

Acts Chapter Twenty-One

Acts 21:1-5

And when it came about that we had parted from them and had set sail, we ran a straight course to Cos and the next day to Rhodes and from there to Patara; and having found a ship crossing over to Phoenicia, we went aboard and set sail. And when we had come in sight of Cyprus, leaving it on the left, we kept sailing to Syria and landed at Tyre; for there the ship was to unload its cargo. And after looking up the disciples, we stayed there seven days; and they kept telling Paul through the Spirit not to set foot in Jerusalem. And when it came about that our days there were ended, we departed and started on our journey, while they all, with wives and children, escorted us until *we were* out of the city. And after kneeling down on the beach and praying, we said farewell to one another.

- Paul boards a ship at Miletus and sailed down the southern coast of Asia Minor to Patara. He changes ships—heads for Tyre—on coast north of Caesarea (Lebanon).
- As they head to Tyre—they see Cyprus on their left.
- Looking up the disciples—we don't know how they came to Christ—but this shows us that there is more happening in early church than what is happening with Paul.
- Prophecy: there is danger waiting in Jerusalem—Interpretation: Don't go.
- Warning about Jerusalem: seen by some—that Paul did not take heed to the Spirit.
- Paul needs to know ahead of time the sacrifice/cost of preceding on his way to Jerusalem.
- Paul always acts for the furtherance of the gospel—in spite of the cost to himself.
- Perhaps Paul continues to have original word—Acts 9:15-16—as his personal compass.
- He has not appeared before kings yet.
- When it is time to leave—another tender picture of the oneness of the church.

Acts 21:6-7

Then we went on board the ship, and they returned home again. And when we had finished the voyage from Tyre, we arrived at Ptolemais; and after greeting the brethren, we stayed with them for a day.

- Short boat trip to Ptolemais

Acts 21:8-14

And on the next day we departed and came to Caesarea; and entering the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, we stayed with him. Now this man had four virgin daughters who were prophetesses. And as we were staying there for some days, a certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands, and said, "This is what the Holy Spirit says: 'In this way the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'" And when we had heard this, we as well as the local residents *began* begging him not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." And since he would not be persuaded, we fell silent, remarking, "The will of the Lord be done!"

- Philip the evangelist—one who brings/announces good news
- Acts 8:40—after bringing Ethiopian eunuch to faith—he preached through the coastal region—ended up in Caesarea.
- Four virgin daughters—occupied a place of prominence as prophetesses.
- Paul knows that God intends for the gospel to go from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. He intends to fulfill all of his call in the process.
- Agabus—like OT prophets—acted out his message
- Indicates even Luke and his traveling companions join in—plead for him—not to go.
- Each prophecy—saying the same thing—confirmation. Prophecy is about what awaits him. Others bring interpretation. Paul is not being led into a trap against his will—he is living into submission to God's will.

- He was bound in the Spirit to go to Jerusalem—Acts 19:21, 20:22
- Warnings were to prepare Paul—not stop him.

Acts 21:15-19

And after these days we got ready and started on our way up to Jerusalem. And *some* of the disciples from Caesarea also came with us, taking us to Mnason of Cyprus, a disciple of long standing with whom we were to lodge.

And when we had come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. And now the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present. And after he had greeted them, he *began* to relate one by one the things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry.

- Paul is probably arriving in Jerusalem approximately 57 AD (about 25 years have passed since the beginning of the Book of Acts). Some believers were recognized for having lived during the days of Jesus.
- Church receives Paul with gladness
- They receive his report and rejoice at what the Lord is doing among the gentiles.
- Indicates he is giving a full report with details rather than just the highlights.
- Remember: He is also bringing a large financial gift with him for the church of Jerusalem.

Acts 21:20-24

And when they heard it they *began* glorifying God; and they said to him, "You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed, and they are all zealous for the Law; and they have been told about you, that you are teaching all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs. "What, then, is *to be done*? They will certainly hear that you have come. "Therefore do this that we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow; take them and purify yourself along

with them, and pay their expenses in order that they may shave their heads; and all will know that there is nothing to the things which they have been told about you, but that you yourself also walk orderly, keeping the Law.

- They begin to share about the nature of the church in Jerusalem—made up of Jewish believers—this church, in the shadow of the Temple—zealous for the Law.
- Gentiles were free to follow Christ apart from the Law—while Jews were free to continue in Jewish practice—if not for the sake of salvation (Rom 14:4-6).
- I Cor 8:8
- I Cor 9:19-23
- The way this is laid out—trouble will come from Jews who are believers.
- Since he is among the Jews—he purposes to walk in a way to win them over.
- Leaders lay out a plan to make Paul appear zealous for the Law as well.

Acts 21:25-26

“But concerning the Gentiles who have believed, we wrote, having decided that they should abstain from meat sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from fornication.” Then Paul took the men, and the next day, purifying himself along with them, went into the temple, giving notice of the completion of the days of purification, until the sacrifice was offered for each one of them.

- Paul had intended to be in Jerusalem for Pentecost. At that time, Jews from all the world would gather in Jerusalem for this feast day (similar to conditions on the day the Holy Spirit was poured forth—all who were there heard the message in his own language—many nations present).
- Pentecost—for the Jews—great celebration around God giving them the Law.
- Paul believed ceremony was useless/but not destructive—only dangerous if embraced for sake of salvation.
- Fulfills I Cor 9:20

- Sacrifice was for thanksgiving—not atonement

Acts 21:27-30

And when the seven days were almost over, the Jews from Asia, upon seeing him in the temple, *began* to stir up all the multitude and laid hands on him, crying out, “Men of Israel, come to our aid! This is the man who preaches to all men everywhere against our people, and the Law, and this place; and besides he has even brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place.” For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with him, and they supposed that Paul had brought him into the temple. And all the city was aroused, and the people rushed together; and taking hold of Paul, they dragged him out of the temple; and immediately the doors were shut.

- Jews from Asia—due to Pentecost
- Paul has had an impact in 'all Asia'—Acts 19:10—the Jews from that region would have had a prior offense against him.
- They rehearse assumptions and accusations against him—with bitterness and hatred.
- Made wrong assumptions about Trophimus. Gentiles were prohibited from Temple beyond the Court of the Gentiles—authority was given to execute any trespassers—even if offender was a Roman citizen.
- Temple shut off to all—control/cleanse
- Charges against Paul in Acts 21:28—same charges Stephen was executed for in Acts 6:13.

Acts 21:31-33

And while they were seeking to kill him, a report came up to the commander of the *Roman* cohort that all Jerusalem was in confusion. And at once he took along *some* soldiers and centurions, and ran down to them; and when they saw the commander and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul. Then the commander came up and took hold of him, and ordered him to be bound with two chains; and he *began* asking who he was and what he had done.

- Paul is taken into Roman custody—from immediate grasp of those intending to kill him.
- From the Tower of Antonia—at NW corner of Temple mount—more than 500 Roman soldiers are stationed (2 flights of stairs from the Court of the Gentiles).
- Paul is placed in chains—assumption of a crime
- Two chains—bound to a soldier on either side (prophecy of Agabus—Acts 21:11)
- Paul must be remembering the chanting of the crowd at Stephen's death (Acts 7:54-8:1).

Acts 21:34-40

But among the crowd some were shouting one thing *and* some another, and when he could not find out the facts on account of the uproar, he ordered him to be brought into the barracks. And when he got to the stairs, it so happened that he was carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the mob; for the multitude of the people kept following behind, crying out, "Away with him!"

And as Paul was about to be brought into the barracks, he said to the commander, "May I say something to you?" And he said, "Do you know Greek? "Then you are not the Egyptian who some time ago stirred up a revolt and led the four thousand men of the Assassins out into the wilderness?" But Paul said, "I am a Jew of Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no insignificant city; and I beg you, allow me to speak to the people." And when he had given him permission, Paul, standing on the stairs, motioned to the people with his hand; and when there was a great hush, he spoke to them in the Hebrew dialect, saying,

- Away with him—similar to Jesus—Crucify Him
- Captain—thinking Paul is a criminal—is amazed when Paul is fluent in Greek.
- They thought he was Egyptian (mentioned by historian Josephus)—who led an army of 4000 men to Mount of Olives where they declared they would take over the Temple Mount. Roman soldiers intervened and caused them to scatter.
- Paul gains permission to speak to crowd.
- When he speaks—in Hebrew—crowd quiets down to listen.

- When he speaks in Jerusalem—this is his first opportunity/in public to proclaim Christ here. He has visited/conferred with church leaders—but did not take the stage as a follower of Christ until now.
- His heart toward His audience—Rom 9:2-5, Rom 10:2
- Paul has just been beaten by the Jews that he asks permission to address.
- Commander hoped that allowing Paul to speak would quiet them down.
- Phil 3:10—Paul knew the fellowship of His sufferings

Acts Chapter Twenty-one—Workbook

Key Words:

Harmonize:

Read the Book of Galatians

Dig:

- 1) What verses in chapter 21 give insight into the nature of relationship experienced in the early church?
- 2) How is Philip identified? What do we know about him?
- 3) Where was Agabus mentioned before? How much influence does he have on his audience in Caesarea?
- 4) When Paul arrives in Jerusalem—what words best describe the condition of the believers?
- 5) What has been the report concerning Paul—in his absence? Is there any indication of how the elders had responded to these reports?
- 6) What instructions do the church leaders give Paul in Jerusalem? What message does this instruction convey?
- 7) Who stirs up trouble for Paul at the Temple? Where do they come from?
- 8) What deceptions fuel the accusations in vs 21 and 28?

- 9) Look at the description of how an entire city is effected and responds. What do we know about the nature of the spiritual warfare from this?

Discuss:

- 1) What is the difference between a warning and the interpretation of a warning?
- 2) How do you make important decisions? How well do you listen to input from others? When and where are we to speak into one another's lives?
- 3) When do we submit to traditions and religious/cultural practices—for the sake of another? When do we refrain?

Point of Prayer:

Pray for Israel—to turn to Christ as their Messiah.

Integrate:

What other scriptures come to mind as you read this chapter?

Application:

- 1) Have you ever received a warning? Did you alter your life in any way?
- 2) Have you warned someone? Did they take your counsel or ignore it? How did this impact you?
- 3) Do you have a place where you regularly share your God-stories?

- 4) Has your commitment to Christ cost you any relationships with family or friends? How has their rejection effected your heart?

- 5) How would your heart respond to this kind of sustained conflict swirling around you?

- 6) Is the church today living more like Paul or the Jerusalem leaders? Which one is more like your own spiritual journey?