

**1186 Third mission continued, how people die, and exhortation to elders - Acts 20:1-38
(by Whirlwind)**

First, we discussed Paul's determination to return from Macedonia. Second, we saw Paul revive Eutychus in Troas, whose soul had stayed in his body. The Bible makes it clear that when a person dies, the spirit departs first; when the soul departs, the person dies—meaning that a person is composed of spirit, soul, and body. We saw that it was Jesus' soul and body that went to Hades, while His spirit was already in heaven at the time of His death. Third, it mentions Paul's determination to bypass Ephesus and his plans—he was committed to fulfilling his mission, no matter what challenges he might face. Finally, the passage describes Paul's final exhortation to the elders of the church in Ephesus. He spoke to them about how to serve among them, warned them to be vigilant, and urged them to shepherd God's church. He then commended them to God. After praying and kissing them goodbye, he broke their hearts by letting them know that he would not return to Ephesus.

Please note that this article is an expansion of the topicwise Bible study held on Sunday (4/19/26). Unless otherwise specified, verses refer to those in NASB95. If this article refers previous articles, they can all be found on our website, '<https://a-christian-voice.com/>'; click on 'Understanding Spiritual Life'.

1. Paul decided to return from Macedonia

"After the uproar had ceased, Paul sent for the disciples, and when he had exhorted them and taken his leave of them, he left to go to Macedonia. When he had gone through those districts and had given them much exhortation, he came to Greece. 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. 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. But these had gone on ahead and were waiting for us at Troas. We sailed from Philippi after the days of Unleavened Bread, and came to them at Troas within five days; and there we stayed seven days."(Acts 20:1–6)

We see that Paul and his companions traveled from Ephesus to Macedonia, strengthening the disciples everywhere as he desired, fulfilling the Great Commission's command: "teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; ..." (Matthew 28:20) Then he spent three months in Greece. This clearly does not refer to Athens, but to Corinth, for the Scripture says, "And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God." (1 Corinthians 2:1)

Since they did not set out from Syria, he kept his original decision to return via Macedonia, and then listed those who had gone ahead to Troas ahead. Thus, "We sailed from Philippi after the days of Unleavened Bread, and came to them at Troas within five days; and there we stayed seven days." (Acts 20:6) Note that the word "we" is used here, meaning there were others with Paul. Some suggest this refers to the physician Luke, who was caring for him all the time when started—a reasonable conjecture. However, since the Bible does not

explicitly state this, and since God deemed it unimportant enough not to record, we need not speculate. The route of their return is clearly described in the text, so I will say no more about it.

2. Paul raises Eutychus from the dead in Troas while his soul still with him

"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. There were many lamps in the upper room where we were gathered together. And there was a young man named Eutychus sitting on the window sill, sinking into a deep sleep; and as Paul kept on talking, he was overcome by sleep and fell down from the third floor and was picked up dead. But Paul went down and fell upon him, and after embracing him, he said, "Do not be troubled, for his life (G5590, soul) is in him." When he had gone back up and had broken the bread and eaten, he talked with them a long while until daybreak, and then left. They took away the boy alive, and were greatly comforted."(Acts 20:7–12)

An incident occurred as Paul was about to leave Troas: the resurrection of Eutychus. We must note that this differs from Jesus' resurrection of Lazarus, who had been completely dead before being raised (cf. John 11:1-46). But Eutychus's soul was still within him; he had merely fallen asleep (died), just as when Jesus healed Jairus's twelve-year-old only daughter: "He, however, took her by the hand and called, saying, "Child, arise!" And her spirit (G4151) returned, and she got up immediately; and He gave orders for something to be given her to eat."(Luke 8:54-55) The return of the spirit indicates that the soul was still in her body—is this not the same as the situation with Eutychus?

In fact, the Bible makes it very clear: when a person dies, the spirit departs first; when the soul departs, the person dies. As the Scripture says, "It came about as her (Rachel's) soul was departing (for she died), that she named him Ben-oni; but his father called him Benjamin."(Genesis 35:18) Therefore, a person is composed of spirit, soul, and body, as the Scripture says, "Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."(1 Thessalonians 5:23)

Speaking of humans being composed of spirit, soul, and body, we observe that Jesus was fully human while on earth, for the Scripture makes it clear: "...Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."(Philippians 2:5-8)

On earth, He was also fully God, for He was born with an unchangeable divine nature; though He emptied Himself, His divine nature remained unchanged. However, He never exercised His divinity while on earth; had He used His divinity on the cross, He would not have died there. Moreover, although He was fully human, He was able to say, "No one has taken it (My life) away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My

Father."(John 10:18) He chose to lay down His life while on earth, just as He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane: "...yet not as I will, but as You will."(Matthew 26:39) Therefore, He was ultimately crucified.

Then someone might ask this question: the Book of Revelation says, "...I (Jesus Christ) was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades."(Revelation 1:18) We know that He rose from the dead three days later; clearly, He went to Hades for three days before rising. So how could He, while on the cross, say to the criminal, "...Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise (G3857)."(Luke 23:43) One passage says "today," while another says "three days"—isn't there a contradiction here? No, if we interpret the Bible correctly, we will not see a contradiction.

Note that while on the cross, Jesus said, "...He bowed His head and gave up His spirit (into God's hands)."(John 19:30) At that moment, His Spirit had already become Christ in heaven, and where Christ is, there is paradise (G3857); therefore, He could say, "...Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise."(Luke 23:43) For the Scripture also says, "...You will not abandon my soul to Hades, Nor allow Your Holy One to undergo decay."(Acts 2:27) It does not mention the spirit, so His soul and body were still to go to Hades for three days!

We see that the body and soul are together, but the spirit-body after the resurrection is different. For example, as He demonstrated to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus and afterward, that is, they needed Jesus to open their eyes to recognize Him, and He could appear suddenly (cf. Luke 24:13–43). After the resurrection, "Jesus said to her (Mary), "Stop clinging to Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, 'I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God.'"(John 20:17) At that time, He was still on earth and had not yet ascended to heaven; therefore, He was still Jesus, not the Christ, for He had already surrendered His spirit on the cross! Apart from this, it seems impossible to find an explanation that satisfies all the scriptures!

Although He was ultimately crucified, "But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power."(Acts 2:24) This is "...He (God) brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places"(Ephesians 1:20) At that time, His spirit-body and spirit had clearly become one in heaven, restoring Him to His original nature. Speaking of His resurrection, it must have been accomplished through the Holy Spirit, for the Scripture says, "But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you."(Romans 8:11) Moreover, we know that "...He (God) gives the Spirit without measure."(John 3:34)

3. Paul's decision to bypass Ephesus

"But we, going ahead to the ship, set sail for Assos, intending from there to take Paul on board; for so he had arranged it, intending himself to go by land. And when he met us at Assos, we took him on board and came to Mitylene. Sailing from there, we arrived the

following day opposite Chios; and the next day we crossed over to Samos; and the day following we came to Miletus. For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus so that he would not have to spend time in Asia; for he was hurrying to be in Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost."(Acts 20:13–16)

First, we note that the text uses the singular form here. Furthermore, since he had met us in Assos, Paul did not have the constant care and companionship of the physician Luke. Of course, we might say that nothing would happen in the short term, but events can unfold in an instant, so the argument that Luke would be there to care for him at all times no longer holds. So, the seemingly reasonable conjecture mentioned earlier has an exception. This is why we emphasize that we should not speculate about things the Bible does not explicitly state.

This passage makes it very clear regarding the route of the third missionary journey; please read the text for yourself. We also see here, "...Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus so that he would not have to spend time in Asia; for he was hurrying to be in Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost."(Acts 20:16) Although the Bible does not explicitly state whether Paul arrived in Jerusalem before the Day of Pentecost, we know from the text that this concept is present. First, "After we arrived in Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly."(Acts 21:17) "Then Paul took the men, and the next day, purifying himself along with them, went into the temple giving notice of the completion of the days of purification, until the sacrifice was offered for each one of them."(Acts 21:26) Let us now look at the regulations for Pentecost: "On this same day you shall make a proclamation as well; you are to have a holy convocation. You shall do no laborious work. It is to be a perpetual statute in all your dwelling places throughout your generations."(Leviticus 23:21) It would have been impossible for the priests to perform the rite of purification for them on Pentecost, so they must have indeed arrived before Pentecost.

We see that Paul's spirit was indeed bound, for the Scripture says, "And now, behold, bound by the Spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me. 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 the grace of God."(Acts 20:22-24) He knew very clearly that what he had to accomplish was his mission, no matter what he might encounter.

4. Paul's final exhortation to the elders of the church in Ephesus

"From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church. And when they had come 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, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews; how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house, solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. And now, behold, bound by the Spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds

and afflictions await me. 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 the grace of God.

“And now, behold, I know that all of you, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, will no longer see my face. Therefore, I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God. Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd (G4165, feed) the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years (G5148) I did not cease to admonish each one with tears. And now I commend 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. I have coveted no one’s silver or gold or clothes. You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me. In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner 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.’” When he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. And they began to weep aloud and embraced Paul, and repeatedly kissed him, 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.”(Acts 20:17–38)

Although Paul had decided to bypass Ephesus, he still cared deeply for the church there, so "From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church."(Acts 20:17). He spoke of how he had ministered among them, emphasizing, "For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God."(Acts 20:27) He warned them to beware of savage wolves and those who would lead the disciples astray, and to remember the time he had spent in Ephesus. Since the word G5148 appears only once, if we add Acts 18:19–21, 19:10, 20:1, Paul’s time in Ephesus was really over two years, so this term should be translated as “somewhat over two years,” though it was said generally here about three years.

He also spoke of being vigilant and of shepherding (G4165, feed) the church of God, the latter being what Peter said: "Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd (G4165) the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory."(1 Peter 5:1-4) In fact, the word “shepherd” (G4165) appears only 11 times; looking at these 11 verses, one can see that its meaning is very clear.

Before parting from them, he entrusted them to God and to the word of His grace, speaking of how he had set an example in everything by his own conduct—that is, as other passages say, "For you yourselves know how you ought to follow (G3401) our example, because we did not act in an undisciplined manner among you, nor did we eat anyone’s bread without paying for it, but with labor and hardship we kept working night and day so that we

would not be a burden to any of you; not because we do not have the right to this, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you, so that you would follow our example."(2 Thessalonians 3:7–9) He urged them to "...remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"(Acts 20:35) Please note that the Chinese Union Version's translation of "follow" here as imitate is somewhat inadequate, as it can imply merely superficial imitation, whereas the text refers to inner, heartfelt following.

Then came prayer and a farewell kiss, which also grieved them as they realized he would not return to Ephesus. Regarding the kiss, since they were all male elders, it posed no problem according to the customs of the time; however, in some countries today—especially regarding kisses between the opposite sexes—one must be very careful to avoid misunderstandings. As for Paul not returning to Ephesus, he must have known this in advance; otherwise, he would not have summoned the elders. This can be seen from his previous actions. When he first arrived in Ephesus, "When they asked him to stay for a longer time, he did not consent, but taking leave of them and saying, "I will return to you again if God wills," he set sail from Ephesus."(Acts 18:20–21) He knew he had to move on at that time. Three months after God allowed him to return to Ephesus, he was "...reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus. This took place for two years, ..." (Acts 19:9–10)

Indeed, Paul would not return to Ephesus. Some time after arriving in Jerusalem, he was taken to Rome, as the Scripture says, "When it was decided that we would sail for Italy, they proceeded to deliver Paul and some other prisoners to a centurion of the Augustan cohort named Julius."(Acts 27:1) Finally, "There (at Puteoli) we found some brethren, and were invited to stay with them for seven days; and thus we came to Rome."(Acts 28:14) In Rome, "...he stayed two full years in his own rented quarters and was welcoming all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered."(Acts 28:30–31) From the Epistle to Philemon, we learn how Onesimus was saved by this way.