

To The Ends Of The Earth

LESSON 21: PAUL'S THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEY, PART 3 (ACTS 21:1-36)

The conclusion of Paul's third missionary journey had to be rerouted due to plots involving the Jews. This took Paul back through Macedonia and to Miletus (south of Ephesus). Despite warnings of what awaited him, Paul was determined to visit Jerusalem.

TRAVELING FROM MILETUS TO JERUSALEM (ACTS 21:1-16)

21:1-6. Paul and his companions (including Luke, notice the use of "we") had to tear themselves away from the Ephesian elders at Miletus (Acts 20:36-38) so they could continue their journey. They sailed to the island of Cos (about 40 miles south), then to the island of Rhodes (about 50 miles southeast), and then to Patara (about 60 miles east, the capital of the province of Lycia). After this, they were able to find a cargo ship sailing across the Mediterranean Sea to Tyre (a city in Phoenicia, which is in Syria, about 400 miles southeast), passing south of the island of Cyprus. After arriving, they sought out the disciples and stayed seven days with them while the ship's cargo was unloaded. During this time, the disciples were persistently telling Paul not to go to Jerusalem. They were apparently being told by the Spirit what was waiting for Paul there and then concluded he should not go (Acts 20:22-23; 21:10-14; not that Paul was being disobedient to God, Acts 16:6-10). When the time ended, the disciples and their families accompanied Paul and his companions outside the city to the beach, where they knelt to pray (Acts 20:36-37). Then, they boarded the ship while the disciples went home.

21:7-9. They sailed down the coast of Phoenicia and arrived in Ptolemais (about 25 miles south of Tyre), staying a day with the disciples there. Then, they traveled farther south along the coast to Caesarea the next day (about 35 miles from Ptolemais). There, Philip hosted them in his house. Philip was an evangelist (spreader of good news/preacher of the gospel; Acts 8:5-40) and one of the Seven who served the needy widows in Jerusalem (Acts 6:1-7). He would have suffered directly due to Saul's persecution around 20 years earlier (Acts 7:54-8:5). This passage, therefore, demonstrates his forgiveness and acceptance of Paul as a brother in Christ and fellow worker in God's kingdom! This man also had four virgin daughters who prophesied. Thus, women were

given miraculous gifts in this period and were valued workers in God's kingdom (though there were restrictions given, 1 Corinthians 14:34-35; 1 Timothy 2:11-14).

21:10-16. A prophet named Agabus (Acts 11:28) came from Judea, took Paul's belt, and bound his own hands and feet. He proclaimed by the Holy Spirit that the owner of the belt (Paul) would be bound in Jerusalem by the Jews and come into Gentile custody (Acts 20:22-24). Hearing this, Paul's traveling companions (including Luke) and the people in Caesarea begged Paul not to go to Jerusalem. Despite these pleas and their weeping breaking Paul's heart, Paul stated his resolve to go to Jerusalem – even if it meant dying for the name of the Lord there (Acts 20:24). Paul essentially asked them to stop making things more difficult for him. Since they could not persuade him, they concluded by expressing their desire for the Lord's will to be done. Then, Paul got ready to leave for Jerusalem, with some disciples from Caesarea going with them, intending to stay with Mnason (from Cyprus, an early disciple).

MEETING WITH THE DISCIPLES IN JERUSALEM (ACTS 21:17-25)

21:17-19. Paul and his traveling companions reached Jerusalem (approximately 65 miles southeast of Caesarea) and received a warm reception from the brothers and sisters there. Note that Paul and his companions had brought the collection for the saints there, having hoped that his ministry would be acceptable to them (Romans 15:25-27, 30-32). The next day, Paul and his traveling companions met with James (probably the Lord's brother; a leader and possibly an elder in the Jerusalem church; Galatians 1:18-19; 2:9; Acts 12:17; 15:13) and the elders of the church. Paul gave them a detailed report about the work God had done among the Gentiles through his service (likely the events since he was last in Jerusalem; Acts 15:12).

21:20-25. The report of gospel success among the Gentiles was positively received so that glory was given to God! They, however, had a concern. God had also been working among the Jews so that there were many thousands (tens of thousands) of Jewish disciples of Christ! These were zealous for the Law and had been informed that Paul had taught the Jews among the Gentiles (outside of Palestine) to abandon Moses (including circumcision and Jewish customs), which Paul had not done (Acts 16:1-3). Please note that the Law of Moses was given by God as both a moral law and national law. Jewish Christians needed to recognize that they should have no regard for the Law of Moses as a way to be saved (Acts 13:38-39; Galatians 3:23-27;

5:4). However, it was evidently permissible to observe aspects of the Law during this time of transition as matters of national governance and heritage (e.g. circumcision, refraining from certain meats, various sacrifices; 1 Corinthians 9:19-23; Romans 14:5-6), though these could never be bound on others! In response, the elders' suggestion was to make Paul ceremonially pure alongside four men who had made a vow (perhaps the Nazirite vow, Numbers 6) and have Paul pay for their expenses. Through this, they believed the Jewish Christians would conclude that Paul was not against Moses. Regarding the Gentiles, they made it known their views had not changed from the conclusions reached in Acts 15 (Acts 15:22-29).

PAUL IS ARRESTED (ACTS 21:26-36)

21:26-29. Paul did as the elders suggested the next day, entering the sacred part of the temple. Almost a week passed without incident. However, some unbelieving Jews from Asia (evidently in Jerusalem for Pentecost; perhaps from Ephesus, Acts 20:18-19) saw Paul in the temple and stirred up trouble against him. They accused him of teaching against the Law and the temple, and of defiling the temple by bringing a Gentile into it. They had seen Paul with Trophimus (an Ephesian who accompanied Paul, Acts 20:4) in the city and supposed Paul brought him into the temple (though there was no indication Trophimus was actually in the temple).

21:30-36. These false accusations were enough to set Jerusalem in an uproar so that the people attacked Paul, dragged him out of the temple, shut the gates, beat Paul, and wanted to kill him. When news reached the Roman commander of the cohort/regiment (about 600-1,000 men), he brought centurions and soldiers to the scene. This caused the Jews to stop beating Paul. Paul was then taken into custody by the Roman authorities, bound with two chains (fulfilling Acts 21:11). The crowd, though, was in confusion, and the commander could not properly identify the true cause of the uproar. So, he ordered Paul to be taken to the barracks. However, Paul had to be carried by the soldiers because of the violent crowd, who were yelling for Paul to be exterminated (killed; as they yelled concerning Jesus, John 19:15)!

CONCLUSION

Paul's third missionary journey has now reached its final destination. As the Holy Spirit had foretold, Paul had been arrested in Jerusalem. However, Paul was willing to endure the false accusations and persecutions – and even die for Christ if that would be the outcome!

DISCIPLESHIP QUESTIONS

What was Paul being told about what was waiting for him in Jerusalem?

How did Paul respond to the news about what would happen to him in Jerusalem?

What does Philip's example demonstrate concerning forgiveness?

What kind of reception did Paul initially experience among the Christians in Jerusalem?

What concern did the elders in Jerusalem report to Paul?

What suggestion did the elders make to Paul to address their concerns?

How could early Christians still live according to some aspects of the Law of Moses and be right with God?

What accusation was made against Paul, and what happened to him immediately afterward in Jerusalem?

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