

January 18, 2026

God's Good News Story: The Church Alive & Growing

The Book of Acts Chapter 20

Passing the Torch: Paul's Farewell Tour Pt. 1

The Book of Acts is a link between the Gospels and the Epistles (letters). It covers generally the first 30-35 years of church history. It is the 44th Book in the Bible and the 5th in the New Testament. Acts begins with the Ascension of Christ @33AD and runs through to about 62-64AD with Paul in Rome in prison but still being a vibrant witness for Christ. Acts is the story of the birth and growth of the early church. It provides a rich, accurate historical as well as spiritual description of the early believers. It shares with us the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the great growth of the church. It features Peter and Paul primarily, it shares with the tragedy of the first Christian martyr, Stephen, it shares with us the powerful story of Paul's conversion and of his three missionary trips, and his arrest and imprisonment in Rome.

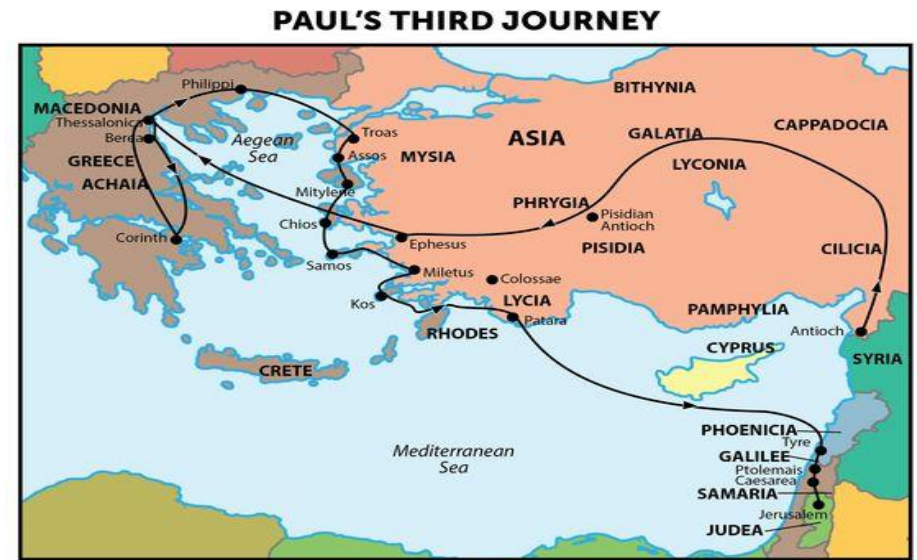
The purposes of the book appears to be (1) to provide an inspired record of selected events in the spread of the gospel and the church, (2) to show how the plans and purposes of God work out through history, and (3) to provide for a defense of the truths of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Acts reveals the origin, nature, and the function of the Church. Acts was completed before Paul's death.

A simple outline is:

Chapters 1-12 describes the missionary work of Peter among the Jews.

Chapters 12-28 shows the missionary expansion of church by Paul to the Gentiles.

(MAP) Paul and His Missionary DreamTeam of Evangelists, Church Planters and Disciple-Makers uses a variety of techniques and ministry outreaches as they made their way on their Missionary Journeys. A key focus of their ministry was going to the cities and trying to reach the masses of lost people.



Today, we pick up where we left Paul and His Ministry Team left back in May of last year in Chapter 19. In this Chapter Paul had made his way back to Ephesus (in modern day Turkey) where God used him to perform many extraordinary miracles. Sadly, these miracles gained a lot of attention, mostly negative, and there arose a riot instigated by a local silversmith who was a religious adherent to the false goddess Artemis. Part of this worship was the use of silver artifacts. The market for these silver objects was the source of great income for the silversmiths and the city. As more and more people became Christians they bought less and less of these silver idols. A mixture of economic fear and spiritual

jealousy led to a riot forming that turned the city upside down, Finally, after a two hour long riot the crowd was quieted and Paul met privately with the believers there in Ephesus and gave them an encouraging talk and then left to go to Macedonia.

This is where we pick up in Chapter 20 today. The author/compiler of the Book of Acts is Luke. Luke is a very detailed writer at times and this chapter is one where he goes into specific detail of where Paul goes.

The title of my message is Passing the Torch: Paul's Farewell Tour Pt.1 From this point on in the Book of Acts we see Paul making his last visits to places where he had established churches as he made his way to his final destination of Rome and his imprisonment and trials.

Paul seems to have two goals as he visited and said his farewells to the various churches in mind:

1. To encourage and strengthen the saints so that they might stay true, stand firm and be effective witnesses.
2. Finish his task of collecting an offering for the needy believers in Jerusalem.

Acts 20:1-6... ¹ *After the uproar had ceased, Paul sent for the disciples, and when he had encouraged them and taken his leave of them, he left to go to Macedonia.* ² *When he had gone through those regions and had given them much encouragement, he came to Greece.* ³ *And there he spent three months, and*

when a plot was formed against him by the Jews as he was about to set sail for Syria, he decided to return through Macedonia. ⁴ *And 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.* ⁵ *Now these had gone on ahead and were waiting for us at Troas.* ⁶ *We sailed from Philippi after the days of Unleavened Bread and reached them at Troas within five days; and we stayed there for seven days.*

The order is as follows: MAP

1. **Macedonia** – after leaving from the riots in Ephesus.
2. **Greece** – specific location unknown, possible Corinth for three months.
3. **Macedonia** – he travels back through Macedonia after learning of another plot to kill him by the Jews. (He is accompanied by his Evangelistic Dream Team Members...Sopater, Aristarchus, Secundus, Gaius, Timothy, Tychicus and Trophimus).
4. **Philippi** – Here he stops for the Feast of Unleavened Bread (@March).
5. **Troas** – he stayed here for seven days and has a unique experience where he raised from the dead a young church member Eutychus.

Acts 20: 7-12... ⁷ *On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul began talking to them, intending to leave the next day, and he prolonged his message until midnight.* ⁸ *There were many lamps in the upstairs room where we were gathered together.* ⁹ *And*

there was a young man named Eutychus sitting on the window sill, sinking into a deep sleep; and as Paul kept on talking, Eutychus was overcome by sleep and fell down from the third floor, and was picked up dead. ¹⁰ But Paul went down and fell upon him, and after embracing him, he said, “Do not be troubled, for he is still alive.” ¹¹ When Paul had gone back up and had broken the bread and eaten, he talked with them a long while until daybreak, and then left. ¹² They took away the boy alive and were greatly comforted.

Pastor and writer Warren Wiersbe makes note of these points in this passage: (p. 484-485 *Bible Exposition Commentary*)

The Lord’s Day
The Lord’s People
The Lord’s Supper
The Lord’s Message
The Lord’s Power

Paul continues his farewell tour: (vs. 13-16) **MAP**

6. **Assos** – Paul travels on foot from Troas to Assos a port city.
7. **Mitylene** – From Assos they sailed here.
8. **Chios** – From Mitylene they sailed here, this is the 5th largest of the Greek Islands.
9. **Samos** – The next day they arrived here.
10. **Miletus** – The next day they landed here and called for the Ephesian Church elders to come and meet him for a farewell message and challenge.

The heart of this chapter is found in Verses 17-38:

¹⁷ From Miletus he sent word to Ephesus and called to himself the elders of the church. ¹⁸ And when they came 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 trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews; ²⁰ how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was beneficial, 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 by the 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 chains and afflictions await me. ²⁴ But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of God’s grace. ²⁵ “And now behold, I know that all of you, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, will no longer see my face. ²⁶ Therefore, I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all people. 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 entrust 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 served my own needs and the men who were with me. ³⁵ In everything I showed you that by working hard in this way 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.'”

³⁶ When he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. ³⁷ And they all began to weep aloud and embraced Paul, and repeatedly kissed him, ³⁸ grieving especially over the word which he had spoken, that they would not see his face again. And they were accompanying him to the ship.

Saying goodbye can be a deeply emotional and troubling experience. We need to feel Paul's heart, understand his purpose, and examine his example in this passage.

I. The Power of Personal Example (17-19)

Paul begins by reminding the elders of his own conduct, showing that a leader's life must match their message.

- **Humility and Sincerity:** He served "with all humility and with tears," demonstrating that true ministry is motivated by love and compassion, not pride.

- **Persistence in Trials:** Paul remained faithful despite "plots of the Jews," teaching that hardship is an expected part of serving God.
- **Selfless Integrity:** Paul highlights his financial independence, working with his own hands to support himself and his companions, embodying the principle that "it is more blessed to give than to receive".

II. The Message of the Torch (20:20-21, 24-27)

- **The Whole Counsel of God:** Paul did not "shrink back" from declaring anything profitable, preaching the full truth of Scripture rather than just comfortable topics.
- **A Goal-Driven Mission:** His priority was not personal safety but finishing his "course and the ministry" received from Jesus—to testify to the gospel of God's grace.
- **The Gospel Core:** He summarizes his message as "repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ," the essential foundation for the next generation to uphold.

III. **The Charge to the Successors – The High**

Calling of Shepherding (20:28-31)

- **Self-Watch and Flock-Watch:** Paul commands the elders to "pay careful attention" first to themselves and then to the flock, as their spiritual health directly impacts those they lead.
- **Guard Against the "Wolves":** He warns that false teachers will arise from both outside and within the church to distort the truth, requiring leaders to be perpetually alert.
- **The Value of the Church:** He reminds them that the church was "purchased with [God's] own blood," emphasizing its immense value and the gravity of their stewardship.

IV. **Passing the Torch: Commending to Grace** (20:32-38)

- **The Ultimate Safety Net:** As Paul leaves, he commends them not to a person or program, but to "God and to the Word of His grace," which is the only thing that can truly build them up.
- **The Grief of Parting:** The final scene of weeping and prayer shows that spiritual leadership creates deep emotional bonds; saying goodbye is hard precisely because the shared mission was so meaningful. The deep sorrow felt at his departure reflects the profound love and unity that should exist within a healthy church community

- **Fellowship in Prayer:** Their final act together was prayer, showing that spiritual relationships are built on a shared reliance on God.
- **Accepting God's Leading:** Ultimately, passing the torch means accepting that God moves His servants according to His will, even when it is painful for those left behind.

Take Away:

Ultimately, Paul's farewell to the Ephesian elders serves as a timeless blueprint for authentic Christian leadership. In "passing the torch," he wasn't just handing over a set of doctrines, but a living example of a ministry fueled by humility, integrity, and a relentless focus on the mission. His challenge to the elders—and to us—is to finish our own spiritual "course" with that same selfless devotion, to protect the flock from the dangers he foresaw, and to find our strength not in our own abilities, but in God and "the word of His grace." Paul's final charge, sealed with the truth that "it is more blessed to give than to receive," reminds us that the Gospel's legacy is secured when our lives powerfully reflect the message we proclaim.

Complete chapter for reading reference follows

Acts 20 New American Standard Bible

Paul in Macedonia and Greece

20 After the uproar had ceased, Paul sent for the disciples, and when he had encouraged them and taken his leave of them, he left to go to Macedonia. ² When he had gone through those regions and had given them much encouragement, he came to Greece. ³ And *there* he spent three months, and when a plot was formed against him by the Jews as he was about to set sail for Syria, he decided to return through Macedonia. ⁴ And 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. ⁵ Now these had gone on ahead and were waiting for us at Troas. ⁶ We sailed from Philippi after the days of Unleavened Bread and reached them at Troas within five days; and we stayed there for seven days. ⁷ On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul *began* talking to them, intending to leave the next day, and he prolonged his message until midnight. ⁸ There were many lamps in the upstairs room where we were gathered together. ⁹ And there was a young man named Eutychus sitting on the window sill, sinking into a deep sleep; and as Paul kept on talking, *Eutychus* was overcome by sleep and fell down from the third floor, and was picked up dead. ¹⁰ But Paul went down and fell upon him, and after embracing him, he said, "Do not be troubled, for he is still alive." ¹¹ When *Paul* had gone *back* up and had broken the bread and eaten, he talked with them a long while until daybreak, and then left. ¹² They took away the boy alive and were greatly comforted.

Troas to Miletus

¹³ But we went ahead to the ship and set sail for Assos, intending from there to take Paul on board; for that was what he had arranged, intending himself to go by land. ¹⁴ And when he met us at Assos, we took him on board and came to Mitylene. ¹⁵ Sailing from there, we arrived the following day opposite Chios; and the next day we crossed over to Samos, and on the following day we came to Miletus. ¹⁶ For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus so that he would not have to lose time in Asia; for he was hurrying, if it might be possible for him to be in Jerusalem the day of Pentecost.

Farewell to Ephesus

¹⁷ From Miletus he sent *word* to Ephesus and called to himself the elders of the church. ¹⁸ And when they came 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 trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews; ²⁰ how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was beneficial, 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 by the 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 chains and afflictions await me. ²⁴ But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of God's grace.

²⁵ "And now behold, I know that all of you, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, will no longer see my face. ²⁶ Therefore, I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all people. 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 entrust 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 served my *own* needs and the men who were with me. ³⁵ In everything I showed you that by working hard in this way 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.'"

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