

The Historical Stories of the Acts of the Apostles

Lesson 13 Acts 20:4 – Acts 21:18

Learning of the plot to kill him on the ship, Paul decides to travel by land back to Macedonia.

To Troas after Passover

Acts 20:⁴And he was accompanied by Sopater of Berea, *the son* of Pyrrhus; and by Aristarchus and Secundus of the Thessalonians; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy; and Tychicus and Trophimus of Asia. ⁵But these had gone on ahead and were waiting for us at Troas. ⁶And we sailed from Philippi after the days of Unleavened Bread, and came to them at Troas within five days; and there we stayed seven days. ⁷And on the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul *began* talking to them, intending to depart the next day, and he prolonged his message until midnight. ⁸And there were many lamps in the upper room where we were gathered together.

Once in Macedonia the team, which includes Sopater, Aristarchus, Gaius, Secundus, Timothy, Tychicus and Trophimus, go ahead of Paul and Luke and to Troas. A year has passed since Paul had hoped to stay in Ephesus through Pentecost. Now he wants to arrive in Jerusalem by the next Pentecost, and he will. Except for a few days throughout the next years, Luke is with him and will remain with him until he reaches Rome.

Paul stays in Philippi through the Passover and until the feast of unleavened bread is over. It is AD 58 in March or April when Paul finally steps on the ship to sail to Troas. The boat trip usually takes two days, but if the winds do not cooperate, the ship can be stranded for days in the water. It takes just under five days to sail the distance and once they arrive at Troas, they remain in the city for seven days. When Sunday arrives, Paul gathers them all together and begins to preach and teach. The lesson continues for hours, lasting until midnight.

Paul raises Eutychus from the dead

Acts 20:⁹And there was a certain young man named Eutychus sitting on the window sill, sinking into a deep sleep; and as Paul kept on talking, he was overcome by sleep and fell down from the third floor, and was picked up dead. ¹⁰But Paul went down and fell upon him and after embracing him, he said, "Do not be troubled, for his life is in him." ¹¹And when he had gone *back* up, and had broken the bread and eaten, he talked with them a long while, until daybreak, and so departed. ¹²And they took away the boy alive, and were greatly comforted.

Luke sets up the scenario for this miracle with Paul's laborious lecture. The young boy cannot stay awake and falls to his death out the window. Raising the boy from the dead, Paul sends him off and then continues to teach until sunrise.

Assos, Mitylene, Samos, and Miletus on the rush to Jerusalem

Acts 20:¹³ But we, going ahead to the ship, set sail for Assos, intending from there to take Paul on board; for thus he had arranged it, intending himself to go by land.

¹⁴ And when he met us at Assos, we took him on board and came to Mitylene. ¹⁵ And sailing from there, we arrived the following day opposite Chios; and the next day we crossed over to Samos; and the day following we came to Miletus. ¹⁶ For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus in order that he might not have to spend time in Asia; for he was hurrying to be in Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost.

It is about 70 miles from Troas to Assos by water and Paul sends the team, including Luke, ahead by boat. Paul goes around the bay to Assos by land, extending his trip by another 100 miles. In Assos, Paul joins the team and boards a ship to go to the city of Mitylene on the island of Lesbos. From Mitylene, the team touches the towns of Chios, Samos, and Miletus. Before loading the ship in Miletus, Paul calls a meeting, asking the elders of the church in Ephesus to come and speak with him.

Paul calls a meeting in Miletus

Acts 20:¹⁷ And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church. ¹⁸ And when they had come to him, he said to them, "You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time,

¹⁹ serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews; ²⁰ how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house, ²¹ solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. ²² And now, behold, bound in spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, ²³ except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me.

²⁴ "But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, in order that I may finish my course, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God. ²⁵ And now, behold, I know that all of you, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, will see my face no more.

²⁶ "Therefore I testify to you this day, that I am innocent of the blood of all men.

²⁷ "For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God. ²⁸ "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.

²⁹ "I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; ³⁰ and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. ³¹ "Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears. ³² "And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build *you* up and to give *you* the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. ³³ "I have coveted no one's silver or gold or clothes. ³⁴ "You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my *own* needs and to the men who were with me. ³⁵ "In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, '**It is more blessed to give than to receive.**' "

Ephesus is 30 miles away, so the elders from the Ephesian church will not be with Paul until his third day in Miletus at the earliest.

In this passage, Luke uses the term “elders” to mean the leadership of the church, both official and volunteer. Paul had first met the people of Ephesus four to five years before in AD 53. It is now AD 58 and Paul is saying his final words to the leadership of that church. Just the year before, the Ephesians had wanted to kill Paul and he left the city before the Festival of Artemis was completed. He had hoped to gain a huge harvest at the festival, but that was not the case.

Paul was a man of great emotions, crying often and not afraid to speak about it. He was also humble, even though he was a man of great intellect and power. He had suffered many trials for the cause of Christ up to that point and would face many more trials in his future. Every house in Ephesus knew the gospel message from the lips of Paul because he had knocked on each door. At this time, Paul is expressing his personal fear for the future in Ephesus. Once Paul arrives in Rome, he will write two letters from prison expressing his desire to return to this area.¹⁸¹

Paul warns that the wolves will bring trouble to Ephesus after his departure. He is speaking of his departure from Miletus to go to Jerusalem, not his death. When Paul arrives in Rome, news will come from the lips of Epaphras about the trouble in Colossae. Later, while in prison, Paul will write to Timothy in Ephesus warning him against those who have shipwrecked their faith.¹⁸² John will also tell of the false apostles in Ephesus.¹⁸³

Paul prays and the elders weep

Acts 20:³⁶And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. ³⁷And they *began* to weep aloud and embraced Paul, and repeatedly kissed him, ³⁸grieving especially over the word which he had spoken, that they should see his face no more. And they were accompanying him to the ship.

The church leaders are emotionally moved by Paul’s words and his goodbyes. They do not want him to leave, so they follow him to the ship.

From Miletus to Tyre and his first warning not to go to Jerusalem

Acts 21:¹And when it came about that we had parted from them and had set sail, we ran a straight course to Cos and the next day to Rhodes and from there to Patara; ²and having found a ship crossing over to Phoenicia, we went aboard and set sail. ³And when we had come in sight of Cyprus, leaving it on the left, we kept sailing to Syria and landed at Tyre; for there the ship was to unload its cargo. ⁴And after looking up the disciples, we stayed there seven days; and they kept telling Paul through the Spirit not to set foot in Jerusalem. ⁵And when it came about that our days there were ended, we departed and started on our journey, while they all, with wives and children, escorted us until we *were* out of the city. And after kneeling

¹⁸¹ Philipians 2:24; Philemon 1:22

¹⁸² 1 Timothy 1:20

¹⁸³ Revelation 2:2

down on the beach and praying, we said farewell to one another. ⁶Then we went on board the ship, and they returned home again.

From Miletus, the ship sails about forty miles south to Cos. It was the birthplace of Hippocrates who founded his school of medicine there, revolutionizing medicine in ancient Greece. ¹⁸⁴

The next day they sailed to Rhodes, an island named after its beautiful roses. The coliseum of Rhodes, one of the seven ancient wonders of the world, was destroyed by an earthquake in 226 BC after standing for only 56 years. The debris remained on the ground for over 800 years. Paul would have seen the remains of the destruction that day.

Patara is a city on the mainland of Asia, not far from Lycia. An oracle of Apollo, a temple where a priest delivered the message of Apollo to the people, was once there. It had been destroyed long before Paul's day. The city had become a Christian city early, most likely because of Paul's efforts, and it was a regular stop for ships on their trips east and west.

The trip to Tyre from Patara is the longest leg of the journey, almost 500 miles. In Tyre the ship is unloaded and the team departs. In the city, Paul and the team enjoy the company of the believers, and it is at this time that Paul receives his first warning not to go to Jerusalem. The warnings do not change Paul's mind. Down at the coast, the team boards another ship headed to Ptolemais.

From Tyre to Ptolemais and Caesarea and his second warning not to go to Jerusalem

Acts 21:⁷And when we had finished the voyage from Tyre, we arrived at Ptolemais; and after greeting the brethren, we stayed with them for a day. ⁸And on the next day we departed and came to Caesarea; and entering the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, we stayed with him. ⁹Now this man had four virgin daughters who were prophetesses. ¹⁰And as we were staying there for some days, a certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. ¹¹And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands, and said, "This is what the Holy Spirit says: 'In this way the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.' " ¹²And when we had heard this, we as well as the local residents *began* begging him not to go up to Jerusalem. ¹³Then Paul answered, "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." ¹⁴And since he would not be persuaded, we fell silent, remarking, "The will of the Lord be done!"

Ptolemais was about 30 miles south of Tyre and, it was the best harbor on the seashore, inset between the mountains. Since it was never controlled by Israel, it has always been considered part of the Palestinian land. Ptolemy's road led from Ptolemais to Caesarea, about 40 miles south. Paul and the team travel by land to Caesarea.

¹⁸⁴ Hippocrates was born in 460 BC

In Caesarea, the team stays with Phillip the evangelist, once known as one of the seven selected to care for the Greek widows, who did not have food to eat. Their duties as servants of the tables lasted fewer than 18 months when Stephen stirred such a ruckus that Paul, who was then known as Saul, began the first great Christian persecution.

Philip had four daughters who were called prophetesses. The word does not mean that they told the future; it means that they spoke the truth of the Scriptures, just as their father did. What a blessing it must have been to have four, pure, unmarried daughters in the home who were devoted to the knowledge of the Scripture.

Agabus is a preacher of the gospel too. He is not a teller of the future as some imagine. He has just come from Jerusalem and knows the sentiment of the city officials towards Paul. Nevertheless, Agabus claims that the Holy Spirit has revealed Paul's fate if he continues his journey into Jerusalem. The team fears for Paul's life. Paul dismisses the threat and the team assumes it to be the will of the Lord to go on to Jerusalem. Agabus' warning will come true. Paul will be bound in Jerusalem and it will take five years until he is released before being rebound and martyred.

From Caesarea to Jerusalem

Acts 21:¹⁵ And after these days we got ready and started on our way up to Jerusalem. ¹⁶ And *some* of the disciples from Caesarea also came with us, taking us to Mnason of Cyprus, a disciple of long standing with whom we were to lodge. ¹⁷ And when we had come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. ¹⁸ And now the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present.

Jerusalem is 70 miles from Caesarea, a three day's journey at least. The team is joined by believers from Caesarea and Mnason of Cyprus. The Codex Bezae indicates that the team is to stay with Mnason in his home somewhere along the road to Jerusalem. Because Luke describes Mnason as a long-standing disciple, most commentators infer that he is one of the original believers from the Day of Pentecost in Jerusalem.

Finally in Jerusalem, Paul is welcomed into the city with open arms by the believers. On the second day, Paul meets with James, the pastor of the church in Jerusalem, and there he greets them all, including the leaders of the Judaizers.

Third Missionary Journey (Complete)			
Departure	Arrival	Miles	Via
Antioch	Through Galatia & Phrygia to Ephesus	1150	land
Ephesus	Philippi	300	land
Philippi	Corinth	450	land
Corinth	Philippi	450	land
Philippi	Troas	150	water
Troas to	Assos	30	land
Assos	Mitylene	35	land
Mitylene	Samos	50	land
Samos	Miletus	50	land
Miletus	Cos	15	water
Cos	Rhodes	35	water
Rhodes	Patara	35	water
Patara	Tyre	500	water
Tyre	Ptolemais	30	land
Ptolemais	Caesarea	40	land
Caesarea	Jerusalem	70	land
Total		3390	