

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

Acts 20:26-38 | Session 59 | The Whole Counsel of God | A.D. 60

If we are to fully grasp Scripture, we have to question assumptions and rightly divide. That means we apply Scripture pertaining to Israel to Israel, and the Scripture pertaining to the body of Christ to us. If we mix the two, we have a confusing mess. We realize that the book of Leviticus is not meant for us today, but then often we try to apply the book of James, written specifically to *the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad*, to us today. In the book of Acts we see a transition from the Kingdom gospel to the circumcised (Israel) to the Grace gospel to the uncircumcised (Acts 13:39 points out the two gospels, as does Galatians 2:7). In Acts 21:21 Paul preached for three years in Ephesus *testifying both to the Jews (repentance toward God), and also the Greeks (faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ)*. Paul taught the appropriate gospel message to the appropriate audience (See 1 Corinthians 9:19-23). In today's passage, Paul has gathered the *elders (presbuteros)* from Ephesus in Miletus (see your map of Paul's third missionary journey). As we saw last week, he is reviewing the work he did while in Ephesus.

Verse 26—

I am pure from the blood of all men. Paul notes that he has warned the Jewish people in Ephesus about the Kingdom of God and their need for repentance for killing their Messiah. There is a passage in Ezekiel 33:1-9 where the prophet was to warn the nation of Israel about their need for repentance, and that if Ezekiel did not give them warning their blood would be on Ezekiel's hands. Paul, acting as a watchman to the Jews in A.D. 60, states he has given them fair warning and the blood would come upon them, not him, for their lack of repentance. The Ezekiel passage is not a principle for us who live in the dispensation of grace. It is specifically a Jewish warning.

Verse 27—

All the counsel of God. This gives us great insight into Paul's ministry in Ephesus. He taught God's will for the Ephesians; to the Jews their opportunity to repent and be baptized to usher in the Kingdom, as well as the personal gospel of salvation by grace through faith to any man, woman, boy, or girl, through faith alone (Ephesians 2:8,9). For example: Acts 19:8 he taught the things concerning the kingdom of God; Acts 20:21 he testified to the Jews, and also to the Greek (two messages); Acts 20:24 he taught that which he had received of the Lord (Ephesians 3:2); In Acts 20:25 Paul said, I have gone preaching the kingdom of God.

Verse 28—

Take heed...to all the flock. We can't prove it from this one phrase, but throughout Scripture it is always Israel who are identified as *the flock*. Jesus said, *I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel*. Therefore, it appears whenever Jesus spoke of sheep, flocks, shepherding, etc., it was in reference to Israel, not us. In Luke 12:32 Jesus, speaking to his disciples said, *Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to*

give you the kingdom. Peter, in his first epistle, uses the term *flock* in 5:2, and 5:3; his letter was addressed to the scattered Jews. Paul never uses *flock* when referring to the body of Christ, since it appears to always be a Jewish analogy.

He addresses the Jewish elders from Ephesus, exhorting them to **feed the church** (ekklesia/a kingdom assembly of Jews) **of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood**. Israel was *purified as God's chosen people by a purchase with Christ's blood*. Yet, Paul tells Titus Jesus Christ gave himself to us (I take that to be all men) *that he might redeem us from all iniquity (Titus 2:14)*. The body of Christ receives salvation by a *gift given by Christ through his victory on the cross*. But we all have been redeemed from iniquity.

Verse 29—

Grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. This has been the pattern in most of the cities where Paul preached. We can likely find some application for us here, because as a general principle, the world hates God and the things of God and will do much to try and destroy God's work. This is why we have to be on our guard to protect our doctrine and make sure we rightly divide the word of truth.

Verse 30-31—

The attack comes from within the assembly and from without. Paul warned them for three years, pleading with them to the point of **tears** to be on guard.

Verse 32—

The thing that will build up these elders as they come under attack will be **the word of God's grace**. If they stand firm on the doctrine of repentance toward God, they will receive **an inheritance among all them which are sanctified**. The **inheritance** is what the Jewish nation will receive; Galatians 3:18 says this **inheritance** was given to *Abraham by promise*. The Greek word for **inheritance**, *kleronomia* is a compound word, *kleros*, by lot, and *nomias* from a root word that means *law*, i.e., by law that which is designated as yours. The body of Christ (what we refer to as the church) does not have an inheritance, rather we have a *free gift*. We should not replace Israel with the church.

Verses 33-38—

While it is acceptable for a church to pay a pastor's salary based on circumstances (in fact Paul teaches that Bible teachers should be paid, Galatians 6:4; 1 Corinthians 9:14), Paul is self-sufficient. Paul let his actions as well as his words speak for him. **I showed you all things...support the weak...remember the words of the Lord Jesus**. Without Paul, we would never have known the Lord spoke these words in verse 35. The Ephesians had truly bonded with Paul and loved him. They knew there was grave danger ahead of him and **they should see his face no more**.