

Acts 21:1 ¶ And it came to pass, that after we were gotten from them, and had launched, we came with a straight course unto Coos, and the *day* following unto Rhodes, and from thence unto Patara:

Acts 21:2 And finding a ship sailing over unto Phenicia, we went aboard, and set forth.

After taking leave of the elders from Ephesus at Miletus, Paul and his companions continued on their journey through Coos, then Rhodes, and on to Patara. From Patara they booked passage on a ship heading to Phoenicia.

I think the inclusion of such seemingly mundane details testifies to the fact that Luke is accurately recording the events taking place.

Acts 21:3 Now when we had discovered Cyprus, we left it on the left hand, and sailed into Syria, and landed at Tyre: for there the ship was to unlade her burden.

Acts 21:4 And finding disciples, we tarried there seven days: who said to Paul through the Spirit, that he should not go up to Jerusalem.

As they neared the shores of Phoenicia, they sighted the island nation of Cyprus on their left as they headed to dock at Tyre. It seems that the ship was carrying merchandise that was to be offloaded there. They found a group of believers and fellowshipped for the seven days they stayed in Tyre. The Holy Spirit gave these believers a message for Paul, "Do not go up to Jerusalem."

Acts 21:5 And when we had accomplished those days, we departed and went our way; and they all brought us on our way, with wives and children, till *we* were out of the city: and we kneeled down on the shore, and prayed.

Acts 21:6 And when we had taken our leave one of another, we took ship; and they returned home again.

At the end of the seven days Paul's entourage continued on their way and were accompanied by the disciples and their families to the outskirts of the city. The group then knelt down on the shore for prayer. Paul and his group once again boarded the ship, and the disciples and their families headed back home.

The fact that Paul continued on to Jerusalem in spite of the warning from these disciples tells me that he must have felt strongly that he was supposed to go to Jerusalem in spite of the warnings of danger. It has been noted previously that the Spirit redirected Paul when he first wanted to go preach in Asia (cf chapter 16). It only makes sense to me that Paul felt more accountable to what he felt was his leading through the Spirit rather than revelation through others. We know from the previous chapter that this was not the first warning he had received.

Acts 20:22–23 "And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me."

Personally, I think this example is significant. The Lord is not forcing Paul to go to Jerusalem, but He is lovingly warning him what he will face if he follows what he feels is God's will. I think it is important to note that Paul chose to follow the Spirit's leading in spite of the danger that awaited him. Maybe I am wrong, as some others conclude, and Paul was foolish in disregarding these warnings and maintaining his course. I choose to side with Paul in this case. It's a matter of personal accountability before the Lord. I know that it confuses me to hear and/or study teaching from so many men that I respect that disagree with one another as to the correct interpretation of scripture. I know that I am personally accountable to the Lord for my actions and for what I share with others from His word. My only recourse is to act according to what I feel the Spirit is teaching me as I study and share His word. I may have some things wrong, but I want to face the Lord knowing that I have lived in obedience to Him in accordance with the truth as I feel He has revealed it to me—the understanding that makes more of the puzzle pieces of truth fit together without forcing them into position.

Acts 21:7 And when we had finished *our* course from Tyre, we came to Ptolemais, and saluted the brethren, and abode with them one day.

Acts 21:8 ¶ And the next *day* we that were of Paul's company departed, and came unto Caesarea: and we entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, which was *one* of the seven; and abode with him.

Acts 21:9 And the same man had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy.

The next stop on their journey was in Ptolemais where they were able to fellowship with the believers there for one day before continuing on to Caesarea, the port city for Jerusalem. In Caesarea they stayed with Philip the evangelist, identified as "one of the seven" (cf Acts 6:1-6).

Luke notes that Philip had four chaste, unmarried daughters that had the gift of prophecy.

Acts 21:10 And as we tarried *there* many days, there came down from Judaea a certain prophet, named Agabus.

Acts 21:11 And when he was come unto us, he took Paul's girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver *him* into the hands of the Gentiles.

Acts 21:12 And when we heard these things, both we, and they of that place, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem.

Paul and company stayed with Philip for several days. Luke records that Agabus, a prophet from Judea (chapter 11 tells us that he was from Jerusalem), showed up and took Paul's girdle, his belt. He tied up his own hands and feet and then delivered another message of warning from the Holy Spirit for Paul. He prophesied that the Jews in Jerusalem would deliver "the owner of this girdle," Paul, into the hands of the Gentiles. This prophecy once again caused Paul's friends and companions to beg him not to continue on to Jerusalem.

Acts 21:13 Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine

heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.

Acts 21:14 And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done.

Paul remained firm in his purpose. He scolded them for trying to sway him from his purpose. He declared that he was not only ready to face prison, but also death in Jerusalem while serving God in the name of the Lord Jesus. His friends finally recognized that he was not to be moved and concluded that they could only trust that “the will of the Lord be done.”

I liked this comment from Burkitt’s Commentary: “St. Paul knew his duty, and understood the will of God: and therefore his friends might sooner break his heart, than break his purpose. Learn hence, That no persuasions of friends, no apprehensions of danger, should ever be able to turn us out of the way of our duty. When Peter dissuaded Christ from suffering, our Saviour rebuked him with the same indignation as he did the devil tempting him to idolatry.”

Acts 21:15 ¶ And after those days we took up our carriages, and went up to Jerusalem.

Acts 21:16 There went with us also *certain* of the disciples of Caesarea, and brought with them one Mnason of Cyprus, an old disciple, with whom we should lodge.

Acts 21:17 And when we were come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly.

When it came time to leave, Paul’s entourage packed up and headed to Jerusalem accompanied by some of the disciples at Caesarea. They went to the home of a man named Mnason from the island of Cyprus, identified as a long time believer that was willing to provide lodging for the group.

Luke notes that the believers in Jerusalem warmly received the whole group.

Acts 21:18 And the *day* following Paul went in with us unto James; and all the elders were present.

Acts 21:19 And when he had saluted them, he declared particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry.

Acts 21:20 And when they heard *it*, they glorified the Lord, and said unto him, Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law:

Acts 21:21 And they are informed of thee, that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise *their* children, neither to walk after the customs.

The next day Paul and company went to see James, the recognized leader, and the rest of the elders of the Jerusalem church. Paul greeted them all and began to share “particularly” (the specifics) with them what God had accomplished through their ministry among the Gentiles. This resulted in heartfelt praise to the Lord for what He had done.

The leaders in Jerusalem went on to tell Paul that the thousands of Jewish believers in Judea were still strongly committed to the law. They have been told that you teach the Jews in other lands that they should forsake the law of Moses entirely and not circumcise their children or follow Jewish traditions.

Acts 21:22 What is it therefore? the multitude must needs come together: for they will hear that thou art come.

Acts 21:23 Do therefore this that we say to thee: We have four men which have a vow on them;

Acts 21:24 Them take, and purify thyself with them, and be at charges with them, that they may shave *their* heads: and all may know that those things, whereof they were informed concerning thee, are nothing; but *that* thou thyself also walkest orderly, and keepest the law.

The leaders went on to tell Paul that the word was sure to spread quickly that he was in town. They told Paul that they had four men who were under the Nazarite vow and suggested that Paul go with them to be purified at the temple and pay the required offerings for having their heads shaved. This would testify to those that were angry with him that they had been misinformed.

I am reminded of Paul's words in his letter to the Corinthians.

1 Corinthians 9:19–23 "For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. And 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; To them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law. To 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. And this I do for the gospel's sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you."

Paul is not encouraging obedience to the law for salvation. It seems to me that he is supporting the keeping of traditions that were so much a part of Jewish culture and recognized as reflecting one's commitment to serving the Lord. This was in no way connected to one's acceptance of the gift of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus. In fact, Luke recorded in chapter 18 that Paul had made such a vow and followed the same custom in the past.

Acts 18:18 "And Paul after this tarried there yet a good while, and then took his leave of the brethren, and sailed thence into Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila; having shorn his head in Cenchrea: for he had a vow."

Acts 21:25 As touching the Gentiles which believe, we have written *and* concluded that they observe no such thing, save only that they keep themselves from *things* offered to idols, and from blood, and from strangled, and from fornication.

The church leaders were careful to note that their suggestion in no way reflected

on what they had already determined to be required of the Gentile believers. They only expected them to avoid things offered to idols, to avoid eating meat that was not kosher, and to maintain sexual purity.

Acts 21:26 Then Paul took the men, and the next day purifying himself with them entered into the temple, to signify the accomplishment of the days of purification, until that an offering should be offered for every one of them.

Paul evidently agreed with their suggestion and took the men to the temple the next day. He participated in the ritual cleansing required to enter the temple area and provided the financial offering required for the four men to complete their purification.

The NIV Commentary offers helpful information on this verse: “Coming from abroad, Paul would have had to regain ceremonial purity by a seven-day ritual of purification before he could be present at the absolution ceremony of the four Jewish Christians in the Jerusalem temple. In keeping with this ritual, therefore, Paul reported to the priest at the start of his seven days of purification, informing him that he was providing the funds for the offerings of the four impoverished men who had taken Nazirite vows; he undoubtedly returned to the temple at regular prescribed intervals during the week (the third and seventh days) for the appropriate rites.”

Acts 21:27 ¶ And when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews which were of Asia, when they saw him in the temple, stirred up all the people, and laid hands on him,

Acts 21:28 Crying out, Men of Israel, help: This is the man, that teacheth all men every where against the people, and the law, and this place: and further brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place.

Acts 21:29 (For they had seen before with him in the city Trophimus an Ephesian, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.)

As expected, some of the Jewish zealots from Asia (probably the same ones that had been spreading lies about him) saw him in the temple and stirred up trouble among the people there. They grabbed Paul and shouted for the “Men of Israel” to help them because this is the man that was going everywhere teaching Jews to disregard the law of Moses. They also accused him of bringing Gentiles into the temple making it unclean. (Luke notes that this was an assumption based on having seen Paul in the city with Trophimus, an Ephesian.)

Acts 21:30 And all the city was moved, and the people ran together: and they took Paul, and drew him out of the temple: and forthwith the doors were shut.

Acts 21:31 And as they went about to kill him, tidings came unto the chief captain of the band, that all Jerusalem was in an uproar.

Acts 21:32 Who immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down unto them: and when they saw the chief captain and the soldiers, they left beating of Paul.

Evidently, these Jewish troublemakers were successful in creating quite a mob

scene. They drug Paul out of the temple and shut the doors. They began to beat Paul intending to kill him; however, the Roman commander had heard about the commotion and showed up with his battalion just in time to take control of the situation.

Acts 21:33 Then the chief captain came near, and took him, and commanded him to be bound with two chains; and demanded who he was, and what he had done.

Acts 21:34 And some cried one thing, some another, among the multitude: and when he could not know the certainty for the tumult, he commanded him to be carried into the castle.

The commander took charge of Paul and ordered that he be bound with two chains. He demanded to know who he was and what he had done. The crowd shouted out so many different things that he could make no intelligent assessment of the situation. He then ordered that Paul be taken to the barracks (probably the Antonia Fortress).

Acts 21:35 And when he came upon the stairs, so it was, that he was borne of the soldiers for the violence of the people.

Acts 21:36 For the multitude of the people followed after, crying, Away with him.

It seems the crowd followed and were so out of control that Paul had to be bodily carried away by the soldiers. The crowd kept yelling, "Away with him." When I looked at the Greek it included, "to raise...to lift up." Were they calling for him to be crucified? I think so because these are the same words that they called out against Jesus.

Luke 23:18 "And they cried out all at once, saying, Away with this man, and release unto us Barabbas:"

John 19:15 "But they cried out, Away with him, away with him, crucify him."

Acts 21:37 And as Paul was to be led into the castle, he said unto the chief captain, May I speak unto thee? Who said, Canst thou speak Greek?

Acts 21:38 Art not thou that Egyptian, which before these days madest an uproar, and leddest out into the wilderness four thousand men that were murderers?

As Paul was being led into the barracks, he asked the commander if he could have a word with him. The commander responded by asking if he could speak Greek? He thought Paul was an Egyptian that had gathered together a group of 4,000 murderers in the wilderness in an attempt to revolt against Roman rule. (Josephus notes that this revolt occurred at the Mount of Olives.)

Acts 21:39 But Paul said, I am a man *which am* a Jew of Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city: and, I beseech thee, suffer me to speak unto the people.

Acts 21:40 And when he had given him licence, Paul stood on the stairs, and beckoned with the hand unto the people. And when there was made a great silence, he spake unto *them* in the Hebrew tongue, saying,

Paul answered that he was a Jewish citizen from Tarsus, an important city in Cilicia; and he would like permission to speak to the people. The commander granted permission, and Paul stood up on the stairs motioning with his hands for the people to get quiet. When they finally quieted down, he began speaking to them in Hebrew.

(What a terrible place for a chapter break!)