

BIB204 NT2 Early Church

Unit 6a

Paul's Arrival and Arrest in Jerusalem

Presented by the



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Hello. This is Unit 6 of BIB204, The Early Church. Last unit, we dealt with Paul's missionary journeys. We did a recap of the first missionary journey, which we had gotten into in Unit 4, as I recall it. And then we sort of did a run through for the first missionary journey, and then we sort of summarized the second and the third missionary journeys. Along the way, I've also tried to give you sort of an idea of what may have been composed of the New Testament in the timeframe that we've covered in the Book of Acts. And again, it is a reconstruction. You do not necessarily have to agree with it, but it is generally in line with what evangelical scholars tend to agree to with respect to the reconstruction of the background of the New Testament. In this unit, what we're going to do is we're going to cover chapter 20 verses 17 all the way to the end of Book of Acts.

And so, at this point, please open your Bibles to Acts 20:17, which reads, "Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him. And when they came to him, he said to them: 'You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews; how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me.'"

So Paul is aware of what's going to happen when he gets to Jerusalem, but he wants to be in Jerusalem before Pentecost. I invite you to come with me, just travel back with me through chapter 20. We're going to back it up a little bit to about verse 2, where it says, "When he had gone through those regions and had given them much encouragement, he came to Greece. There he spent three months, and when a plot was made against him by the Jews as he was about to set sail for Syria, he decided to return through Macedonia." So this is about the year AD 56, 57. 1 and 2 Corinthians have been composed, when he spends time in Greece, where you find Corinth and Cenchreae. He probably composed the letter to the Romans during this three-month period because at the end of the letter to the Romans, I believe the first couple of verses of chapter 16, Phoebe, the servant at the church at Cenchreae, is basically the letter carrier of what we now call the letter to the Romans. So she's going to leave Cenchreae in Achaia and she's going to travel all the way to Italy. She's going to travel west to Italy. Northwest. North-northwest to Italy and to deliver the letter to the house churches at Rome. So you can see the New Testament beginning to take shape along a chronological trajectory here. And this is the year AD 57.

So we can go back to where we were. Paul is speaking to the elders of Ephesus at a place called Miletus. And we terminated briefly at verse 23. Verse 24, "But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the Gospel of the grace of God. And now, behold, I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face again. Therefore, I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all of you, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God. Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore, be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears." He's

basically telling them, “I know I’m not going to see you again, and I know that after my departure, there will arise false doctrine. There will be savage wolves even from among you. There will be perverse men speaking twisted things to draw people away, to create disciples, to make disciples for themselves. And remember, I warned you about this for the space of two or three years, every night with tears.”

“And now (verse 32) 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.” He speaks of his record. Verse 33, “I coveted no one’s silver or gold or apparel. You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me.” In other words, he worked for himself. “In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’” So he says to them, “I’ve served as an example. I worked with my own hands and I gave, even when I worked with my own hands, to exemplify and to embody the words of the Lord Jesus. Verse 36, “When he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. And there was much weeping on the part of all; they embraced Paul and kissed him, being sorrowful most of all because of the word he had spoken, that they would not see his face again.” Because they loved Paul, and Paul loved them back. “And they accompanied him to the ship,” to see him off. That ends chapter 20.

So chapter 21, we see basically Paul’s journey with respect to the itinerary. If we look at verses 1 through 6 initially, Paul and his party set sail. They go to Cos and then to Rhodes and then to Patara. They cross over to Phoenicia by ship. They come to Cyprus, but they don’t land at Cyprus. They sail to Syria and they land at Tyre because that’s where the ship was unloading its cargo. They sought out the disciples at Tyre and they stayed there for seven days. And of course, Paul is hearing from others now, “Don’t go to Jerusalem.” After the seven days were over, verse 5, they departed and kept on in their journey and they prayed on the beach. Then Paul and his party went on the ship and they returned home. Now, you’ll notice that if you look at verse 6, “Then we went on board the ship,” now, that “we” there is inclusive. Wherever you see the “we” in this portion of Acts, in fact, throughout the entire document of Acts, you’re looking at Luke being a member of that party. Historically, Luke is a proselyte of Antioch. That means his home church was Antioch of Syria and he accompanied Paul on second and third missionary journeys here and there.

I’m going to take verse 7 all the way to verse 16. It’s just easier that way. So they finished the voyage from Tyre. They arrived at Ptolemais (verse 7). They stayed with the brothers there for one day. Then they left. They went to Caesarea, spent time at the house of Philip the evangelist. And while they were there, a prophet named Agabus came from Judea, probably the same Agabus that we read about in Acts 11. And he took Paul’s belt, bound his own feet and hands (verse 11), and said, “Thus says the Holy Spirit, ‘This is how the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.’” And of course, there’s a reaction, a hue and a cry. They heard it when the people there urged him not to go out to Jerusalem. So Luke is not of the opinion that Paul should go to Jerusalem. But Paul answers, verse 13, “What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.” He would not be persuaded, so people stopped trying to convince him otherwise. Verse 15, they got ready. They went to Jerusalem. Some of the disciples from Caesarea traveled with Paul and his party to Jerusalem, and they went to the house of Mnason of Cyprus, an early disciple with whom they would lodge. So you have sort of this itinerary of Paul’s journey to Jerusalem, which takes us to verse 17. Remember, this is the year AD 57 thereabouts. It’s probably early AD 58 at this point. “When we had come to

Jerusalem, the brothers received us gladly. On the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present.”

So let me sharpen that a bit more. When you go back to the previous chapter where Paul stays in Greece for three months, Acts 20:3, arguably, that’s where he composes Romans. 1 and 2 Corinthians have already been composed in AD 55 and 56. Romans is composed in AD 57. So AD 58, he’s making his way to Jerusalem. So back to chapter 21 verse 17, they arrived at Jerusalem. They are received gladly (verse 18). Paul goes in the next day with the party to James because James is now the de facto leader of the church at Jerusalem. And at this point in history, the apostle Peter and John Mark have linked up and they’ve been traveling all around, and Mark has been listening to Peter give anecdotes about his time with Jesus of Nazareth. Peter certainly never intended to give any sort of chronological, detailed narrative about the life of Jesus of Nazareth, but Mark was careful to record everything.

Now, this tradition is recorded by the church historian Eusebius, who recorded the words of a bishop, a church father by the name of Papias, who was a bishop or the ruling elder of Hierapolis, which was about a hundred miles, give or take a mile or two, from Ephesus. A hundred miles east of Ephesus thereabouts on average. So early in the 2nd century, Papias gave this tradition about Mark following Peter, Mark being Peter’s interpreter. And so Mark basically takes his record of the Petrine anecdotes and shapes it into a Gospel, we think. So all of that has happened so far. So Peter is no longer at Jerusalem. He’s not heading up to Jerusalem church. He’s more peripatetic now, moving around. And John Mark is with him. John Mark is being mentored by Peter.

So James is the leader. So this is why Paul goes into James. All the elders at Jerusalem are present. Verse 19, “After greeting them, he related one by one the things that God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry.” So he tells them what’s been happening, second and third missionary journeys. “And when they heard it, they glorified God. And they said to him, ‘You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed. They are all zealous for Torah.’” Well, our English version says “zealous for the law.” But that’s what that means. ““And they have been told about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses.”” So there is a ferment at Jerusalem, and these elders along with James are telling Paul, “This is a volatile situation. This is a fine pickle we find ourselves in. And so, what are we going to do about this? They’ve heard about you, though. They’ve heard that you teach Jews everywhere to forsake the Law of Moses. That’s not good.”

“What then is to be done? (verse 22) They will certainly hear that you have come.” “They’re going to find out that you’re here.” So “Do therefore what we tell you (verse 23). We have four men who are under a vow; take these men and purify yourself along with them and pay their expenses, so that they may shave their heads. Thus all will know that there is nothing in what they have been told about you, but that you yourself also live in observance of the law. But as for the Gentiles who have believed, we have sent a letter with our judgment that they should abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality.” So they basically reiterate the content of the letter that we read about in Acts 15. “Yes, we agree that the Gentiles should abstain from these things and we therefore have fellowship with them on that basis. We understand about the Gentiles, but you, Paul, we need to stabilize this volatile condition in Jerusalem because they’re going to hear that you’ve come and we need you to show that you also adhere to Torah.” So Paul agrees for the sake of peace. So we read in verse 26, “Paul took the men, and the next day he

purified himself along with them and went into the temple, giving notice when the days of purification would be fulfilled and the offering presented for each one of them.”

Verses 27 to 36 of chapter 21 are violent. It doesn’t matter, in other words, what Paul does here, taking these four men and taking them to temple and showing that he himself adheres to the law. The seven days are almost completed with respect to the feast of Pentecost, because this is Pentecost. The Jews from Asia, diaspora Jews who are there for the feast, they see him in the temple and they stir up the whole crowd. They lay hands on him. They cry out. Look at verse 28. “Men of Israel, help! This is the man who is teaching everyone everywhere against the people and the law and this place. Moreover, he even brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place.” They really cry out about this because they had seen Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city and they thought that Paul had brought him into the temple. That was not the case. “Then all the city was stirred up. The people ran together (verse 30). They seized Paul. They dragged him out of the temple, and at once the gates were shut. And as they were seeking to kill him (verse 31), word came to the tribune of the cohort that all Jerusalem was in confusion. He at once took soldiers and centurions and ran down to them. And once they saw the tribune and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul.” If the tribune and the soldiers hadn’t gotten there, they would have beaten Paul to death.

The tribune came up and arrested him and ordered him to be bound with two chains, asked him who he was, what he had done. There was much confusion in the crowd. Some groups shouting one thing, another group shouting another thing. You see that in verse 34. He couldn’t learn the facts, this tribune, so he brought Paul into the barracks. He had to be carried by the soldiers (verse 35) because of the violence of the crowd, because the mob of the people followed, crying out, “Away with him!” When you see that language in the New Testament, “Away with him!” it means they want him dead. Verse 37, Paul is brought into the barracks and he asks the tribune, “May I say something to you?” and the tribune was surprised, asked him, “Do you know Greek? Are you not the Egyptian, then, who stirred up a recent revolt and led four thousand Assassins into the wilderness?” Paul says by way of reply, “I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia.” So actually, no. “I am a citizen of no obscure city. I beg you, permit me to speak to the people.” So this tribune gives Paul permission. Paul stands on the steps. He motions with his hand to the people. The people hush and he speaks to them in Aramaic. So that closes chapter 21.

A solid amount of chapter 22 concerns Paul’s speech to the people of Jerusalem. If you look at verses 1 of chapter 22 all the way to verse 21, Paul basically gives an autobiography of himself. Now, in a previous unit, we covered this because the story of Paul coming to Christ is covered in Acts 9 and 22 and 26. So Paul gives them his personal history. He’s a Jew. He’s born in Tarsus of Cilicia. He’s educated at the feet of Gamaliel, according to the strict manner of the law of the fathers, zealous for God. So that’s verse 3. He talks about how he persecuted Christians to the death. He talks about his conversion experience, starting in verse 6. He talks about Ananias who came and laid his hands on him. Verse 17, he talks about how the Lord got him in a trance and told him to leave the city. And this is prior to Barnabas coming to get him from Tarsus to come teach the mixed church in Antioch of Syria. So he relates that. But he closes in verse 20 with respect to that relation. “And when the blood of Stephen your witness was being shed...” This is Paul saying to the Lord, “They’re not going to kill me because they know me,” basically. “I myself was standing by and approving and watching over the garments of those who killed him.” Verse 21, “And he (that is, the Lord) said to me (that is, Paul), ‘Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles.’” That’s all the crowd needs to hear.

Take a look at verse 22. Up to this word, they listened to Paul. But once they heard, “I will send you far away to the Gentiles,” well, the crowd was, as they say in our day and age, triggered. “They raised their voices and said, ‘Away with such a fellow from the earth! For he should not be allowed to live.’” They don’t want to hear anything else. They want him dead. They’re shouting (verse 23). They’re throwing off their cloaks. They’re flinging dust into the air. The tribune brings him into the barracks, intending to flog him, to find out why they were shouting against him. They stretched him out for the whips, and they probably would have used the flagellum, the same kind of whip that was used on Jesus prior to his crucifixion. So they were going to torture the information out of him essentially. And Paul speaks up in timely fashion. Verse 25, he said to the centurion who was standing by, “Is it lawful for you to flog a man who is a Roman citizen and uncondemned?” When the centurion heard this, he went to the tribune and said to him, “What are you about to do? This man is a Roman citizen.” Verse 27, “The tribune came and said to him, ‘Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?’ And he said, ‘Yes.’ The tribune answered (verse 28), ‘I bought this citizenship for a large sum.’ Paul said, ‘But I am a citizen by birth.’ So those who were about to examine him withdrew from him immediately, and the tribune also was afraid, for he realized that Paul was a Roman citizen and that he had bound him.” They weren’t even supposed to bind Roman citizens. So they’re in a fine pickle here, and Paul spoke up in timely fashion. Otherwise, he would have been whipped, tortured for information that he didn’t necessarily have.

So let’s finish up this chapter and we’ll pick it up in chapter 23. I keep saying verse. I mean chapter. On the next day (verse 30), desiring to know the real reason why he was being accused by the Jews, this tribune unbound Paul and commanded the chief priests and all the council to meet, and he brought Paul down and set him before them. Before I close, the important thing to note here is that Paul is right now in a barracks in Jerusalem, under arrest, and the tribune is trying to get to the bottom of the riot, the riotous proceedings in Jerusalem the day before. In the next segment, we’re going to pick it up in chapter 23 and we’re going to deal with what Paul does with respect to the religious authorities and what transpires next.