

Thoughts on Acts Twenty

After the uproar at Ephesus, "Paul sent for the disciples, and when he had exhorted them and taken his leave of them, he left to go to Macedonia" (Acts 20:1). The interesting point here is the calling of the disciples for a final "exhortation" before his departure. Compare this to the calling of elders from Miletus in verse 17. The first is probably an encouragement to keep the faith and work to spread the Gospel. The second explains what he expects to happen to himself at Jerusalem and, as time passes, the Elders of the church. Paul's prophetic words to the elders are recalled in Jesus' last words to the church (Revelation 2:4-5). These are examples for us today as we move about the world, encouraging brethren, explaining our actions and expectations, and warning of potential threats to gospel faith.

Brethren often come to this chapter to use verse seven to show that we engage in communion, taking the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week. Just as Luke spends little time on the journey from Ephesus to Corinth and back to Troas, we spend little to no time thinking of the agony in Paul's heart (between verses 1 and 2) as he waits in Macedonia. Because of divisions and sins reported in the church at Corinth, Paul sent Timothy to them. Paul said, *"For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, and he will remind you of my ways which are in Christ, just as I teach everywhere in every church"* (1 Corinthians 4:17). Titus was to bring word of how they reacted to Paul's letter and Timothy's exhortations, but he was delayed in returning to Paul. Paul became more concerned with time. He wrote, *"Now when I came to Troas for the gospel of Christ and when a door was opened for me in the Lord, I had no rest for my spirit, not finding Titus my brother; but taking my leave of them, I went on to Macedonia"* (2 Corinthians 2:12-13). The stoning in Lystra or the riot in Ephesus had not hurt like the news of the sins in the church at Corinth. When Paul finally received Titus's reports, the richness of their repentance brought joy to Him as he heard Titus' report (2 Corinthians 7:13-14). He then continued visiting the churches and arrived at Corinth.

After spending three months in Corinth, it seems Paul intended to go directly back to Antioch of Syria (Acts 20:3). From the primary discussion in chapter twenty, it also appears that the Holy Spirit wanted some crucial lessons passed on to the Ephesian elders, and subsequently, to us. So, once more, Paul's plans were changed by the Spirit, and he retraced his steps through Macedonia to Ephesus. On the way, Paul and his companions decided to spend time in Troas and met with the brethren during their appointed meeting time.

There are two points to note in verse 7. One, they assembled, came together, gathered, or collected together on the first day. And two, they broke bread in this assembly as in Acts 2:42. This is the first time a worship assembly is mentioned along with the First Day. *"And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them"* (Acts 20:7 KJV). The verse also places the Lord's Supper as part of the assembly. The third part of the assembly was the *dialogomai*, or reasoning talk, presented by Paul. Today we refer to that kind of speaking as a sermon. The sermon, and the assembly, lasted until midnight. After Paul assured everyone that Eutychus was alive and well, he went up and broke bread and ate a meal, as in Acts 2:46. The two "breaking bread" events are different as one is in the assembly, and the other is out of the assembly. One is the Lord's Supper, and one is a meal to refresh the body.

On his way back to Jerusalem, Paul calls the Ephesian elders and tells them what will happen to him and them in the future. Acknowledging the Holy Spirit's involvement, he tells them, *"Bound by the*

Spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me" (Acts 20:22-23). Then, knowing he will never see them again, he reminds them of their duties. First is to watch themselves, then watch after the saints in their care. *"Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood"* (Acts 20:28). Paul, with the Holy Spirit, knew what would take place after he departed from them. False teachers, whether Judaizers or heathens such as the Gnostics, would destroy the members' faith. The first duty of the elders is to regard, or monitor, their own behavior. They are to be "examples to the flock." (1 Pet. 5:3.) They must take care to be worthy examples. The second duty is to look after the flock. The church is "the flock," as Jesus is the "Good Shepherd" (John 10:11).

Paul prayed for the elders. Do we pray for ours?