

Christ the Lord Episcopal Church  
Study of the Book of Acts  
Easter Season 2024

May 1, 2024

Week 5 - Chapters 17 - 20

Chapter 17

**Paul was the chosen instrument to carry Christ's name to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15). Yet only twice in Acts is Paul's missionary preaching aimed at an exclusively Gentile audience: in Paul's address to the residents at Lystra (Acts 14:15-17) and in Paul's Areopagus speech delivered in Athens (17:22-31).**

**The Areopagus sermon is the fullest and most dramatic speech of Paul's missionary career. Anticipated by the shorter address in Lystra (14:15-17) and consistent with the kerygma Paul presents to the Gentiles in his letters (cf. Romans 1-3; 1 Thessalonians 1), this address provides a window into how Paul dealt with the Gentiles in other places. The speech may be outlined as follows:**

**A: Introduction — Evidence of the ignorance of pagan worship (17:22-23)**

**B: The object of true worship is the one Creator God (17:24-25)**

**C: Proper relationship between humanity and God (17:26-28)**

**B: The object of false worship are the idols of gold, silver, or stone (17:29)**

**A: Conclusion — The time of ignorance is now over (17:30-31)**

**This emphasis on God the creator (who is separate from the created order) also echoes earlier speeches in Acts: 4:24; 7:48-50; 14:15. The statement that God has "need of nothing" echoes both Jewish ("the Deity stands in need of nothing"; Josephus, *Ant.* 8.4.3.111) and pagan philosophical ("God has need of nothing"; Euripides, *Herc. fur.* 1345-46) views of God's self-sufficiency. Furthermore, that such a God is not to be worshipped in human-made temples also resonates both with Jewish (Isa 57:15; Josephus, *Ant.* 8.3.2.114) and pagan (Lucian of Samosata, *Sacr.* 11) traditions.**

**Paul's Areopagus speech is sometimes unfairly criticized: 1) for lacking explicit citations to Scripture, which led 2) to the speech's failure to win converts among the Athenians. But as we have seen, Paul's argument is thoroughly grounded in the thought world of biblical Judaism (and Christianity) despite its lack of scriptural citations. And a peek at the very end of the story suggests that while some of Paul's audience did mock him (17:32a), others promised to hear him again (17:32b), and still others "joined him and believed" (17:34). So goes the proclamation of the Gospel!**

**Commentary on Acts 17:22-3 Mikeal C. Parsons 2014 Working Preacher**

## Chapter 18

Evidence from Paul's epistles suggests the great apostle launched out on his third missionary trip in an attempt to undo the damage caused among the churches by numerous opponents of the gospel. Beginning at Antioch, Paul journeyed through Galatia and Phrygia (18:23), eventually coming to Ephesus on the west coast of Asia Minor. Paul's ministry in Ephesus lasted more than two years and was marked by an obvious movement of God's Spirit. Luke records that "the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed" (19:20). Following a riot instigated by area tradesmen, who saw the spread of Christianity as a threat to their livelihood selling silver idols of the goddess Diana, Paul ventured through Macedonia and into Achaia. In Athens, Paul was again divinely protected from a murderous plot at the hands of the Jews.

Arriving at Miletus, Paul summoned the elders of the Ephesian church to bid them farewell. This emotional discourse reveals Paul's pastoral heart (verses 18–20, 31, 36–37), and it records the presence of a well-trained group of disciples who would be able to carry the message of Christ throughout Asia.

MacArthur, John F.. Acts (p. 94). HarperChristian Resources. Kindle Edition.

## Chapter 19

When Paul arrives in Ephesus, where our story takes place, Apollos had left for Corinth. But Paul meets a group of Christians there who, like Apollos, had an inadequate understanding of baptism. They had never heard of the Holy Spirit, and they had been baptized "into John's baptism" (19:3). Paul has to explain to them that John's baptism was a "baptism of repentance" anticipating the coming of the Messiah. Subsequently, Paul baptizes them into "the name of the Lord Jesus" and lays hands upon them. The Holy Spirit comes upon them, and they speak in tongues and prophesy.

The greatest glory of Ephesus was the Temple of Artemis. Artemis and Diana were one and the same, Artemis being the Greek name, Diana the Latin. This Temple was one of the Seven Wonders of the World. It was 425 feet long by 220 feet wide by 60 feet high. There were 127 pillars, each the gift of a king. They were all of glittering Parian marble and 36 were marvelously gilt and inlaid. The great altar had been carved by Praxiteles, the greatest of all Greek sculptors. The image of Artemis was not beautiful. It was a black, squat, many-breasted figure, signifying fertility; it was so old that no one knew where it had come from or even of what material it was made. The story was that it had fallen from heaven.

In those days everyone believed that illness and disease, and especially mental illness, were due to evil spirits who settled in a man. Exorcism was a regular trade. If the exorcist knew the name of a more powerful spirit than that which had taken up residence in the afflicted person, by speaking that name he could overpower the evil spirit and make him depart.

**There is no reason to disbelieve that these things happened. The human mind is a strange thing and even misguided and superstitious faith has its results in the mercy of God. When some charlatans tried to use the name of Jesus the most alarming things happened. The result was that many of the quacks, and also many of those who were sincere, saw the error of their ways. Nothing can more definitely show the reality of the change than that in superstition-ridden Ephesus they were willing to burn the books and the charms which were so profitable to them. They are an example to us.**

**Next is a thrilling story that sheds a great deal of light on the characters in it. First, there are Demetrius and the silversmiths. Their trouble was that their pockets were being touched. True, they declared that they were jealous for the honor of Artemis; but they were more worried about their incomes. When pilgrims came to Ephesus, they liked to take souvenirs home, such as the little model shrines which the silversmiths made. Christianity was making such strides that their trade was threatened.**

**Second, there is the man whom the King James and Revised Standard Versions call the He was more than that. He kept the public records, he introduced business in the assembly; correspondence to Ephesus was addressed to him. He was worried at the possibility of a riot. Rome was kindly but the one thing she would not stand was civil disorder. If there were riots in any town Rome would know the reason why and the magistrates responsible might lose their positions. He saved Paul and his companions but he saved them because he was saving his own skin.**

**Third, there is Paul. Paul wished to face that mob but they would not let him. Paul was a man without fear. For the silversmiths and the town clerk it was safety first; for Paul it was always safety last.**

**-Barclay's Daily Study Bible (NT)**

## **Chapter 20**

**No doubt the collection money Paul was carrying would have been an added inducement to murder him. Of course, Paul was not going to Jerusalem alone. He was in the company of representatives from the various Gentile church areas that had donated to the Jerusalem relief fund. These men must have been the official delegates appointed by their respective churches to present the collection to the Jerusalem elders. However, Luke was silent concerning the function of the delegation. Luke wanted to show the progress of the gospel from Jerusalem to Rome. Any inter-church affairs mentioned were almost always in the form of summaries or generalities, unless they were relevant to the movement of the gospel message.**

**Luke described only a single event at Troas, what was perhaps a special “worship service.” He said of himself and the church congregation: “On the first day of the week we came together to break bread” (20:7). It was an evening service, perhaps with a communal meal.**

If Luke was using a Jewish reckoning of time, with days beginning at sunset (or twilight), then Saturday evening would have marked the beginning of the first day of the week.

According to the Jewish method of calculating the new day from sunset, Paul would have met with the Christians on what was Saturday evening and would thus have resumed his journey on Sunday morning. According to the Roman method of reckoning the new day as beginning at dawn, the Christians would have met in the evening of either Sunday (the first day of the Jewish week) or Saturday (the first day of the Roman week).

Since elsewhere Luke reckons the hours of the day from dawn (3:1), he appears to follow the Roman method of time-reckoning and the Jewish calendar (cf. [Luke 24:1](#)). (I. Howard Marshall, *Acts*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, page 326)

Literally, the Greek expression translated “on the first day of the week” means “on one of the Sabbaths.” Could Luke have been simply saying that Paul and the church came together “on one of the Sabbaths” or weeks?

One thing is not in doubt. This meeting was an evening meeting, and it became a very late one (20:7, 13). It was also a very special meeting, because Paul thought it would be the last time he would ever see the church. That being the case, it is very dangerous to make any assumptions from this event about the form and time of the apostolic church’s regular worship services.

Luke told the story of the raising of the young man (who could not stay awake) from the dead in such a casual manner as to make one wonder if he was really dead, or only seemed dead. However, it’s doubtful Luke would have singled out this story to tell if the boy had merely been knocked unconscious. Perhaps Luke was trying to show his readers that the power of God was so completely with Paul that such miracles were the natural order of the day. (The same feeling was engendered when we read that pieces of cloth Paul had touched could transmit healing to the sick.)

Luke Johnson writes, “The small details already noted clearly indicate the message Luke wants the reader to derive from the tale: the power of the raised prophet Jesus is at work in the Apostle Paul precisely at the moment he sets off on his own journey to ‘chains and afflictions’ in Jerusalem” (*The Acts of the Apostles*, Sacra Pagina Series, page 358).

Paul’s gesture of leaning over Eutychus and embracing him reminds us of Old Testament stories of the great prophets Elijah and Elisha. Elijah restored the life of the son of the widow of Zarephath, who died from some unspecified illness ([1 Kings 17:17-24](#)). Elisha resuscitated the Shunammite’s son who died as a result of a farming accident ([2 Kings 4:33-36](#)). Luke already told his readers the story of Jesus raising to life the only son of a widow from Nain ([Luke 7:11-15](#)) and Peter’s raising of Dorcas (9:36-41). Even as the prophets of Israel, his peer the apostle Peter—and, of course, his Master, Jesus—Paul can be used by God to do good to the point of reversing a tragic death.

The “wolves” were the other element of Paul’s pastoral analogy. The wolves were the ones who threatened the herd, the church. In the fourth part of his speech, Paul spoke of wolves in terms of what Paul foresaw would occur in the church after his passing. As Paul looked toward the future, he painted a somewhat dismal prospect for the Ephesian church. He told the elders: “I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them” (20:29-30).

These tragic circumstances began to take shape, even in Paul’s lifetime. They are described in the letters to Timothy, who apparently ministered to the church in Ephesus ([1 Timothy 1:3-4](#); [19-20](#); [4:1-3](#); [6:3-5](#); [2 Timothy 1:15](#); [2:14-18](#); [3:1-9](#)). A generation later, the Ephesian church, while rooting out some heresy, had become so loveless that the risen Christ threatened it with a loss ([Revelation 2:4-5](#)).

Commentary on Acts 20 *Author: Paul Kroll, 1995, 2012*

### Questions to ponder

Why did Luke include the incident of Eutychus (20:7–12) in his record? What lessons are there for us?

Have you ever had the experience of feeling like the Holy Spirit is leading you? How did it turn out? What were the lessons you learned.

Has material concerns ever influenced your decisions? Where is God and walking the way of Jesus in your life as you make life choices?

Have you ever experienced mob mentality over political/religious beliefs? Why does one group need to win over the other?