

# **THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES**

by

Frank E. Allen

Copyright @ 1931

## **CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE**

### **LAST MISSIONARY WORK IN FREEDOM**

(Acts 20:1-16)

#### **OUTLINE**

Key verse - 24

Review of paragraph

Record of last missionary work in freedom, so far as Bible records - period covered, about a year - side lights in epistles - work extended to Illyricum - Wrote letters to Corinthians, Galatians and Romans - back through Macedonia on account of plot against his life - across to Troas - preached - dispensed Lord's Supper - restored Eutychus to life - preached all night - comforted disciples - departed

1. Paul emphasized the importance of holding fast the truth (1,2).
2. Paul emphasized the importance of liberality in the church (verse 35, II Corinthians 8).
3. Paul emphasized the importance of preaching the Gospel of grace (Romans and Galatians).
4. Paul emphasized the importance of enthusiasm in the service of Christ (11, 13, 31).

In this chapter of Acts we have the summary of the last missionary work of Paul, so far as the record goes, while he enjoyed freedom. Possibly he was set free again after his imprisonment, but if so we have no account of his work.

#### **PERIOD COVERED**

The period covered by the account in this chapter was about a year. In this year's work Paul evidently did some pioneer missionary work, but perhaps the most of his time was occupied in visiting the churches of Macedonia and Achaia, exhorting them and writing letters to the churches.

The letter to Rome was written during this year. Though Paul had not seen Rome he knew many disciples who were there.

## SIDE LIGHTS

The epitome of Paul's work which is given in this chapter is so very brief that we would not know much about what he did or taught were it not for incidental statements in some of the Epistles which enable us to understand more fully how vigorously he continued to carry on the work both by spoken word and by correspondence.

## TO ILLYRICUM

When Paul was traveling through Macedonia he must have gone farther west than he had ever done before, for in the Epistle to the Romans he said he had traveled from Jerusalem to Illyricum, thus pointing out the extreme distances over which he had traveled from east to west. Illyricum was the province northwest of Macedonia. As he had not been there before, so far as we know, it must have been during this year that he went there for the purpose of bearing the Gospel into new and more distant fields.

## WROTE LETTERS

Though Paul was busy preaching, he took time to write letters in order that the disciples might be instructed and encouraged, and that dissensions might be healed and erroneous practices corrected in the church. It was probably from Philippi, on this journey, that Paul wrote the Second Epistle to the Corinthians. In this letter he makes reference to some of the trying experiences through which he had passed in Asia, possibly at Ephesus. He wrote: "**For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life**" (II Corinthians 1:8). In this Epistle there are some very interesting side lights thrown upon Paul's character and also concerning his method of collecting the money of the church. During this same journey he seems to have written letters to the Christians in Galatia and in Rome. In both of these letters he urges the Christians to hold fast to their Christian liberty and not to be turned back to a gospel of works. We are justified by faith, he urges, and should allow no one to rob us of that great truth. The Epistle to the Romans, which so fully establishes the doctrine of justification by faith, has often been regarded as the greatest Epistle which Paul ever wrote. It was taken to Rome by Phoebe who was of the church of Cenchrea. Aquila and Priscilla, who had been with Paul in Corinth and Ephesus, were in Rome when this Epistle was written. They were the first to whom Paul sends greetings there. They had probably gone back to Rome from whence they had been driven by Claudius. Now that he had died they would be permitted to return.

## HIS PLANS CHANGED

There were a number of friends who accompanied Paul on this journey and helped him in his work. Some one revealed to him a plot of certain Jews who had planned to take his life as he was about to sail back into Syria. In order to escape from them he returned through Macedonia, went across to Troas, and sailed along the coast of Asia toward Jerusalem.

## IN TROAS

While he was in Troas for a week, ministering to the disciples there and dispensing the Lord's Supper, an interesting incident took place of a young man who fell down from the third floor while Paul was preaching and was taken up for dead. Paul restored him to life again and thus comforted and strengthened the disciples of that place. He continued to preach until morning when he left to continue his journey.

## HOLDING FAST THE TRUTH

Paul emphasized the importance of holding fast the truth. He exhorted the disciples at Ephesus before he left them, and when he went into Macedonia and Greece he exhorted them much. He believed in teaching as well as evangelizing. He would indoctrinate the church as well as convert the world. The greater part of the written message of Paul was given for the purpose of indoctrinating the church.

During the early part of his ministry Paul was frequently persecuted so severely that he could not remain with the disciples to teach them for a protracted period. But to such places he returned as often as he found opportunity. Where he was permitted to remain, as in Corinth and Ephesus, he preached and taught for a period, in the former instance for about two years, and in the latter for about three.

Paul organized the church so that the work might be carried on, the people instructed, and discipline exercised after he left. He ordained elders in every church. He sent different disciples, who had been associated with him for a time, to various churches to give them the help and instruction which they needed. He knew that false teachers would soon appear in Ephesus, therefore he warned the elders of that church to be on their guard. They were not only to feed the flock, but they were to guard against wolves which should enter in not sparing the flock. He also warned them against heretical disciples who should arise from their own midst. He had done his best to teach them for three years, admonishing them night and day with tears (29-31). If, therefore, they did not watch, it was not because they had been left without instruction or warning.

If the Christian of that day and this could only be persuaded to guard against the entrance of small sins there would be no doubt but that they would hold to the truth. John Newton said that Satan seldom comes to Christians with great temptations, or with a temptation to commit a great sin. You bring a green log and a candle together and they are safe neighbors; but bring a bundle of shavings and set them on fire with the log in the midst of them and you will soon have a large fire. It is thus with little sins. You will be startled with the thought of committing a great sin; and so the Devil brings before you a small temptation and leaves you to indulge in it. You feel that there is no great harm in this, and there is no great evil in that; and thus the little shavings are lighted and the great log is burned. Paul said to the Galatian church, and to us: **“Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage”** (Galatians 5:1).

Isaiah taught, **“For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little”** (Isaiah 28:10), until the people of his day ridiculed him because he reiterated the same truth so often. John Wesley’s parents saw the need of drilling their children in their lessons until they had grasped the truth firmly. “Why, my dear,” said Wesley’s father to his mother, while she was patiently teaching a simple lesson to one of her children, “why, my dear, do you tell that dull boy the same thing twenty times over?” “Because,” replied the mother, “nineteen times will not do. If I tell him but nineteen times all my labor is lost; but the twentieth secures the object.”

The Bible is the source of all truth. If the church is to hold fast the truth the children must be impregnated with its truth from their infancy. They must be taught that it is the only infallible guide, and that even a slight deviation from its teaching is an entering wedge which may lead far from the truth. It took the experts of London, we are told, ten years to finish making what is said to be the most perfect yard-stick in the world. It is made of platinum and iridium, and was designed to be the standard of the British government. Every year for ten years after it was completed it was to be examined, and if it varied by a millionth of an inch it was to be rejected.

The Bible is the Christian’s standard for his rule of life. Its truth never changes. The law of the Lord is perfect. We cannot hold to its truth too firmly.

“I supposed I knew my Bible,  
Reading piecemeal, hit or miss,  
Now a bit of John or Matthew,  
Now a snatch of Genesis;  
Certain chapters of Isaiah,  
Certain Psalms, the twenty-third,  
Twelfth of Romans, first of Proverbs -  
Yes I thought I knew the Word!  
But I found that thorough reading  
Was a different thing to do,  
And the way was unfamiliar  
When I read the Bible through.

“You who like to play at Bible,  
Dip and dabble, here and there,  
Just before you kneel, aweary,  
And yawn through a hurried prayer,  
You who treat the crown of writings  
As you treat no other book -  
Just a paragraph disjointed,  
Just a crude, impatient look -  
Try a broad and steady view:  
You will kneel in very rapture,  
When you read the Bible through!”

## LIBERALITY IN THE CHURCH

Paul emphasized the importance of liberality in the church. Near the close of this chapter Paul reminded his hearers that he had worked hard for his own living, yet he had ministered to those who were with him, and had showed them that they ought to support the weak, **“I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive”** (Acts 20:35). When Paul first went out as a missionary he was exhorted **“to remember the poor”** (Galatians 2:10) and this, he tells us, **“he was forward to do.”**

When writing to the Corinthian church, about this time, Paul spoke of the importance of liberality (II Corinthians 8). He showed how some of the churches had been made more liberal by their poverty and gave even more than they were able to give. They urged Paul to take the gift that they had given. He told the Corinthian church that their abundance should be a supply for others' want. He taught them to give on the first day of the week as God had prospered them: **“Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come”** (I Corinthians 16:2). Paul was also very careful about carrying money. He asked each church to choose one or more delegates into whose hands the money collected was to be placed, and the whole group of these men were asked to go with him to Jerusalem: **“And when I come, whomsoever ye shall approve by your letters, them will I send to bring your liberality unto Jerusalem”** (I Corinthians 16:3). He would not run any risk of being suspected of appropriating funds to himself which came from the church.

In those days the methods of handling and transporting money were not simple and easy as they are today. There was great danger from robbers. More precautions needed to be taken and men usually traveled in groups when carrying any valuable amount of money. This possibly accounts for the number of men who came from Macedonia across Asia and onward with Paul. They remained on the ship while Paul took a portion of the journey across the land: **“And we went before to ship, and sailed unto Assos, there intending to take in Paul: for so had he appointed, minding himself to go afoot”** (Acts 20:13). They were safer with their money on board the vessel.

Paul's exhortation concerning Christian consecration and giving was not in vain. The Macedonian Christians first gave themselves to the Lord: **“And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God”** (II Corinthians 8:5). When they had done this there was no hesitation about giving their means to the Lord. He commended the Christians of Achaia because they were ready so soon with their collection and he held them up as an example to the other Christians in those parts. At the same time he warned them against giving with a covetous spirit, **“for God loveth a cheerful giver”** (II Corinthians 9:7). We have never had a greater example than Paul, among mere men, of one who consecrated his life and his all to Christ. As he went through Macedonia and Greece he trod the ground where many heroes had lived, walked and fought, and many of them had given their lives for their fellowmen. But among them all there was no one who gave himself more unstintedly to the service of bringing blessings to his fellowmen, and with less of an earthly reward, than Paul.

His example, then and today, ought to make men liberal in their giving to Christ's cause. Paul was a servant, as we have it in our English version, but literally, he called himself a slave of Christ. He found joy in doing, giving, and even in suffering for Christ.

A missionary in West Africa asked the Christians to bring what they could on the following Sabbath to help in sending the good news to those places where God's love was yet unknown. On the Lord's day appointed they brought a large collection of things available for turning into money. At last a little black girl walked up and offered herself. The missionary smiled and said: "Not yet, dear child, some day I hope, but at present you are too young to teach." "But massah not understand," she said, "I have sold myself to missus. She will give you the money." The poor girl thought she was doing right. She thought she was following the example of the great apostle in giving herself first, and her all, to extend the Gospel of the love of Christ. It is said that there was a converted miser to whom a neighbor appealed for help in his distress. The miser decided to prove the genuineness of his conversion by giving him a ham. On his way to get it the tempter whispered, "Give him the smallest one you have." A mental struggle followed, and finally the miser took down the largest ham he had. "You are a fool," the devil kept saying to him, to whom the converted miser replied: "If you don't keep still I'll give him every ham in the smokehouse!"

**"Therefore, as ye abound in every thing, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love to us, see that ye abound in this grace (liberality) also. I speak not by commandment, but by occasion of the forwardness of others, and to prove the sincerity of your love. For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich."** (II Corinthians 8:7-9).

## THE GOSPEL OF GRACE

Paul emphasized the importance of preaching the Gospel of grace. There were many who were teaching other forms of doctrine and attempting to show another way of salvation. It kept Paul busy correcting false teachings which were springing up in the churches which he had established and in writing letters to counteract false teachers who would deprive the Christians of their liberty in Christ. A thoughtful student of the Word has said: "As he is a traitor to his prince who taketh upon him to coin money out of a base metal, yea although in the stamp he putteth for a show the image of the prince; so he that shall teach any doctrine that cometh not from God, whatsoever he say for it, or what gloss soever he set on it, is a traitor unto God, yea, a cursed traitor, though he were an angel from heaven."

Paul pronounced an anathema upon any who would preach another gospel **"But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed"** (Galatians 1:8-9). During this period, when writing to two churches in opposite directions, the Galatians and Romans, Paul had emphasized at greater length than any other doctrine that of the grace of God. We are not justified by works but by faith in Christ, he declared.

It seems strange that any one who has known the Gospel of grace should want to turn again to the idea of salvation by works, yet it is a very common thing for man to do. Paul had to urge the churches continually to guard against it. The pride that is in man keeps asserting itself and insisting that man is able to save himself, or at least that he is able to do a large part in saving himself. No one could have taught any more clearly and forcefully than did Paul, the truth that our works have nothing to do with making us appear righteous in the sight of God. We appear righteous in the sight of God only when we are clothed with the righteousness of Christ. **“Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified”** (Galatians 2:16).

The Epistles to the Galatians and to the Romans were especially dear to Martin Luther, for in them he found the great truth of justification by faith alone. This led him to forsake and oppose a system and a church which taught salvation by works. Luther had never had peace of heart before this time. When he began to trust in Christ rather than in his own works he found peace. He found a strength and a comfort which enabled him to endure all the severe trials through which he passed.

There is an instrument used for weighing gold in the assay office that is so delicately balanced that, when two pieces of paper of exactly the same size and weight, are placed upon the balances it still retains the same poise. But if a name is written upon one of the papers it will turn the scale. The name of Jesus on the heart turns the scale into favor with God. It is the possession of His name thus written that spells, “SAVED!” It is the lack of it that spells, “lost.”

Possibly, when Paul was in the part of the world where we find him in this chapter, in Achaia, he was tempted more strongly than ever before to turn aside from the simple Gospel of Christ and Him crucified, but he determined to preach nothing else than this, for he knew that it was the only saving message for Jew and Greek alike. The temptation comes to almost every minister, as it came to the young man of whom we read in the “Bonnie Brier Bush,” to preach some philosophical message which will astound the hearers. It would be well if every messenger of Christ would arrive at the same conclusion as that young man did, when he thought of the words of his dying mother who had told him to speak a good word for Jesus Christ.

“Who sees the face but sees in part; who reads  
The spirit which it hides, sees all; He needs  
No more. Thy grace -  
Thy life in my life, Lord, give Thou to me;  
And then in truth, I may forever see  
My Master’s face.”

### **ENTHUSIASM IN CHRIST’S SERVICE**

Paul emphasized the importance of enthusiasm in the service of Christ. He did this both by his teaching and his life. In this passage we are given an instance, which shows not only how earnest he was in giving the message, but how his fire held others in rapt attention.

He was willing to preach, and men were willing to listen while he preached all night. We are told of one young man who fell asleep, but that was likely owing to the crowded room and the impurity of the atmosphere on a hot night. Eutychus fell asleep and fell down from the third story and was taken up dead. Paul restored him to life again. He however, was not typical of the majority of the audience. Even after that incident the meeting was not dismissed, but Paul remained and talked to them until the light of the morning sun, peeping over Mt. Ida behind Troas, dimmed the light of the lamps in the upper room.

The first time Paul had passed through Troas it looked as though it was to be neglected that he might reach regions beyond. But God had many chosen ones in that city and He enabled Paul to pass through it twice after that, to teach and win many to Christ. In all probability Titus and others of the disciples who had been there had disseminated the Gospel throughout the city.

Paul was no doubt weary after his four years of hardship and constant labor, working night and day on this missionary journey. He was now on his way back to Jerusalem. Surely he would set aside a period of time for rest, visit the noted scenes of Troy and talk over the historic characters of that place. He remained a week in Troas. Might he not have an outing and with it something to divert his mind from the constant strain of missionary work? He had evidently passed through a stormy voyage on the Aegean, for the voyage, which under favorable circumstances took but two days, took five days. Would they expect him to preach at Troas after all this? Might not the Christians send Paul out to the hot springs near Troy where he could enjoy a weekend in the marble baths and lounge about the place with slaves to wait upon him? If any man deserved it surely Paul did. If these things created an attraction for Paul there was a joy that was greater in the opportunity to partake of the Lord's Supper with the disciples in Troas. He preached to them and talked with them the whole night afterwards.

Paul could have taken the ship with the others who sailed from Troas in place of waiting and walking across the peninsula to Assos, a distance of more than twenty miles. It must have been an exceedingly trying journey after preaching all night. Why did he do it? He evidently remained of deliberate purpose in order that he might preach to the people of Troas through the remainder of the night. The winds from the north sprang up about midnight and died down about noon the next day. The sailing vessel would, of course, take advantage of this. It would be necessary for the ship to sail at midnight in order that it might make the day's journey before the wind died down again. The companions of Paul evidently left at about midnight on this account. Paul had told them he would meet them at Assos. He knew that he could cut across the shorter distance by land and catch the vessel the next day even though he remained at Troas until morning. Therefore Paul labored all night preaching at Troas and the next day walked twenty miles overland to catch the ship which, apparently, he might have taken at midnight if he had been willing to quit preaching at that time. The people were hungry for the Gospel and Paul felt that it would be the last time he could ever preach to them. Weary of body, though he might be, he would preach on as long as he could possibly remain with them. It is a remarkable example of the unfailing energy of the great apostle. Paul's enthusiasm for Christ was amazing; it seemed beyond human endurance.

He frequently went back over old ground, teaching and writing, that he might establish the churches in the faith, and at the same time pushed out into new territory by the way in order to extend the good news into more distant fields. What a wonderful example! How many of us are willing to spend and be spent to any thing like the same extent? Oh, for the burning passion for service which will give us no rest, nor permit us to give the Lord any rest, until the ends of the earth are brought to the feet of Jesus?

It is said of the dumb son of king Croesus, that as he saw an assassin stealing up behind his father, he tried to cry out but could not. He tried again but could make no sound. A third time he strained and struggled to warn his father against the approaching enemy, and with a dreadful effort burst the bonds of dumbness and cried out so as to catch his father's attention and save his life.

When we see men threatened with eternal death. When we see the enemy of souls about to drag them down to hell we ought to call out to them in every way that we can, and we ought to keep on calling, entreating, warning, persuading, so long as God gives us strength to speak of His great love and of His never failing mercy.

Some one asked an old Scottish lady what she thought of the preaching of Robert Murray McCheyne. She hesitated a moment, then replied: "He preaches as if he were dying to have you saved." Do we have that spirit? Do we preach and plead with a like fervency?

"Ne'er think the victory won,  
Nor once at ease sit down,  
Thy arduous work will not be done  
Till thou has got the crown."

## QUESTIONS

### (Acts 20:1-16)

1. Why did Paul leave Ephesus?
2. Where did Paul go from Ephesus?
3. Into what new field did Paul apparently go during this time?
4. What were some of the Epistles which Paul wrote during this time?
5. What are some of the side lights which they throw on his work during this time?
6. How many occasions can you name when plots were made against Paul in addition to the one in this paragraph?
7. Show how God's protecting hand is manifest in these providences?
8. What is the apparent reason why so many men accompanied Paul into Asia?
9. Why did not Paul stop to preach in Troas the first time he was there?
10. How did Paul employ his time during the week in Troas?
11. How long did he preach the last night?
12. Was Eutychus typical of the majority of Paul's hearers?
13. What is the apparent reason why Paul walked to Assos?

14. Why could not the ship have waited for him until he had finished preaching?
15. How is it evident that Paul believed in indoctrinating the church as well as evangelizing the world?
16. What precautions did Paul take to guard against the disintegration of the churches after he left?
17. What did Paul do and say to encourage liberality in the church?
18. In what instances, when speaking of liberality, did Paul commend as well as exhort?
19. What place did Paul give to grace in his preaching and writing?
20. Is there a temptation to preach another Gospel today?

**~ end of chapter 35 ~**

<http://www.baptistbiblebelievers.com/>

\*\*\*