

## BIBLE SERIES: "EXPLORING OUR AWESOME BIBLE"

by Mario Seiglie

NT-60 3-28-2015

### ACTS 20-21 PAUL'S SPEECH IN MILETUS; JERUSALEM WITH JAMES; THE RIOT



As we complete Acts 20, we should not forget the remarkable fact that here are *two* different festival seasons mentioned, comprising of three Feast days—first, the Feast of Unleavened Bread (a term Luke uses that normally includes the eight day period starting with the Passover and then the seven days of Unleavened Bread); next, Luke mentions the Feast of Pentecost. This is important evidence of the keeping of *these Feast days and the Hebrew calendar* by the New Testament Church.

Now, while in Miletus, Paul convokes the Ephesian elders to a vital ministerial meeting.

Luke preserved the gist of Paul's farewell speech to these elders, which has two themes. First are his teachings: "He said to them: 'You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you, serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews; how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house, testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me. But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. And indeed, now I know that you all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, will see my face no more. Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God.'" (Acts 20:17-27).

Paul reminds them he had been diligent in teaching them, first in the synagogues, and then in their homes, what he identified as the Church's core message mentioned in four different ways: (1) repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ; (2) the gospel [good news] of the grace of God; (3) preaching of the coming kingdom of God; and (4) the whole counsel [Gk. *boule* - plan] of God -- God's Plan of Salvation!

Here you can see how Paul's teachings are so complete and consistent. They began with the need for repentance of sins, then faith in the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ and His Lordship over us. He then explained the concept of God's grace or unmerited pardon and favor toward us, followed by focusing on the future reward in the kingdom of God, and finally, that he had not left out any fundamental belief or practice that deals with God's Plan of Salvation.

As *Barne's Commentary* points out, "The proper meaning of the word translated here, 'I have not shunned,' the Gk. *hupesteilamen*, is 'to disguise any important truth; to withdraw it from public view; to decline publishing it from fear, or an apprehension of the consequences.' Paul means that he had not disguised any truth; he had not withdrawn or kept it from open view, by any apprehension of the effect which it might have on their minds" (notes on Acts 20:27).

Secondly, Paul's speech focuses on his conduct, which some of these elders would fail to imitate, to their everlasting shame. He warns, "Therefore take heed to yourselves and to 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. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears. So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. I have coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me. I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. Then they all wept freely, and fell on Paul's neck and kissed him, sorrowing most of all for the

words which he spoke, that they would see his face no more. And they accompanied him to the ship" (Acts 20:17-38).

It is tragic to hear Paul alerted them that after his departure some of them would show their true colors and seek to take over and divide the Church (such as Diotrefes did in 3 John 1:9-10). To do this, they would speak "perverse things," the Gk. term is *diastrepho*, to turn aside, twist, distort or undermine. In other words, they would use slander to ruin reputations of other leaders and then inject heresy—common tools the Devil uses.

Then Paul adds a saying by Jesus that was not recorded in the Gospels: "It is more blessed to give than to receive," a principle based on Luke 6:38.

He departs, sailing around the coast before arriving in Israel. Modern scholarship shows this route is geographically and historically accurate.

Luke records, "Now it came to pass, that when we had departed from them and set sail, running a straight course we came to Cos, the following day to Rhodes [where the Colossus of Rhodes once stood, one of the 7 Wonders of the Ancient World], and from there to Patara. And finding a ship sailing over to Phoenicia, we went aboard and set sail. When we had sighted Cyprus, we passed it on the left, sailed to Syria, and landed at Tyre; for there the ship was to unload her cargo. And finding disciples, we stayed there seven days. They told Paul through the Spirit not to go up to Jerusalem. When we had come to the end of those days, we departed and went on our way; and they all accompanied us, with wives and children, till we were out of the city. And we knelt down on the shore and prayed. When we had taken our leave of one another, we boarded the ship, and they returned home. And when we had finished our voyage from Tyre, we came to Ptolemais, greeted the brethren, and stayed with them one day" (Acts 21:1-7). Despite these warnings, Paul continues toward Jerusalem to be there for Pentecost.

Luke adds, "On the next day we who were Paul's companions departed and came to Caesarea, and entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him. Now this man had four virgin daughters who prophesied. And as we stayed many days, a certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. When he

had come to us, he took Paul's belt, bound his own hands and feet, and said, 'Thus says the Holy Spirit, 'So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this belt, and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.' Now when we heard these things, both we and those from that place pleaded with him not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, 'What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.' So when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, 'The will of the Lord be done.' And after those days we packed and went up to Jerusalem. Also some of the disciples from Caesarea went with us and brought with them a certain Mnason of Cyprus, an early disciple, with whom we were to lodge. And when we had come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly" (Acts 21:8-17).

So they arrived safely in Caesarea, Israel, but again, everywhere they went, there were warnings of Paul's arrest in Jerusalem. Nevertheless, he was determined to go there to meet and inform the apostle James and the elders. At Caesarea, he stayed with Philip, one of the original seven "deacons" of Acts 6. He had four unmarried daughters that were prophetesses who received messages from God. There are a number of prophetesses in the Bible (Miriam, Ex. 15:20; Deborah, Judges 4:4; and Huldah, 2 K. 22:14).

Luke continues, "On the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present. When he had greeted them, he told in detail those things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord. And they said to him, "You see, brother, how many myriads of Jews there are who have believed, and they are all zealous for the law; but they have been informed about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs. What then? The assembly must certainly meet, for they will hear that you have come. Therefore do what we tell you: We have four men who have taken a vow. Take them and be purified with them, and pay their expenses so that they may shave their heads, and

that all may know that those things of which they were informed concerning you are nothing, but that you yourself also walk orderly and keep the law. But concerning the Gentiles who believe, we have written and decided that they should observe no such thing, except that they should keep themselves from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality" (Acts 21:18-25).

This is a very important section of Scripture, for it shows how the Jerusalem Decree had been applied by Paul and others for around ten years. We see there is clearly no concern that Paul was teaching about Sunday-keeping or to eat pork, or to forsake tithing or Feast days. Instead it showed that Paul was teaching all of God's commandments and that "myriads" (tens of thousands) of Jews had converted and were still "zealous for the law."

*The Bible Knowledge Commentary* points out, "While there was rejoicing over Paul's report, there was also apprehension about Paul's reputation among believing Jews who were zealous for the Law. A patently false report had gone out concerning Paul. It was true Paul taught Gentiles that it was religiously inconsequential whether they circumcised their sons or not and he did not teach them [the] Jewish customs. However, he never taught Jews... not to circumcise their sons or to disregard Jewish customs" (notes on Acts 21:22). The term "customs" here is the Gk. *ethos*, which *Vine's Greek Dictionary* calls "a custom, usage, prescribed by law." In this context of Acts 21, it is talking about *rituals and sacrifices*, such as what was mentioned -- the Nazirite ritual vow.

So James refers to the Jerusalem Decree and mentioned how *Jewish Christians* should still keep the ritual and purification laws [the Temple still existed], although Gentile Christians did not have to. And to show that Paul, as a Jewish Christian, was still keeping this ritual law, James and the elders recommended Paul keep one of them—the Nazirite vow, which Paul agreed to do. This shows this was not about the Sabbath or the Feast days!

Again, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* brings out, "The four men evidently had a Nazirite vow. At the conclusion of their vow some costly sacrifices were required of each man (Num.6:13-17). These men evidently were too poor to pay for them. Paul

was asked to underwrite the expense of their sacrifices and thereby display his sympathy with the zealots of the Law.

"Was Paul wrong in entering into this arrangement, which was a specific part of the Law? For several reasons it may be said he was not: (1) Paul himself had previously taken a Nazirite vow (Acts 18:18). (2) Later he unashamedly referred to this incident before Felix (Acts 24:17-18). (3) This action on Paul's part only confirmed one of the principles of his ministry which was to become like a Jew to win the Jews, and to become like one under the Law to win those under it (1 Cor. 9:20). (4) One of Paul's goals for the Jerusalem trip, along with relief of the poor, was the unifying of Jews and Gentiles. (5) Paul was not denying the finished work of Christ by offering animal sacrifices. The epistles Paul had already written by this time (Gal. 1 and 2 Thes. 1 and 2 Cor., and Rom.) make it clear that such a denial was incomprehensible. He must have looked on these sacrifices as memorials. After all, this will be the significance of millennial sacrifices (Ezek. 43:18-46:24; Mal. 1:11; Mal. 3:3-4). (6) Paul later asserted he did not violate his own conscience (Acts 23:1)" (notes on Acts 21:18).

Unfortunately, Paul's repeated trips to the Temple led to a misunderstanding and a riot.

Luke writes, "Then Paul took the men, and the next day, having been purified with them, entered the temple to announce the expiration of the days of purification, at which time an offering should be made for each one of them. Now when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews from Asia, seeing him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd and laid hands on him, crying out, 'Men of Israel, help! This is the man who teaches all men everywhere against the people, the law, and this place; and furthermore he also brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place.' (For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.) And all the city was disturbed; and the people ran together, seized Paul, and dragged him out of the temple; and immediately the doors were shut" (Acts 21:26-29).

What happens next? We will cover this exciting part of the Scriptures, God willing, in the next Bible Study.