

## Acts 20

After the uproar promoted by Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen had ceased, Paul called for the disciples and exhorted them, then he made plans to go into Macedonia. Luke records some of the emotions Paul felt at other points in his history, but made no comment of Paul's feelings here. It is Paul who records his feelings in his second letter to the Corinthians saying, "For we would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning our affliction which befell us in Asia, that we were weighed down beyond our power, inasmuch that we despaired of life..." (1 Cor. 1:8). Added to the problems in Ephesus, there was grave concern about brethren in Corinth. While Paul was at Ephesus he had been informed of certain irregularities in Corinth: ignoring a blatant case of fornication, quarreling about preachers, lawsuits with fellow-brethren, as well as a number of other serious problems. Paul had written the epistle called 1 Corinthians to them, expecting to correct other matters once he was there. The problems in Corinth (and elsewhere) weighed heavily upon his mind and so anxious was he to have word from them that, although finding an "open door" at Troas, he rushed on to Macedonia, hoping to find Titus with word from Corinth (2 Cor. 2:12f). Titus did meet him there and his news was mostly good but there was still some unrepentant brethren there, so from somewhere in Macedonia Paul wrote his second letter to Corinth; a letter whose tone is far more severe than the first. According to Paul, he had deferred his planned visit to them to allow time for penitence to take place (2 Cor. 1:23).

Paul did visit Corinth for although Luke did not mention Corinth specifically, he did mention that Paul stayed in Greece three months (Acts 20:3). While there he wrote the Roman church that grand epistle. The letter was apparently carried by Phoebe, servant of the church in Cenchrea (seaport for Corinth) and Gaius was his host (Rom. 16:1; 23). Gaius is mentioned as having been personally baptized by Paul in Corinth (1 Cor. 1:14).

Seven brethren are said to have traveled with Paul as far as Asia and some of the number continued on with him to Jerusalem (20:4). One of the seven (Trophimus) is later mentioned as being in Paul's company in Jerusalem and another (Aristarchus of Thessalonica) will travel with Paul to Rome when that journey is made from Judaea a couple of years later (21:29; 27:2). Perhaps all of these traveled on with Paul to Jerusalem and had resorted to him from various cities to Ephesus to carry the benevolence gentile churches had contributed for the poor Jerusalem

saints. Certain brethren did travel with Titus when he bore the second letter to Corinth and they are called the "messengers of the churches" (2 Cor. 8:23). Paul had instructed churches to raise funds for Jerusalem, as well as saying "whomsoever ye approve, them will I send with letters to carry our bounty to Jerusalem" (1 Cor. 16:3). At the time of the writing of the first letter to Corinth, Paul's plans were unsettled. There was the possibility he would go to Rome, but then again the possibility he would go to Jerusalem (1 Cor. 16:4). By the time he arrived in Corinth, however, his plans were concrete: he would accompany the churches' messengers as they carried benevolence for the relief of the saints. Paul planned to sail for Jerusalem from Corinth, but a plot against his life caused him to alter those plans (20:3). Thus he, and some of the others with him "backtracked", returning back to Macedonia from whence they had earlier come.

These seven brethren went ahead of Paul and waited for him at Troas. As he traveled back through Macedonia, the "we" passages commence again, indicating that Luke once more is Paul's companion. The "we" passages first appeared in 16:10 in Troas, then the narrative returns to the third person in Philippi. Since the "we" passages ceased in Philippi and then commence again there another 6-7 years later, the inference is that Luke had lived and worked in Philippi during that period of time, but of course this is simply an inference.

Acts 20:7-12 records Paul in Troas. "And upon the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul discoursed with them, intending to depart on the morrow; and prolonged his speech until midnight." This passage is significant because it shows that early Christians were faithfully following Christ's instructions "This do in remembrance of me" (Lk. 22:19). It teaches us that the day the disciples kept the supper was the week's first day and by necessary inference, teaches that the Supper is to be observed each week. Paul was hastening to get to Jerusalem; he likely did not expect to see these brethren again and he had many exhortations and admonitions for them. He prolonged his speech until midnight and a young man named Eutychus fell asleep and falling from the third story was "taken up dead" (20:9). Paul restored him to life and the brethren were comforted. The company then set sail for Asos but Paul determined to travel by land and meet them there. By land, the distance is 20 miles; by sea, 40. Just as Paul had appointed, they meet and their voyage continues on together from Asos. A couple of more days of sailing brought them to Miletus from whence Paul sent for the elders of the Ephesian church that he might greet them one last time.

Paul's address to them occupies the remainder of the chapter. Interestingly enough, these elders are identified by Paul by two other terms; he sends for the elders, calls them bishops (overseers) and implies they were shepherds (Acts 20:17; 28). There are three Greek words which are anglicized and there are the three English equivalents of these terms: "presbyters" (elders); "bishops" (overseers); and "shepherds" (pastors). The words "elders", "overseers" and "shepherds" do not mean the same but they are terms which describe the same man. These three words describe those men from three different vantage points. They are "elders" because they are mature in the faith; they are "overseers" because they are over the flock of God and they are "shepherds" because it is their responsibility to "feed" the flock of God. God's plan was that his church have elders in every church and throughout Paul's labors, he taught and saw that men were appointed to such position in the various churches (14:23). He set forth the needed qualifications for these men in his letters to two young preachers, (1 Tim. 3; Titus 1). The terms "bishop" and "pastor" are scriptural terms but in today's world they are used to describe unscriptural concepts. Men today distinguish between "elders" and "bishops"; no such distinction was made in the first century church. Some identify their preacher as "pastor" (a position he might possibly occupy, along with a plurality of other men who also are elders) but the concept of a "one-man pastor system" is in conflict with the teachings of the New Testament.

Paul reminded these brethren of his labors there with them and how he had served the Lord with lowliness of mind, tears and the plots that came from the conniving minds of the Jews (20:19). He reminds them that nothing of profit was held back from them. His labors were public and from house to house. He testified to both Jews and Greeks, repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ (20:20f.).

Paul said "and now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem". Everywhere Paul traveled on this journey the Holy Spirit warned that bonds and afflictions waited for him there (20:22f). "Bound in the spirit" signified that Paul felt already he was in chains. Some feel that Paul was disobedient to God in going to Jerusalem. Paul was not perfect, but is difficult for me to believe he was in rebellion to God when he went to Jerusalem. Jesus knew he would be crucified in Jerusalem yet he went anyway. I hardly see how Paul could later say, "I am ready not only to be bound in Jerusalem but also to die there for the name of the Lord" if he knew he was in rebellion to the Lord's instructions (21:13). I do not know WHY Paul felt he must go to Jerusalem in face of the Holy Spirit's warnings that bounds and afflictions waited for him there, but am

persuaded that although he KNEW he would be bound, there was still reason for him to go.

Paul reminded the elders "I declared unto you the whole counsel of God." He urged the elders to take heed both to themselves and the flock, which flock was not theirs but God's! They were to watch because grievous wolves would enter in and injure God's church.

Paul commends them to God and to the word of his grace. He reminded them he had supported himself among them (a worthy and noble example to all we who preach). He was conscious of the power of example saying he had given to the elders (and the church) an example helping the weak and remembering Christ's words "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (20:35).

Such a solemn, serious charges was certain to touch the hearts of these good men. "They all wept sore and fell on Paul's neck and kissed him, sorrowing most of all for the word which he had spoken that they should behold his face no more" (20:37f.).

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