

# Session #18: Acts, Chapter 20:1-21:14

Compiled and written by Theresa Lisiecki

Chapter 20 is somewhat a transitional chapter. Paul has taken his cue from the silversmiths that it is time for him to go and after giving the disciples their final word of encouragement St. Paul leaves Ephesus. Chapter 20 has mainly three elements: First the story of Eutychus; secondly Paul's travel log and finally his farewell address. Note that the "we" passages return meaning that somewhere along the travels St. Luke rejoins the troop.

## **Journey to Macedonia and Greece 20:1-6**

His mission into Macedonia is simply to meet and strengthen the Church communities already founded. We can read in 2 Corinthians 2:12-13 a little about this trip: *When I came to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ, a door was opened for me in the Lord; but my mind could not rest because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I took leave of them and went on to Macedonia.* Timewise this is probably the summer of 57 AD.

### **20:2 giving them much encouragement**

This is not only in his physical presence and word but scholars believe Paul wrote his Second Letter to the Corinthians and his Letter to the Romans at this time. The Letter to the Romans is unique in that Paul is writing to a community he did not found and has not met.

### **20:3 a plot**

We know nothing more of this plot and can only assume that like the others the Jews were seeking a way to silence Paul.

### **... 20:4 Sopater Aristarchus. Secundus Gaius Timothy Tychicus and Trophimus**

Here we have a delegation of seven men who will travel with St. Paul to Jerusalem. Other than Timothy, little is known of these men. It is believed that they were designated delegates of the different Churches bringing monies collected by their communities for the poor in Jerusalem. Who are these men:

- Sopater: one scholar suggests he is a Jewish Christian who probably became a disciple when St. Paul was preaching and teaching in Beroea.
- Aristarchus: a Macedonian who was one of the two grabbed by the silversmith riot in Ephesus (19:29)
- Secundus: Scholars believe this is a nickname because in Latin his name translates to "Second".
- Gaius: Also one of the two who was seized by the mob in Ephesus (19:29)
- Timothy: As we learned in Acts chapter 16, he is a Christian Jew with a Jewish mother and a Greek father who became a part of St. Paul's group at Lystra during the second missionary trip. St. Paul will later write two letters to him.
- Tychicus: St. Paul will mention him often in his letters. (Ephesians 6:21, Colossians 4:7, Timothy 4:12, Titus 3:12)
- Trophimus: Another we know nothing about except he will be mentioned in 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 4:20

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**20:5 *waiting for us*** Here we have that shift again from third person observer to first person participant. Scholars believe that Luke, who had stayed behind in Philippi met up with Paul and sailed with him to Troas.

**20:6 *days of unleavened bread*** These are the days of Passover. We can clearly see here Paul's emotional and physical ties to Judaism are very loose. Orthodox Jewish males are required by Jewish law to be in Jerusalem for the Passover if humanly possible. Paul obviously has made no effort and we can see in that that he feels no longer ties to the Old Covenant.

### **Eutychus Restored to Life 20:7-12**

Scholars look for passages like this to see the history behind the story. While we might be entertained (and even relate thinking of long, boring homilies) by the thought of a young man falling asleep during St. Paul's preaching, the passage gives us a glimpse into those first Eucharistic celebrations. This is the only passage we will hear of St. Paul bringing someone back from the dead.

**20:7 *first day of the week*** The first day of the week was the day after the Jewish Sabbath. The Sabbath ends on Saturday so this celebration, this gathering is happening on Sunday. This is the first time we are hearing that the community gathered on Sundays. The first Eucharistic (Mass) gatherings.

***prolonged his speech until midnight*** And we think some of our clergy talk to long! St. Paul preaches so long most likely because he knows he will never see them again.

**20:9 *Eutychus fell from the third story*** This poor young man. Sitting in the window seal and falls asleep due to the lateness of the hour and the heat from the candles and bodies. His sleep is so deep that he falls out the window! This is the only account of Paul bringing someone back from the dead. And Eutychus was aptly named for his name in Greek means "Lucky". One scholar points out that this event takes place between Passover (Death and Resurrection of Jesus) and Pentecost. They suggest that St. Luke wants to draw our attention once again to the Resurrection of Jesus, to new life in Jesus.

**20:10 *threw himself upon him*** We can get the sense from this scene that St. Paul was so distraught at what he may have caused that he acts in emotion. But we can also see in this act a mirror to the Old Testament when Elijah throws himself on the son of the widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17:21), and that of Elisha (2 Kings 4:34) when the son of the Shunammite woman is restored to life in a similar way. We can also see St. Luke once again showing the greatness that is in St. Peter is also in St. Paul. St. Peter restores the young girl. Tabitha in chapter 9:40 of Acts. St. Luke is wanting us to see St. Paul as not just a great teacher but also as a healer and prophet.

**20:11 *had broken bread*** We see in this passage the sequence to their celebration that we following to this day. First the Liturgy of the Word (although our preaching does not go on as long) followed by the breaking of the bread or the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

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Christ comes as both Word and Sacrament. St. Justin writing in the first century talks of those early Eucharistic celebrations:

*On Sunday we have a common assembly of all our members, whether they live in the city or the outlying districts. The recollections of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as there is time. When the reader has finished, the president of the assembly speaks to us; he urges everyone to imitate the examples of virtue we have heard in the readings. Then we all stand up together and pray. On the conclusion of our prayer, bread and wine and water are brought forward. The president offers prayers and gives thanks to the best of his ability, and the people give assent by saying, "Amen". The Eucharist is distributed, everyone present communicates, and the deacons take it to those who are absent.*

### **Journey to Miletus 20:13-16**

Paul and his companions now move down the chain of islands off the Aegean off the coast of Asia Minor. The final stop, at Miletus, which is 30 miles from Ephesus

#### **20:13 *intending himself to go by land***

St. Paul sends his companions by sea while he himself walks. The sea journey is 30 miles, the journey by land 20 miles. Why separate? One author suggests that St. Paul knows that once he gets to Jerusalem he will face a great trial so he takes this opportunity for private prayer.

#### **20:15 *we sailed away***

Interesting passage. May give a bit of insight into St. Luke, the master of details.

#### **20:16 *Pentecost***

What is for the Catholic Church the feast of the coming of the Holy Spirit celebrated 50 days after Easter, began for the Jews as a "harvest festival" celebrated 50 days after Passover. Pentecost for the Jew is celebrated by coming to the Temple to dedicate the first loaves of bread made from the spring wheat harvest. Why was St. Paul desiring to arrive at this time? (Read Romans 15:25-28). The religious symbolism of presenting the first harvest of the riches given from the outlying Christian communities would send a great message. Also, a great number of Christian Jews would be gathered in Jerusalem at this time giving St. Paul a great opportunity to connect.

### **Paul's Farewell Speech at Miletus 20:17-38**

What we read here is a brief summary of Paul's farewell speech to the leaders of the Christian Church in Ephesus. He reminds them of his own conduct and warns them of the possible dangers ahead. He urges them to be humble, persevering and bold (18-21), giving their hands to hard word and their hearts to the less fortunate (34-35). Paul also warns them to protect the flock from heresy and those preaching it. (28-30). As the speech ends we see that Paul has brought everyone to tears because of their sadness to lose him as well as his own sadness to leave. This is St. Paul's third address in Acts, the first being to the Jews in Antioch (13:16-52) and to the pagans in Athens (17:22-34). This speech is divided into two parts: first is a brief

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summary of his life in Ephesus (verses 18-27), with the second part a challenge to lead for the elders gathered (28-35).

**20:18** *I lived among you*

One of the many attributes of St. Paul was that he understood that he gave witness to God not just in the words he offered, or the miracles granted through him but by the way he lived his life. St. Paul never seems to be afraid to say – “Look at how I lived! I lived as Christ would want me to live.” Can we say that?

**20:23** *testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me*



It doesn't take a rocket scientist to know that Paul has become a wanted man. He understands how the “system” works for himself was the head of such a pursuit to clean out these members of “the Way” when Stephen was stoned.

**20:24:** *I do not account my life of any value*

In his own conversion process Paul has come to the point that he has given himself completely over to the Lord and sees his life as having no meaning or importance other than that of doing what God wants him to do. “*He sees holiness as a constant uninterrupted striving towards his encounter with the Lord*” (The Navarre Bible)

**20:25** *see my face no more*

Paul is telling them that he will not be returning to this area. Either by death or his need to spread the gospel elsewhere, this is the last time he plans to be with them.

**20:26** *innocent of the blood of you all*

This is a point of pride with Paul. He believes that he has done such an outstanding job, leaving no stone unturned, that he can walk away knowing they have all they need to carry on without issue if they heed what he taught.

**20:28** *Holy Spirit made you guardians*

“Guardians” can also be translated to mean “overseers”. Just who did St. Paul call from Ephesus to meet him here in Miletus? The leaders of the Church in Ephesus whom today we would understand or see as the Bishops and lead clergy of the community. These were the men who “shepherd” the people in Ephesus.

***Obtained with his blood***

Paul is identifying the Church as belonging

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to Christ. That through blood of the Cross, Jesus “bought” the life of the Church and imbued it with His divine power of the Spirit

### **20:29 fierce wolves**

An apt image Paul uses to describe the false

Teachers that will eventually descend upon Ephesus and other communities. (1 Timothy 1:3-7; Revelation 2:2)

### **20:30 speaking perverse things**

We would be wise to heed the words of St.

Paul for ourselves. It was not just in the first century but in very century that there were those who chose their own ego and wealth over the truth of God, choosing to preach and teach a false message so as to glorify themselves rather than God. Those individual exist to this day which is why we would be wise to be discerning over who we give our authority over to; and we should have high standards for our Bishops, priests, deacons and lay professionals. Just because they stand in the Church does not mean they have the Church’s best interest at heart.

### **20:31 three years**

Remember, St. Paul preached in the synagogue for

several months before moving to the Hall of Tyrannus and then remained in Ephesus from that point for over two years.

### **With tears**

The meaning is not clear here whether Paul is speaking of

his great caring for the people that it brought him to tears or of his willingness to challenge those who sought his council with the truth, even if it hurt to hear it bringing them to tears.

### **20:34 these hands ministered**

St. Paul was a tent maker. Where ever he

went St. Paul would not only teach and preach but set himself up as a repairer and maker of Tents, thus supplying himself for his own needs. St. Paul refused stipends from the local Churches he served. He wanted the message and teachings he delivered to come without cost to the local people and in the end it freed him from any possible corruption.

### **20:35 it is more blessed to give than to receive.**

This is a very famous

statement of Jesus’ which, interesting, was not recorded in any of the four gospels. Rather it was passed down by the apostles and disciples in the form of oral tradition. This moment reminds us that there was much that Jesus said and did that was not recorded not for lack of desire but due to a variety of limitations and choices.

### **20:36 he knelt down**

While there are many postures one can take in

prayer kneeling expresses the inner desire to be submissive to the Lord, as a servant to his/her master.

### **Arrival In Tyre 21:1-6**

We have now come to our third “we” section of Acts where St. Luke once again joins the delegation accompanying St. Paul to Jerusalem. This final part of the trip, from Patara to Tyre is over 400 miles. There is little joy in these final days of returning home. Just as Jesus knew what awaited him, St. Paul understands that this trip to Jerusalem will be his last here on earth. But St. Paul does not fear death. To quote from his own words, written to Philippians (1:21): *For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.*”

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**21:3 Tyre** St. Paul seeks the comforts of the local Christian community most lively begun with the persecution of Christians in Jerusalem having left for safer places (Acts 11)

**21:4 sought out the disciples** The Christian community has grown and in these years has established itself well enough that Paul and his entourage are able to find shelter in their time of need.

**they told Paul not to go** The community, in prayer tells St. Paul not to continue his plans to travel to Jerusalem. They too are aware that entering that holy city could mean his death. Why does St. Paul feel compelled to go? For two reasons:

1. Paul has to go to Jerusalem because the Holy Spirit compels him to go and Paul will not disobey God.
2. Paul was delivering the offering the Gentile churches of Greece and Asia Minor had collected for the poor in Jerusalem.

**21:5 kneeling down on the beach** While there are a variety of different structured opportunities to prayer, we should know that prayer, the lifting of our hearts and wills to God, can happen anywhere and at any time. St. Paul himself says: *Pray without ceasing.* (1 Thessalonians 5:17)

### Arrival at Ptolemais and Casearea 21:7-14

**21:8 Philip the evangelist** Now here is a name we haven't encountered in a while. Remember back to Acts chapter 6? Philip was one of the seven who were ordained for service in verses 5-6. Later we read in chapter 8:4-25 that left for Samaria to engage in missionary work there and along the coast of Judea (8:26-40). We can see from this passage that he must have settled in Caesarea.

**21:10 a prophet named Agabus** Again, someone we have meet in an earlier chapter: Acts 11:28 who foretold of the famine. Little is known of the man other than what is written in here in Acts. Here he prepares Paul by foretelling of his arrest once he comes into Jerusalem

**21:11 he took Paul's belt** The saying that actions can speak louder than words is one that the prophets of the Old Testament took literally. (For an example read Isaiah 20:1-4; Jeremiah 13:1-11 and Ezekiel 4:1-8) Here we have Agabus showing Paul bound, hand and foot, at the mercy of the Jews in Jerusalem.

**21:13 but even to die** Paul is prepared. He knows that suffering awaits him and Paul has prepared himself to live through whatever awaits him. Not even the affection and pleading of his companions can stop him from this overpowering sense of personal mission to go to Jerusalem.

**21:14 The Lord's will be done** St. Paul's attitude mirrors that of Jesus. The greatest desire of his heart is to fulfill, to follow the will of God, even unto his own death.

### Reflection Questions:

1. Eutychus, while a youth, fell asleep during St. Paul's teaching. What is your level of attentiveness during the homily at Mass? What could you do to make yourself more

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interested in what the priest or deacon is saying?

2. We are seeing everywhere here in the United States a decline in vocations. How is it affecting you? What ideas do you have that could stop, maybe even reverse this trend?
3. Most of us, from childhood have been taught to not question what "Father" or "Sister" says or does. Is this wise? How can we create a balance between respect and discernment?

## **Catechism of the Catholic Church**

"Do this in memory of me": 1341-1344

WHAT IS THIS SACRAMENT CALLED?: 1328-1332

Vocal Prayer: 2700-2704

Guides for Prayer: 2683-2696

THE CHURCH IS THE TEMPLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT: 797-798

## **Bibliography:**

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- [New Collegeville Bible Commentary: The Acts of the Apostles](#) by Dennis Hamm
- [Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: Acts of the Apostles](#) by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch
- Agape Bible Study: Gospel of Luke by Michal Hunt. [AgapeBibleStudy.com](http://AgapeBibleStudy.com)
- [Acts: The Spread of the Kingdom](#) by Jeff Cavins and Sarah Christmyer