

# MILETUS, A NOTABLE CITY IN ANCIENT HISTORY AND IN MYTHS (PART I): THE TESTIMONY OF A FAITHFUL MINISTER ACTS 20:13–27

## *Introduction*

This is one of the most touching scenes in all of Scripture. It is a powerful message, especially to those who truly serve the Lord Jesus.

- I. Paul's passion — His face set for Jerusalem (vv. 13-18).
- II. A constant, unswerving service (vv. 18-19).
- III. A sense of urgency in evangelism and teaching (vv. 20-21).
- IV. A nagging compulsion: to reach the lost (v. 22).
- V. A willingness to suffer (v. 23).
- VI. A total abandonment to Christ (v. 24).
- VII. A testimony of foreseeing his ministry in the future (v. 25).
- VIII. A clear and pure heart (vv. 26-27).

### ACTS 20:13–27 MILETUS

The city of Miletus was only about twenty-eight miles from Ephesus. It was a great harbour and commercial centre in Paul's day. Its coasts were steeped in ancient history and myth. The city is well known from such writings as Homer's "Troy." □

## **I. Acts 20:13–18 Paul's Passion**

Paul was gripped with the passion to visit Jerusalem. He set his face for Jerusalem and nothing would stop him from going there. Note two interesting points.

1. Paul's need and desire to be alone. The journey to Assos was twenty miles by land and thirty miles by sea. Why did Paul wish to be alone and go by land instead of sea? The answer evidently lies in his need to be alone. Paul had been given a heavy burden by God to evangelize Rome and Spain (see Acts 19:21-23), and he had been warned by friends not to return to Jerusalem. But he delayed his evangelizing Rome and Spain; he wanted to minister in Jerusalem to his own dear people and to be present when the relief help was delivered for the poor. Paul was perhaps being disquieted by the Holy Spirit and questioning what he should do; thus he sensed the need to seek God's face and to think the matter through. He needed to share the matter with his Lord. Note the similarity between Jesus' determination to make His final journey to Jerusalem and Paul's own determination. Both had their faces "set out for Jerusalem" (Lk. 9:51; Acts 20:22. See notes, Acts 21:1-16.)
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**Thought 1.** The servant of God must get alone and seek God's face for direction in his ministry, especially when significant changes or new directions are to take place.

2. Paul was extremely rushed and hurried. He was taken aboard the ship in Assos. The picture is that he rushed to get aboard and set sail. In fact Paul rushed so much, he left some baggage and his Scripture behind (see 2 Tim. 4:13).

Note that Paul determined the course of the ship (v. 16). He had either leased a ship or the captain was willing to oblige Paul. The scene is that of Paul rushing from place to place, wasting no time, struggling to reach Jerusalem before Pentecost (v. 16). He wanted to celebrate the pouring out of the Holy Spirit with the believers in Jerusalem. Note: he even planned to bypass Ephesus. However, for some reason the ship was delayed for several days at the port of Miletus, so Paul sent for the elders of Ephesus to come and meet with him (v. 17). When they came, he shared one of the most touching scenes in all literature, a scene that can be titled, "the final testimony of a faithful minister to his dear people."

## II. Acts 20:18–19 *Steadfastness of the Minister*

The testimony of a constant, unswerving service. Note three points.

1. Paul was totally devoted from "the [very] first day" and through *the whole time* (chronon), that is, through all kinds of situations and circumstances.
2. Paul *served the Lord* (douleuon toi kurioi), not self and not others. Note the word *served* (douleuon): it is taken from the word *bond-slave* (doulos). Paul constantly called himself the slave of Jesus Christ (see Rom 1:1).
3. Paul's service was characterized by three things.
  - He served *with humility* (meta pases tapeinophrosunes) or lowliness of mind (see *Humility*, Lk. 14:11).

=> He moved among all.

=> He recognized and acknowledged and shared with all, the lowly as well as the upper class.

=> He stopped to help in any way he could.

- a. He served "with great tears." He had a tender, understanding and compassionate heart. He wept over...
  - the unsaved world (Acts 20:19, 31).
  - the carnal believers (2 Cor. 2:4).
  - the sensual and apostate ministers (Ph. 3:18).
- b. He served through severe trials, especially in being attacked by the unsaved religionists (Jew). The point is this: despite the terrible trials, he kept on serving faithfully. (See note, *Paul, Sufferings*, Acts 18:9-11.)

**John 21:16** Again Jesus said, “Simon son of John, do you truly love me?” He answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Take care of my sheep.”

**1 Cor 15:58** Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain.

**Gal 6:10** Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

**2 Tim 4:2** Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage – with great patience and careful instruction.

### III. Acts 20: 20–21 Urgency in Evangelism and Teaching

The testimony of urgency in evangelism and teaching. Note five important points.

1. Paul taught the whole gospel, plainly and simply. He kept nothing back. The Greek says he did not *shrink back nor draw back*. He did not *shrink back* or *hold back* any part of the gospel. He did not tiptoe around the gospel. The whole truth was proclaimed and taught. Note the word “taught.” Paul taught so plainly and simply, it was like showing the truth, painting it before the very eyes of the people. He did not use flowery speech and big words. He spoke simply on the level of the people.

**1 Cor 2:1, 4** When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power.

2. Paul taught publicly and privately. He used every opportunity he could to teach, even going from house to house. Note: his visits in homes were not strictly social calls. He, of course, did fellowship with believers in their homes, but the social visits were used to teach the Word as well.
3. Paul taught powerfully, as a man upon oath. This is seen in the word *declared* (*diamarturomenos*). He proclaimed the truth as a man of integrity. He spoke with authority, as one who had the right of God Himself to testify.
4. He taught both Jew and Greek. He showed no favouritism or partiality. He was a Jew, but he did not favour the Jews. He was called by God to be the apostle to the Gentiles, and he was severely persecuted by the Jews, but he did not neglect the Jews. He preached to all men. Colour, nationality, belief, status, poor or rich – nothing mattered. He reached out to all.

**Acts 10:34-35** Then Peter began to speak: “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favouritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right.”

**Rom 10:12** *For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile – the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him.*

5. He taught repentance and faith (see *Repentance*, Acts 3:19; *Faith*, Jn. 2:24; *Obedience and Belief*, Acts 5:32).

**Mat 3:2** *And saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.”*

**Luke 12:3** *“What you have said in the dark will be heard in the daylight, and what you have whispered in the ear in the inner rooms will be proclaimed from the roofs.”*

**John 5:24** *“I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.”*

**Rom 10:9** *That if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*

#### **IV. Acts 20:22 A Nagging Compulsion**

The testimony of a nagging compulsion to reach the lost. The words “compelled by the spirit” mean Paul’s own spirit, not the Holy Spirit. Paul was driven to do all he could to reach his own people, the Jews (Rom 9:1-3; 10:1). The deep intensity of his compulsion can be seen in the fact that he was probably making the trip against what God really wanted him to do. There is a strong indication that God wanted him taking an evangelistic mission into Rome and Spain (see Acts 19:21-23; 20:13-18. Acts 21:1-16.)

**John 4:34** *“My food,” said Jesus, “is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.”*

**John 9:4** *“As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work.”*

**Acts 4:20** *“For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.”*

**Acts 10:38** *How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.*

**1 Cor 9:16** *Yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!*

#### **V. Acts 20:23 Persecution**

The testimony of a willingness to suffer. Paul said the Holy Spirit bore witness to him that bonds and afflictions would come upon him in every city. Therefore, he knew that persecution awaited him in Jerusalem. He did not know what form they would take, but he would have to suffer when he arrived in Jerusalem.

- => Note the devotion of Paul: walking so closely to the Lord, the Holy Spirit prepares him for every trial he was to face.
- => Note the courage of Paul: marching forth despite knowing unbelievable trials and sufferings awaited him (see *Paul's Sufferings*, Acts 18:9-11).
- => Note the enduring commitment of Paul: persevering and continuing on with the Lord despite an unending series of persecution, and despite knowing that such afflictions awaited him no matter where he went.

**John 15:20** *“Remember the words I spoke to you: ‘No servant is greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also.”*

**Phil 1:29** *For It has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him.*

**2 Tim 3:12** *In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.*

**1 Pet 4:12-13** *Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.*

## **VI. Acts 20:24 Total Abandonment to Christ**

The testimony of total abandonment to Christ. This is a striking verse, but it is also a precious verse, and should be read many times to get the full impact of its message.

1. Paul considered his life “worth nothing.” His life was not for him to use and to do as he pleased, not for earthly comfort or pleasure. His life was not for himself; it was for Christ. His life was “important.” It had *worth* (timian), that is, *precious* and *valuable*; but it was not for himself, not for his own use. His life was the *precious* and *valuable* possession of the Lord. The Lord possessed his life, for he had given it to the Lord, and the Lord was using it to the maximum.
2. Paul had given his life to the Lord for two reasons.
  - a. Paul wished to finish the race of his life with joy, faithfully and diligently running the Christian race to the end (1 Cor. 9:24-27; Ph. 3:13-14). Note: he did complete his race, proclaiming its fulfillment to Timothy (2 Tim. 4:6-8).

**2 Tim 4:6-8** *For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day – and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.*

**1 Cor 9:24-27** *Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.*

**Phil 3:13-14** *Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.*

- b. Paul wished to finish the task and ministry which the Lord Jesus had given to him (see Acts 9:15; 26:16-18; Gal. 1:1, 11-12; 15-17). Note what his task was — to proclaim the gospel of the grace of God (see *Grace*, Tit. 2:11-15. See how grace is stressed in *Ephesians*; Eph. 1:2, 6-7; 2:5, 7-8; 3:2, 7-8; 4:7, 29; 6:24.)

**Acts 9:15** *But the Lord said to Ananias, “Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel.*

## VII. Acts 20: 25 *Foreseeing Future Ministry*

The testimony of foreseeing his ministry in the future. Paul was probably thinking...

- of his future mission to Rome and Spain (see Acts 20:13-18)
- of possible persecution and martyrdom

He knew that in either case he would not be able to visit the Ephesian church again. The scene was touching, tender, and solemn. Note: he had preached the Kingdom of God to these men. (See *Kingdom of Heaven*, Mt. 19:23-24.)

**John 4:34** *“My food,” said Jesus, “is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.”*

**John 19:30** *When he had received the drink, Jesus said, “It is finished.” With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.*

**Acts 20:24** *However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me — the task of testifying to the gospel of God’s grace.*

**2 Tim 4:6-8** *For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day — and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.*

### **VIII. Acts 20:26–27 Minister with a Clear and Pure Heart**

The testimony of a clear and pure heart. Paul made an astounding claim, a claim which he meant to be a challenge to the ministers who stood before him and thereby to all ministers of all ages.

1. He was free from the blood of all men. If any man was unsaved, it was the man's fault (see Eze. 33:6).
2. The reason he was free was that he had proclaimed all the counsel of God. He had proclaimed the truth — the whole will of God — warning every man.

*Col 1:28-29* We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching every one with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. To this end I labour, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me.

*Ezek 33:6* 'But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet to warn the people and the sword comes and takes the life of one of them, that man will be taken away because of his sin, but I will hold the watchman accountable for his blood.'

**Thought 1.** The testimony of Paul should be the claim of every preacher and teacher in the church. ■