

Acts Chapter 21

- The elders of Ephesus escort Paul and his party to their ship and we pick it up as they board.

V: 1-3 “... *after we...*” Dr. Luke was still with Paul, among the party.

- **(Map)** Travel log - From **Miletus** to **Co-os**, then to **Rhodes**.
- **Rhodes** has an interesting history. At one time, at the port entrance there was a huge, ten story tall brass statue of Apollos. As the ships came into the port, they did so by passing under and between the legs of this gigantic brass statue.
- It was actually considered one of the 7 great wonders of the ancient world.
- In 244 AD an earthquake toppled the statue which they never raised back up. In 644 AD a Jewish merchant bought the statue and broke it up, and it took 900 camel loads to carry all the brass away. Each camel could carry 2,000 pounds of cargo, the equivalent of a VW Bug.
- From **Rhodes** to **Patara**. Boarding another ship en-route to Phoenicia (Israel).
- From **Patara** to **Phoenicia** they passed **Cyprus**, landing in **Tyre** of **Syria**. **Tyre** being a major commercial port. It's noted that Paul travelled on a cargo ship, not a luxury cruise.

V: 4-6 This is all taking place at about 60 AD, meaning that 27 years have passed since that first Pentecost where Peter preached following the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and the birth of the church.

Paul wrote to the church in Colosse:

Colossians 1:5-6 “⁵For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the Gospel; ⁶which is come unto you, as it is in all the world;...”

- So they found a group of disciples right there in Tyre, the word really means that they searched out, looked for, and found a group of believers.
- In want to encourage you that when you're out of town or traveling, that you seek out a group of disciples and gather with them, go to church. Too many think that a vacation means also taking a vacation from church - I personally am glad that God doesn't take a vacation from us!

- At that time it's been estimated that the number of Christians in the Roman empire was numbered in the millions, so finding a group of believers in Tyre wasn't all that unusual.
- **Matthew 15:** When Jesus went to Tyre and Sidon He encountered a Syro-Phoenician woman whose daughter demon possessed. As she cried out to Jesus, initially He ignored her.

Then Jesus said to her:

Matthew 15:26-28 “²⁶...it is not meet to take the children's bread, and cast it to dogs. ²⁷And she said, truth, Lord, yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table. ²⁸Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith, be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.”

- This woman's testimony of Jesus may have laid the ground work for the church in Tyre.
- The last part of this verse would seem to indicate that the Spirit was telling Paul not to go to Jerusalem. Previously however it appeared that Paul was commanded by the Spirit to go to Jerusalem.
- I think that the Spirit through these men was warning Paul of the imprisonment and trials to come, as a way of preparing him, which the disciples in Tyre interpreted as meaning that he should not go.
- Paul was on a mission, he was bearing a gift to the church in Jerusalem, and he wouldn't be easily stopped.
- There are those who argue whether Paul was in God's will or not in going to Jerusalem, I believe that he was.
- This group of believers along with their families escorted Paul and his party back to the shore where they knelt down and prayed, and sent them on their way.
- Why did they take their wives and kids? Because this was a golden opportunity for them to see and hear the Apostle Paul, as they walked, and talked, as he taught and spoke.
- I've heard people say at times, we'll we're not coming to church tonight because we're having "family time..." seemingly assuming that you can't have family time at church. Family time and church attendance are not mutually exclusive terms, I mean it's a common experience and a point of reference, and a topic of family discussion.

V: 7-12 (Map) Sailing from Tyre to Ptolemais / Acco Paul again is greeted by the brethren who take him in.

- The next day they depart from Acco by ship to Caesarea, the main Roman port in Israel.
- There they stay with Phillip, one of the 7 deacons, the evangelist who ministered in Samaria and to the Ethiopian eunuch.
- In his earlier days Paul had severely persecuted the church, causing many believers to scatter out of Jerusalem. He at that time had unwittingly helped spread the Gospel far and wide, and now that we see Phillip in Caesarea he may have been caught up in that.
- ⁹Phillip had four virgin / un-married daughters who prophesied.
- We see at times that the gift of prophesy isn't always foretelling the future as much as it's speaking forth God's truth through the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

1 Corinthians 14:3 "But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort."

God promised through the prophet Joel:

Joel 2:28 "And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions."

- They stayed with Phillip several days during which time another prophet, Agabus, prophesied regarding Paul's impending imprisonment.

We were introduced to Agabus earlier:

Acts 11:27-28 ²⁷And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch. ²⁸And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar."

- Agabus' prophesy concerning Paul was later all fulfilled in Jerusalem.
- These well intending believers tried to get Paul to not go to Jerusalem, sometimes the Lord guides us into difficult circumstances as part of his plan.

V: 13-14 Paul wanted to minister to them, but at the same time he knew what he had been called to. Even Paul didn't know the whole story, he thought he would die in Jerusalem, not knowing that God would use all of what would happen to get him to Rome and beyond.

- Paul had already been in prison, he'd been beaten, stoned and left for dead - he didn't fear whatever might lie ahead in Jerusalem.

Philippians 1:23 “For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better.”

- Part of him wanted so much to be with Jesus in heaven, and part of him knew that he had a ministry to fulfill here on earth, it wouldn't be until some years later that he could say that he'd fulfilled or completed his mission.

2 Timothy 4:7-8 “⁷I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: ⁸Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing.”

- ¹⁴Even Luke was involved in trying to persuade Paul, “we ceased...”
- ¹⁴They resolved together “... the will of the Lord be done.” The perfect end to any prayer, and the end to worry, and frustration, turn it over to the Lord.

V: 15-17 So they travelled on up to **Jerusalem**, taking up their “carriages,” meaning taking up their luggage, they packed up and got going.

- With the feast of Pentecost just around the corner, finding a place to stay might have been a real challenge - and God provided through another believer.
- Mention is made of Mnason of Cyprus, an old or early disciple - who was given to the gift of hospitality, apparently he had a place in Jerusalem where they stayed.
- Paul and company received a warm welcome.

V: 18-20a Paul met with James and the elders, this is the same James that was the bishop or leader of the church some years earlier.

- Notice that neither Peter nor John, or any of the other original disciples / Apostles are mentioned. They are probably all out doing what Paul has been doing.
- Paul testified as to his ministry and the spreading of the Gospel, and the churches that were planted, and the multitudes that had come to faith in Jesus amongst the Gentiles.

Notice:

“¹⁹... *what things God had wrought...*” and “²⁰... *they glorified the Lord...*”

- God was deservedly getting the glory!

Matthew 5:16 “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”

V: 20b-21 Paul was received warmly, gladly - but at the same time there was an issue to address.

- I like that they didn't assume that what they'd heard was true, they just wanted to address it in some way and keep the false rumors from spreading any further.
- Being a Jew is a religious, an ethnic, and a cultural identifier. Jews that turn to Jesus and no longer “religious” Jews, but are still Jews ethnically and in many ways culturally.
- Just like any believer there will be changes and adaptations as we seek Jesus.
- Many of those things were still being worked out in Paul's day, and Paul's teachings to the Gentiles was controversial in and of itself, let alone the balance of keeping or not keeping the Law.
- We aren't bound to the Law as a means of salvation, but at the same time we end up keeping the Law because of our love for Jesus.
- 1st Commandment: “I am the Lord your God you shall have no other god's before Me.” I'm trying real hard to keep that one, not so that I can be saved, but because I'm already saved and I love my Lord and I want to honor and bless Him.
- There are parts of the Law that we keep, and there are parts of it that we set aside, knowing that Jesus has kept and maintained the righteous requirements of the Law for us.
- Because I'm not bound by the Law doesn't mean I can just go out and commit murder in violation of the 6th commandment.
- There were Judaisers who were telling the Gentiles that they had to be circumcised to be saved when that is clearly not the case.

Romans 2:28-29 “²⁸For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: ²⁹But he is a Jew which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.”

Galatians 5:2 “Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing.”

- Bear in mind that context is everything. Paul is talking to the Galatians, to the Gentiles, explaining to them that circumcision, keeping the Law will not save them.
- I know of Jews who are believers in Jesus / Yeshua - they are no longer Jews religiously, but they are still Jews ethnically and culturally.
- They enjoy the feasts knowing now what they really mean, but they also know that they aren't saved by keeping the feasts any more than circumcision.
- They would probably still have their sons circumcised as both a matter of culture, and health benefits and there is nothing wrong with that.
- No doubt some of the things that Paul had said and taught had come back exaggerated and misunderstood - particularly by the non-believing Jews who were so antagonistic to the Gospel and to Paul personally.

1 Corinthians 9:20, 22 “²⁰And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the Law.” - “²²To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.”

- Remember back in **Acts 16:1-3** that Paul had Timothy get circumcised so as not to be offensive to the Jews - Paul had gone out of his way not to offend, but there are always some who will be offended no matter what you do.
- It is thought that the book of Hebrews is directed to those believing Jews who were still hung up on the Law and trying to achieve that balance and understanding of God's grace.
- The Jews had a real problem with Paul's message of salvation by faith alone, because of God's grace.

Ephesians 2:8-9 “⁸For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: ⁹Not of works, lest any man should boast.”

V: 22 These two groups are going to come together, and there is that potential for strife, or for unity depending on how things are handled.

- It was certainly Paul's desire to eliminate the division that existed between the Jewish church and the Gentile church:

Galatians 3:26-28 “²⁶For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. ²⁷For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

²⁸There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.”

- Jesus died on the cross to pay the price for our sins, to enable us as one united church / bride to have fellowship with Him - not two or multiple churches that can't get along.

Ephesians 2:14-19 “¹⁴For He is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; ¹⁵having abolished in His flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in Himself of twain one new man, so making peace; ¹⁶And that He might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: ¹⁷And came and preached peace to you which were afar off (Gentiles), and to them that were nigh (Jews). ¹⁸For through Him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. ¹⁹Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God.”

- That's the goal, the desire. Now it's up to God to do it.
- Understanding that these Jewish believers were going to come, and that they would challenge Paul, they laid out their plan - which we'll get into next week.

V: 23-24 James and the elders had already formulated a plan, anticipating Paul's arrival into Jerusalem.

- These men had taken something akin to a Nazarite vow, a vow of consecration.
- For thirty days they had no meat or wine, and they didn't shave. They spent the last week of the vow praying in the Temple, and at the end of the vow they were to bring a lamb for a sin offering, a ram for a peace offering, and a basket of unleavened cakes of fine flour mingled with oil as a meal offering, and a drink offering.
- Besides missing work for at least a week, this was all an expensive process.
- The plan is that if Paul would help sponsor these men in their vow, and take part of the same ritual he could demonstrate to all the Jews that he has not forsaken the Law as he's been accused of doing.
- Some might view these concessions as a compromise, others would see it as an attempt to minister to the weaker brother.

1 Corinthians 9:20, 22 “²⁰And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain

them that are under the Law.” - “²²To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.”

- We've already been through the discussion relating to keep the Law religiously vs: culturally - and there being no spiritual benefit to keeping it.
- We need to learn to be flexible at times and like Paul to be all things to all men.

V: 25 Here James re-states what had already been agreed upon earlier in **Acts 15:20** that the Gentiles didn't need to be under the law in any way except to keep themselves from idols, from consuming blood, and sexual immorality.

- They are acknowledging that the Gentiles don't have to keep the law and so forth, but that at this point Paul isn't ministering to Gentiles, he's ministering to Jews - as a Jew.

Romans 12:18 “If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.”

- There are times when for love's sake, you'll simply do something that you would not ever do.
- Comparative frailty of the Jewish part of the church compared to the Gentile part of the church. Hebrews, probably written by Paul to tell the Hebrews to stop being so Hebrew... Paul probably didn't make a sin offering, but certainly one of consecration seeing that he'd written so strongly against it.

V: 26-30 Paul was more than just a believer or a disciple of Jesus, he was an Apostle - he had seen the risen Lord, communed with Him, he'd been empowered to do miracles - yet at the same time he is submitting to the authority of the leaders of the church.

Hebrews 13:17 “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.”

- Paul went through the traditional purification process which was mandatory before he could enter into the Temple courts, and he sought to fulfill what James had laid out.
- But as that process was almost complete the Jews from Asia wrecked the plan. Paul was well known, (infamous) he'd started churches throughout Asia, many thousands of Jews and Gentiles had come to faith, many of whom left the synagogues which angered the Jews. They sought purposefully to thwart him,

they followed him from city to city because he was declaring that the Gentiles could be saved at all, and in particular apart from the law.

- They laid hands on Paul and cried out for all the Jews to help them, identifying Paul as the culprit who had spoken against the Law and the Temple, and that he had profaned the Temple by bringing Gentiles / Greeks into it.
- There were concentric rings around the Temple.

Temple Diagram:



- There was the court of the Gentiles, where the Gentiles could observe what was going on in the Temple. All part of God's OT outreach plan.
- There were warning signs that the Gentiles were not to go any closer upon penalty of death.
- Then the court of the women - then the court of the men / Jews.
- Next was the place of the sanctuary where only the Levites and Priests could go, then the Holy Place, and finally the Holy of Holies where only the High Priest could go, and even then only once a year on "Yom Kippur" the day of Atonement.
- They threw Paul out of the Temple and the doors were closed, symbolizing that the Temple was closed to him, but whether Paul realized it or not, it had long been closed to him.

Matthew 10:16-18 "16Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves. 17But beware of men: for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues; 18And ye shall be brought before governors and kings for My sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles."

- In Paul's ministry there was either a great revival, or a great riot! In this case the latter.

V: 31-34 They weren't content to just toss Paul out of the Temple, now they're trying to kill him.

Jesus warned His disciples to expect this type of treatment:

John 15:18-20 "18If the world hate you, ye know that it hated Me before it hated you. 19If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. 20Remember the word that I said unto you, the servant is not greater

than his lord. If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept My saying, they will keep yours also.”

- As believers we've been given great favor from the Lord, but at the same time the world hates us and often deals with us harshly or deceptively, or brutally. We shouldn't be surprised by it. I know that so often my reactions is “hey, I didn't do anything to them...” but it's already ingrained in them, hardwired basically to hate.

John 16:2 “They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service.”

- News of the up-roar gets to the Romans who are already on edge due to the feast days and the influx of Jews from all over the world.
- They responded immediately with soldiers and centurions - plural. Centurions were in command over 100's - so multiple “hundreds” of Roman soldiers respond to the Temple gates where this riot is erupting.
- As the Romans get there Paul is being beaten by the mob and they end up rescuing Paul from the crowd.
- The Romans rescued Paul, but where was the church? Where was James? This was his plan, their plan. Why was Paul the only one being beaten?
- Assuming he's a dangerous criminal they bind him with two chains, probably chaining his hands and feet. Then due to the attempts of the crowd, they end up carrying him.
- Paul was probably a mess; if you've ever seen a person subject to mob brutality - it's not a pretty picture.

V: 35-36 The Roman soldiers are carrying Paul up the stairs into the Roman fortress that adjoined the Temple mount, the Antonia Fortress.

Map - pictures

- As the Romans are carrying Paul into the fortress, the Jews are crying away with him, it's very reminiscent of when 27 years earlier when the crowds were screaming for Jesus to be carried away and to crucify Him.
- As Paul is caught up in these events, those memories were certainly flooding back into his mind, assuming that would be his fate as well.

V: 37-40 Just before Paul is brought into the fortress he begins to negotiate with the commander who had assumed that he was a known Egyptian rebel who had caused trouble before.

- Paul explains who he is and that he wants to address the crowd, which miraculously they allow him to do. The Romans have just given Paul a soap box to stand on - and just as miraculously again the Jews quiet down to hear what he has to say.
- The normal language of the common man there was Aramaic. The Romans spoke Latin, and if they were educated they spoke Greek, which was the common language of the educated class. Hebrew was limited to educated Jews, and religious Jews that served in and around the Temple.

Paul's heart was that the Jews would be saved:

Romans 9:1-3 “¹I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscious also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, ²that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. ³For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh:”

- The mob is trying to kill him, but as he holds his hands out to silence them, they become silent and listen.
 - This was no doubt the moment that Paul had hoped for.
 - Ever since his encounter with the Lord on the road to Damascus his desire was for the salvation of Israel. Once he realized that Jesus was the Messiah, all the scriptures suddenly came together, they fit.
 - All the prophecies of the suffering Messiah suddenly made sense, it all made sense, and all he needed was an opportunity to present the truth and they would believe and be converted.
 - Once we've been enlightened by the Holy Spirit and everything is suddenly clear to us we assume the same thing as Paul - that if we just share the truth it will be clear to them too, we just need to tell them, then they'll believe and be saved.
 - Don't you wish it was that easy?
- 1 Corinthians 2:14-15** “¹⁴But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. ¹⁵But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man.”
- So this is Paul's moment, he understands fully, but the crowd before him is spiritually discerned, and they're hostile, a bad combination.

Romans 1:16 “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.”

Ref.Acts.21