

# The Context Bible

## Life Group Lesson 40

September 29-October 5, 2014

### Acts 20:17-21:26 2 Corinthians 12:11-13:14

Have you ever wished the Bible was easier to read through like an ordinary book – cover to cover? Because the Bible is a collection of 66 books, reading it like an ordinary book is quite difficult. Compounding this difficulty is the fact that the later writers of the New Testament were often quoting or referencing passages in the Old Testament. In fact, much of the New Testament makes better sense only if one also considers the Old Testament passages that place the text into its scriptural context.

You are reading a running commentary to The Context Bible. This arrangement of Scripture seeks to overcome some of these difficulties. Using a core reading of John's gospel, the book of Acts, and the Revelation of John, the Context Bible arranges all the rest of Scripture into a contextual framework that supports the core reading. It is broken out into daily readings so that this program allows one to read the entire Bible in a year, but in a contextual format.

Here is the running commentary for week forty, along with the readings for week forty-one appended. Join in. It's never too late to read the Bible in context!

#### *Week Forty Readings*

<p><b>9/29 Paul to Corinthians Again – Paul's Concerns 2 Cor 12:11-13:14</b></p> <p>Prov 18:7-18:8 Prov 10:18 Prov 11:12-11:13, 11:16-11:17 2 Chron 35 Ezek 25 (for 2 Chron 13)</p> <p><b>9/30 Paul to the Ephesian Elders: Church Polity Acts 20:17- 20:38</b></p> <p>Titus 1 Prov 20:29 Prov 25:16-25:17 1 Tim 3:1-3:7 Prov 31:1-31:9</p>	<p><b>10/1 Paul to the Ephesian Elders: Church Polity Acts 20:17-20:38</b></p> <p>1Tim 3:8-6:5</p> <p><b>10/2 Paul to the Ephesian Elders: Difficult Goodbyes Acts 20:17-20:38</b></p> <p>Eccles 3-4 Phil 1:21-1:26 Mrk 6:14-6:29 Heb 13:17-13:19, 13:22-13:25</p>	<p><b>10/3 Paul goes to Jerusalem Acts 21:1-21:26</b></p> <p>Amos 3:7-3:8 Jer 25</p> <p><b>10/4 Paul Goes To Jerusalem Acts 21:1-21:26</b></p> <p>Jer 29 Dan 9 Dan 11:1-11:35, 11:40-11:45</p> <p><b>10/5 Off</b></p>
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## SETTING

Our reading through Acts had paused to read in context Paul's letter we call "2 Corinthians" during the time period of its composition (Acts 19:21-20:16). We have one last section of that letter to read, along with a selection of other Scriptures to mix into Paul's, bringing some additional insights. After that, we return to the Acts narrative, adding additional Scriptures as relevant.

*Paul's Concerns (2 Corinthians 12:11-13:14; 2 Chronicles 35; Ezekiel 25; Proverbs 10:18; 11:12-11:13, 11:16-11:17; 18:7-18:8)*

If you are reading this in your Life Group class, take a moment and look to your left. Now look to your right. How well do you know the persons around you *that are not related to you in some way*? Would you be able to identify the struggles they have in life? Could you discuss the ways these people around you are growing in the Lord? The ways they need to grow? Keep these questions in mind as we look at the readings surrounding this section of our Context Bible.

We have reached the end of Paul's letter we call 2 Corinthians. Paul ended his letter with some thoughts that are instructive on many levels. Our focus is on: (1) Paul's intimate concern (2) over the choices set before the church. Consider first Paul's intimate concern.

The background of what preceded this section was the church's continued focus on the personalities of their ministers (Paul versus the false teachers he mockingly labeled "super apostles") along with the physical accouterment they brought to their work. Amazingly, these false apostles actually rose in the eyes of the Corinthians because they lived off charity rather than the physical labor that Paul used to sustain his ministry. The false teachers denigrated Paul for his manual labor, and many church members did as well. Paul addressed this in the readings last week, and in this week's reading, brought the issue to a conclusion. As Paul finished handling this issue, he did so in a way that showed a deep caring and compassion. While many might be tempted to simply write off such folks as choosing their own course, and letting it reach its proper end, not Paul! Paul saw his role like that of a parent with a child needing correction and instruction. Paul did not wash his hands of the matter. Paul could not leave it alone!

As we see Paul addressing the situation, it is a bit stunning for the modern church to read the level of intimate knowledge Paul had of the members. Paul, and the church, *knew* what was going on in the lives of the Corinthian Christians. They were all plugged into each other. Paul knew of the church members struggling with sexual immorality, gossip, fussing and quarreling, conceit and more. The church was not simply a meeting place for people to gather together once a week or once a month. It was a truly intimate fellowship where the members were involved in each other's lives.

They interacted. They were in a journey *together*. It is something that can be lost in any church, especially a mega-church. It brings a level of spiritual life that is important. It is what Paul calls, “the fellowship of the Holy Spirit” (2 Cor 13:14).

The Greek word “fellowship” is *koinonia* (κοινωνία). It is not simply a fellowship like we might envision in a social club or group. It is a participation, a shared commonness. We can read of it translated as “contribution” where Paul wrote of the *koinonia* that the Greek churches made to the believers in Jerusalem when sharing their possessions and money (Rom 15:26). *Koinonia* is the “participation” we have in the blood and bread of the eucharist (2 Cor 10:16). Earlier in 2 Corinthians when Paul challenged what “fellowship” light has with darkness, Paul was writing of *koinonia* (2 Cor 6:14). This is an intimacy that generates a genuine and caring concern of Paul for the believers.

The second part of our focus is on the choices before the church. Paul noted that he was soon making a third visit to the church. It could go down in two different ways. If the church prepared for Paul, if they got their act together and behaved as believers, the visit would be marvelous. Paul could continue serving them in humility and grace. However, and Paul was blunt about this, if the church chose to continue to live in defiance of both God’s holiness and Paul’s responsibility, he would come and show them power. Not Paul’s power, but the power of God who resurrected Jesus from the dead. The choice belonged to the church.

Accompanying this reading were two Old Testament passages that reveal choices and actions. In 2 Chronicles 35, we read of Judah’s king Josiah’s reinstatement of the Passover, after finding and reading Moses’ Law. Reading carefully we can pick up the repeated use of the word, “prepare.” Prior to the Passover, Josiah told the Levites to “prepare” themselves and their houses as ordered in the Law (2 Chron 35:4). They were also instructed to slaughter the Passover lamb and consecrate themselves and “prepare” for their brothers to follow the Law (2 Chron 35:6). We then find the assembly ready, being “prepared” to follow the Law as the king commanded and sacrificing the animals ((2 Chron 35:11). The service continued through the night with the priests “preparing” properly (twice in 2 Chron 35:14). This was a careful process where all were “prepared” to follow the Lord’s instructions (2 Chron 35:16). From there, Josiah “prepared” the temple before going off to fight the Lord’s battles (2 Chron 35:20). Unfortunately, though, Josiah did not listen to the words of God coming through the mouth of Neco, and Josiah was struck down in battle. As the chapter ends, Josiah passes away, but not without the historic note that he was a good king whose death was lamented by the people. Josiah made choices. Most were carefully prepared upon the Law of God, and they came with good fruit. His choices that defied God, cost him his life.

In Ezekiel 25, we read of God’s judgment on the Ammonites, and peoples of Moab, Seir, Edom and Philistia. God was going to bring judgment upon them because of their

choices to spurn God and slander his people. God would bring them into judgment so that they might know Israel's God Yahweh was the true God.

These are the choices. Everyone lives a life of choices. Sometimes the occasions are momentous, sometimes seemingly small, but the choices are there nonetheless. Paul was teaching the Corinthians the importance of how to make their choices. Deliberate living, *i.e.*, recognizing the choices are there to be made and then making them, is just as important for us today. We have added several proverbs for their guidance in such deliberate living.

- *Proverbs 10:18* – Hatred does not serve us well. If we show hatred toward another (speaking “slander” or negatively) we are acting foolish. If we hide our hatred toward another, we are living a lie. Either way, the outcome is not good for what it does to *us*! The answer is to learn to live without hate.
- *Proverbs 11:12-11:13* – How we treat others is extremely important. If we choose to make fun of, denigrate, or belittle others, it shows our own inadequacies and leads to no good. If we are guarded about what we say, we show sense that makes things better all around.
- *Proverbs 11:16-11:17* – There are ways to get money that are not seated in righteousness, but that will not bring peace and joy to life. Graciousness and kindness will produce honor (which is greater than riches) and benefits beyond measure.
- *Proverbs 18:7-18:8* – How we choose our conversations will dictate how our lives unfold. It is a key part of deliberate choices and deliberate living. People like to hear gossip, but that does not make gossip good for those speaking it or for those hearing it.

*Paul to the Ephesian Elders: Church Polity (Acts 20:17-20:38; Titus 1; 1 Timothy 3:1-3:7; Proverbs 20:29; 25:16-25:25; 31:1-31:9)*

We return to the Acts narrative with Acts 20:17-20:38. When we last left the narrative on Paul, he was in Ephesus on his third missionary journey. It was from Ephesus that Paul wrote the letter we call First Corinthians. We know that Paul left Ephesus and traveled back to Corinth and through Macedonia. During this time Paul wrote the letter we have just finished, Second Corinthians. Paul then went into Miletus, a town about 30 miles from Ephesus.

From Miletus Paul summoned the elders of the church at Ephesus. The elders held a special pastoral role in the church. We consider church roles from some of Paul's later writings, to Titus and Timothy.

In 1 Timothy, chapter three, Paul began his discussion of “the office of overseer” (1 Tim 3:1). The Greek word the ESV translates, as “office of overseer” is “*episkopos*.” In English, we get the word “episcopal” from it. The King James translates the word “bishop.” It is a word that Paul used in Acts 20:28 when he was speaking to the elders of the church at Ephesus:

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.

Paul sets out a number of requirements for an “overseer”:

Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil (1 Tim. 3:2-3:7).

These requirements are found by various churches to have different meanings. Some see the “husband of one wife” to require marriage of an overseer. The question then becomes whether the marriage be “of one wife” in the sense that polygamy is excluded, or in the sense that over a lifetime, the man never had more than one marriage (excluding divorcees and widowers who remarried).

Similarly, scholars debate whether Paul meant that the overseer had to have more than one child (since Paul speaks of plural “children”) or any children at all.

After discussing the office of *episkopos*, Paul wrote of “deacons.” The word for “deacon” is *diakonoi*. It is the same word found in Acts 6 where the apostles set up deacons to serve the congregation in Jerusalem. Like the “overseers,” the deacons have a list of requirements by Paul. The list contains both affirmative and negative statements:

Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. For those who serve well as

deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus (1Tim. 3:8-3:13).

In common Greek usage, *diakonoi* simply meant “servants.” These were servants of the church, ministering to the body of Christ.

The roles of overseer and deacon were distinct roles, as we see not only here, but also in other writings of Paul. When Paul wrote his letter to the Philippian church, he began it:

Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus,

To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers [*episkopos*] and deacons [*diakonoi*] (Phil 1:1).

One question that divides scholars is whether Paul also made room for women to be “deacons,” or in the word preferred by some, “deaconesses.” In Romans 16:1-16:2 Paul writes,

I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant [*diakonoi*] of the church at Cenchreae, that you may welcome her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints, and help her in whatever she may need from you, for she has been a patron of many and of myself as well.

The ESV translators use the English word “servant” to translate Paul in Romans 16, even though they are translating the same word that Paul later uses in Timothy (translated “deacon”). Paul is using the feminine form of the word in Romans.

The problem is not simply in Romans 16, but is also inherent in the 1 Timothy 3 passage above. Paul writes that “deacons” must be dignified, *etc.* Then in verse 11, he writes, as translated by the ESV, “Their wives likewise must be dignified...” The problem is Paul’s word translated “wives” is *gune*, a word that can mean “wives,” but more generally means simply “woman” or “women.” The ESV chooses to translate Paul as referring to the wives of deacons, but there is a question as to whether Paul is writing about women in some role similar or ancillary to deacons.

In a thorough discussion, George Knight gives four possible meanings: (1) women were part of the diaconate; (2) women had their own role as “deaconesses;” (3) there were women who served as female assistants to the deacons; or (4) Paul is writing about the wives of the deacons. Knight finds options 3 or 4 most compelling.<sup>1</sup>

As we read through 1 Timothy, we see no more checklists of any office. We do, however, read of Paul writing about a “council of elders” in chapter 4:

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<sup>1</sup> Knight, George W., *The Pastoral Epistles: a Commentary on the Greek Text* (Eerdmans 1992) at 171ff.

Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you. Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress (1 Tim 4:13-4:15).

The word for “elder” is *presbuteros* from which we get “presbytery.” While Paul uses the word very rarely (in 1 Tim chapters 4 and 5 and Titus 1:5), Paul’s close companion Luke used the word frequently. Paul reminded Titus that one reason Paul left Titus behind was to “appoint elders in every town as I directed you” (Titus 1:5).

Churches see this role of elder differently. Some see it synonymous with the role of “overseer.” One basis for this is the Acts passage where Luke mentions that Paul spoke with the “elders” [*presbuteros*] (Acts 20:17), yet Paul calls those elders “overseers” [*episkopos*]. Similarly, while Paul uses the word “overseer” in Titus 1:5, he shifts to the word “elder” two verses later in a way that seems to show the two words as synonymous:

This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you— if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. For an overseer, as God’s steward, must be above reproach (Tit 1:5-1:7).

Other churches see the roles as distinct, seeking to have Bishops who oversee the elders (considered “priests” in the Catholic church<sup>2</sup>) and deacons.

Because the word “overseer” [*episkopos*] was used in reference to Christ in his role as the Good Shepherd in 1 Peter 2:25, some churches take the word for “shepherd” – “pastor” – and use it in place of “overseer.”

Paul sets out no other offices in 1 or 2 Timothy. As we turn to the third Pastoral Epistle, we again read Paul giving structural instructions for the church to a fellow laborer, Titus. Unlike Timothy, however, Paul instructs Titus only on appointment of overseers, not of deacons. Scholars offer several reasons. First, some believe that the church on Crete was still in its infancy, and like that of the Jerusalem church pre-Acts 6, it had not yet reached a point where the overseers were unable to serve as well as teach. Others find the absence merely indicative of no need for Paul to repeat something Titus must have already understood.

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<sup>2</sup> Catholic structure is not as simple as set out. Because it is both historically based as well as based on Scripture, the church has a function of “Cardinal” which is superior to that of “bishop.” The basis for a cardinal grew out of the New Testament “Elder” which the church considered “priest.”

We are remiss if we fail to note that everywhere Paul writes of “overseers,” “elders,” and “deacons,” he always uses the plural. As Knight noted,

An analysis of the data seems, therefore, to indicate the existence of oversight by a plurality of church leaders throughout the NT church in virtually every known area and acknowledged or commended by virtually every NT writer who writes about church leadership.<sup>3</sup>

*Paul to the Ephesian Elders: Difficult Goodbyes (Acts 20:17-38; Ecclesiastes 3-4; Philippians 1:21-1:26; Mark 6:14-6:29; Hebrews 13:17-13:19, 13:22-13:24)*

Paul feared going into Ephesus itself lest he be unable to pull himself away in time to get to Jerusalem by Pentecost. Once the elders arrived, Paul gave an incredible “good-bye” speech that Luke recorded in some detail. In the speech Paul recounted his actions in Ephesus as well as his mission efforts in general.

As we consider Paul’s speech, it is interesting to do so in light of the letters Paul had recently written (1 and 2 Corinthians and Romans) as well as those that will soon follow. We see in Paul’s speech many phrases and ideas that are echoed in those letters. No doubt these were thoughts that were current in Paul’s teachings and vocabulary at that phase of his life. We also see several phrases and words that are classic Luke in New Testament usage. This is also not surprising in light of Luke’s presence at the time and his own likely note-taking while Paul was speaking. We see Luke taking Paul’s ideas and expressing some verbatim while putting others into his own, no doubt shortened, vocabulary! (We have no indication that Paul preached this sermon all night!)

Paul began by reminding the elders of his actions and attitudes while on his mission trip. Paul echoed Romans 1:1 (“a servant of Christ Jesus”) and 12:11 (“serve the Lord”) as he told the elders,

You yourselves know how I lived among you ... serving the Lord with all humility and with tears. (Acts 20:18).

The humility is something Paul valued so highly that he we see it in his letter to the Corinthians (2 Cor 10:1 “I who am humble” and 11:7 “did I commit a sin in humbling myself”). Similarly in the same Corinthian letter we are reminded Paul had written a previous letter that he termed one of “many tears” (2 Cor 2:4).

Paul’s speech contains many other references that track those of his writings, readily identified and set forth in most any good commentary. Paul detailed the problems that he faced in his efforts to teach the Ephesians both publicly and privately through the

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<sup>3</sup> Knight at 176-177.

house churches. Paul taught of repentance (a Luke word much more so than a Paul word, although Paul certainly taught repentance<sup>4</sup>) and faith in Jesus Christ.

Paul told the elders that he was going to Jerusalem. Paul was under no illusions about what he would face. God had already prepared Paul for the imprisonment and suffering that were before him. Paul really did not care about his own life, however. Paul wished only to finish the course God had set before him testifying to the good news of Christ's death for humanity's sin. Paul knew, because of what was coming, that he would not again see these elders, among whom he lived and worked for three years.

Paul charged the elders to pay special attention to their own responsibilities. Just as Paul had properly discharged his calling by faithfully declaring the whole counsel of God's word, the elders were to pay special attention not only to each other, but moreover to the church. The Holy Spirit made the elders overseers of the church and that was a significant responsibility.

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 (Acts 20:27-20:28).

Paul was certain that Satan would attack the church both from within and without and the elders were to remember that God had spent his own blood for the church; the elders should be ready to spend nothing less.

Paul then charged the elders to be alert, to remember Paul's tears and his 24/7 teaching and care. Paul commended the elders,

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 (Acts 20:32).

After reminding the elders that Paul himself worked among them to support himself and his ministry, Paul urged that they *see* the sermon, that they see that hard work is good, as is helping the weak through giving.

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<sup>4</sup> We find Paul using some form of the word only five times in his 13 letters (Romans 2:4, 2 Corinthians 7:9-7:10; 12:21 and 2 Timothy 2:25). Luke used the word almost two dozen times in Luke-Acts (Luke 3:3, 3:8, 5:32, 10:13, 11:32, 13:1, 13:3, 13:5, 15:7, 15:10, 16:30, 17:3, 17:4, 24:47 and Acts 2:38, 3:19, 5:31, 8:22, 11:18, 13:24, 17:30, 19:4, 20:21, and 26:20). That does not, of course, mean that repentance was only a Lucan concept. For example, Paul taught the church to turn from idols (see 1 Thess. 1:9; Rom 10:9). Repentance is God's call for humanity expressed in the teachings of Christ and his church. But the word used (*metanoia* *μετάνοιαν* a turning of the mind) is more peculiarly Luke's than Paul's.

After Paul addressed the elders, they knelt down and prayed together. There were a lot of tears and hugs; especially over knowing they would not see Paul again. Paul then boarded his ship and sailed towards Jerusalem.

Paul and the elders knew, there was a time for everything. As Ecclesiastes put it so appropriately, there is a time to be born and a time to die... A time to weep and a time to laugh... A time to mourn and a time to dance... A time to embrace... Paul and the Ephesian elders were at one of those turning points in history where a chapter was finished and would not be repeated. It was a tearful goodbye, with a reunion planned in heaven one day. Paul lived with this in mind with all the churches where he ministered. (Phil 1:21-1:26).

*Paul Goes to Jerusalem (Acts 21:1-21:26; Amos 3:7-3:8; Jeremiah 25, 29; Daniel 9, 11:1-11:35, 11:40-11:45)*

Luke gave specific details about the sailing journey as the group stopped at various islands on the way toward Jerusalem, including a one-week stop in Tyre. The sailing journey finally ended at Caesarea where the group stayed at the house of “Philip the evangelist.”

Here is a practical illustration of Luke’s encounters that formed a basis for his writings. We should remember at this point that Luke had started his history of Luke-Acts assuring his reader that his “orderly account” was based on the events delivered by “eyewitnesses and ministers of the word” (Luke 1:2-1:3). We add that here because Luke is with Paul during this stay at the home of Philip the evangelist in Caesarea, where Philip lived with his four daughters who “prophesied.”<sup>5</sup> This is the same Philip that Luke would write of in Acts 8 in the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch. Philip himself no doubt related the Acts 8 account of Philip to Luke!

In Acts 8, Luke wrote of Philip having received instruction from God to go on a certain road, encountering on the road the Ethiopian eunuch reading Isaiah. Philip had the joy of sharing the gospel and baptizing this eunuch. Afterwards, Luke had recorded that Philip,

found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea (Acts 8:40).

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<sup>5</sup> Although they do not figure prominently in this story, we are remiss if we fail to mention the significant role Philip’s daughters played in the early church. History teaches us that they were instrumental in teaching the next generation of believers the accounts of what had happened in the life of Christ and the early church. Eusebius (c. 260-339 AD), a historian of the church writing several hundred years after Luke, quotes the Acts passage and then notes several church fathers who received stories of the early church from Philip’s daughters. See Eusebius, *The Church History* Book 3:31 ff.

This is the same “Caesarea” where Paul, Luke and others found and stayed with Philip (Acts 21:8).

Paul had not been long at Philip’s when a prophet named Agabus came to visit.<sup>6</sup> In classic Old Testament fashion, Agabus delivers not only a verbal prophecy, but a visual one as well. Agabus took Paul’s belt and tied his own hands and feet declaring that Paul would also be bound and tied by the Jews in Jerusalem and delivered then into the hands of the Gentiles. The Christians who saw and heard Agabus began urging Paul to abandon his plans to go to Jerusalem.

As an aside, this is another place where we see how Luke’s presence at this encounter with Agabus informed his story, this time about Agabus’s accurate prophecy about a coming famine noted in Acts 11:27-11:28. It reinforces the words of the Old Testament prophet Amos, God reveals his secret to his servants the prophets (Amos 3:7-3:8).

Paul was not so easily persuaded. He had set his face to Jerusalem and would not be deterred. Paul told the group,

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! (Acts 21:13).

The expression Paul uses gets lost a bit in the translation “breaking my heart.” Paul’s language translated “breaking” is from the way one washed clothes. It could be more literally rendered,

What are you doing, weeping and pounding my heart the way one pounds clothes upon the rocks when washing them?

Paul was concerned only with God’s will, not the will of anyone less! Paul echoes the attitude of Jeremiah, who willingly suffered much in order to proclaim God’s message and follow his will. Time after time when the word of the Lord instructed Jeremiah to do something, he did it. When Jeremiah was told to speak, he spoke (Jer 2:1, 2:4ff). When Jeremiah was told to buy linen underwear and hide it, he bought linen underwear and hid it (Jer 13:1-13:11). When the word of the Lord asked Jeremiah questions, he answered them (Jer. 1:11, 1:13). When the word of the Lord told Jeremiah where to stand, he stood there (Jer 7:1ff). When the word of the Lord told Jeremiah to “make yourself straps and yoke-bars, and put them on your neck,” Jeremiah made straps and yoke-bars and put them on his neck. In a way, it is not surprising that Jeremiah would be so careful in his obedience. After all, much of Jeremiah’s message centered on

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<sup>6</sup> We wonder if it was from this visit that Luke received a firsthand account of Agabus coming to Antioch prophesying the coming famine as recounted in Acts 11:27-11:28.

Judah's and Israel's failure to obey God's words. Jeremiah said as much when Jehoiakim was on the throne:

For twenty-three years, from the thirteenth year of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah, to this day, the word of the LORD has come to me, and I have spoken persistently to you, but you have not listened. You have neither listened nor inclined your ears to hear, although the LORD persistently sent to you all his servants the prophets, saying, 'Turn now, every one of you, from his evil way and evil deeds, and dwell upon the land that the LORD has given to you and your fathers from of old and forever. Do not go after other gods to serve and worship them, or provoke me to anger with the work of your hands. Then I will do you no harm.' Yet you have not listened to me, declares the LORD, that you might provoke me to anger with the work of your hands to your own harm. Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts: Because you have not obeyed my words, behold, I will send for all the tribes of the north (Jer 25:1-25:9).

Jeremiah's obedience to God's word included following instructions to write the words.

Over the next several chapters, Jeremiah related the promise that God would not abandon his people to captivity and exile. God would bring the people back into the Promised Land, ever faithful to his promises generations before. Jeremiah's obedience to this word provided the written record that the Hebrews would maintain in hopes of God's ultimate deliverance. Jeremiah even sent the word of the Lord in letterform to the Hebrews who had already commenced their exile in Babylon. In that letter, he delivered God's instructions about their lives in exile. The letter contained instructions and inspiration that are still one of the most cited parts of Jeremiah:

Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare. For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Do not let your prophets and your diviners who are among you deceive you, and do not listen to the dreams that they dream, for it is a lie that they are prophesying to you in my name; I did not send them, declares the LORD.

For thus says the LORD: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans

for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you, declares the LORD, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, declares the LORD, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile (Jer 29:3-29:14).

Jeremiah’s faithfulness to obey the word of the Lord set him apart, and delivered for millennia, messages affirming God’s faithfulness, provision, and fulfilled promise. Thank God for Jeremiah’s obedience!

Paul was well aware of this attitude and trail blazed by Jeremiah centuries before. So we are not surprised when Luke tells us that Paul and his group got ready and headed out on the 64-mile trek to Jerusalem.

### QUESTIONS

1. How are you at deliberate living? Do you see life as choices? Do you get so caught up at times that you lose sight of the choices you are making, as you find yourself reacting rather than deliberately choosing? Do those times get you in trouble? What can you do to live more deliberately?
2. What is your level of intimacy with other believers? Are there brothers and sisters in the Lord to whom you are close enough that you truly know what is going on in one another’s lives? Is this closeness so rich that final goodbyes would be tearful?
3. What is the most important thing in your life? How does the priority of God’s will stack up with everything else in your life?

### *Week Forty-One Readings*

<p><b>10/6 Paul Arrested in the Temple</b> Acts 21:27-21:36</p> <p>Ezek 44 (for v. 28) Pslm 65 Pslm 66 Pslm 28 Prov 17:26</p> <p><b>10/7 Paul Speaks to the People</b> Acts 21:37-22:21</p> <p>Pslm 98 Pslm 108 Pslm 120</p>	<p><b>10/8 Paul and Roman Tribune</b> Acts 22:22-22:29</p> <p>Pslm 40 Pslm 54 Pslm 64</p> <p><b>10/9 Paul Before the Council</b> Acts 22:30-23:11</p> <p>Ex 22:28 Pslm 92 Pslm 17 Pslm 30 Jer 45 Prov 10:6-10:7, 10:9-10:11</p>	<p><b>10/10 The Plot to Kill Paul</b> Acts 23:12-23:22</p> <p>Prov 1 Pslm 142 Pslm 7 Pslm 140 Pslm 1</p> <p><b>10/11 Paul Sent to Felix the Governor</b> Acts 23:23-23:35</p> <p>Heb 13:3 Luk 12:1-12:12 Esth 1-3</p> <p><b>10/12 Off</b></p>
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