

## Acts 21

- Our study of Acts picks up again today in the travel journal style that will mark the remainder of the book
  - Luke chronicling Paul's movements and experience
  - Beginning with chapter 21 tonight, the rest of the book of Acts sees Paul in captivity
    - First Paul is captive in Jerusalem
    - Later he will move to Caesarea
    - Finally, the book ends with Paul in prison in Rome

[Acts 21:1](#) ¶ When 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;  
[Acts 21:2](#) and having found a ship crossing over to Phoenicia, we went aboard and set sail.

[Acts 21:3](#) When we came 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.

[Acts 21:4](#) After looking up the disciples, we stayed there seven days; and they kept telling Paul through the Spirit not to set foot in Jerusalem.

[Acts 21:5](#) When our days there were ended, we left and started on our journey, while they all, with wives and children, escorted us until we were out of the city. After kneeling down on the beach and praying, we said farewell to one another.

[Acts 21:6](#) Then we went on board the ship, and they returned home again.

- Tonight we begin where Luke left off at the end of chapter 20
  - Paul is in Miletus, having given the elders of Ephesus a departing exhortation
    - Remember, Paul is escorted by men representing the various Gentile churches and bringing gifts for Jerusalem
  - After Paul delivers his message, he gets on the ship again and continues toward Jerusalem
    - Paul has felt compelled to reach Jerusalem for some time
      - And as he approaches, he will receive numerous warning signs that something terrible awaits him there
    - And yet Paul continues on

- Leaving Miletus, Luke records the ship's progress along the Pamphylia coast
  - First, the ship goes to Cos, then to Rhodes and on to Patara
    - Once again, I recommend you consult the map for Paul's third missionary journey to trace these stops along his route
  - In Patara, they switch ships for one headed to Phoenicia
    - They needed a larger ship to cross the open sea
    - They head toward Syria and specifically, the ship was headed to the ancient city state of Tyre
- When Paul reaches Tyre, Luke says they stayed there a week
  - This stop was probably not of choice for Paul, since we know he was rushing home for Pentecost
    - Paul was riding on trading ships, which took time to off load and take on cargo in each port
    - Plus sailors wanted time in port and off the ship
  - While in the city, they go seeking for disciples
    - Paul knew that a church had begun in this city at the hands of disciples spread during the first Jerusalem persecution
      - But Paul has never visited them and doesn't know where they are, since they are Gentiles and not in the synagogues
      - So Paul goes looking for them
  - When he finds them, they eventually tell him through the Spirit that he should not set foot in Jerusalem
    - This statement is potentially confusing
      - Because it seems to suggest that Paul will be disobeying the Spirit to enter Jerusalem
    - Remember, we must understand it in light of all we've read so far and in light of how the story of Paul eventually ends

- When the text says the warning came “through the Spirit,” it helps us understand what is really going on here
  - Luke doesn’t use the more common phrase “by the Spirit”
  - Saying “by” would indicate that the words spoken were according to God’s Spirit
    - If that were so, then we would have to conclude that Paul was being told by God not to enter Jerusalem
  - Instead, Luke says “through” so that we might understand the brothers in Syria were speaking based on a revelation of the Spirit
    - But the conclusion they drew from their revelation was their own
    - Through the Spirit, they came to know of the danger in Jerusalem
  - But by their own estimation, they determined that Paul should not go into that danger
    - The Spirit never gave that prohibition
- Since Paul was determined to leave, they followed him to the ship and prayed with him before he left
  - We’re going to see this pattern repeat again
    - Paul will receive warnings from well-meaning brothers who worry for his safety
    - But in each case, Paul recognizes that the revelation of the Spirit was intended to help Paul prepare for what was coming
    - It was not intended to stop him

[Acts 21:7](#) When we had finished the voyage from Tyre, we arrived at Ptolemais, and after greeting the brethren, we stayed with them for a day.

[Acts 21:8](#) On the next day we left and came to Caesarea, and entering the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, we stayed with him.

[Acts 21:9](#) Now this man had four virgin daughters who were prophetesses.

[Acts 21:10](#) As we were staying there for some days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea.

[Acts 21:11](#) 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.'"

[Acts 21:12](#) When we had heard this, we as well as the local residents began begging him not to go up to Jerusalem.

[Acts 21:13](#) 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."

[Acts 21:14](#) And since he would not be persuaded, we fell silent, remarking, "The will of the Lord be done!"

- Paul has nearly reached Jerusalem
  - After a brief stop in Ptolemais and a visit with the church in that town, Paul arrives at Caesarea
    - It sounds as if they made the trip to Caesarea by land rather than by ship, since the towns are only 30 miles apart
    - This was a modern city rebuilt by Herod the Great and it served as the Roman capital of Judea
  - Paul chooses to bring his entourage to the home of Phillip the evangelist
    - We remember Phillip from chapter 8 as the one who brought the Gospel to the Samaritans
    - That happened roughly 20 years earlier from this point, and he has settled down in Caesarea
  - Luke met Phillip here for the first time, and it's likely that Luke learned many of the details of Phillip's time in Samaria from this encounter
    - We also hear that Phillip has four daughters who are virgins and have the gift of prophecy
      - The mention of their virginity would have been unnecessary if it simply meant they had not had relationship with men
        - That would be expected unless they were married
      - The real point of the statement, therefore, must be that they are committed to a life of singleness in service to the church

- And so they live with their father
- The daughters are also prophetesses which demonstrates that spiritual gifts of all kinds are available to both men and women
  - Bothe men and women have speaking and teaching gifts along with all other gifts, except apostleship
  - Scripture only places limits on the exercise of our gifts when such use would be counter to a high spiritual purpose
    - For example, Paul teaches in 1Cor 14 that a woman is not to exercise her gift of prophecy or teaching when doing so would challenge male headship in the church
    - This is why women are not given apostleship
    - Also, men cannot exercise speaking in tongues when an interpreter is not present because it does not edify the Body
- Luke says that while Paul was staying in Caesarea, the prophet Agabus came from Judea to see Paul
  - We saw him earlier in chapter 11 foretelling the famine in Antioch
  - Now the prophet visits Paul in Caesarea and uses this elaborate display with Paul's belt to communicate to Paul what will happen when he enters Jerusalem
    - Through the man's symbolic display, he communicates that Paul will be bound as a prisoner
      - In fact, this binding will begin a period of fives years in which Paul will remain bound in one sense or another as a prisoner
    - Notice in this example the prophet speaks exactly what the Spirit says
      - The Spirit gives another warning, but not a prohibition to travel to Jerusalem
    - We also see that the warning had two very different effects on the crowd and on Paul
  - First, the crowd takes the warning and interprets it much like the earlier group

- They see the reality of this misery as reason not to venture into Jerusalem
  - We can assume why they would have this point of view
  - They believe instinctively that the highest value in life is preserving our physical lives
  - If Paul knew that he was going to be endangered in Jerusalem, then certainly that argued for avoiding the danger
- Such a view is the natural and common one in the world, especially among unbelievers
  - And it is shared by many believers, both here in this story and in the world today
    - It seems sensible to conclude that protection of our life is the highest goal we can have
  - But the Bible gives Christians an even higher goal than protecting our physical lives
    - We're told that obedience to God is the highest goal of a sanctified life
      - It is even more important than preserving our physical life
      - In keeping with the example set by our Lord himself
  - But when we place our physical lives over obedience to God, we stand to lose something much greater than our physical bodies
  - Jesus said it this way:

[Mark 8:35](#) "For whoever wishes to save his life **will lose** it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it.

- There are eternal implications for our disobedience, especially if the disobedience is an attempt to
  - Then we have Paul's reaction to the news
    - Paul gently admonishes them telling them they are breaking his heart

- The phrase “breaking my heart” in Greek carries the meaning of “weakening my will” or “lessening my resolve”
- Paul is correcting the crowd by pointing out that they are working against Paul’s best interests and making it harder for him to obey the Lord
- In a way, Paul is saying something similar to what Jesus told Peter when they were nearby in Caesarea Philippi

[Matt. 16:23](#) But He turned and said to Peter, “**Get behind** Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God’s interests, but man’s.”

- When Paul asks the brethren what are they doing, he is really saying “Do you know what you’re doing to me?”
  - As Paul demonstrates his resolve, it has a teaching effect on the crowd
    - They see his resolve and then in v.14 they declare that the Lord’s will be done
  - Now we see clearly where the Lord’s will is in this matter
  - God is calling Paul into Jerusalem and into chains for the sake of the Gospel
    - And the brethren are now understanding this call, made clear by Paul’s teaching on that point
    - So now they turn from a somewhat selfish desire to preserve his life to better desire to obey God’s will
  - Remember, the book of Acts told us earlier that Jesus confided in Paul concerning the many things he would suffer for the name of Christ
    - And now many of them are about to take place and Paul is ready to be obedient to that call
- What can we learn from the fact that God is revealing Paul’s coming suffering even as Paul moves toward the city
  - Obviously, the more God reveals, the harder it gets for Paul to move onward

- Yet it's also interesting that these revelations continue to come in very public moments before church gatherings and leaders
- It's as if God wants the church to witness Paul's obedience even in the face of certain persecution and death
- And that was in fact the purpose, or at least one purpose
  - Remember, not long after Paul dies the church enters a period of hundreds of years of persecution
    - And many Christians are soon to be called upon to face death for their faith without retreating from their confessions
  - And leading into the period, the Lord has decided to parade Paul through his own period of captivity and martyrdom in a very public way
    - So that Paul may be an example for the church in facing this suffering for the sake of Christ
- We should remember this lesson when we consider how to face the trials in our lives
  - God have the right to use our lives any way He wishes for His glory and His eternal purposes
    - And like Paul, God could decide that the best way to use our lives is to bring us through trials or tragedy as opportunity to demonstrate His power and grace through us
    - Are we prepared to become glory to God in that way?

[Acts 21:15](#) After these days we got ready and started on our way up to Jerusalem.

[Acts 21:16](#) 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.

[Acts 21:17](#) After we arrived in Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly.

[Acts 21:18](#) And the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present.

[Acts 21:19](#) After he had greeted them, he began to relate one by one the things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry.

[Acts 21:20](#) 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;



[Acts 21:21](#) 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.

- From Caesarea Paul moves to Jerusalem and finally arrives
  - Smartly, the brethren in Caesarea send with Paul to Jerusalem with a trusted brother who lived in the city
    - The plan was to have Paul and his entourage board with this man
    - His name is Mnason, and he may have been at Pentecost
      - He was a Hellenistic Jew and as such, he would have been less bothered by a mixed crowd of Jewish and Gentile believers boarding with him in Jerusalem
  - As Paul enters the city, he is warmly received by the church
    - He visits James and the other elders
    - And Paul gives a full report on how the church is spreading among Gentiles across the world
      - How encouraging this must have been for the church leaders in Jerusalem to hear
- Then the discussion turns to more serious matters concerning Paul's safety
  - The leaders remind Paul that in Jerusalem there are many thousands of believing Jews now
    - The word in Greek for thousands is myriads, which literally means 20,000 or more believing Jews in the city
  - On the one hand, this is a great testimony to the growth of the church in the city of Jerusalem
    - The believing Jews comprise a sizable minority in the city now
    - On the other hand, James tells Paul that the Christian Jews in Jerusalem were zealous to keep the Law
      - Since believers are not required to keep the Law in this way, these believers were either doing so as a matter of personal preference

- Or they were unaware of their liberty in this regard
- Or they were maintaining appearances to ensure good relations with the rest of the Jews in the city
- These believing Jews had been fed false rumors that Paul was teaching against Jewish Law and customs
  - We can be sure these rumors were the products of false teachers and dishonest men trying to stir up trouble for Paul
  - But the church leaders tell Paul that many believing Jews have accepted these rumors as true
  - So they decide upon a plan of action to help protect Paul

[Acts 21:22](#) "What, then, is to be done? They will certainly hear that you have come.

[Acts 21:23](#) "Therefore do this that we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow;

[Acts 21:24](#) take them and purify yourself along with them, and pay their expenses so 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.

[Acts 21:25](#) "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."

[Acts 21:26](#) 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.

- The leaders know that eventually the whole of the church will discover that Paul is in town, and so they must have a way to show that Paul respects Judaism
  - There were four men in the church who were at the end of a period of a vow
    - At the end of a vow, these men were to purify themselves including shaving their heads
    - This process was somewhat costly, involving payments to the temple priests, for the sacrifices, etc.
    - So James recommends that Paul accompany them to the temple and pay for these expenses

- In this way, Paul would show his support for customs
- And he would demonstrate that he wasn't against the Law, allowing it to be practiced voluntarily
- Furthermore, the Gentiles in Paul's party would abide by the restrictions hammered out at the Council of Jerusalem
- We can see James working politically to get Paul to affirm support for voluntary adherence to the Law
  - Even while he agrees that Gentiles are not under the Law
- Paul agreed and accompanied the men to the temple
  - He himself was also purified
    - Paul would have had his own head shaved
    - Then he gave the notice that these men and himself had completed vows
    - This process involved reporting to the priest on behalf of each man, in turn, and setting the date that the sacrifices would be offered for the men
- In this case, the vows were complete in seven days, and so the sacrifices were conducted at the end of that time
  - The process seems to have had it's intended effect, because we never hear of believing Jews harassing Paul
  - Ironically, today believers may criticize Paul for sacrificing in the temple,
    - Some suggest that this was wrong for Paul since Jesus was the one sufficient sacrifice and no other is required
    - First, remember that this was not a sacrifice for atonement of sin but in thanks for completing the vow
    - Secondly, it was done to harmonize the Jewish and Gentile believers
    - Finally, keeping the Law is not wrong; only if we make it mandatory is it wrong

[Acts 21:27](#) ¶ When the seven days were almost over, the Jews from Asia, upon seeing him in the temple, began to stir up all the crowd and laid hands on him, [Acts 21:28](#) 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."

[Acts 21:29](#) For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with him, and they supposed that Paul had brought him into the temple.

[Acts 21:30](#) Then all the city was provoked, and the people rushed together, and taking hold of Paul they dragged him out of the temple, and immediately the doors were shut.

[Acts 21:31](#) While they were seeking to kill him, a report came up to the commander of the Roman cohort that all Jerusalem was in confusion.

[Acts 21:32](#) 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.

[Acts 21:33](#) 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.

[Acts 21:34](#) But among the crowd some were shouting one thing and some another, and when he could not find out the facts because of the uproar, he ordered him to be brought into the barracks.

[Acts 21:35](#) When he got to the stairs, he was carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the mob;

[Acts 21:36](#) for the multitude of the people kept following them, shouting, "Away with him!"

- At the end of the vow period, Paul has been found out by the unbelieving Jews visiting from Asia
  - They were probably in town for the Passover or Pentecost as well
    - And they begin to stir up the city against Paul
  - They lie and distort Paul's teaching, making accusations calculated to gain a strong negative response from the Jews
    - The nail in the coffin was the charge that one of Paul's Gentile traveling companions, Trophimus, was brought into the holy place
    - That was about the worst thing a Jew could do, and it was guaranteed to start a riot
  - At the time the riot begins, Paul is in the Inner Court and into the Outer Court
    - And the doors to the Inner Court are closed, because a man's blood could not be spilled in the Inner Court

- And the Jewish mob are preparing to kill Paul
- Before they get very far, the commander of the Roman cohort hears of the rioting and rushes to put it down
  - He arrives to find Paul being beaten and puts a stop to it
  - They put Paul in chains and lead him away to interrogate him
- Thus begins five years of Roman imprisonment
- The noise and aggressiveness of the crowd requires that the interrogation move indoors, so the commander orders them to take Paul into the barracks
  - But the crowd follows in pursuit and continue to threaten the soldiers and Paul
  - So to get Paul inside, they must lift him up and carry him into the barracks

[Acts 21:37](#) ¶ 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?"  
[Acts 21:38](#) "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?"  
[Acts 21:39](#) 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."

- Paul speaks up at this point and asks for a chance to address the crowd
  - Paul speaks in Greek, which surprises the commander and causes him to mistake Paul for a notorious revolutionary wanted for insurrection
    - Paul quickly identifies himself as a citizen of Tarsus and as a Jew
    - And he asks for permission to address the crowd
  - This was a brave request and it leads into chapter 22 next week, where Paul's speech and the crowd's response lead the story forward