

ACTS CHAPTER 21

Read vs. 1-14

1. In Tyre Paul was again warned _____ (vs.. 4)

Paul didn't know the believers in Tyre. This church was started by Christians who were fleeing persecution after the stoning of Stephen. You will recall from studying Acts 7 that Paul had a major role in bringing about that persecution. How ironic that now he is visiting some of those believers that had fled because of him! Paul was no longer the same man. Christ had so totally changed him that now he was united with these believers like a brother.

Paul was determined to return to Jerusalem. He was carrying all of the gifts he had collected from the Gentile churches and he was determined to deliver them personally to the impoverished believers in Jerusalem. He felt compelled by God to go to Jerusalem. He is often criticized for this; people think that he should have heeded the warnings and stayed away. Decide for yourself as you do this lesson. Perhaps you've been in a situation where you felt that God was telling you one thing and your Christian friends were trying to discourage you from it. This calls for discernment! What are your motives? What are their motives? Have these friends been valuable advisers in the past? Which decision has the wisdom of the scriptures behind it? Proceed with prayer!!!

2. In Caesarea, Paul and his companions stayed in the home of Philip. What do you know about Philip from previous studies? (see Acts 6:5, 8:5-8 and 8:26-40)

The regional headquarters of the Roman government was in Caesarea. Paul was later imprisoned in this city for two years.

3. Philip had 4 daughters who could _____ (vs. 9)

There are accounts of female prophets in the old testament also. Consider Miriam (Ex. 15:20, Deborah (Judges 4:4), Huldah (II Kings 22:14), & the wife of Isaiah (Isaiah 8:3). A prophet spoke the word of God and had wisdom from God. They gave fair judgments. It was not necessarily the telling of future events.

God also gave some tests for discerning between a prophet of God and a false prophet. Consider: Deut. 18:20-22 and Deut. 13:1. The words of a prophet will always come to pass and always agree with scripture.

4. How did Agabus warn Paul about going to Jerusalem? (vs. 10 & 11)

5. Describe the reaction of Paul's friends to this warning. (vs. 12-14)

It was probably harder for them to think about Paul going through this than it was for Paul to face it. Paul appreciated their concern for him, but he had such a clear sense of direction from God that nothing could change his mind. Paul also had total peace. Even if he was to die, it was OK. In Phil.1:21-24 Paul says that "to die is gain". He knew beyond a shadow of doubt that when he departed from this life he would be with his Lord. Why wouldn't he want that? Indeed, he did. He knew that he wouldn't die before God wanted him to; he had no fear of what men could do to him. He also had confidence that he would finish the job that Christ had given him before God called him home.

Read vs. 15-30

6. Who does Paul give a report to in vs. 18 & 19?

Paul was warmly received by the leaders of the church. He gave his verbal report of all the things that had happened, of all the people that were saved and of all the churches that had been established. They rejoiced to hear about it.

7. James and the others reminded Paul that there were also _____ of Jews who believed and that they were zealous _____ (vs. 20)

Even though the church leaders understood Paul's ministry and endorsed it, they were also very much aware of how it would probably be received by the other Jewish believers. Jerusalem was still a strong hold for the law. It had been about 9 years since the Jerusalem council. What was decided at that time? (Acts 15:28 & 29) Paul's ministry to the Gentiles had been thoroughly examined at that time and they had given him their blessing. They agreed that the Gentile believers were not under obligation to keep the law. Christ had ended the law (Ro. 10:4) and established a new covenant. (Luke 22:20, Heb. 7:22, Heb. 8:7-13) But this was not generally accepted among the Jews. They heard second-hand accounts of what Paul was teaching and were greatly offended.

The accusations against Paul held some truth. He had been teaching the believers that they didn't have to keep the law. But it was also true that he had received the blessing of the church fathers to do that. That had no bearing on those who wanted to cause trouble for Paul. They considered him a heretic and they attacked him with the same religious fervor that he had had before his conversion.

8. Why were the Christian Jews upset with Paul? (vs. 21)

Consider Gal. 5:1-6 and 5:14. Paul adamantly taught that salvation was by grace alone and did not depend on the law. Is it OK for a Christian Jew to keep the old holidays and customs? Yes, if he clearly understands that he is not doing it for salvation. Paul himself loved his Jewish heritage and still participated in the celebrations and traditions. Paul was in a "no win" situation. In addition to the lack of understanding by the Jewish believers,

there were probably a good number of Jewish unbelievers who were throwing fuel on the fire, too. They would be more than happy to see Paul silenced.

Here we must be reminded once again about this time in history. Acts is the bridge between law and grace, between the old testament and the new testament. This time of transition was extremely difficult. The Jews who did become believers did not want to give up their culture and their traditions. Paul spent much energy trying to teach the Jews about the freedom that they had in Christ. The whole book of Galatians is an attempt to help them comprehend what Christ had accomplished for them. Changes of this magnitude aren't usually accomplished in one generation.

9. *Considering the council's decision in 15:10 & 11 and 15:28-29 as well as other principles you have learned, were the Jews right in accusing Paul of an offense?*

We can understand why they were upset. Without instruction and an understanding of what was happening, Paul was an offense to them. They were staunchly defending everything that they had ever been taught. However, there is no Christian love being displayed here. They are not making any effort to hear Paul's defense. The fruits of the Spirit are not being evidenced in their lives. Even the church leaders like James had no power to influence them. The trouble was escalating quickly. Remember that this was also the time of Pentecost and many out-of-town Jews were also present. The crowd mentality quickly took over.

Note....In Acts 12:2 we read about James, the brother of John, being killed by Herod. The James in this chapter was the half brother of Jesus.

10. *In verses 23-26 the church leaders suggest a plan to appease the unbelieving Jews. Paul consented to go along with their suggestions. (vs. 23- 26) What was the end result? (vs. 27-30)*

What if he had refused to go along? It's hard to imagine that things could have been any worse. In I Cor. 9:20-23 Paul explains how he tried to not be offensive to people. His purpose was that somehow he would be able to win them to Christ. It seems that the only way this could have been prevented would have been for Paul to stay away from Jerusalem, but he felt that God had led him to be there. Romans 8:28 will come into play here and God will work things out to accomplish His purpose in Paul's life.

Read vs. 31-40

11. *Paul probably would have been killed if he hadn't been rescued by_____.*

God interceded to save Paul by using the Roman soldiers. Our God has every means at His disposal in every circumstance. Things are never out of control in a Christian's life. God's will will be accomplished and it will be accomplished when He desires it to happen.

The Jews bring 3 accusations against Paul and later add a 4th one. He is accused of

speaking against the Jews, of opposing the law and speaking against the temple. Look up Romans 9:1-5. Paul loved his country and would have laid down his life for the Jews. He did not oppose the law, but he did understand how Christ had fulfilled it and ushered in a new covenant. He revered the temple as every Jew did.

They also accused him of bringing a Gentile into the temple. This was not true, but they had seen him previously with Trophimus. Probably some of the accusers were from Ephesus because they recognized Trophimus. (Acts 20:4) You will recall the trouble that Paul encountered in Ephesus because of the silversmith and the idols of Artemis.

12. *The crowd was so violent that Paul had to be _____ by the soldiers. (vs. 34 & 35)*

Notice in verse 33 that Paul was bound with two chains. This fulfills the prophecy of Agabus in Acts. 21:10 & 11. Once again God used the Romans to rescue Paul from premature death.

13. *Who did the captain think that Paul was? (vs. 37 & 38)*

In AD 54 an Egyptian who claimed to be a prophet gathered 4000 men and came to the Mount of Olives claiming that the walls of Jerusalem would collapse at his command. The Roman army had captured the group, but the Egyptian himself had escaped. The captain assumed for some reason that Paul was that man. When Paul asked if you could speak, the commander was totally surprised to hear him speaking Greek. Paul explains who he is. As a Jew he had every right to be in the temple. He doesn't reveal his Roman citizenship yet, which would give him even more protection.

14. *Paul asked permission to _____. (vs. 39)*

This chapter ends as Paul is standing on the steps with a sea of people in front of him. In the next chapter, we'll see him take full advantage of his situation as he freely shares his testimony.