy enough to also use it. The understanding that they were missing was that those who belong to Jesus, can only call upon the power of the name of Jesus Christ. If the exorcists were, in fact, fakes they must have been taken aback by the fact that the demon answered by acknowledging both Jesus and Paul.

A human being is never a match for a demon, unless clothed with the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Satan will have no difficulty devouring us just as a lion does his prey. If we are placed under the authority of Jesus, the enemy will respect the uniform that we wear. The evil spirit's question to these men: "Who are you?" is one of utter contempt. I once heard the story of a man who prayed: "Lord, let my name be known in hell!" When he was questioned about this prayer, he answered: "I know that God knows my name. But when I meet the devil, I don't want him to be able to say to me: 'Jesus I know, and I know about Paul, but who are you?'" We must make sure that our names are not only written in the Lamb's Book of Life but also in the registers of hell.

The Greek is very vivid in its description of the incident. The man possessed by the demon leaped on them (Robertson's Word Pictures in the New Testament reads: "spring upon like a panther), and "mastered" them. One of the most embarrassing things for a human being is to be forced to leave a house naked. The demoniac exposed their nakedness, not merely in the physical sense of the word.

Because of this incident, a widespread spiritual awakening occurred in the city. Spiritual revivals often occur after the powers of darkness are defeated in an area. It is said to be quite possible that the demon-possessed man was delivered through Paul's ministry, but Luke our author does not specify whether this is the case or not. It is implied that all the public destroyed their paraphernalia. The recognition of the lordship of Jesus draws a sharp line between light and darkness.

It seems interesting that the burning was done publicly; it was meant to be a testimony to the world. When we choose Jesus Christ, it is a heavily weighted statement if it is done publicly.

The documents that were kept and burnt, were grossly overpriced. It is recorded that the total value of these scrolls amount to fifty thousand drachmas, which is equivalent to about \$10,000 US dollars. Those who had possession of these documents would charge for the use of the incantations on them. It is also understood that "magical secrets lost their potency when they were made public." For many in Ephesus, converting to Christianity came with a devastating financial loss for them. Those who chose to convert understood this and still made the decision that would change their lives. After all: "What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?"

At the height of all this, Paul is "riding the crest" which was left by the apostle. Paul is wanting to go to Macedonia and Achaia, visit Jerusalem and eventually end up in Rome to begin new missionary work in Spain. The urge to push back his vision, is the Lord's doing or work.

The general understanding is that Paul wrote the first Epistle to the Corinthians while he was in Ephesus. He said "After I go to Macedonia, I will come to you- for I will go through Macedonia. Perhaps I will stay with you for a while, or even spend the winter; so that you can help me on my journey, where I go. I do not want to see you now, but only make a passing visit.; I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits. But I will stay on at Ephesus until Pentecost, because a great door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many who oppose me."

Before Paul could put any of his travel plans into effect, Satan launched an opposing factor. Paul's preaching changed in Ephesus. The people stopped

purchasing shrines of Artemis, which had hurt the pocketbooks of silversmiths in this city.

Artemis was the goddess of hunting and fertility. The temple in this city was dedicated to her name, this temple was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Demetrius addresses a meeting of fellow craftsmen stating that their livelihood is at stake, because of the apostles preaching on idolatry. He also points out that Artemis will lose her throne in Ephesus due to financial loss, exposition of fraud, and loss of deity. The craftsmen present their case not in lieu of their pocketbook, but in the spiritual form of defense of the divinity of their idol. (Keep in mind the first commandment here “I am the Lord your God, you shall have no other gods before me.”)

Ephesus’ affluence or the state of having a great deal of money or wealth, rested on the popularity of their idol goddess Artemis. Few people may have actually cared about Artemis, but they were concerned with how her fall could affect their market. The phrase “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians” was generated by the silversmiths. It did not take very long for this to sweep over the city, and cause an uproar or what is described as a riot. The frenzy caused by this caused confusion, with each group shouting different things at the other. No one truly understood what was going on, then a Jew was thrown into the mix. An individual named Alexander tried to calm the crowd, he was overlooked because he was a Jew. This riot which was led by Satan went on for almost two hours, after which the city clerk calms the mob and brings them to a more logical state of mind.

This magistrate, this city clerk reminds the crowd that the city of Ephesus is known for its worship of Artemis, and her temple. However, this demonstration or riot proved nothing as to who caused the disruption or accusations, but it did have those who were brought to the front arrested for “committing the crime,” the Roman authorities easily could have misinterpreted this as a revolt against the government.

We see an end to this chapter to be rather ironic, as it is written that the clerk dismissed the assembly. A rather odd way of telling the people to return to their homes, as there is nothing to see here, nor is there any reason for this outburst or riot.

The information given in the first three verses of chapter twenty is probably the scantiest in all of Luke's records. But, we can pull several details from Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians and from his Epistle to the Romans.

Luke states that Paul said goodbye to his disciples in Ephesus and then left for Macedonia. He had formed a plan, and he announced his plan as such "After I go through Macedonia, I will come to you-for I will be going through Macedonia." This in turn ended his stay in Ephesus, which was the longest stay recorded in the apostles' travels. During his travels Luke does not make mention of crossing the Aegan Sea. We know that he visited Troas and stayed there to preach, which he had not done when he landed there on his way to Philippi, after receiving the "Macedonian Call."

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary provides is with some details, gathered from Paul's writings: "From his Epistles we gather the following most interesting particulars: First, That, as might be expected from its position on the coast, ... he revisited Troas; and whereas on his former visit he appears to have done no missionary work there, he now went there expressly 'to preach Christ's Gospel,' and found 'a door opened unto him of the Lord' (Jesus) (2 Cor 2:12), which he entered so effectually as to lay the foundation of a church there (as appears from Acts 20:6-7, below).

Secondly, That he would have remained longer there, but for his uneasiness at the non-arrival of Titus, whom he had dispatched to Corinth to finish the collection for the poor saints at Jerusalem, which Paul wished to take with him (1 Cor 16:1-2; 2 Cor 8:6); but still more, that he might bring him word what effect his first Epistle to that church had produced.

Thirdly, That in this state of mind, afraid of something wrong, he 'took leave' of the brethren at Troas, and went from thence into Macedonia. No doubt it was the city of Philippi that he came to-landing at Neapolis, its seaport ... as appears by comparing 2 Cor 11:9, where 'Macedonia' is named, with Phil 4:15, where it appears that Philippi is meant. Here he found the brethren, whom he had left on his former visit in circumstances of such deep interest, a consolidated and thriving church, generous and warmly attached to their father in Christ, under the superintendence, probably, of our historian, 'the beloved physician.' ... All that is said by our historian of this Macedonian visit is contained in the second verse of this chapter,-that he 'went over those parts and gave them much Exhortation.'

Fourthly, Titus not having reached Philippi so soon as the apostle, 'his flesh had no rest, but he was troubled on every side: without were fightings, and within were fears' (2 Cor 7:5).

Fifthly, At length Titus arrived, to the joy of the apostle, the bearer of better tidings from Corinth than he had dared to expect (2 Cor 7:6,13), but chequered by painful intelligence of the efforts of a hostile party to undermine his apostolic reputation there (2 Cor 11, etc.)

Sixthly, Under the mixed feelings which this produced, he wrote (from Macedonia, and probably Philippi) his Second Epistle to the Corinthians ... dispatching Titus with it, and along with him two other unnamed deputies, expressly chosen to take up and bring their collection for the poor saints at Jerusalem, and to whom he bears the beautiful testimony, that they were 'the glory of Christ' (2 Cor 8:22-23).

Seventhly, It must have been at this time that he penetrated as far as to the confines of 'Illyricum,' lying along the shores of the Adriatic (Rom 15:19). He would naturally wish that his second Letter to the Corinthians should have some time to produce its proper effect before he revisited them, and this would appear a convenient opportunity for a northwestern circuit, which would enable him to pay a passing visit to the churches at Thessalonica and Beroea though of this we have no record."

The place where he spent three months was probably the city of Corinth. Luke speaks of "Greece" which is an unusual name given to a region. Whether the plot against his life was conceived in this city, or somewhere else, the apostle later return to Syria, is not all that clear. This threat made him decide not to board the ship to travel back over to Macedonia. Luke again introduces himself in the story in a typical inconspicuous way, by using the word we. Most names mentioned here appear in the apostles Epistles, sometimes with a slight spelling change. Luke's record of the travel is too concise to determine if all of them accompanied Paul to Jerusalem or whether some left in Asia.

We only know of one person who is immortalized because he fell asleep during the sermon. He is truly known for falling to his death and being resurrected. Truly we cannot doubt that he was dead when he hit the ground, but Paul says, "Don't be alarmed, He is alive!!" Which could be interpreted as "Do not start a death wail!! He lives!" Paul's throwing himself on the boy's body is reminiscent

of Elijah's resurrection of the dead son of a Shunammite woman. Luke mentions these stories to emphasize the miracle.

Luke mentions that in the room they were in there were many lamps. These lamps were oil lamps and not all necessarily lit at the same time. Some were used as backups, and only lit when the others ran out of oil. We would expect that when a sermon goes on for hours and hours that many would fall asleep before midnight.

We do not know why Paul made the trip from Troas to Assos overland rather than boarding the ship. The apostle was obviously in a hurry, wanting to arrive in Jerusalem in time for Pentecost. This, however, cannot be the reason, the distance from Troas to Assos was approximately 20 Roman miles (142 yards / 20 Roman miles= About 7.1 miles.)

The farewell in the Book of Acts tends to be the most moving sections. Paul presents the representatives of the churches that he establishes with a thorough apology of his doctrine and lifestyle.

Everything Paul says to the elders of the Ephesian Church leads up to the exhortation to them to "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." This is the heart of the apostle's charge to these men, setting his own life as an example to be followed. He said to them "Follow my example, I follow the example of Christ."

Paul mentions humility and this reveals that his concept of humility differs from ours. We tend to think that any mention of our own humility is self-defeating. Saying that we are humble is considered to be a demonstration of pride. Paul tells them that they should do nothing out of selfish ambition. Paul tells them that their attitude should be the same as Jesus', because humility presupposes an elevated position.

Paul's entire message on his travels is summed up in the words "repentance" and "faith". However, his preaching about "faith in the Lord Jesus" refers to the atonement of our sins by His death and our justification and sanctification before God through His resurrection.

With those ideas in mind, the apostle shares his conviction that his visit to Jerusalem will probably end in his death. It may seem contradictory that he seems to know what will happen to him, and at the same time, that he knows he will end up in prison with fatal results. We understand this to mean that Paul knows what the end would be, just not what exactly would happen.

Our translation of the Bible tells us that Paul was compelled by the Holy Spirit, which gives us an sense that the Holy Spirit urged Him to go to Jerusalem. Older translations say that he was “bound to the Holy Spirit.”

The Holy Spirit leading Paul’s life seems to be very complex. When the Lord commissioned Ananias to go and pray for Paul after his experience on the road to Damascus, he said that He was his instrument to carry my name to the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name. These words were undoubtedly passed on to Paul. He knew that to do the work that Jesus was leading him to do, that he would have to endure an extreme amount of suffering to carry out this plan. The grace of God in Paul’s life did not mean that the need for restitution had been cancelled.

The Spirit sent Paul a warning, but this was truly to test Paul’s willingness to make the ultimate sacrifice for the Lord. If people who give their life for country are heroes, how much more those who die in the service of the Lord Jesus Christ!

Paul considered his primary task not to preach, or even to interpret the Old Testament prophecies pertaining to the coming of Christ, but “of testifying to the Gospel of God’s grace.” He did all that to prove that, if one encounters Jesus, then their life will be transformed. This was the testament to which Paul was an example. To Timothy he would write: “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners-of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life.” Our preaching will only be effective in as much as it is backed up by our life.

Everything mentioned up to this point leads to Paul’s charge to these leaders, those who were responsible as the shepherds of the Lord’s flock. First, Paul declares himself to be innocent of their blood. He references God’s Word to

Ezekiel “When I say to a wicked man, “You will surely die,” and you do not warn him or speak out to dissuade him from his evil ways in order to save his life, that wicked man will die for his sin, and I will hold you accountable for his blood. But if you do warn the wicked man and he does not turn from his wickedness or from his evil ways, he will die for his sin; but you will have saved yourself. Again, when a righteous man turns from his righteousness and does evil, and I put a stumbling block before him, he will die. Since you did not warn him, he will die for his sins, and I will hold you accountable for his blood. But if you do warn the righteous man not to sin and he does not sin, he will surely live because he took the warning, and you will have saved your life.

The importance of this passage for us is that Paul clearly states that shepherding the Lord’s sheep must always begin with shepherding oneself. “Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers” begins at home. We cannot lead others into a deeper relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ than we have ourselves. The word “watch” also suggests outward dangers against which one must find protection.

The command “Be shepherds” suggests a response to the challenge of the call of God. These words are actually not found in the Greek text which reads in the Interlinear Transliterated Bible: “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which you Ghost the Holy hath made overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with blood his own.” TLB paraphrases this: “And now beware! Be sure that you feed and shepherd God’s flock-his church, purchased with his blood-for the Holy Spirit is holding you responsible as overseers.” The thrust of Paul’s charge is that a pastor should feed his congregation, which means that he should be faithful in teaching them the Word of God. Barnes’ Notes adds the following insight-full comment: “To take heed to ALL the flock the rich and the poor, the bond and the free, the old and the young. It is the duty of ministers to seek to promote the welfare of each individual of their charge not to pass by the poor because they are poor, and not to be afraid of the rich because they are rich. A shepherd regards the interest of the tenderest of the fold as much as the strongest; and a faithful minister will seek to advance the interest of all. To do this he should know all his people; should be acquainted, as far as possible, with their unique needs, character, and dangers, and should devote himself to their welfare as his first and main employment.”

In writing to Titus, Paul specifies the characteristics an elder of the church must demonstrate to qualify for his God-given task: “An elder must be blameless, the husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. Since an overseer is entrusted with God’s work, he must be blameless-not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. Rather he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. 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.”⁴³³ And Peter adds to this: “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: 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; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away. Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’ ”⁴³⁴ The mention of the bride price, “bought with His own blood,” should inspire each pastor with a holy awe when considering the often motley crowd the Holy Spirit has entrusted to his care. It is of the utmost importance that a pastor realizes that God considers His church to be the “pearl of great value” for which “He sold everything” in order to buy it.⁴³⁵ What the pastor sees with his own eyes is often far removed from the image John saw in Revelation of “a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.” It requires a lot of faith to be a good shepherd of God’s flock!

Paul’s vision of the future of the church in Ephesus was not optimistic. It is bitter irony that the church in which the apostle spent the most time to establish would, more than any other, become the prey of the enemy and be destroyed from the inside out. It was to this church that the glorified Lord would, only a few decades later, have the apostle John write: “Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.”

Paul may have received supernatural insight that prompted him to sound this warning. He must have been familiar with Jesus’ statement in the Sermon on

the Mount: “Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.”⁴³⁸ He may have recognized some of the telltale symptoms in the lives of those he addressed, knowing the fruit their lives would bear or not bear. Trying to remedy some of the dangers, he wrote to Timothy: “As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies. These promote controversies rather than God’s work—which is by faith. The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. Some have wandered away from these and turned to meaningless talk. They want to be teachers of the law, but they do not know what they are talking about or what they so confidently affirm.” Some of the people he embraced were wolves in sheep’s clothing. In this also the apostle would experience some of the agony his Lord felt when during the intimacy of the Last Supper He announced Judas’ betrayal. John writes: “After he had said this, Jesus was troubled in spirit and testified, ‘I tell you the truth, one of you is going to betray me.’”

Against the background of this apostolic warning, the following words acquire a deeper meaning: “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.” Even wolves in sheep’s clothing can become part of the flock and become sanctified members of the Lord’s body. Paul was himself the prime example of what God’s grace could do to transform a life.

Paul’s parting words: “I have not coveted anyone’s silver or gold or clothing” are reminiscent of Samuel’s farewell speech to the people of Israel. The apostle may have intentionally phrased his words as a quotation. The last of Israel’s judges is recorded as having said: “ ‘Here I stand. Testify against me in the presence of the LORD and his anointed. Whose ox have I taken? Whose donkey have I taken? Whom have I cheated? Whom have I oppressed? From whose hand have I accepted a bribe to make me shut my eyes? If I have done any of these, I will make it right.’ ‘You have not cheated or oppressed us,’ they replied. ‘You have not taken anything from anyone’s hand.’”

Samuel said to them, ‘The LORD is witness against you, and also his anointed is witness this day, that you have not found anything in my hand.’ ‘He is witness,’ they said.” Paul’s manual labor while sojourning in Ephesus did not only provide for his own support but also, at least in part, for the support of the church he had planted. Such a policy would be unheard of in modern times; as a matter of fact, it would be contrary to all church planting strategy. In our day, a church is considered healthy when it is self-supporting. And although a bi-vocational pastor is no unusual phenomenon, a church-supporting pastor certainly is. Paul’s lifestyle proves that the difference between a shepherd and a savage wolf can be easily determined when one considers a church’s budget.

But the apostle’s words go well beyond the matter of financial support; they give evidence of a loving pastoral heart. This is expressed in the quotation of the Lord Jesus’ unwritten statement: “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” Most commentators agree that these words are not found in any of the Gospels. They may, however, be a paraphrase of: “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” After all, giving of material things is only meaningful if it is motivated by love. In his Epistle to the Corinthians, the apostle wrote: “If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.”⁴⁴³ What Paul says here, therefore, means that it is more important to give love than to receive it.

The parting scene is one of the most moving moments in the whole Book of Acts. The whole group kneels down in the sand and while they pray, the tears flow freely. The apostle’s tears were probably the first to fall. Separation from loved ones is one of the most difficult experiences in life. As a missionary, who had to leave his children behind, I can testify to this. As a French proverb states: “Leaving is a kind of dying.”

From this prayer meeting on the beach at Miletus, Luke takes us to another prayer on a beach in Tyre, giving meticulously details of the ship’s journey. Luke’s description of the voyage is laced with nautical terms, indicating his familiarity with sailing. Their first ship took them along the coast from Miletus to Patara, where they transferred to another vessel, which made a beeline to Tyre. At Tyre the ship’s cargo had to be unloaded, which took one week, giving the apostle and his company ample time to visit with disciples, who urged Paul not to continue to Jerusalem because of the dangers the Holy Spirit revealed

that would await the apostle. As we noted earlier, this strange tension between the Spirit's personal guidance to Paul and what the same Spirit revealed to fellow believers, seems hard to reconcile.

No details are given of the one-day visit with the disciples at Ptolemais; Luke takes us straight to Caesarea. Some commentators believe that the 30-mile journey from Ptolemais to Caesarea was made over land. There the group stays with Philip, the deacon who had been part of the early church in Jerusalem and whose role in bringing the Gospel to Samaria and in the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch is described in earlier chapters. Luke calls him "Philip, the evangelist" to distinguish him from the apostle by the same name.

The fact that the Holy Spirit has given the gift of prophecy to women cannot be denied. Paul clearly speaks of the legitimacy of women prophesying under certain conditions. Whether this contradicts the injunction in his Corinthian Epistle is certainly open for debate. We read: "As in all the congregations of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church." Paul's point seems to be more that women should be careful not to cause public embarrassment to their husbands than to prevent them from praying and speaking edifying words during a church service. We should be careful not to impose values and customs that were relevant in one place and in one century upon other times and conditions without contextualizing the issue. If, for instance, it would be improper for a man to pray with a covered head in the church of Corinth, this would certainly not be the case in Jerusalem, where no male believer would think of praying in public without a hat.

Although Luke does not mention this specifically, there is a suggestion that Philip's daughters may have given a prophecy about Paul's upcoming imprisonment in Jerusalem, which would give relevance to the mention of the gift the Holy Spirit had given them. Agabus' prophecy is then a continuation of the warnings given to Paul and his fellow believers about the dark days that would ahead.

Paul and Agabus knew each other from the church in Antioch where Agabus had pronounced a prophecy about the coming famine. In the dramatization of

his prophecy, Agabus followed the tradition of Old Testament prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel who had been commanded by the Lord to give their prophecies as object lessons. The reaction of both the bystanders and Paul to Agabus' prophecy indicates how deep their mutual love was. They plead with Paul not to go to Jerusalem and Paul remonstrates that their response breaks his heart, but it does not change his resolve and the company concludes that it may, indeed, be the Lord's will that the apostle would go through the trials that were predicted.

One wonders why in this case, the future was not kept hidden from Paul and his friends as it usually is for most of us. The general guideline Jesus gives us is: "Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."⁴⁴⁹ The warnings were, obviously, not given for the purpose of generating worry, but to strengthen determination. Paul's attitude, evinced in the words: "I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus" is fundamentally different from Peter's statement: "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you."⁴⁵⁰ Not only did Paul understand what was ahead of him and Peter didn't, but Peter's utterance was based on carnal self-confidence, whilst Paul's confidence was in the grace of God that would allow him to testify to the truth of the Gospel before kings and governors. In Jerusalem, the group takes its abode in the home of a certain Mnason, who was originally from Cyprus. The believers receive Paul with love and respect. The next he met with the leadership of the mother church, of which James was evidently the first among equals.

Prayers of the People: Martha, Billy and family, Karissa, Uncle Dennis, Uncle David, Alexis, Patrick and family, Deb, those who are suffering from oppression, addiction, depression, lonely with no family for Christmas, those soldiers serving overseas and their families left behind, homeless and hungry, victims of war, a moral and upright government, those who suffer loss of any kind.

Heavenly Father, thank You for the Word of God which is profitable for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness. May we individually and collectively be on our spiritual guard, not only for our own

well-being but also for those that You have seen fit to place in our lives. Give grace and wisdom to all who are called to be elders or overseers in local churches today, and protect all believers who have fallen prey to false teachers or who have been exposed to doctrines of demons. Protect the hearts and minds of all Your children, and guide each one of us into the way of truth. In Jesus' name, AMEN.

“Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.”
(Acts 20:28)