

Acts

Lesson #16

St. Paul's Journey to Jerusalem

(20: 1 – 21: 14)

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Review

On the way home from Corinth St. Paul stopped in Ephesus, the major deep-water port on the west coast of Asia Minor and the hub of maritime trade: Paul saw its potential immediately.

Until now, Paul's "evangelization strategy" had focused on traveling from place-to-place founding churches. His strategy was effective, but it was not efficient. On his 3rd missionary journey, A.D. 54-57, Paul traveled to Ephesus, and he stayed there, letting the people come to him. Ephesus was St. Paul's most effective missionary journey. At its end Luke writes that *"all the inhabitants of the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord, Jews and Greeks alike"* (19: 10).

Yet, some very troubling events occurred in Ephesus: the newly converted believers held a book burning, and a massive riot erupted in the 25,000-seat theater at Ephesus. Paul left Ephesus shortly afterward, pondering these events and doing some serious soul searching.

Preview

After three years in Ephesus, St. Paul leaves for Macedonia and travels leisurely to Greece, where he stays for three months. Preparing to leave for home, probably from the port at Cenchreae, he learns of an assassination plot and instead travels by land through Macedonia, where he stays in Philippi for Passover, and then he goes on to Troas. During the journey Paul develops a deep and dreadful foreboding that he must get to Jerusalem by Pentecost 50 days later, and that when he does, he will be killed. His companions sail from Troas to Assos, while Paul walks, pondering his options.

His decision made, St. Paul sails from Assos with his companions, past Ephesus to Miletus, where he meets with the leaders of the church at Ephesus and says goodbye to them, encouraging them and saying that they will not be seeing them again. He then sails on to Tyre (in Lebanon of today) and south to Caesarea Maritima, where he prepares to walk the final leg of his journey to Jerusalem . . . and to his death.

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“When the disturbance was over [in Ephesus], Paul had the disciples summoned and, after encouraging them, he bade them farewell and set out on his journey to Macedonia. As he traveled throughout those regions, he provided many words of encouragement for them. Then he arrived in Greece, where he stayed for three months. But when a plot was made against him by the Jews as he was about to set sail for Syria, he decided to return by way of Macedonia.”

(20: 1-3)

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“Sopater, the son of Pyrrus, from Bereoea, accompanied him, as did Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica, Gaius from Derbe, Timothy, and Tychicus and Trophimus from Asia who went on ahead and waited for **us** at Troas, where **we** spent a week.”

(20: 4-6)

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About to sail from Cenchrea to Ephesus and then on to Caesarea Maritima, St. Paul discovers an assassination plot! Apparently, some thugs had been hired by the Jews to sail to Ephesus on the same ship as Paul, kill him and toss his body overboard, a tasty treat for the Aegean crabs!

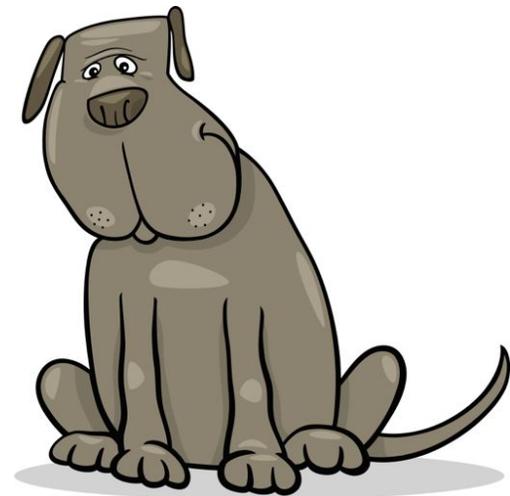
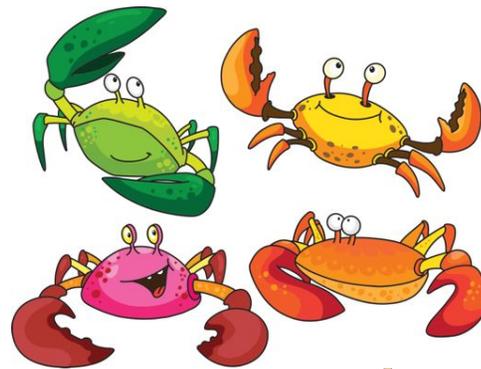
We can only imagine how the scene may have played out: Paul openly boards the ship, but just as it lifts anchor and is about to untie from the dock, Paul quietly disembarks, and as the ship sails away, Paul waves goodbye to the assassins, a wily grin on his face!

Paul then rounds up his companions—Sopater, Aristarchus, Secundus, Gaius, Timothy and Luke—and they walk to Philippi. There, Paul sends the others ahead to Troas, while he and Luke stay with Lydia for Passover.



St. Paul lived a dangerous life! He was flogged 5 times; beaten with rods 3 times; stoned and left for dead in Lystra; shipwrecked 4 times; attacked by mobs multiple times; arrested and jailed; and now an assassination plot!

I'm glad the crabs didn't get him!



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“On the first day of the week when we gathered to break bread, Paul spoke to them because he was going to leave on the next day, and he kept on speaking until midnight. There were many lamps in the upstairs room where we were gathered, and a young man named Eutychus who was sitting on the window sill was sinking into a deep sleep as Paul talked on and on. Once overcome by sleep, he fell down from the third story and when he was picked up, he was dead. Paul went down, threw himself upon him, and said as he embraced him, ‘Don’t be alarmed; there is life in him.’ Then he returned upstairs, broke the bread, and ate; after a long conversation that lasted until daybreak, he departed. And they took the boy away alive and were immeasurably comforted.”

(20: 7-12)

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Back at the ancient harbor of Troas.

Photography by Ana Maria Vargas

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**Model of a 1st-century Roman villa, typical of expensive homes in the countryside.
In the Eutychus tale, the home is larger, with three stories.**

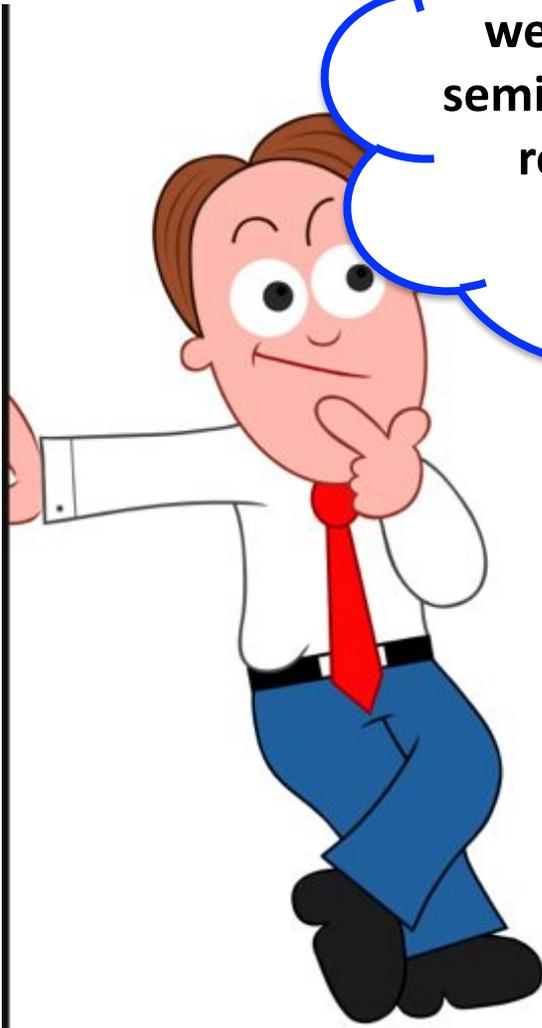
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- Apparently, after arriving in Troas, Paul and Luke join Sopater, Aristarchus, Secundus, Gaius and Timothy as guests for dinner and Eucharist on a Sunday evening. Because Paul was leaving the next day, the after-dinner conversation continued until midnight, *“as Paul talked on and on”* (20: 9).

- Eutychus, a young man sitting on the 3rd-story window sill listening to Paul, nodded off and fell out the window!





I know just how that feels. When I was in graduate school I had a 15-week, 3-hour Tuesday afternoon seminar in a windowless conference room with 8 people, studying Edmund Spencer's *The Faerie Queen*. Deadly!

Some have experienced that in our classes, too! Thankfully, they're not 3 hours long.



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- We read in our NAB translation that “[Eutychus] *fell down from the third story and when he was picked up, he was dead*” (20: 9). But was he?

- When Paul dashed down to Eutychus he “*threw himself upon him, and said as he embraced him, ‘Don’t be alarmed; there is life in him’*” (20: 10).

- The Greek reads ἦρθη νεκρός, literally, “was picked up dead,” suggesting that St. Paul then raised Eutychus from the dead, as Elijah, Elisha and Jesus raised a dead child.

- But humor undercuts the story—deliberately, I think—suggesting that Paul, throws himself on the boy, checks his ABCs, and finds that he’s just been knocked silly, a lighter, more humorous reading of the story, offering much needed comic relief.

“We went ahead to the ship and set sail for Assos where we were to take Paul on board, as he had arranged, since he was going overland. When he met us in Assos, we took him aboard and went on to Mitylene. We sailed away from there on the next day and reached a point off Chios, and a day later we reached Samos, and on the following day we arrived at Miletus, Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus in order not to lose time in the province of Asia, for he was hurrying to be in Jerusalem, if at all possible, for the day of Pentecost.”

(20: 13-16)

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After the book burning and riot in Ephesus, St. Paul went to Macedonia, revisiting communities he had founded. When he arrives in Greece he stays three months, but we have no information about what he does there.

After the assassination attempt at Cenchera, Paul and company walk north to Philippi, a 421 mile, 23-day journey (according to Orbis), where he sends the others ahead to Troas, while he and Luke spend Passover in Philippi, presumably with Lydia and her friends.

Once in Troas, Paul puts everyone on board ship and they sail for Assos, while Paul walks the 30-mile coastal road, alone.

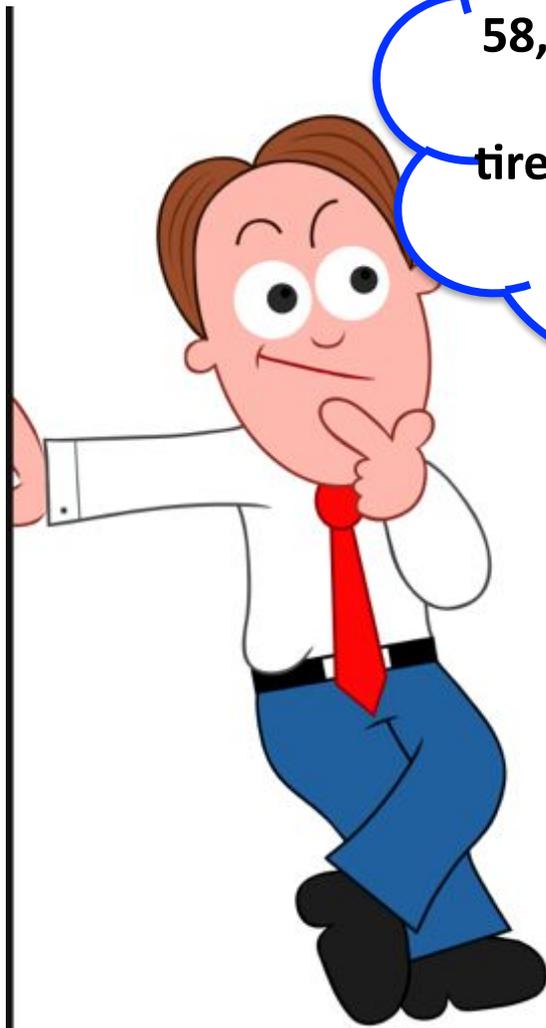
Since leaving Ephesus, Paul seems pensive and deeply troubled. We learn why when he calls the leaders from Ephesus to meet with him at Miletus.

“From Miletus he had the presbyters of the church at Ephesus summoned. When they came to him, he addressed them, ‘You know how I lived among you the whole time from the day I first came to the province of Asia. I served the Lord with all humility and with the tears and trials that came to me because of the plots of the Jews, and I did not at all shrink from telling you what was for your benefit, or from teaching you in public or in your homes. I earnestly bore witness for both Jews and Greeks to repentance before God and to faith in our Lord Jesus . . .

“ . . . But now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem. What will happen to me there I do not know, except that in one city after another the holy Spirit has been warning me that imprisonment and hardships await me. Yet I consider life of no importance to me, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to bear witness to the gospel of God's grace.

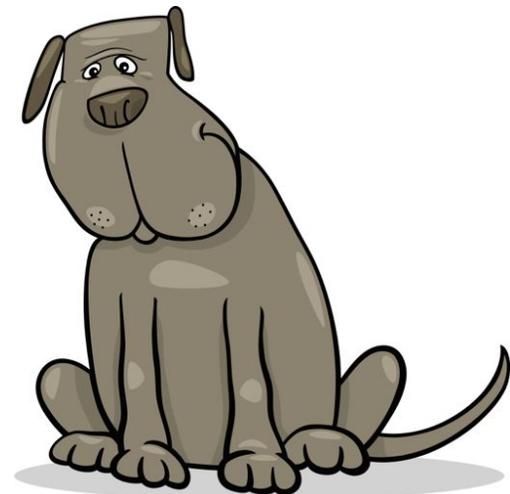
(20: 17-24)

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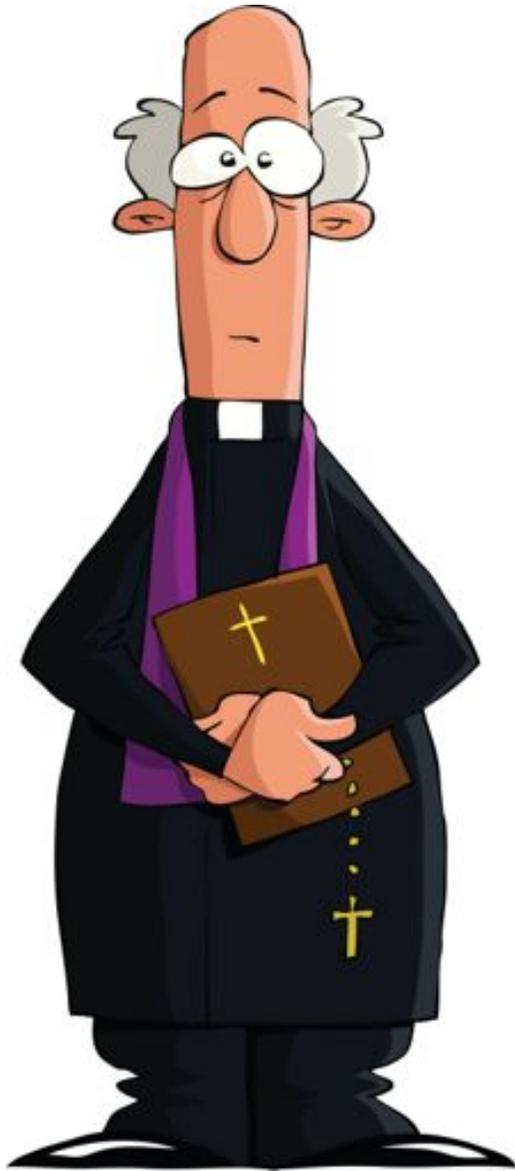


Wow! Paul sounds desperately tired and depressed. It's now A.D. 58, and Paul has been on the road for over a decade, working tirelessly for Christ under the most difficult and trying of circumstances.

I wish I could have been there to help him feel better. I'm good at that!



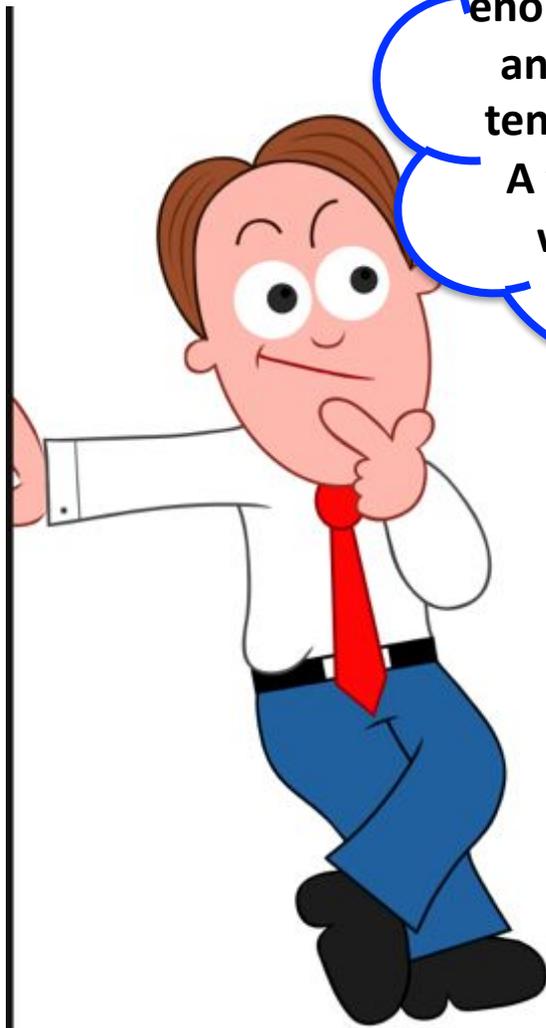
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Shortly after this, during A.D. 60-62, Paul writes his epistle to the church at Philippi, the church that meets in Lydia's home. In it he says:

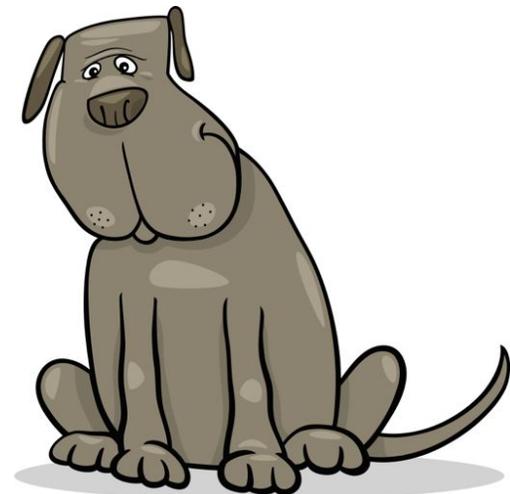
“My eager expectation and hope is that I shall not be put to shame in any way, but that with all boldness, now as always, Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me life is Christ, and death is gain. If I go on living in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. And I do not know which I shall choose. I am caught between the two. I long to depart this life and be with Christ, [for] that is far better. Yet that I remain [in] the flesh is more necessary for your benefit.”

(Philippians 1: 20-24)

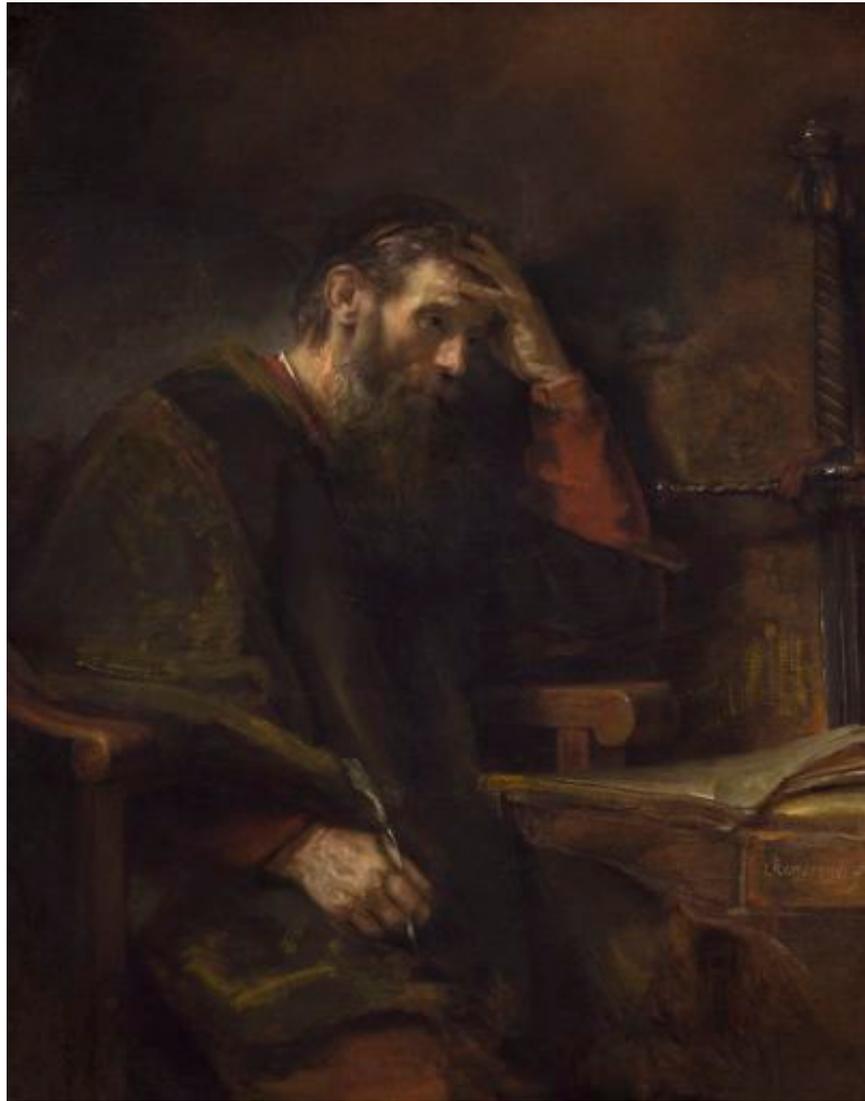


As we've studied through Acts we've observed that St. Paul is at once enormously bright, deeply opinionated and often demanding; but he is also tender, loving and deeply committed. A very intense person (for better or worse) Paul can slip easily into a profound melancholy.

St. Paul is the most complex personality in all of Scripture.



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**Rembrandt. *The Apostle Paul* (oil on canvas), 1657.
National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.**

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“ But now I know that none of you to whom I preached the kingdom during my travels will ever see my face again. And so I solemnly declare to you this day that I am not responsible for the blood of any of you, for I did not shrink from proclaiming to you the entire plan of God. Keep watch over yourselves and over the whole flock of which the holy Spirit has appointed you overseers, in which you tend the church of God that he acquired with his own blood. I know that after my departure savage wolves will come among you, and they will not spare the flock. And from your own group, men will come forward perverting the truth to draw disciples away after them. So be vigilant and remember that for three years, night and day, I unceasingly admonished each of you with tears. And now I commend you to God . . .

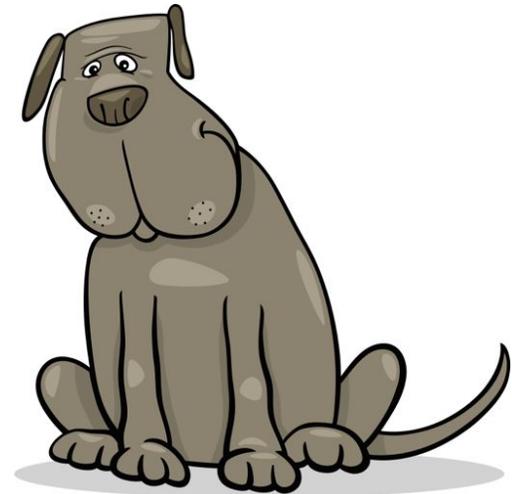
“ . . . and to that gracious word of his that can build you up and give you the inheritance among all who are consecrated. I have never wanted anyone’s silver or gold or clothing. You know well that these very hands have served my needs and my companions. In every way I have shown you that by hard work of that sort we must help the weak, and keep in mind the words of the Lord Jesus who himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”

(20: 25-35)



During Paul's post-Ephesus wanderings, he had become increasingly convinced that he must get to Jerusalem by Pentecost, and that when he does, he will be killed. This dark, inner dread has sunk deep roots into Paul's very soul, and it compels him to embrace his fate.

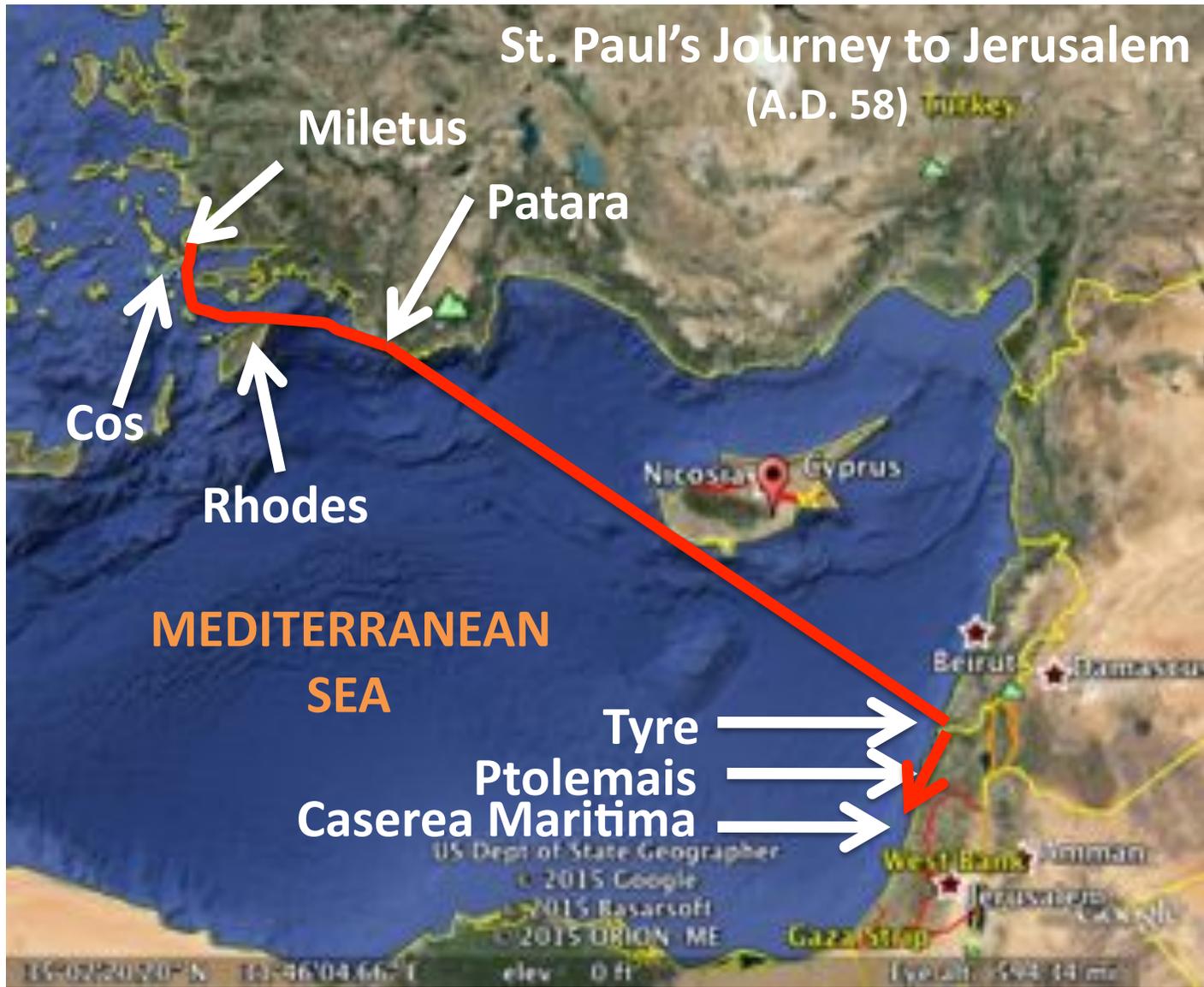
I'm worried about Paul. I'll bet his Ephesian friends are, too.



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“When he had finished speaking he knelt down and prayed with them all. They were all weeping loudly as they threw their arms around Paul and kissed him, for they were deeply distressed that he had said that they would never see his face again. Then they escorted him to the ship.”

(20: 36-38)



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“When we had taken leave of them we set sail, made a straight run for Cos, and on the next day for Rhodes, and from there to Patara. Finding a ship crossing to Phoenicia, we went on board and put out to sea. We caught sight of Cyprus but passed by it on our left and sailed on toward Syria and put in at Tyre where the ship was to unload cargo. There we sought out the disciples and stayed for a week. They kept telling Paul through the Spirit not to embark for Jerusalem. At the end of our stay we left and resumed our journey. All of them, women and children included, escorted us out of the city, and after kneeling on the beach to pray, we bade farewell to one another. Then we boarded the ship, and they returned home.”

(21: 1-6)

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“We continued the voyage and came from Tyre to Ptolemais, where we greeted the brothers and stayed a day with them. On the next day we resumed the trip and came to Caesarea, where we went to the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the Seven, and stayed with him. He had four virgin daughters gifted with prophecy. We had been there several days when a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. He came up to us, took Paul’s belt, bound his own feet and hands with it, and said, ‘Thus says the holy Spirit: This is the way the Jews will bind the owner of this belt in Jerusalem, and they will hand him over to the Gentiles. When we heard this, we and the local residents begged him not to go up to Jerusalem . . .

“. . . Then Paul replied, ‘What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? I am prepared not only to be bound but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.’ Since he would not be dissuaded we let the matter rest, saying, ‘The Lord’s will be done.’”

(21: 7-14)

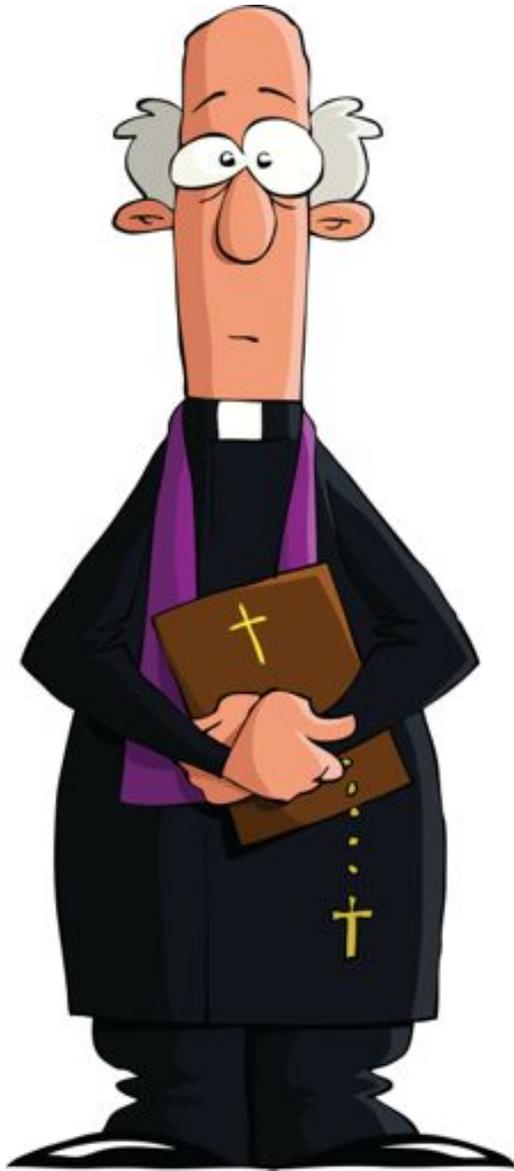
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So, St. Paul is determined to go to Jerusalem, no matter what anyone says: Luke, friends in Tyre and Caesarea, the prophet Agabus from Jerusalem . . . no one.

Paul is as stubborn as a mule!

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St. Paul has embraced fully what he considers to be his fate. At this point in his life, he is indifferent to living or dying: he just wants to complete the job the Lord has given him . . . and be done.

It will take another ten years.

Only in A.D. 68, sitting on “death row” in the Mamertine prison in Rome, will Paul finally be able to write:

“I am already being poured out like a libation, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have competed well; I have finished the race; I have kept the faith.”

(2 Timothy 4: 6-7)

Since his dramatic conversion of the road to Damascus, Paul has led an enormously stressful life: physically, spiritually and emotionally. He is worn out, and he badly needs a break, a sabbatical, if you will. And he’ll get one, but not as we might expect.

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Questions for discussion and thought

1. After Ephesus Paul has clearly changed. How would you describe his post-Ephesus behavior?
2. What do you think caused this change?
3. Why do you think Paul avoided going to Ephesus on his return trip to Jerusalem, bypassing it by sailing to Miletus?
4. How did the delegation from Ephesus react to the tone and content of Paul's announcement that he would not be returning?
5. Even though many people try to dissuade Paul from going up to Jerusalem, he refuses to listen to them. Why?

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