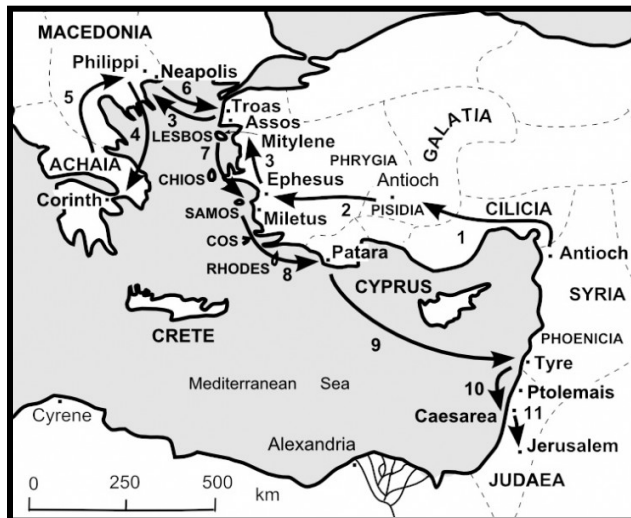


As God's people, we want to be guided by His Word and empowered by His Spirit to look more like Jesus. This Scripture Guide is based on this morning's passage to further equip you with what God's Word says.

Scripture Guide Acts 20

Over the course of Acts chapter 20, Paul leaves Ephesus (3 on the map) and makes a second trip through Greece and Macedonia (4 & 5). Then he returns to Asia Minor (6), where he is rejoined by Luke in Troas. Then they travel down the coast of Asia Minor en route to Jerusalem.

This section highlights Paul's detour on the beach of Miletus. He planned a short visit with the leaders in the Ephesian church, where he had ministered and taught for three years. He prays with them and gives a parting speech before he leaves them for good. This seems to be one of the only recordings of Paul's interaction with the churches and leaders he leaves behind. It is a tearful interaction, accompanied by an ominous foreshadowing of suffering coming for Paul. Paul's gospel ministry and the leaders who were chosen in Asia minor will be put to the test after he departs. The thrust of his farewell speech is an apologetic defense of his personal ministry and teaching. In vv. 18-27, He preempts any charge that he did not teach them the full will of God for salvation. In vv. 28-32, Paul exhorts and encourages the Ephesian leaders. Then in vv. 33-35, he preempts any charge that was a preacher for monetary gain. We will focus on the content of his speech in this week's guide.



20:17-27 A large portion of Paul's speech is apologetic. It's possible that Paul's opponents in Asia Minor had tried to prejudice his converts' minds against him in his absence. So Paul defends his ministry and teaching. We do not know from Luke's account whether false teachers had already come into Ephesus. Still, there are several other instances in Acts and Paul's letters that suggest that Paul knew the opposition would arise.

As he begins his speech, Paul reminds them of his humble and faithful service. In v. 18, he defends his teaching and ministry legitimacy by appealing to the Ephesians' personal relationship with him.¹ He tells them, "you yourselves know how I lived among you." Though Paul has a special connection with the leaders and the Ephesian families, he explains his method of ministry in other churches as being a spiritual father calling Christians to follow his example (see also Philippians 3:17, 2 Thessalonians 3:7). In v. 20, he says that he not only taught in public but "house to house" as well. Acts 9:9-10 tells us that Paul and his disciples spent at least two years in Ephesus teaching and explaining the gospel to the predominantly Greek Gentile people. The impact of the gospel and Paul's ministry must have been proliferative as Luke tells us that "all the Jewish and Gentile residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord.

In light of his close relationship with them, the Ephesian leaders would have known Paul's integrity and faithfulness. For Paul, his faithfulness was defined by his steadfastness in the face of suffering. He focuses on his trials in v. 19, and how he was continually exposed to danger and conspiracy from both Jew and Gentile. Yet, his boldness and the content of his teaching never compromised – even in the face of a riot in Ephesus (Acts 19:23-41). Paul says that he never shrank² from declaring the will of God in the gospel and anything else that was profitable (vv. 19, 26). All of this is rooted in Paul's humble devotion to Jesus – expressed beautifully in v. 24, "However, I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the good news of God's grace," (NIV).

¹ Bruce, F.F., pg. 388, *The Book of the Acts* (New International Commentary on the New Testament), Eerdmans, June 30, 1988 (See also 1 Corinthians 6:11, 1 Thessalonians 2:1-11; 3:3-4; 4:2)

² ὑπεστέλλω - hoop-os-tel'-lo - to withhold out of sight, to cower or (figuratively) shrink, to conceal, to draw or keep back, shun, withdraw. See Galatians 2:12 for a parallel use of the same Greek word.

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20:28-32 In the middle of his speech Paul refocuses on his audience to exhort and encourage them. In verse 17, Luke calls them all elders, but Paul calls them overseers³ who shepherd and care⁴ for the sheep. He reminds the Ephesian leaders of their responsibility and the threats to the believers in their congregations. About five years later⁵, when Paul is imprisoned in Rome, he writes his letter to the Ephesians. In it, he reminds the Ephesian church and its leaders that Jesus has given powerful gifts to his church in the form of the “apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds⁴ and teachers.” The purpose of these gifts is to bring unity, maturity, and defense against their enemy, the devil (Ephesians 4:7–16; 6:10–19).⁵

Paul gives them a sober warning against false teaching – twisted things that will draw away the disciples (v. 30). Along with Jesus in Matthew 7:15, Paul calls those who distort the gospel “fierce wolves” who lurk among the sheep. Paul knew that the threat of false teaching was not simply *out there* from outside of the church but from within. Paul’s own care for the Ephesians included “tears and admonishment,” which is part of the example he has left for the Ephesian elders. So they are to keep alert and watch over their own teaching as well as the people whom God has placed under their authority (see a parallel in 1 Timothy 4:16). Paul again encourages them with the promise that the word of God’s grace is what will protect them, build them up, and give them their final reward along with all those who are called and sanctified by God (v. 32).

20:33-35 Paul closes his speech with another appeal to his character and the example he left for the Ephesians. It seems that Paul’s opponents in Ephesus and elsewhere charged him with only preaching for monetary gain – “coveting silver and gold.” In his letters, we can see occasions where Paul did not ask for money (2 Corinthians 11:9) and occasions where he did (Philippians 4:15). Paul explains in Romans 15:14 and 1 Corinthians 9:11-14 that he and the other Apostles and missionaries have the right to receive monetary support from preaching the gospel. However, he explains that he does not always make use of that right so that he would not hinder the progress of the gospel (1 Corinthians 9:12, 18). So Paul was willing to work with his own hands because the mission was his highest priority. This also parallels what he wrote to the Ephesians (Ephesians 4:28) where Paul reminds them of the example he set to be hard-working in order to have something to share with the poor among them (see also 2 Thessalonians 3:9). His foundation for this is the example that Jesus left for Paul and them both: “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (v. 35).⁶

Application

Paul shares his life and heart with the Ephesians. Elsewhere in Paul’s letters, we see his love and care for the leaders who he trains (see 1 Thessalonians 2:7-12). By Luke’s account, Paul only spent three years in Ephesus, but that was enough time for him to reproduce the kind of leaders that he was. He led them by his example. He led as Jesus, “the great shepherd of the sheep,” leads his people (Hebrews 13:20, 1 Peter 5:2-4).

Two of the most important aspects of his leadership were how he shared his life with others and how he faithfully carried out the mission. We can see how much love Paul had for the Ephesians and how much love they had for him (vv. 37-38). But also we see throughout the rest of Paul’s letters his great love and compassion for the churches that he helped found. He had “great anguish” for Christians who were struggling in their faith. At the same time, he rejoiced in the fruit of faith in the churches (Philippians 2:17). Paul also was not faint-hearted in the face of seemingly constant opposition to the gospel. Twice in Acts 20:17-35, Paul attests to his resolve to faithfully teach the word and not shrink back from the opposition. His boldness was all the more evident to the Ephesian elders who experienced the opposition firsthand and saw Paul’s faithfulness. He set his example in both word and deed. Indeed, these are qualities Jesus desires for the elders, shepherds, and overseers of his Church.

³ ἐπίσκοπος - ep-is'-kop-os - a superintendent, overseer, Bishop; This is the same title given to officers in charge of a church. In this same passage and throughout the New Testament the three terms are nearly synonymous with each other: elders (πρεσβύτερος), pastors (ποιμήν), and overseers (ἐπίσκοπος). There seems to be no distinctions in roles or responsibilities given from God.

⁴ ποιμαίνειν - pou-mah'-ee-no - rule, govern, or literally to shepherd, feed, to tend a herd or flock, keep sheep.

⁵ ESV Study Bible Online <https://www.esv.org/resources/esv-global-study-bible/introduction-to-ephesians/>

⁶ This does not show up in any of the four Gospels. However, a similar idea is presented in Luke 6:38; 11:9-13; John 13:34; Matthew 10:8. Perhaps, Paul heard this teaching directly from the disciples. Or he was offering a paraphrase of Jesus’ teachings in the Gospels.