

## Acts Chapter 21

### Theme of Acts: The Holy Spirit and the Birth of the Church

#### Personal Reflection

Complete this section in one sitting or little by little during the week. Begin with prayer, inviting the Holy Spirit into your time. Spending time in the Bible, studying the original intent, meaning and cultural context helps you to understand how it applies to you now.

#### Further Study

Complete on your own or with your small group.

**Read Acts 21** Click on any Bible verse in the study to read it or use your own Bible.

#### Personal Reflection

In *Acts 20:17-28*, Paul met with the elders from Ephesus in Miletus. He said to them that the Holy Spirit told him to go to Jerusalem and that prison and hardships would face him. Luke wrote, "When Paul had finished speaking, he knelt down with all of them and prayed. They all wept as they embraced him and kissed him." Notice the words Luke chose when writing Acts 21. He began, "After we had torn ourselves away from them" referring to the elders Paul had been meeting with.

Based on Luke's words, what can you infer about their relationships?



The beginning of Acts 21 reads like a travel log by Luke as he recites all the stops on their way back to Jerusalem.

The map shows their trip by way of Kos, Rhodes, Patara, passing Cyprus to Tyre.

They stayed 7 days in Tyre with the local disciples. The Holy Spirit told them something of what was awaiting Paul in Jerusalem and "in their loving zealous care they took it as a valid warning to him not to go to Jerusalem (Meyer's New Testament Commentary)." Yet he chose to continue his trip there.

Luke wrote that all the disciples there, including wives and children, joined Paul and his companions as they left the city to go to the beach. What purpose might Luke have had for including that wives and children were present? Consider how Jesus treated women and children.

Their next stop was Ptolemais, where they remained for a day with the believers there before traveling to Caesarea where they stayed with Philip the evangelist, one of the seven chosen about 20 years prior to help with the distribution of food to the widows in Jerusalem. *Optional, read Acts 6:1-6*

Paul had gathered contributions for the poor from the various churches and was bringing those back to Jerusalem. Given Philip's previous role, why might Paul have chosen Phillip's home to stay in?

Philip had gone from "overseer of the poor" to "evangelist." In *Acts 8:26-40* the Holy Spirit had told Philip to go to Gaza where he shared the gospel of Jesus with a man from Ethiopia. The Holy Spirit then took Philip away; he appeared in Azotus then traveled to Caesarea, where Paul now stayed with him.

Phillip's purpose was always the same, just as ours is - to love God and others, to share the gospel. However, his way of living out that purpose changed. What are some different ways God has used you to live out your purpose?

Phillip had four daughters who prophesied. "The English word 'prophecy' has come to have, since about the beginning of the seventeenth century, only the one sense of 'to predict what is yet to come.' In the time of Queen Elizabeth 'prophesyings' meant 'preachings,' and Jeremy Taylor's famous work on the "Liberty of Prophesying," was written to uphold the freedom of preaching. These women were, in their degree, Evangelists also (Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges)." That Philip's daughters prophesied, or evangelized, like their father, showed that women had an important, God-ordained role in the early church.

Agabus the prophet came down from Judea. He is the same prophet who predicted a famine would (and did) occur. This time Agabus communicated like some of the Old Testament prophets sometimes did. "They didn't merely speak out prophecies; they acted them out as well ... they're a key ingredient in the compelling, multi-sensory presentations (*Bible Project*)." Using Paul's belt, Agabus tied his own hands and feet; he predicted that the Jewish leaders would similarly bind Paul and hand him over to the Gentiles. *Optional, read Acts 11:28*

Those listening wept and pleaded with Paul not to go to Jerusalem, yet Paul remained steadfast in his decision. The people switched from pleading to saying "The Lord's will be done."

The Holy Spirit told Paul what he was to endure and He communicated it to the others as well. If God's purpose in sharing with the others was not to dissuade Paul, what might His purpose have been? (Consider what we have been learning about prayer and encouragement.)

In Jerusalem, Paul and those with him were welcomed warmly. They went to see James and the elders to report on what God had done during Paul's last journey.

During the counsel of Jerusalem when it was debated on if a person had to become Jewish (circumcised) before becoming a Christian, it was James who made the final judgment. The elders repeated that decision in their response to Paul's report. *Optional, read Acts 15:13-21*

The spiritual leaders praised God for what occurred during Paul's journey and also cited rumors and slander. To show there was no truth in the rumors, the elders told Paul to complete a Nazarath vow with four other men "and thus show decisively that he did not intend to undervalue or disparage the laws of Moses (Barnes Notes on the Bible)." Just as the leaders had done at the council of Jerusalem, they wrote a letter about their decision. *Optional, Acts 18:18-19*

Trophimus was a Gentile from Ephesus, one of the men chosen to bring the collection from other churches to Jerusalem. The Jews from Asia who were now also in Jerusalem may have been present during the riot in Ephesus. They saw Paul with Trophimus in the city, but not in the temple. To stir things up, they made an accusation against Paul, saying he brought Gentiles (Trophimus) into the temple. As the Jews from Asia dragged Paul from the temple, he was not able to complete the Nazarite vow of making an offering.

When Paul was in Corinth he had also made a Nazarite vow; however, Luke did not mention Paul taking any sin or trespass offering at the end of that vow either. "If the offerings were omitted as implied, Paul may have wanted the consecration part of the Nazarite vow but not the atonement/sin offering part, which he stripped out (*Bible Verse Study*)."  
*Optional, read Acts 19:23-41, Acts 20:4, Acts 21:26-27*

When writing to the Romans, Paul urged them to consecrate or dedicate themselves to the Lord and that the sin offering, atonement, had been already paid by Jesus. *Optional, read Romans 12:1, Romans 3:24*

God is always present in the details. Consider that with the Nazarite vow, Paul participated in the consecration of himself to God but that he did not participate in the sin offering; he knew the price was already paid. To consecrate is to devote (something) exclusively to a particular purpose or to make something sacred. What actions might you take to consecrate yourself to God as a thank you for His paying the price for you?

*Acts 21:28-29* "comprises an object lesson in the dangers of acting on appearances and partial knowledge (Life with God Bible)." Today rumor and slander remain divisive tools in our relationships and in our church. What are some ways you can be part of addressing them and help bring about healing instead of injury?

Just as the Holy Spirit had warned, Paul was beaten; people tried to kill him. Just as in Ephesus, another riot ensued. The mob was violent, shouting. Just as Agabus had predicted, the Jewish officials arrested Paul and bound him. "Ancient historians and biographers often linked characters by noting parallels between them (Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible)."

While Jesus was fully God and fully man, and Paul was only fully man, Luke uses the technique of parallels. What are some that are seen in *Acts 21:28-40*? (Continue to notice these parallels in the upcoming chapters of Acts.)

### **Putting it into practice:**

In *Acts 21*, the Holy Spirit communicated to Paul, to the prophets and to the other believers. He continues to communicate with us today. In church Frank encouraged us to spend time in God's Word, to learn what He says. To cultivate quietness to hear the Holy Spirit stirring in our hearts. To hear God's still small voice. We learn to recognize His voice by knowing Him and what He says in His Word. Frank also said when making a decision, we should listen to the wisdom of others for confirmation not direction.

This week, spend time reading the Bible, even if it's just a few verses at a time. Talk with God then ask Him to help you hear Him. He is always waiting for you; start with where you are right now, today. What do you hear Him saying? Consider writing it down and talking with Him more about it over the next days or weeks.

## **Further Study**

The Holy Spirit communicated with Paul and the early believers. Review how many times the Holy Spirit gave the same message to different people in this section of Acts.

The Holy Spirit continues to communicate with believers today. We can be assured a message is from God when it aligns with His Word in the Bible, often it is confirmed by separate sources and when we see that message come true (final confirmation).

How do confirmed messages from the Holy Spirit affect your relationship with God? (Does it build trust? Faith? Quench doubt?)

How do you know when you have heard from the Holy Spirit? How do you test it against the Word of God?

Mediterranean culture highly valued greetings and hospitality.

How can you show hospitality to each other? How can you show it to others in church on Sundays? How can you show it in other areas of your life?

In *Acts 21* Paul visited Kos, Cyprus and Patara along with other places. Kos is an island in Greece where just this summer they battled fires and had to evacuate. Cyprus is the third largest and third-most populous island in the Mediterranean. Patara, in Turkey, was where Saint Nicholas was born in 270.

Does learning about these places make them “more real” to you? How does it encourage your belief that what Luke wrote was real?

Read *1 Thessalonians 5:11*. As a small group you have been consciously encouraging each other the last few weeks.

How has the encouragement you received in small group affected you? How has it affected your relationship with Jesus and what God has called you to do?

If you have encouraged others (family, friends, co-workers, others at One Hope), how has that experience affected you? What did you notice in others as you encouraged them?

## **Pray**

When Paul and those with them left the elders from Ephesus, they prayed together. When they left the disciples in Tyre; they prayed together.

Including God in our conversations by addressing Him directly is powerful. Before you leave your small group time, spend time praying specifically for each other and what God has for you right where you are.