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Paul's Farewell to the Ephesian Elders

20: 13-38

Late 56 AD to early 57 AD

Paul's farewell to the Ephesian elders DIG: Why might Paul want to be in Jerusalem for Shavu'ot (2:1)? What has characterized his ministry so far? Why does he emphasize how he lived among them? From your reading of Acts, what types of hardships has Paul already encountered? Compare 20:24 with Philippians 3:7-8, how would you explain what motivates Paul to keep going on? What does it mean to Take care of yourselves in verse 28 (First Timothy 4:11-116)? How does their divine appointment as elders highlight the seriousness of their responsibility? What two dangers does Paul warn them about in verses 29-30? How is the message of grace in verse 32 and example of Paul in verses 33-35 protect them from these dangers? Some people viewed the office of elder as a way of gaining power and wealth (see First Timothy 5:6-10; First Peter 5:3). How does Paul fight against that idea here? What do you suppose the Ephesians will miss most about Paul?

REFLECT: If someone watched you the past year, what would they assume the lifestyle of a believer is like? How would you like to change so they might get a more accurate picture? How would you paraphrase Paul's summary of the gospel in verse 21 to explain faith to someone? Who makes up the "flock" for whom you are responsible? In what specific ways can you shepherd them? What is the one thing you must accomplish in life? How does that relate to Paul's goal (verse 24)? What might be some parting words or themes you'd like to leave behind to those who follow you? What are the most important warnings and encouragements to pass on? In the race toward doing God's will, are you in the front of the pack, one of the stragglers, or an onlooker? Why?

The arrival: Paul's party, along with Luke this time, went on from Troas (to see link [click Ci - Paul Raised Eutychus From the Dead at Troas](#)) and set sail for Assos, twenty miles away. But Paul had made this arrangement for the other men because he was going there on foot. Travel along the coastal road would be quicker than a sea voyage round the cape. Evidently he wanted to be alone to collect his thoughts about what

he believed would be his farewell address to the **Ephesian elders**. Then on the second leg of the trip, **Paul met** the travel party at **Assos**, **we took him on board and went to Mitylene**, Italy, some thirty miles away (see [Bx](#) - **Paul's Vision of the Man of Macedonia: A closer look at the "us" or "we" passages and sea passages**). On the third leg of the journey, **sailing from Mitylene**, **we arrived the next day opposite** the island of **Chios**; **the next day we crossed over** to the island of **Samos**, and **the day after that we came to Miletus**. For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus so that he might not spend much time in Asia, because he was hurrying to be in Jerusalem, if possible, by the day of **Shavu'ot (20:13-16)**. There were fifty days between **Pesach (20:6)** and **Shavu'ot**. So, **Paul** decided not to go to **Ephesus** lest he lose any more valuable time. **Paul's** desire to hurry to get to **Yerushalayim** for **Shavu'ot** shows that as a Messianic Jew, he saw no conflict between his faith in **Yeshua** and Jewish practice (**13:9**). We can also see this from the fact that on another occasion he felt he had to justify a decision to remain in **Ephesus** and *not* go up to **Jerusalem** for this pilgrim festival (**First Corinthians 16:8-9**).⁴⁸⁰



A review of the past: Instead, **Paul** invited the leaders of the Ephesian church to come to him, where a ship was waiting to unload cargo and take on more. **From Miletus, dispatching someone to Ephesus, Paul called for the elders-overseers** (Greek: *episkopous*) of the community to Miletus. As a crow flies, **Ephesus** was only thirty miles north of **Miletus**, but the rather winding road was longer. It must have taken about three days for a messenger to travel to **Ephesus** and bring the elders back to **Miletus**. But in due time they arrived. **When they came to him, he said to them, "You yourselves know how I behaved among you all the time from the first day I set foot in**

Asia, serving the Lord with all humility and tears and trials which fell upon me through the plots of the Jewish leaders (Second Corinthians 2:4). I did not shrink back from proclaiming the Scriptures to you anything that was profitable, teaching you publicly as well as from house to house, testifying to both Jewish and Greek people repentance to God and trust in our Lord Yeshua (20:17-21). The gospel is the same for **Jews and Gentiles . . . repentance and trust in YHVH through Yeshua Messiah.** The Dual-Covenant theory, advocated by unbelieving **Jews**, believing that Christians are saved through **Jesus** and that **Jews** are saved through Moses, is clearly wrong. **Yeshua** declared: **I AM the way and the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through Me (John 14:6; also see Acts 4:12).**

A testimony of the present: Having reminded **the Ephesian elders** of **his** example during **his** presence with **them**, **Paul** now prepared **them** for **his** absence: **And now, look, bound by my spirit** (Greek: *pneumati*, meaning *spirit* or *wind*), **I am compelled to go to Jerusalem - not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Ruach ha-Kodesh bears witness to me from city to city, saying that bondage and afflictions await me (20:22-23).** **Paul** recognized the dangerous road ahead of **him**. In **his spirit**, **Paul** sensed that something **bad** was going to happen to **him** in **Jerusalem**, but **he** simply didn't know any details. But it didn't trouble **him**. **He** could give it all over to **the LORD**, singing from **his** heart: **I have set ADONAI always before me. Since He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken (Psalm 16:8).** **Paul** was indeed being led to **Jerusalem**. **God** had a purpose for **his** going there. **He** was ready to surrender **his** life for the sake of the gospel.⁴⁸¹

It has been said that the best use of one's life is to spend it for something that outlasts it. The truth is, only the Kingdom of **God** is going to last. Everything else will eventually vanish. That is why we must live purpose-driven lives committed to fulfilling our mission on earth. That result will last forever. **Paul** said: **I don't consider my life of any value, except that I might finish my life's work and the office I received from the Lord Yeshua** (see [Bc - Sha'ul Turns from Murder to Messiah](#)), **to declare the Good News of the grace of God to the Jew first and then to the Gentiles (20:24).** There are people on this earth whom only you will be able to reach, because of where you live and what **ADONAI** has made you to be. If just one person will be in heaven because of you, your life will have made a difference for eternity. Start looking around at your personal mission field and pray, "**Lord**, who have you put in my life for me to tell about **Jesus?**"⁴⁸²

Based upon **his** limited knowledge, **he** said: **Now, look! I know that none of you, among whom I have gone proclaiming the Kingdom, will ever see my face again.** This fact

added a touching finality to the occasion. Later, when **he** was in Rome, **he** wrote **Timothy** about **his** desire to come to **Ephesus** again (**First Timothy 3:14** and **4:13**), but **he** never made it. But on this day **he** declared: **I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all (20:25-26)**. **Paul** made a solemn declaration that, as a **watchman** like **Ezeki'el** (**Ezeki'el 33:1ff**), **he** was **innocent of everyone's blood**. **His** conscience was clear. **He** withheld nothing from **them**. **He** did not hesitate to preach anything that would be helpful. **He** loved **them** enough to teach **them** everything that would be of benefit, even if **they** didn't like it. In other words, **he** was willing to hurt **their** feelings momentarily if it would help **them** eternally. **He** was **clean** in the sense that **he did not shrink back from declaring to you the whole Word of God (20:27)**. **He** didn't just teach **them** the many wonderful things **ADONAI** wanted to do for **them**. **He** also taught **them** the truth about the hardships that would inevitably come and the calling of a crucified life.⁴⁸³

A warning about the future: **Paul** had a sense of urgency as **he** spoke to **them**. **He** warned **the Ephesian elders** about the vulnerability of the young church. **Take care of yourselves and all the flock of which the Ruach ha-Kodesh has made you overseers-elders** (Greek: *episkopous*), **to shepherd the community of God in Ephesus - which He obtained with the blood of His own (Ephesians 1:14)**. **I know that after my departure, savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock** (see the commentary on **Jude Ah - Godless People Have Secretly Slipped In Among You**). **Even from among yourselves will arise men speaking perversions, to draw the disciples away after themselves**. Unfortunately, **Paul's** words here were fulfilled and necessitated the writing of the letters to **Timothy (First Timothy 1:3-7 and 19-20, 4:17, 6:3-5; Second Timothy 1:15, 2:16-18, 3:1-9)**. That false teachers did soon arise to prey upon the Asian churches is well documented by **Ephesians 5:6-14** and **Colossians 2:8**, as well as by the letter to **Ephesus in Revelation 2:2**. **Therefore be alert, remembering that night and day for three years I did not stop warning you of the truth of the gospel with tears (20:28-31)**. By the second century Asia was a virtual seedbed for Christian heresy. **Paul's** warning was both essential and timely.

A final warning about greed: There was, however, one more matter of personal conduct that **he** had not touched upon: **the leaders'** relationship to material goods. **He, himself** had never used **his** ministry as a mask to **cover up greed (First Thessalonians 2:5 NIV)**. At Corinth he supported **himself** with **his** own **hands (Acts 19:2ff; First Corinthians 4:12, 9:12 and 15; Second Corinthians 11:7 and 12:13)**. The same was true at **Thessalonica (First Thessalonians 2:9; Second Thessalonians 3:7-8)**. And here **he** seems to indicate that **he** followed the same pattern of self-support in **Ephesus**. **Now I commit you to God and the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to**

give you the inheritance among all who have been made holy. I coveted no one's silver or gold or clothing. You yourselves know that these hands of mine have provided for my own needs as well as for those with me. Greed is a universal human problem, and church leaders are not exempt. That is why Paul insisted that a major qualification for church leaders is that they should free from the love of money (First Timothy 3:3 and 8; Titus 1:7 and 11). The servant of God is to be a giver and not a taker. False teachers are particularly marked by their greed (First Timothy 6:3-10). Paul had begun his farewell address by listing the qualities of his own ministry as an example for the Ephesian leaders to follow. He concluded with a final quality he had sought to model. In all things I have shown you an object lesson - that by hard work one must help the weak, remembering the words of the Lord Yeshua, that He Himself said: It is more blessed to give than to receive (20:32-35).⁴⁸⁴ This quotation of Jesus is not recorded in the gospels but was nonetheless known among early believers. In fact that it is the only quotation of Messiah outside the gospels gives significant weight to the truth it reveals. The gospels no more contain every word our Lord spoke during His earthly ministry than they do all His deeds (John 21:25). Only the divinely inspired Bible, however, contains those words and deeds that He wished for us to remember. The fanciful deeds and sayings recorded in extra biblical writings are to be rejected.⁴⁸⁵

The departure: When he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. They all began weeping and falling upon Paul's neck and they kissed him repeatedly, grieving most of all over the statement he made that they would never see his face again. Their visit ended with Paul and his friends walking side by side walking down the path to the docks, beards wet with tears (20:36-38). Obviously, the Ephesian leaders had some idea of how blessed they were to have the kind of leader Paul was to them. He was a leader who kept watch over himself and his followers. In nautical terms, he was the best kind of captain - one who kept the vessel on course even if his compass took him far from those he loved. He had given them all he had. The best kind of good-bye is the kind with no regrets.

*When all is said and done, Lord, my prayer is that we, Your people - through Your mercy - will present our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to You; this is our spiritual worship. May we not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of our minds, so that we may discern what is Your will - what is good and acceptable and perfect (Romans 12:1-2).*⁴⁸⁶