

**Acts 20:1-12 ~ Teacher's Lesson
Early Church Practice**

Introduction: Acts 20 offers an insightful glimpse into early church practice.

Review: After spending two years in Ephesus, Paul decided to go back to Greece. However, just before he left, there was a terrible riot in opposition to the Gospel.

******Where did Paul go after the uproar ceased (20:1-6)?** He left Asia (Turkey) and went to Macedonia (modern Northern Greece), then down to Greece (alias Acadia; Southern Greece) for three months, then back up to Macedonia, then finally to the city of Troas (in Turkey).

Romans: While Paul was in Greece (Corinth) this time, he penned his letter to the church in Rome.

What word did Luke use in 20:1-2 to describe what Paul did both in Ephesus and Macedonia? The words Luke used were “encouraging” (20:1) and “encouragement” (20:2).

1. Why do you suppose these believers needed encouragement (20:1-2)? They were facing terrible opposition alone, without Paul.

Application: We all need encouragement in our faith! Take the time to be an encourager to others.

Paul wanted to get in a boat and sail directly from Greece to Syria. What stopped him (20:3)? A plot by “the Jews” made him change his plans. They had not forgotten what happened the last time he was there: they lost not one but two synagogue rulers, a church was started right next door to the synagogue, and they had been humiliated in a court case judged by Gallio.¹ “Old times there are not forgotten”.

2. Be a detective. Put two and two together. From the facts that were given, what was the essence of this plot? How might “the Jews” have plotted to kill Paul (20:3)? It is likely that ship on which he would have sailed was full of Jews going to Jerusalem for Passover; the plot may have been to murder Paul on board after they were at sea, throwing his corpse overboard.²

How many men accompanied Paul when he went through Macedonia (20:4)? Luke listed seven men.

¹ Kistemaker, 713.

² Bruce, 405.

3. Why did so many men accompany Paul through Macedonia (20:4)? In light of Jewish hostility, they may have been his body guard! Also, since part of reason for going to Macedonia in the first place was to collect an offering for the Jerusalem church, these men may have added accountability.

The mission team split up in Philippi (20:5-6).³ Where did they come back up again? They came back together again in the city of Troas, in modern Turkey.

Acts 20:5-6 contains the words “us” and “we”. Who are us and we? Luke was not an arm-chair spectator; Luke was on this part of the trip with Paul.

Miracle at Troas

******A miracle occurred at Troas (20:7-12); someone was raised from the dead. What factors contributed to the man’s death the first place?** When Paul got a little long winded, a young man who was sitting in a third-story window died when he fell asleep and fell out the window. God graciously worked through Paul to raise him from the dead.

Application: It can be dangerous to sleep in a church meeting!

4. What snapshot of early church meetings can be seen in 20:7? The church at Troas evidently **1)** gathered on the first day of the week, **2)** in the evening (since Paul spoke to midnight), and **3)** for the purpose of breaking bread.

House Churches: Though not explicitly stated here, the upper room was probably in someone’s home. In India today, it is common for churches to meet on the upper floor of a home, which is often the third floor. The top floor typically has no interior walls and so can accommodate around 100 people.

What day is the first day of the week (20:7)? Sunday is the first day of the week. In Jewish thinking, the first day of the week began on Saturday night. However, Luke used the Roman method of reckoning a new day as beginning at dawn, which meant the church met on Sunday (not Saturday night).⁴

5. What is the significance of the fact the early church met on the first day of the week rather than on Saturday (the Jewish Sabbath)? See *Exodus 31:12-17*, *Matthew 28:1*, *1 Corinthians 16:20*, *Revelation 1:10*. The fact that the early church met on Sunday rather than Saturday reflects the tip of a theological iceberg:

- a) The sign of the Old (Mosaic/Sinai) Covenant is Saturday Sabbath observance (Exodus 31:12-17). That the early church felt no compulsion to observe the Hebrew Sabbath indicates that they understood they were free from the Law of Moses. You don’t keep the sign of a cancelled covenant (divorced people do not continue to wear a wedding ring).

³ The days of Unleavened Bread are a Hebrew festival associated with Passover. It commemorates the hasty Hebrew exodus out of Egypt.

⁴ Marshall, 344.

b) Jesus rose from the dead on a Sunday, the first day of the week, thus called the “Lord’s Day” by Scripture. The early church evidently met on Sunday in honor of Jesus’ resurrection.

c) **Why did Paul speak in the evening rather than during the day?** The early church met in the evening, after work. They did not regard Sunday as a new covenant Sabbath day. Today we typically have Sundays off work. This is a direct result of Christianity later becoming the official religion of the Roman Empire.

6. Based on the grammar of 20:7, did the church at Troas gather to break bread or to hear Paul? Why? The word “to” is a telic infinitive and denotes a purpose or goal. Their purpose in meeting was to break bread. This was their custom. Since they were already gathering to break bread, Paul spoke to them. A major feature of the early church was the weekly love feast, or *agapé*.

Interesting: Paul was in Troas a whole week (20:6), but waited until the Lord’s Day to speak to the gathered church.

7. What did Luke mean by “to break bread” (20:7)? *Acts 2:42, 22:19.* Since at the Last Supper Jesus took bread and broke it, many think that Luke used “to break bread” to refer to the Lord’s Supper.⁵ Others think it simply refers to eating the *agapé* meal. Factoring in other New Testament references and church history, it appears that the early church did indeed celebrate the Lord’s Supper every Lord’s Day as an actual meal, in the evening.⁶ In Greek, the word “supper” (as in Lord’s “Supper”) refers to the main meal toward evening.

What time of night did Eutychus fall out the upper room window (20:7-9)? It was about midnight.

According to 20:7, why did Paul talk so long? *See also 20:11.* It was because he knew he was leaving the next day. This was his last chance to encourage them.

8. What is the significance of the fact that there were so many lamps in the upper room (20:8)? Perhaps the smoke from so many lamps drove Eutychus to the window for fresh air.

When did Paul finally take a break to eat (20:7, 9, 11)? It appears that the church did not eat the Lord’s Supper/love feast until after midnight.

How long after midnight did Paul talk (20:11)? He “conversed” with them until daybreak. Believers in the persecuted church will gladly stay up all night learning God’s Word from a gifted teacher. They did not normally meet all night, but since they had such a special guest speaker, they met till morning.

⁵ Kistemaker, 716.

⁶ Marshall, 345.

Mother of All Sermons? Paul's example in Troas might appear to be the mother of all lectures, but in reality it wasn't. A careful reading of the text will reveal that Paul "talked with" them (20:7), not "at" them, and that he "conversed with" them (20:11). This is not an eight-hour sermon/monolog. He did not merely preach; he conversed.

Word Studies:

- "Talked with" (20:7) is from *dielegeto*. The lexical form of it is *dialegomai* (dialog). One of the most accurate and up-to-date books for defining first century Greek words is Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich and Danker's *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. These Greek scholars reveal that the primary meaning of *dialegomai* is to "discuss, to conduct a discussion" or to "converse". Thus, the ESV translators wrote that Paul "talked with" (*dialegomai*) the church at Troas (20:7), not that he preached to them.
- "Conversed" (20:11) is from *homileo*, and means "to speak with someone". As can readily be seen, converse is related to conversation. *Homileo* is a virtual synonym with *dialegomai*. What happened that night was more of a discussion led by Paul, not a pure monologue.

So What?

20. What can we learn about early church practice from Acts 20? How was it different from today?

- a.) Meeting on the first day of the week, the Lord's Day, was a New Testament pattern. They did this in honor of the day Jesus rose from the day.
- b.) They met in the evening, after work, because Sunday was not seen as a Sabbath day.
- c.) The primary reason for meeting was to celebrate the Lord's Supper.
- d.) They celebrated the Lord's Supper as an actual meal. The cup and loaf looks back to Jesus' death on the cross. The meal looks forward to the wedding banquet of the Lamb and Jesus' promise to come back and eat it again with us. Weekly church meetings should have three components: worship, teaching and fellowship (the breaking of bread).
- e.) Paul's teaching style was dialog, discussion, conversation and not merely preaching to people as if he were broadcasting over the radio. That they were willing to stay up all night to learn shows a strong commitment to Bible teaching.
- f.) They met in the upper room, which was probably someone's home. Each of the New Testament epistles was written to a church that met in someone's home. In the New Testament church, each person in a church knew everyone else. Each church was more like family than a loose association of strangers.
- g.) In our last lesson from Acts 19 we saw the secular usage of the Greek word that is usually translated "church" (*ekklésia*). From this we learned that a church is a decision-making body, as led by its elders. The democratic process should play a role in church polity.

Optional Extra Material

By-Passing Ephesus

******Why did Paul sail past Ephesus (20:13-16)?** He was in a hurry to get to Jerusalem and did not want to spend more time in Asia (he'd already been there two years).

Geography: In short, Paul sailed on the Aegean Sea, down along the coastline of Western Turkey.

- a) From the mainland city of Troas in NW Turkey Paul went by land to the Turkish port city of Assos, 30 miles SE of Troas.
- b) From Assos he sailed due south to the island city of Mitylene (a favorite Roman holiday resort).⁷
- c) From Mitylene he sailed south to the island of Chios (birthplace of Homer).⁸
- d) From Chios he sailed southeast, past the mainland port city of Ephesus, to the island of Samos (birthplace of Pythagoras).⁹
- e) From Samos he sailed to the mainland port city of Miletus in Turkey (30 miles south of Ephesus).

**** = ask this question before reading the text aloud. Doing so will cause focus.

- These lessons are designed for a 45 minute session and are based on the text of the ESV.
- You can hear this lesson being taught at SermonAudio.Com/NTRF.

Stephen E. Atkerson
NTRF.org
Revised 04/22/2018

⁷ *New Bible Dictionary*, 785.

⁸ *ESV Study Bible*, 2129.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 2129.