

Acts of the Apostles - Chapter 21 (NIV)

On to Jerusalem

21:1 After we had torn ourselves away from them, we put out to sea and sailed straight to Kos. The next day we went to Rhodes and from there to Patara. 2 We found a ship crossing over to Phoenicia, went on board and set sail. 3 After sighting Cyprus and passing to the south of it, we sailed on to Syria. We landed at Tyre, where our ship was to unload its cargo. 4 We sought out the disciples there and stayed with them seven days. Through the Spirit they urged Paul not to go on to Jerusalem. 5 When it was time to leave, we left and continued on our way. All of them, including wives and children, accompanied us out of the city, and there on the beach we knelt to pray. 6 After saying goodbye to each other, we went aboard the ship, and they returned home.

Luke is still using the personal pronoun, “we” which means that he is included in the group. In the first three verses, Luke is handling the logistics or route of their trip. It looks like there is very little time for preaching or teaching by the group until they reached Tyre. Even there, they did not do any evangelizing, they sought out other disciples and not non-believers. They tried to talk Paul out of going to Jerusalem. They were still concerned about the pending doom or death that Paul had told them about.

“It would seem that the specific warning not to go up to Jerusalem was a human interpretation of the Holy Spirit’s prophecy of the danger that awaited Paul. Otherwise, it is difficult to see why Paul would have gone against the Holy Spirit’s direction – unless he was in direct rebellion, which some commentators believe is so.” (Guzik)

Not only did the disciples of Tyre follow them to the boat, but they also all knelt and prayed before saying Goodbye.

21:7 We continued our voyage from Tyre and landed at Ptolemais, where we greeted the brothers and sisters and stayed with them for a day.8 Leaving the next day, we reached Caesarea and stayed at the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the Seven. 9 He had four unmarried daughters who prophesied.

When they arrived in Caesarea (by the Sea), they stayed with Philip the Evangelist. It says that he was one of the original Seven chosen in Acts 6:1-5 to take care of the widows (deacons). He is the same Philip that led the Ethiopian Eunuch to the saving knowledge of Jesus in Acts 8:26-40. He was one of the first deacons and now he is given the title of an evangelist. What an amazing example of Christian growth.

“Now this man had four virgin daughters who prophesied” (NKJV): It’s interesting that with these four daughters who had the gift of prophecy, none of them seemed to tell Paul anything about his upcoming time in Jerusalem. The Holy Spirit *could* have used them, but He chose to use someone else.” (Guzik)

21:10 After we had been there a number of days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. 11 Coming over to us, he took Paul’s belt, tied his own hands and feet with it and said, “The Holy Spirit says, ‘In this way the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles.’”

We have read of this prophet, Agabus in Acts 11:27-28. He is the prophet that foretold of the famine during the reign of Claudius. Now he is telling Paul of what will happen to him in Jerusalem. This is the third time that Paul has heard of the pending doom in Jerusalem. 1 - In Macedonia (Acts 20:22-23), 2 - in Tyre (Acts 21:4) and 3 - now in Caesarea. Agabus takes Paul's belt and says that the Jewish leaders will bind the wearer of this belt and turn him over to the Gentiles or Romans.

21:12 When we heard this, we and the people there pleaded with Paul not to go up to Jerusalem. 13 Then Paul answered, "Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." 14 When he would not be dissuaded, we gave up and said, "The Lord's will be done."

They all tried to persuade Paul not to go to Jerusalem. Just in the case of Jesus, this was a human response to a spiritual calling by the Holy Spirit. They wanted Paul to stay away from Jerusalem but God was calling Paul home by way of Rome.

21:15 After this, we started on our way up to Jerusalem. 16 Some of the disciples from Caesarea accompanied us and brought us to the home of Mnason, where we were to stay. He was a man from Cyprus and one of the early disciples.

Paul knew what he had to do. So he went on to Jerusalem. One more stop at the home of another disciple.

"Mnason of Cyprus, an early disciple: Based on the dating of Paul's Corinthian ministry at about a.d. 51 (Bruce) and other considerations, it is reasonable to think Paul arriving in Jerusalem in a.d. 57. Even though this was only some 25 years after the beginning of the Book of Acts, some Christians were already recognized as "an early disciple," one who had been associated with the followers of Jesus from the earliest years."(Guzik)

Paul's Arrival at Jerusalem

21:17 When we arrived at Jerusalem, the brothers and sisters received us warmly. 18 The next day Paul and the rest of us went to see James, and all the elders were present. 19 Paul greeted them and reported in detail what God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry.

Upon Paul's arrival in Jerusalem, he is greeted and given the opportunity to meet with James and the elders. This James is Jesus' brother. The apostle James, the son of Zebedee was put to death. He reported what God had done among the Gentiles.

21:20 When they heard this, they praised God. Then they said to Paul: "You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews have believed, and all of them are zealous for the law. 21 They have been informed that you teach all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to turn away from Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or live according to our customs. 22 What shall we do? They will certainly hear that you have come, 23 so do what we tell you. There are four men with us who have made a vow. 24 Take these men, join in their purification rites and pay their expenses, so that they can have their heads shaved. Then everyone will know there is no truth in these reports about you, but that you yourself are living in obedience to the law. 25 As for the Gentile believers, we have written to them our decision that they should

abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality.”

At the end of Paul’s first missionary journey, there were discussions about what the Gentiles had to do to be saved. This time, we are told that they praised God. Now comes the BUT. Many Jews have turned to Jesus and they are zealous for the Law. In John 14:6 does Jesus say “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life” but you need to keep the Law or not eat blood or do not eat of a strangled animal or abstain from sexual immorality. No, faith in Jesus is what it takes. Man adds things to what God or Jesus says. In Jerusalem, the Christian leadership is behaving like the Scribes and the Pharisees by pushing obedience to the Law.

“Based on Romans 14:4-6, it seems that Paul didn’t have a problem with Jewish Christians who wanted to continue to observe old customs and laws. It seems that he himself did so sometimes, such as when he took and fulfilled a vow of consecration in Acts 18:18-21 (probably a Nazirite vow). Paul seemed fine with this, *as long as they didn’t think it made them more right before God.*” (Guzik)

The Christian leadership in Jerusalem is taking the stance of “Don’t rock the Jewish boat”. If you are a Jewish Christian then continue being Jewish but make it about Jesus or God. They reconfirmed that the Gentiles had to follow the four laws in addition to their faith in Jesus.

21:26 The next day Paul took the men and purified himself along with them. Then he went to the temple to give notice of the date when the days of purification would end and the offering would be made for each of them.

Paul agreed to take these four Christian men of Jewish background to the Temple for purification rites and to get their heads shaved. Paul should have declined but 1 Corinthians 9:20 (see next quote) tells us why he didn’t. It tells us that Paul became a Jew to win Jews; to win those under the law; he became under the Law. He did what he had to, in order to win souls for Christ.

“Many commentators believe this was a terrible compromise on Paul’s part; that he was a hypocrite. Yet the motive behind Paul’s sponsorship of these Christian Jews completing their Nazirite vow is explained in: *And to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law.* 1 Corinthians 9:20” (Guzik)

Paul Arrested

21:27 When the seven days were nearly over, some Jews from the province of Asia saw Paul at the temple. They stirred up the whole crowd and seized him, 28 shouting, “Fellow Israelites, help us! This is the man who teaches everyone everywhere against our people and our law and this place. And besides, he has brought Greeks into the temple and defiled this holy place.” 29 (They had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with Paul and assumed that Paul had brought him into the temple.)

Once again, Jews from Asia cause problems for Paul. They stirred up the Jews saying that: 1) He spoke against the Jewish religion. 2) He brought Gentiles into the Temple. 3) Had Paul actually brought Gentiles into the Temple. If James and the elders told them to take these men to the Temple then they would have been sure they were Jewish.

“Signs were posted which read (in both Greek and Latin): “No foreigner may enter within the barricade which surrounds the temple and enclosure. Anyone who is caught trespassing will bear personal responsibility for his ensuing death.” The Romans were so sensitive to this that they authorized the Jews to execute anyone that offended in this way, even if the offender was a Roman citizen.”

21:30 The whole city was aroused, and the people came running from all directions. Seizing Paul, they dragged him from the temple, and immediately the gates were shut. 31 While they were trying to kill him, news reached the commander of the Roman troops that the whole city of Jerusalem was in an uproar. 32 He at once took some officers and soldiers and ran down to the crowd. When the rioters saw the commander and his soldiers, they stopped beating Paul.

Once again Paul found himself seized by an angry mob. They took him out of the Temple and beat him but wanted to kill him. The Roman soldiers heard the uproar and came to the Temple. When they arrived the Jews stopped beating Paul.

21:33 The commander came up and arrested him and ordered him to be bound with two chains. Then he asked who he was and what he had done. 34 Some in the crowd shouted one thing and some another, and since the commander could not get at the truth because of the uproar, he ordered that Paul be taken into the barracks. 35 When Paul reached the steps, the violence of the mob was so great he had to be carried by the soldiers. 36 The crowd that followed kept shouting, “Get rid of him!”

Paul was arrested and put into chains. The crowd was so out of control that the Romans took Paul to their barracks. The crowd was shouting “Away with him!”

“Boice on *Away with him!* “They did not mean, ‘Take him away from the temple area.’ They meant, ‘Remove him from the earth.’ They wanted him dead.”

Paul Speaks to the Crowd

21:37 As the soldiers were about to take Paul into the barracks, he asked the commander, “May I say something to you?”

“Do you speak Greek?” he replied. 38 “Aren’t you the Egyptian who started a revolt and led four thousand terrorists out into the wilderness some time ago?”

39 Paul answered, “I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no ordinary city. Please let me speak to the people.”

40 After receiving the commander’s permission, Paul stood on the steps and motioned to the crowd. When they were all silent, he said to them in Aramaic:

Paul was not willing to be taken away without first speaking to the angry crowd.