

I. Introduction

Good morning! Last week we looked at Paul's message to the elders of the church at Ephesus. We saw how Paul expressed his attitude toward his mission in **Acts 20:24**, saying, **"However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me--the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace."** To Paul, his God-given mission was the central focus of his life. Paul did not worry about pleasing men; Paul focused on pleasing God.



In today's Scripture passage, we will see that Paul's third missionary journey came to an end shortly after he arrived in Jerusalem. He originally departed on the journey from Antioch, but he will not be able to return there because his journey ends when he is arrested by the Romans. Paul and his party made many stops along the way. This allowed them to greet the believers in various cities, and was also probably the unavoidable result of catching rides on small trading vessels that made frequent stops. In this way they will journey from Miletus to Caesarea, and then overland to Jerusalem.



Let's begin by reading Acts 21:1-14.

II. Scripture Reading (Acts 21:1-14, NIV, 1984)

1 After we had torn ourselves away from them, we put out to sea and sailed straight to Cos. 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 Finding the disciples there, we stayed with them seven days. Through the Spirit they urged Paul not to go on to Jerusalem. 5 But when our time was up, we left and continued on our way. All the disciples and their wives and children accompanied us out of the city, and there on the beach we knelt to pray. 6 After saying good-bye to each other, we went aboard the ship, and they returned home.

7 We continued our voyage from Tyre and landed at Ptolemais, where we greeted the brothers 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. 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 Jews of Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles.'" 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."

III. Teaching

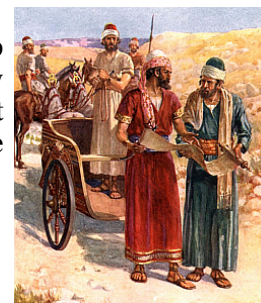
Paul and his companions seemed to find Christians in every town they stopped at. Only 25 years after the birth of the church in Acts 2, there were already churches in most cities across the areas we know today as Greece, Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, and beyond. In the first century of the church, the Good News of Jesus spread very rapidly throughout the Roman Empire. In the passage we just read, after visiting the Christians in Tyre and Ptolemais, Paul and his party arrived in Caesarea where they stayed at the home of Philip the evangelist.

Philip was a remarkable man. Philip was one of the seven chosen to help with distributing the food in Acts 6, but he had a tremendous preaching ministry in addition to his servant ministry of delivering food to the widows. You may remember



something of Philip's ministry from when we studied Acts 8. In **Acts 8:5**, we read that, "**Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Christ there.**" There was a great response to his message and so many believed in Jesus and were baptized that the apostles Peter and John went to Samaria to join the work.

But the most famous story about Philip is probably the story of how Philip shared the Good News of Jesus with the Ethiopian eunuch. **Acts 8:35**, records how Philip used the passage in Isaiah that the man was already reading to share about Jesus. "**Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.**"



The Ethiopian man believed and was baptized in **Acts 8:38**, "**And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him.**" The Spirit of the Lord took Philip away after this, and the newly-baptized man went on his way rejoicing. According to tradition, this man won many to faith in Christ in his home country of Ethiopia. Judging by the record in Acts 8, Philip is called the evangelist with good reason. In fact, Philip is actually the only person in Acts who is given the title of evangelist.



Acts 8:40 tells us, "**Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.**" In Acts 21, Philip is still in Caesarea and now has four unmarried daughters who are prophets of the Lord. But on the occasion of Paul's visit no prophecy from these daughters is recorded, but instead we have the prophecy of Agabus.

Acts 21:11, "**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 Jews of Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles.'**" The people who heard this pleaded with Paul to stay away from Jerusalem. But Paul knew that the Holy Spirit was leading him to go, so I think the purpose of the prophetic warning was to prepare Paul and the others for what was going to happen. Paul must have concluded the same, because he remained determined to go to Jerusalem.



Let's continue with Acts 21:15-25.

IV. Scripture Reading (Acts 21:15-25, NIV, 1984)

15 After this, we got ready and went 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. 17 When we arrived at Jerusalem, the brothers 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.

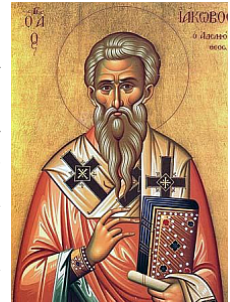
20 When they heard this, they praised God. Then they said to Paul: "You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews have believed, and all of them are zealous for the law. 21 They have been informed that you teach all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to turn away from Moses, telling them not to circumcise 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 everybody 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."



V. Teaching

In Jerusalem, Paul stayed at the home of Mnason, a man who was originally from Cyprus and who was one of the early believers in Jesus. Mnason is honored as a saint in the Greek Orthodox Church and especially in Cyprus, where he later served as a bishop. It was the time of Pentecost, so Jerusalem would have been full of travelers who had come to the feast. It seems the disciples made a special effort to find lodging for Paul in the crowded city.

In Jerusalem, Paul reported to James and the elders of the church concerning all that God had done among the Gentiles and they rejoiced at the good report. There are three men named James in the New Testament, but the James here in Acts 21 is the author of the Letter of James and also the brother of Jesus who is mentioned in Matthew 13:55 and Galatians 1:19. Some people say Jesus' brothers and sisters were actually cousins or Joseph's children from an earlier marriage, but the obvious explanation is that after Mary gave birth to Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit, Joseph and Mary lived as a married couple and had other children in the natural way. The Catholic Church, however, cannot accept this simple explanation because their doctrine requires Mary to remain a permanent virgin, but there is no Scriptural evidence for that doctrine.



In any case, the prominent mention of James reflects his major role in the church leadership in Jerusalem. James praised God for Paul's report, but he also raised a concern. In Jerusalem, all of the thousands of Jewish believers in Jesus had remained devout Jews and they continued to follow the Laws of Moses as well as trusting in Jesus Christ. To us, this might seem impossible, but the early days of the church were a time of transition. The Jews who recognized Jesus as the Messiah saw no reason to give up their Jewish lifestyles. For James and the others, it was enough for them to affirm that the Gentiles would not be required to follow the Law of Moses; they saw no reason for the Jewish Christians to give up temple worship and other Jewish practices. All of this would change a few years later when the Romans destroyed the temple in 70 AD, but at this time that was still a dozen years or so in the future.

Among the Jewish Christians, rumors about Paul had spread. Paul's insistence that gentiles be free from the Law of Moses had been misunderstood as general hostility toward the Law of Moses. James felt that it was essential to dispel this misunderstanding for the harmony of the church. And so, James proposed using the situation of four men who had made a vow as an opportunity to illustrate Paul's commitment to the Law of Moses. James said, **Acts 21:24, "Take these men, join in their purification rites and pay their expenses, so that they can have their heads shaved. Then everybody will know there is no truth in these reports about you, but that you yourself are living in obedience to the law."**

Paul also desired harmony in the church and, even more, Paul longed for opportunities to share the love of Jesus with his fellow Jews. This was a good chance for Paul to live out what he had earlier written about in **1 Corinthians 9:20, "To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law."**

So Paul accepted James' plan. Let's finish our Scripture reading for today with Acts 21:26-39.

VI. Scripture Reading (Acts 21:26-39, NIV)

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. 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, "Men of Israel, help us! This is the man who teaches all men everywhere against our people and our law and this place. And besides, he has brought Greeks into the temple area 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 area.)

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. 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, "Away with him!" 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 desert 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."

VII. Teaching

Rumors about Paul had spread among all of the Jews, not just among those who had believed in Jesus. Now Paul faces a false accusation. Some Jews who saw Paul at the temple stirred up the crowd against him by accusing him of bringing Greeks into the temple. They started a riot and dragged Paul out of the temple, intending to kill him. But the Roman commander heard what was going on and went out with his troops to restore order.

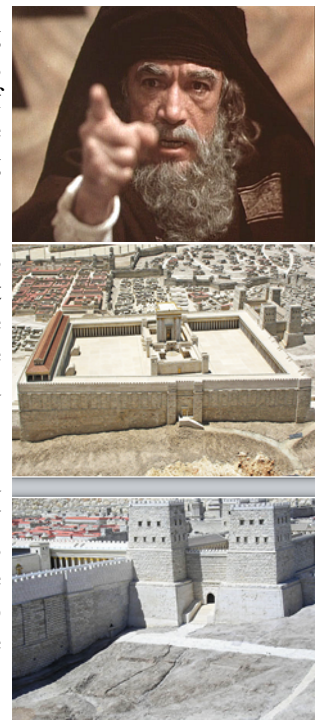
This photo shows a model of what the temple area looked like in Paul's time. You can see the temple in the center, and the large courtyard around it. But notice the large building at the back right corner; that is Antonia Fortress. The Romans added that fortress and military barracks at the edge of the temple complex so that they could look down into the temple courtyard and respond quickly to any trouble.

When the mob attacked Paul, the Roman commander responded immediately. Paul had been dragged out of the temple, but was soon rescued by the soldiers who intended to take him into the barracks. So, at the time Paul is talking to the Roman commander, he was at the top of the steps leading into the Antonia Fortress. At first, the commander thought Paul might be an Egyptian who had previously caused trouble, but when Paul spoke to him politely in Greek, the Roman commander realized that Paul is an educated man.

In **Acts 21:39**, Paul responded to the commander, **"Paul answered, 'I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no ordinary city. Please let me speak to the people.'"** After being almost killed by rioters and then chained by the Romans, most people would be thinking only of saving their own skin. But Paul's thoughts were for the salvation of his brothers and sisters, the Jewish people. Paul saw below him a large crowd of angry people. But instead of looking upon them with anger or fear, Paul looks upon the crowd with compassion and love. Paul speaks softly and persuasively to the Roman commander in order to gain permission to speak to the crowd.

At the top of the steps leading into the Antonia Fortress, Paul will give a remarkable evangelistic message centered on his personal experience with Jesus. We will take a close look at that message next week. But for today, let's take a moment before we close to reflect on Paul's bold stand. Paul is chained with two chains, the Scripture says, probably meaning that he is chained by the hands to a guard on each side. Paul stands before an angry mob of offended Jews that was beating him and trying to kill him just a moment ago. And now, Paul is a prisoner of the Romans and he knows that they will not necessarily treat him any better than the mob. The mob is disorderly and angry. The Romans are disciplined and orderly. But they are not known for their mercy. If they decide that Paul is a troublemaker, they may soon beat him or execute him.

Paul is innocent of wrongdoing, but among either the Jews or the Romans, a false accusation may soon result in Paul's death. But Paul does not worry about his own

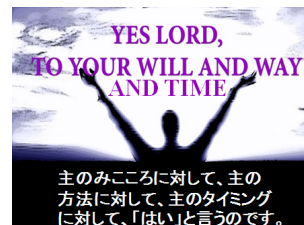


life. Paul is focused on completing his race and finishing his task. Paul's single desire is to preach Jesus at every opportunity. In **Philippians 1:21**, Paul wrote, **"For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain."** As we consider the figure of Paul standing on the steps of the Antonia Fortress, we see Paul living these words.

VIII. Conclusion

In Caesarea, the brothers and sisters pleaded with Paul not to go when Agabus prophesied that Paul would be arrested and bound when he went to Jerusalem. Now the prophecy is coming true. But how did Paul answer their concerns when the prophecy was given? **Acts 21:13**, **"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.'"**

Paul lived for the Name of Jesus and Paul was ready to die for the Name of Jesus. What are we willing to do for the Name of Jesus? May I encourage us all to reflect on this question and search our hearts? Ask yourself, "What am I willing to do for the Name of Jesus?" Jesus loves us so much that He died for us. What are we willing to do for Him? When Jesus calls us to serve, are we ready to say, *"Yes Lord, to Your Will and Way and Time?"*



Let's pray!

IX. Prayer