

ACTS

Chapter 21

On to Jerusalem

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."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.

21:1 *sailed straight to Cos.* Favorable winds took them to a stopping place for the night at this island.

Rhodes. The leading city on the island of Rhodes, once noted for its harbor colossus, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world (but demolished over two centuries before Paul arrived there). It took them a day to get to Rhodes.

Patara. On the southern coast of Lycia. Paul changed ships from a vessel that hugged the shore of Asia Minor to one going directly to Tyre and Phoenicia.

21:3 *Cyprus.* See 13:4.

Tyre. Paul had passed through this Phoenician area at least once before (15:3; cf. Mk 7:24).

21:4 *seven days*. These, added to the 29 days since the Passover in Philippi, would leave only two weeks until Pentecost.

urged Paul not to go. The Spirit warned of the coming trials in store for Paul at Jerusalem. Because of these warnings, Paul's brothers urged him not to go on, knowing that trials lay ahead. But Paul felt "compelled by the Spirit" to go (20:22). – The Spirit was compelling Paul to go. The Spirit had warned Paul that prison and hardships awaited him. The Spirit also informed the disciples at Tyre of what the apostle faced. On the basis of that information they gave Paul mistaken advice, to stay away from Jerusalem. They drew false conclusion from true information, just as people sometimes make false application of God's written word. They meant well, but Paul could not bow to their urging. (PBC) – Both prophetic messages and human advice play important roles in this conflict, and the narrative reveals some of the difficulties in using either to determine God's will for human life. – This is an interesting case of conflict in understanding the Spirit's directions. The conflict can, of course, be reduced to the human level. The more extensive statements of the Spirit's revelations in 20:23 and 21:11 simply indicate what will happen to Paul if he goes to Jerusalem. The message in 21:4 goes further, drawing the conclusion that Paul should not leave from Jerusalem. Perhaps the Spirit's message is consistent, but the prophets in Tyre have mixed their own conclusion with the Spirit's message. The use of indirect discourse in 21:4 removes the message a step from the Spirit's direct expression. Nevertheless, it is interesting that the narrator has allowed to surface at least a superficial contradiction in the divine guidance that Paul is receiving, an indication that it is seldom easy to separate divine revelation from human interpretation. Appeal to divine guidance is not an easy escape from the ambiguities of human life. (Tannehill)

21:7 *Ptolemais*. The modern city of Acco, north of and across the bay from Mount Carmel. It was one day's journey from Tyre on the north and another 35 miles to Caesarea on the south.

21:8 *Caesarea*. A Gentile city, the capital of Roman Judea (see note on 10:1).

Philip the evangelist. Philip's evangelistic work may have focused on Caesarea for almost 25 years (see note on 8:40). "Evangelist" is a title used only here and in Eph 4:11; 2Ti 4:5. – Almost twenty-five years before, after the baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch, Philip "appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea" (8:40). He was still there, exercising his special gift of telling the good news. His daughters were also gifted. Recall the prophecy of Joel, which Peter quoted on Pentecost: "Yours sons and daughters will prophecy" (2:17; Joel 2:28). The Messiah had come. God had poured out his Spirit. Philip's daughters had the gift of being able to explain and apply God's word. (PBC)

21:9 *unmarried daughters*. They may have been dedicated in a special way to serving the Lord.

prophesied. See 1Co 11:5; 12:8–10; cf. Lk 2:36. For OT prophetesses see Ex 15:20; Jdg 4:4; 2Ki 22:14; Ne 6:14.

21:10 *prophet named Agabus.* Evidently he held the office of prophet, as Philip held the office of evangelist (v. 8). This is the same prophet who had been in Antioch prophesying the coming famine in Jerusalem some 15 years earlier (11:27–29).

21:11 PAUL’S BELT – The kind of belt Paul would have worn was a long piece of cloth wrapped around his waist. It could be used for hitching up one’s loose outer garment in order to walk or to work. It could also serve as a pocket when it was properly folded and tightened. (PBC)

21:12 *we and the people there.* Now Luke, in the company of travelers with Paul, joins in urging Paul not to go to Jerusalem.

21:13 BREAKING MY HEART – Their weeping is an emotional reinforcement of their appeal, and Paul must reproach them. The affection of friends who do not understand his decision greatly increases Paul’s difficulty in holding to his purpose, and he seeks to end their appeal with an unequivocal statement of his resolve. (Tannehill)

21:14 *Lord’s will be done.* May mean that they finally recognized that it was the Lord’s will for Paul to go to Jerusalem. – Paul does insist, which suggests that he has a very powerful reason for going to Jerusalem. This reason, however, remains obscure. The lack of an obvious human reason for going to Jerusalem makes the sense of divine purpose all the stronger. Nevertheless, there are a few hints in the narrative of how Paul’s final journey to Jerusalem fits with his basic mission. In his farewell speech Paul said that he was willing to risk his life in order to “complete my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to bear witness to the gospel of the grace of God” (20:24). The journey to Jerusalem is necessary to complete the ministry to which he has been called. Because Paul goes to Jerusalem aware of what will befall him there, his arrest and trials are not an unexpected interruption of his plans but a part of what he must face to complete his ministry.

Thus the completion of Paul’s ministry apparently requires the extensive defense of his work against religious and political accusations that actually follows in the narrative. Paul is facing the cultural consequences of his previous ministry, which have disturbed religion and society, with their guardians, by introducing a new understanding of God’s work as reaching out through Jesus Messiah to both Jew and Gentile, breaking down the barrier between them. The mounting accusations that Paul has “upset the world” (17:6; cf 16:20-21; 18:13; 19:25-27) now come to a climax. The world discovers that the challenge is really serious when it learns that the ministers of the new gospel are willing to face the consequences of their own disturbing words.

Paul’s decision to go to Jerusalem and to Rome is a decision to face this crisis. Jerusalem and Rome are the centers of the two powers that Paul has disturbed and to whom he must give a reckoning. He heads for the centers of power, where he will defend his ministry and carry his witness to the high authorities who embody that power. Paul is controlled by a larger purpose. Whether he is fully conscious of this or not, he goes to do what he will in fact do: defend his ministry before angry Jews and confused Romans and carry his

witness to the centers of power. In doing so, Paul is also seeking a way for the gospel to move forward in spite of the opposition it has caused. (Tannehill)

21:16 *Mnason*. Must have been a disciple of some means to be able to accommodate Paul and a group of about nine men traveling with him. – Seems to have been a man of means. At least he was a generous man, known to be hospitable, for the disciples from Caesarea knew that Paul's part of nine men was to stay at this man's house. (PBC)

Paul's Arrival at Jerusalem

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." **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.

21:17 *arrived at Jerusalem*. No more than a day or two before Pentecost.
the brothers received us warmly. May indicate the grateful reception of the offering as well.

21:18 *James*. The brother of the Lord, author of the letter of James and leader of the church in Jerusalem (see Gal 1:19; 2:9). He is called an apostle but was not one of the Twelve.

21:19 REPORTED IN DETAIL – A detailed report of the work among the Gentiles would included an account of how and why the collection was gathered. That, too, was something that God had accomplished and for which he had received the credit. Paul ministry was the instrument, but all the achievements were God's. (PBC)

21:20 THEY PRAISED GOD – The way "praised" is used in the original language suggests that a service of thanksgiving was held. (PBC)

THOUSANDS OF JEWS – There were thousands, perhaps tens of thousands, of Jew in the homeland who believed in Jesus as the Messiah and their Redeemer. (PBC)

ZEALOUS FOR THE LAW – As far as the Jewish believers style of living was concerned, they continued to observe the rules and ceremonies of the law of Moses. (PBC) – The term suggests not only “zeal” for observance, but also “jealousy” for the honor to be paid to Torah, and therefore hostility toward any perceived derogation of that honor. Paul refers to himself in Gal. 1:14 as being zealous for the traditions of his ancestors. (Sacra)

21:21 THEY HAVE BEEN INFORMED – The Judaizers again were carrying on their campaign against Paul, this time charging that in his mission work the apostle was telling not only Gentiles but also Jews to “turn away from Moses” and refrain from circumcising their children. The charge was false. (LL)

THEY HAVE BEEN INFORMED – What Paul did teach was the circumcision and living according to the ceremonial law are not necessary for salvation. (PBC)

21:23 made a vow. They were evidently under the temporary Nazirite vow and became unclean before the completion time of the vow (perhaps from contact with a dead body); cf. Nu 6:2–12. – Such a vow might be made as a gesture of thanksgiving or in connection with a promise to do some special service to God and man. (PBC)

21:24 purification rites. In some instances the rites included the offering of sacrifices. Such rites were observed by choice by some Jewish Christians but were not required of Christians, whether Jew or Gentile. – By participating in the rites of these four men, Paul could demonstrate that he was not urging people to forsake their Jewish heritage. (PBC)

pay their expenses. Paul’s part in sponsoring these men would include (1) paying part or all of the expenses of the sacrificial victims (in this case eight pigeons and four lambs, Nu 6:9–12) and (2) going to the temple to notify the priest when their days of purification would be fulfilled so the priests would be prepared to sacrifice their offerings (v. 26).

living in obedience to the law. Paul had earlier taken a vow himself (18:18), he had been a Jew to the Jews (see 1Co 9:20–21), and Timothy had been circumcised (16:3). However, Paul was very careful not to sacrifice Christian principle in any act of obedience to the law (he would not have Titus circumcised, Gal 2:3). – For the gospel’s sake and to avoid anything that would spoil the church’s unity, Paul complied. It was an act of loving concern, and it was in keeping with the policy Paul had followed in all his work. For Paul to assist the four men with their purification rites was in no way to be understood as in conflict with the decision made in 15:20. (PBC)

Paul Arrested

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!"

21:27 *seven days.* Cf. Nu 6:9. These were the days required for purification, shaving their heads at the altar, the sacrifice of a sin offering and burnt offering for each, and announcing the completion to the priests.

Jews from the province of Asia. Paul had suffered already from the hands of Asian Jews (20:19). – From Ephesus or some of the other cities of that province. They had been his bitter enemies in the mission field, and they were infuriated to see him in Jerusalem. (PBC) – Jews in Jerusalem for the great pilgrimage feast such as Pentecost. (Sacra)

STIRRED UP THE WHOLE CROWD – The volatility of the great crowds at the pilgrimage feasts, where a perceived slight against the ancestral customs could quickly generate a riot that required suppression by the military authorities. (Sacra)

21:28 *brought Greeks into the temple area.* Explicitly forbidden according to inscribed stone markers (still in existence). Any Gentiles found within the bounds of the court of Israel would be killed. But there is no evidence that Paul had brought anyone other than Jews into the area. – The temple area had a court of the Gentiles, but for Gentiles to go beyond a stone barrier in the temple area was an offense punishable by death. (PBC) – Marking off an inner enclosure in the temple were 13 stone slabs that bore the following inscription in Hebrew and Greek: "Let no Gentile enter within the balustrade (a rail and the row of posts that support it) and enclosure surrounding the sanctuary. Whoever is caught will be personally responsible for his consequent death." (LL)

21:29 *Trophimus.* Paul probably did not take him into the forbidden area. If he had, they should have attacked Trophimus rather than Paul. – Was one of the group who had accompanied Paul in delivering the collection. For him to be in the city was not the same as Paul taking him into the temple. (PBC)

21:30 **DRAGGED HIM FROM THE TEMPLE** – The mob, bent on killing Paul, dragged him from the temple so that their holy place would not be defiled by the shedding of blood. (PBC)

gates were shut. By order of the temple officer to prevent further trouble inside the sacred precincts. – The gates of the inner court were closed so that he could not run back inside for refuge. The mob and the temple police were very concerned about defilement

under the ceremonial law, but less concerned about the moral law which forbids murder. (PBC)

21:31 *commander*. Greek *chiliarch*, a commander of 1,000 (a regiment)—Claudius Lysias by name (23:26), who was stationed at the Fortress of Antonia (see note on v. 37).

ROMAN TROOPS – They were quartered in the Antonia Tower, which overlooked the temple area from the northwest corner. It had been built there because through the years most disturbances in Jerusalem had begun in the temple area. (PBC)

21:32 *some officers*. Centurions. Since the plural is used, it is likely that at least two centurions and 200 soldiers were involved.

21:33 *two chains*. Probably his hands were chained to a soldier on either side.

21:36 AWAY WITH HIM – Echoes the cry of the crowd against Jesus in the hearing before Pilate. (Sacra) – Meant “Kill him!” (PBC)

Paul Speaks to the Crowd

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.” ⁴⁰ Having received 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 ^a:

21:37 *barracks*. The Fortress of Antonia was connected to the northern end of the temple area by two flights of steps. The tower overlooked the temple area.

DO YOU SPEAK GREEK – The commander’s questions was not a request for information. Rather, it expressed his surprise that Paul addressed him in Greek. (PBC)

21:38 *the Egyptian who started a revolt*. Josephus tells of an Egyptian false prophet who some years earlier had led 4,000 (Josephus, through a misreading of a Greek capital letter, says 30,000) out to the Mount of Olives. Roman soldiers killed hundreds, but the leader escaped.

terrorists. The Greek here is a loanword from Latin *sicarii*, meaning “dagger-men,” who were violent assassins. – Terrorist literally means “dagger men.” They were extreme Jewish nationalists who were ready to take direct action against Romans and others whom they considered to be enemies of the Jewish people. Their usual method was to assassinate individuals, often stabbing them at festival gatherings and then disappearing into the crowds. They sparked the revolt of A.D. 66, which finally led to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. The Jewish historian Josephus writes that in A.D. 54 an Egyptian led a revolt of 4000 dagger men which the Romans quashed. Hundreds were killed, but the leader escaped. The commander’s question was a probing question, trying to determine why the Jews had turned on Paul with such murderous

fanaticism. Could it be that he was that Egyptian and that the Jews were taking vengeance on the man who led so many of their countrymen to death while he himself escaped? (PBC)

21:39 I AM A JEW – He may speak Greek, but he also speaks Aramaic, he may be from a Diaspora city, but his upbringing is in Jerusalem; he may work among the Gentiles, but his zeal for God is the same as his compatriots. (Sacra)

Tarsus. See note on 22:3. – Cilicia was in southeastern Asia Minor. Tarsus was its capital. It was famous as a center of Greek learning. It was a gateway for land travel between Asia Minor and the rest of Asia and therefore an important trade center. (PBC)

21:40 *Aramaic.* More likely Aramaic than Hebrew (see NIV text note), since Aramaic was the most commonly used language among Palestinian Jews. – However unlikely it may appear that a commander in such a situation would allow his prisoner to address the mob – although Paul's Hellenistic credentials might have slightly overawed the tribune momentarily – this first defense begins a series of such speeches by Paul that will dominate the rest of the narrative. (Sacra)