
SERIES: A SURVEY OF THE BOOK OF ACTS**ACTS CHAPTER 21****“JOURNEYING TOWARD JERUSALEM”**

We are “surveying” not studying in detail these chapters in the book of Acts. A survey is “An overview of an area or subject; a general analysis.” We have been engaged in a general overview of the book of the Acts of the Apostles. The material is not an in-depth, verse-by-verse study of the book but a “get-acquainted” tour intended to whet one’s appetite for a more analytical examination of this important transitional contribution to the literature of the New Testament.

This 21st chapter is a segment out of the life of the Apostle Paul that is fast paced, as he is moving from city to city and from one surprising situation to another, with many different persons walking into and out of his life. This chapter can teach us much about how a dedicated disciple of Jesus Christ lives trustfully day by day.

An Hour at The Beach.

Chapter 20 ended down by the waterside and we read that *“He knelt down and prayed with them all. Then they all wept freely, and fell on Paul’s neck and kissed him, sorrowing most of all for the words which he spoke, that they would see his face no more. And they accompanied him to the ship.”* (Acts 20:36-38) This is a scene of such sweet sorrow.

After the beach prayer meeting at Miletus with the elders who had come from the church in Ephesus; after the holy hugs and tearful departure, Paul went aboard ship and sailed away into a storm, not a storm upon the sea but a storm in a city – the city of Jerusalem – the city of peace which, for Paul was not to prove true.

Luke's logbook records that they sailed from Miletus to Caesarea stopping at various ports along the way. One of the ports was Tyre where the ship docked in order to unload cargo. There were Christians there and Paul took advantage of the pause in sea travel to fellowship with them.

A Week In Tyre. 21:1-6

How Paul and his company found disciples in Tyre we do not know, however, it could be that news of the esteemed apostle spread and the Christians there looked him up. When they discovered each other Paul spent seven days fellowshipping with them. (v.4)

While there Paul is warned that trouble was waiting for him in Jerusalem: *“They told Paul through the Spirit not to go up to Jerusalem.”* (v.4) No doubt news of Paul's extended ministry among Gentiles was widespread and consequently, non-Christian Jews were lying in wait for him.

In Acts 20 Paul had said, *“Now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that*

chains and tribulations await me. But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.” (vs.22-24)

At the end of the seven day break in his sea journey, Paul took his leave of the disciples in Tyre. We read: *“They all accompanied us, with wives and children, till we were out of the city. And we knelt down on the shore and prayed. When we had taken our leave of one another, we boarded the ship, and they returned home.”*

What a beautiful farewell party that must have been! Entire families accompanied Paul to the ship. Can't you imagine that later in life those children, who were present on that occasion, could recall to others that they had seen and heard the great apostle Paul. Thank God for church bodies which include entire families. What an object lesson this scene must have been to unsaved people looking on.

After the goodbyes had been said and prayers had been prayed, Paul and company went aboard ship and sailed onward. He would never again pass this way.

A Day in Ptolemais. v.7

“And when we had finished our voyage from Tyre, we came to Ptolemais, greeted the brethren, and stayed with them one day.”

We do not know who these brethren were or how many of them there were, but they had the privilege and pleasure of spending an entire day with the apostle Paul. Wouldn't you like to have the opportunity to spend a day with him? What would you like to talk with him about? What questions would you ask him?

We do not know what Paul talked to these disciples about but we can be assured that it was a Christo-centric conversation! I am quite certain that he did not waste time talking about the weather, politics or sports. Through the years it has amazed me, as I have listened to Christians in church talking about the most incidental matters, when they supposedly have gathered together to talk about eternal things.

Many Days in Caesarea. vs. 8-14

Caesarea was the nearest seaport to Jerusalem. For the time being, Paul's ship journey was over and now he travels by land from Caesarea to Jerusalem.

However, before he proceeds to Jerusalem, he spent a period of time in Caesarea at the house of Philip the evangelist. What a reunion this must have been! The last time that Paul and Philip were mentioned in the same paragraph is in Acts 8 – *“As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison. Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word. Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them.” (Acts 8:3-5)*

Paul (Saul) had overseen the stoning of Stephen who, along with Philip, was a deacon in the first church. (Acts 6:5) Philip was running for his life and Paul, then called Saul, the Christian-hater, was in hot pursuit! Former enemies were now friends; the persecutor Paul was now on

the same team as preacher Philip. What a change in relationships the Gospel makes! No doubt they had wonderful fellowship centered in their Savior.

A Warning to Paul

While in Caesarea God sent a prophet named Agabus from Jerusalem to Caesarea with a warning. Agabus knew that the atmosphere in the holy city would be dangerous for Paul because news of his ministry to Gentiles was widespread. Agabus knew that Paul would face hostility and it would be dangerous for him to continue his journey to Jerusalem.

Agabus not only verbalize his warning to Paul but he visualized what was likely to happen when Paul arrived in Jerusalem. Verses 10 and 11 contain this warning: *"He took Paul's belt, bound his own hands and feet, and said, 'Thus says the Holy Spirit, 'So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this belt, and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'"*

Paul's friends begged him to avoid Jerusalem. The scene became emotional. However, he refused to turn back. He said, *"What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."* (v.13)

I had a pastor friend who was near death from a lingering illness. He sent me an e-mail in which he said, "Do not try to pray me out on heaven!" He went on to say, "I am looking forward to going home and meeting my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

Paul was determined to go to Jerusalem for he was ready to die for the cause of Christ if necessary. In other words he was saying to his friends in Caesarea, "Do not try to pray me out of Jerusalem!" I like the way that verse 14 puts an end to the efforts to dissuade Paul: *"So when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, 'The will of the Lord be done.'"*

These friends of Paul were wise and mature Christians for they turned the entire matter over to the Lord for His will to be done. We cannot make spiritual decisions regarding the Lord's will for another person. Each person must seek and sense the Lord's will for themselves and do it regardless of what others may think. Ultimately, our decisions must be guided by the Holy Spirit, not the emotions and opinions of other people. The matter being settled, *"we packed and went up to Jerusalem."* (v.15)

The memory of fellowship with these friends must have been a great comfort to Paul as he exited Caesarea. There was Philip, the evangelist; Paul, the apostle; Agabus, the prophet and Philip's four daughters who prophesied. Thank God for Christian associates and friends!

Difficult Days in Jerusalem. vs. 15-40

When Paul arrived in Jerusalem he found lodging in the home of *"one of the early disciples"* (v.16) named Mnason. Whatever the length of time Paul spent with Mnason, it was the last quiet and peaceful period that Paul would experience for a very long time. After getting settled in Mnason's house, Paul reported to pastor James and the church in Jerusalem. How long an interval there was between his arrival and his appointment with James and the elders of the church is not known.

It has been suggested that Paul was out of the will of God by going to Jerusalem and if he had heeded the warnings that he had previously received he would not have been arrested. However, a study of the following Scriptures reveals that Paul was in the will of God by going to Jerusalem and what ever took place there was wholly within the plan and purposes of God.

- Ananias had foretold to Paul that he was called to suffer for the name of the Lord Jesus. (Acts 19:15-16)
- Paul knew that bonds and imprisonment awaited him in every city. (Acts 20:22-24)
- Paul knew also that he would go to Jerusalem and then to Rome. (Acts 19:21-22)
- Paul's friends in Tyre had told him that he should not go to Jerusalem. (Acts 21:4)
- Paul had been told by Agabus what would happen to him when he arrived in Jerusalem. (Acts 21:13)
- Paul personally knew that it was the will of God for him to go to Jerusalem even though his witness there would not be accepted. (Acts 22:17-18; 23:11)

The Appointment With Pastor James And The Elders.

Paul met with the pastor of the Jerusalem church, James, and elders of the church. He had been sent out from this church and now he returns to report on his missionary endeavors. He declared what God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry and the church received his report joyfully.

Verses 19 and 20 indicate that *"When he had greeted them, he told in detail those things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord. And they said to him, "You see, brother, how many myriads of Jews there are who have believed, and they are all zealous for the law...."*

The Advice From James And The Elders.

The church leaders encouraged Paul to undertake the Nazarite Vow to protect himself and the church at Jerusalem. Their reasoning was that there were thousands of Jews who were believers in Christ and yet they were still zealous for the Law of Moses. After all, that was their religious heritage and to totally reject the Law, in the eyes of their unsaved fellow countrymen, was to be interpreted as rejecting Moses.

We must remember that this was a period of transition. Grace was a new concept to these Jewish believers in Christ and they were reluctant to appear to be disrespecting the Mosaic Law. Did many of us fully understand the difference between Law and Grace when we were first saved? I think not.

They admired Moses on the one hand and had accepted Christ on the other. This was Moses mixed with Jesus. Paul knew that this was the transition era from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant. We see him here following the principle of *"becoming a Jew to the Jews that he might win the Jew."* (1 Cor. 9:20) Some since have severely criticized Paul for what he did on this occasion, but they were not there in that atmosphere. Paul became all things to all men that he might win some.

The Animosity of the Jewish Community.

Pastor James and the elders of the Jerusalem church told Paul that the Jewish believers had been informed that Paul no longer followed circumcision, the customs of the Jews or the Law of Moses. Therefore, the church leaders advised Paul to go through the rituals in the temple as proof that the reports they had heard about Paul were not true. (vs. 21-22) *“Therefore do what we tell you....”* (v.23) Paul consented to their advice which did not satisfy his opponents but only served to further inflame their animosity.

The Arrest Of The Apostle Paul. vs.27-32

The seven days required of the vow and purification process were almost at an end when some of the Jews from Asia, who were in Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost (Acts 20:16) recognized Paul. They supposed that he had taken with him into the temple a Gentile named Trophimus and that the temple had been defiled by a Gentile entering it.

The whole city was in an uproar, the doors of the temple were closed, Paul was captured and they planned to kill him. (versus 30-31) The chief captain taking with him soldiers rescued Paul from being beaten to death. (v.32) Paul is bound in chains, the uproar increased and they cried out *“away with him.”* (v.36)

The chapter ends with Paul standing at the top of a stairway having been rescued by Roman soldiers from the frenzied mob. Paul asked for permission to speak to the people and it was granted. This chapter began rather quietly but ends in a citywide uproar. It has been said that where ever Paul went either a revival or a riot broke out!

Let us remember that we are the Lord's lights in a spiritually dark world and if we are shining as we should be shining, we ought not to be surprised at the reactions of those in darkness who resent the light of spiritual truth.

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