

Acts 2 – Jerusalem God’s Will be Done!

Paul Goes to Jerusalem

Act 21:1-2 Now it came to pass, that when we had departed from them and set sail, running a straight course we came to Cos, the following day to Rhodes, and from there to Patara. And finding a ship sailing over to Phoenicia, we went aboard and set sail.

Are you following him? He took a ship at Miletus, and they sailed down to the southern coast of Asia Minor to Patara. There they changed ships. Now he is headed for Tyre on the seacoast north of Caesarea. It was actually on the coast of Israel in what was ancient Phoenicia. Today that is Lebanon. - McGee

Act 21:3 When we had sighted Cyprus, we passed it on the left, sailed to Syria, and landed at Tyre; for there the ship was to unload her cargo.

I love the way this is expressed here. I think the translators of our Authorized Version have captured something that the modern translations just miss. They “discovered Cyprus” on the left hand is a way of saying that as they were sailing towards Tyre, Cyprus loomed up in the distance on their left-hand side. Of course, it doesn't mean that they were the first people to discover Cyprus. They saw the island and were near enough to recognize it, but they did not stop there. They were on their way to Tyre, a great commercial center which had been there since ancient times. - McGee

Act 21:4 And finding disciples, we stayed there seven days. They told Paul through the Spirit not to go up to Jerusalem.

This is the verse used by those Bible teachers who feel that Paul made a great mistake when he went up to Jerusalem. It shows that these men spoke to Paul through the Holy Spirit. If I understand this correctly, the Spirit of God is not going to contradict Himself. I believe He is saying the same thing here that He had said before. Paul is not to go up to Jerusalem unless he is prepared to make the required sacrifice. Paul keeps saying that he is willing to make the sacrifice. He is perfectly willing to lay down his life for the Lord Jesus. That is the way I think it should be understood.

For several reasons I do not believe that Paul stepped out of the will of God when he went up to Jerusalem. He had a sentimental reason for going there, but it was a good reason. He was carrying the offering from the gentile Christians to the suffering saints in Jerusalem. He wanted to present this to the church in Jerusalem with his own hands, because it was his hands that at one time had wasted the church in Jerusalem. He had been partly responsible for the state of penury in which the saints in Jerusalem found themselves. Paul did not want to send some representative to Jerusalem; he wanted to go to Jerusalem himself.

Another reason I do not believe that Paul stepped out of the will of God is because of his writings later on. When Paul was in prison in Rome, the church at Philippi sent to him an expression of their sympathy. They loved him and they sympathized with his condition. But Paul wrote to them, “But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel” (Php_1:12). Because what happened to Paul did not hinder the spread of the gospel, I do not believe that Paul was out of the will of God.

Furthermore, you remember that when the Lord appeared to Ananias and told him to go to Paul after his conversion, He said to Ananias, “... Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: for I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake” (Act_9:15-16). Up to this point in our study of Acts, Paul has not appeared before kings and rulers, but we know it is in the will of God that he should do so. In the next chapters we will find that he does go before kings. He will testify before King Agrippa. It is probable that he appeared before Nero in Rome. We know for certain that he reached those who were in Caesar's household because he sent greetings from them in his Epistle to the Philippians (Php_4:22), which was written while he was a prisoner in Rome.

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Finally, as I have already mentioned, in 2Ti_4:7 Paul writes, “... I have finished my course...” This was written at the end of his life. It seems to me that he would not say that if for a time he had stepped out of the will of God. I must confess that as I look back over my own ministry, I am confident that I stepped out of the will of God for a brief time. I didn't do it purposely. I did it ignorantly. I did it in a headstrong manner. I think the Lord has a way of making these things up to us. But I do not think that Paul at the end of his life could write that he had finished his course if he had been out of the will of God.

I have spent some time on this because there is controversy over it. I have several very good friends in the ministry who do not agree with my point of view, but we are still friends. I love these brethren in the Lord. I just tease them and say I hope they will see the light someday. As one of them said to me, “When we get in the presence of the Lord, we will all be in agreement.”- McGee

Act 21:5 When we had come to the end of those days, we departed and went on our way; and they all accompanied us, with wives and children, till we were out of the city. And we knelt down on the shore and prayed.

Again, this is a lovely thing that Paul did here. Paul and the people with him knelt down there on the shore and prayed.

Friend, the best position to be in while praying is kneeling. However, you can pray in any posture and anywhere. Since I drive a great deal, I have learned to pray in the car. (When you drive the freeways of Southern California, you had better learn to pray!) But the most appropriate posture when we come into the presence of Almighty God is to kneel.
- McGee

Act 21:6-7 When we had taken our leave of one another, we boarded the ship, and they returned home. And when we had finished our voyage from Tyre, we came to Ptolemais, greeted the brethren, and stayed with them one day.

I have often wondered why Paul didn't stay there longer than that. You will notice the marvelous reception given to him and the number of believers in all these various places at that time. There must have been millions of believers in the Roman Empire by the end of the first century. - McGee

Act 21:8 On the next day we who were Paul's companions departed and came to Caesarea, and entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him.

Paul is traveling down the coastline going from one place to another. I have driven that route by bus. Since there was no bus running in Paul's day, I'm sure that he walked this route. And what a ministry he had! Think of the believers that he met on the way. He had a real ministry and a real opportunity.

As I have been going from church to church, from town to town, from city to city, from place to place, ministering the Word of God, it is a great encouragement to see what God is doing in the lives of folk. When I was a pastor, I had to keep my nose to the grindstone, and I developed an Elijah complex—“I'm the only one left. I'm all by myself. I am the only one standing for you, Lord.” Friend, if you could go over the ground, I have been over in the past year, it would thrill your heart to know the number of wonderful churches, wonderful Christian works, wonderful Christian homes, wonderful Christian believers that there are in this country and in other countries of the world. It has been a real thrill to my own heart to meet these believers. Undoubtedly this was also the experience of Paul. - McGee

Act 21:9 Now this man had four virgin daughters who prophesied.

Philip had four virgin daughters who prophesied. This means they were gifted by the Holy Spirit to receive messages directly from the Lord and to convey them to others. Some have inferred from this verse that it is permissible for women to preach and teach in the church. However, since it is expressly forbidden for women to teach, speak, or

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have authority over the men in the assembly (1Co_14:34-35; 1Ti_2:11-12), it can only be concluded that the prophetic ministry of these four virgin daughters was carried on in the home or in other non-church gatherings. – Believers’ Bible Commentary

Act 21:10-11 And as we stayed many days, a certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. When he had come to us, he took Paul's belt, bound his own hands and feet, and said, "Thus says the Holy Spirit, 'So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this belt, and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.' "

The Holy Spirit is revealing to Paul what will happen to him when he goes up to Jerusalem. It is as though He is saying, “Paul, this is what you are going to face. Are you willing to do it?” God doesn't want Paul to feel that He let him stumble unwittingly into a trap. Paul knows what awaits him, and he still is perfectly willing to go. Actually, this prophet is not telling him anything new. Back in chapter 20, when he was still in Asia Minor, he already knew that bonds and afflictions waited for him. - McGee

Act 21:12-13 Now when we heard these things, both we and those from that place pleaded with him not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, "What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."

Remember that this is Dr. Luke writing. He and the others didn't want to see Paul go to Jerusalem. The Spirit of God is revealing to Paul that he is going to be bound. Paul is not only willing to be bound but is also willing to die for Jesus in Jerusalem. He asks the believers not to cry and to break his heart. It is touching here to see the concern of the believers for the apostle Paul. My, how they loved him! - McGee

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

All their arguments proved of no value. He was determined to go, and so they simply said, “The will of the Lord be done.” – Believers’ Bible Commentary

Act 21:15-16 And after those days we packed and went up to Jerusalem. Also some of the disciples from Caesarea went with us and brought with them a certain Mnason of Cyprus, an early disciple, with whom we were to lodge.

From Caesarea to Jerusalem was an overland journey of more than fifty miles, a long trip in those days of slow transportation. The apostle's traveling party had been increased by the addition of some of the disciples from Caesarea and also by a Christian brother named Mnason (pronounced nay'-son). Originally from Cyprus, he had been one of the earliest disciples there. Now he was living in Jerusalem and was privileged to be host to the apostle and those who journeyed with him during Paul's last visit to Jerusalem.

Paul's missionary journeys really end with his arrival in Jerusalem. The remainder of the Book of Acts is occupied with his arrest, trial, journey to Rome, trial, and imprisonment there. – Believers’ Bible Commentary

Paul Visits James

Act 21:17-18 And when we had come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. On the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present.

Upon arrival in Jerusalem, the apostle and his friends were cordially received by the brethren. The next day a meeting was arranged with James and all the elders. There is no way of knowing for sure which James is referred to here. It could be James, the brother of our Lord, James, the son of Alphaeus, or some other person with that name. The first is the most likely. – Believers’ Bible Commentary

Act 21:19 When he had greeted them, he told in detail those things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry.

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What a glorious reception by the church in Jerusalem! He is a veteran now, friend. He has been in the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ, and he bears in his body the marks of the Lord Jesus. - McGee

He shares the works of Christ in the gentile lands, and they rejoice to hear it, but....

Act 21:20-22 And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord. And they said to him, "You see, brother, how many myriads of Jews there are who have believed, and they are all zealous for the law; but they have been informed about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs. What then? The assembly must certainly meet, for they will hear that you have come.

However, the Jewish brethren were apprehensive. Word had traveled around that the Apostle Paul had preached and taught against Moses and the law. This could mean trouble in Jerusalem.

The specific charge being made against Paul was that he taught all the Jews in foreign lands to forsake Moses, by telling them not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the Jewish customs. Did Paul actually teach this or did he not?

He did teach that Christ was the end of the law for righteousness to those who believe. He did teach that once the Christian faith had come, believing Jews were no longer under the law. He taught that if a man received circumcision as a means of obtaining justification, then such a man cut himself off from salvation in Christ Jesus. He taught that to return to the types and shadows of the law, after Christ had come, was dishonoring to Christ. In view of this, it is not hard to see why the Jews should think of him as they did. – Believers’ Bible Commentary

Act 21:23-26 Therefore do what we tell you: We have four men who have taken a vow. Take them and be purified with them, and pay their expenses so that they may shave their heads, and that all may know that those things of which they were informed concerning you are nothing, but that you yourself also walk orderly and keep the law. But concerning the Gentiles who believe, we have written and decided that they should observe no such thing, except that they should keep themselves from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality." Then Paul took the men, and the next day, having been purified with them, entered the temple to announce the expiration of the days of purification, at which time an offering should be made for each one of them.

Now what should Paul do? He has arrived in Jerusalem and has been given a royal reception by the church. He has given them the gift from the gentile churches. They have listened to his report and rejoiced in the way God has saved the Gentiles. Now they turn to Paul and tell him that there are thousands of Jews in Jerusalem who are trusting Christ and have accepted Him as their Messiah and Savior. None of them want to have a division in the church. There is only one church of Jesus Christ, not a Jewish church and a gentile church. A Jew who comes to Jesus Christ does not stop being a Jew. So, they say to Paul, “Look, you are a Jew. That is your background. And you want to win the Jews for Christ.” Paul says, “I sure do!” So, they say, “Since you are a Jew, it wouldn't hurt you to go with these four Jewish men who have made a vow. They have shaved their heads and are going into the temple. Would you go along with them?” Paul says, “Sure.”

Paul didn't take this vow because he was commanded to do so. He took this vow because he wanted to win these people.

Friend, you don't have to take a vow. But if you want to take a vow, you can. If you want to shave your head with a vow, that is your business. If you want to take a vow and let your hair grow long, that is your business. It is all right with the Lord. Under grace you have a right to do these things. Under grace you have the right to make a vow if you want to do so—just so you understand that you are not saved by what you do but by the grace of God. - McGee

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Paul Arrested in the Temple

Act 21:27-29 *Now, when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews from Asia, seeing him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd and laid hands on him, crying out, "Men of Israel, help! This is the man who teaches all men everywhere against the people, the law, and this place; and furthermore, he also brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place." (For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.)*

When the seven days of the vow were almost ended, Paul's attempt to pacify the Jews proved futile. When some of the unbelieving Jews from proconsular Asia saw him in the temple, they incited a riot against him. Not only did they charge him with teachings that were contrary to the Jewish people and to the law, but they also accused him of defiling the temple by taking Gentiles into the inner courts. What actually happened was this: they had previously seen Paul with Trophimus in the city of Jerusalem. Trophimus was a Gentile convert from Ephesus. Because they saw them together, they supposed that Paul had taken his Gentile friend into the inner courts of the temple. – Believers' Bible Commentary

Act 21:30-36 *And all the city was disturbed; and the people ran together, seized Paul, and dragged him out of the temple; and immediately the doors were shut. Now as they were seeking to kill him, news came to the commander of the garrison that all Jerusalem was in an uproar. He immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down to them. And when they saw the commander and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul. Then, the commander came near and took him, and commanded him to be bound with two chains; and he asked who he was and what he had done. And some among the multitude cried one thing and some another. So, when he could not ascertain the truth because of the tumult, he commanded him to be taken into the barracks. When he reached the stairs, he had to be carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the mob. For the multitude of the people followed after, crying out, "Away with him!"*

Although the charge was obviously false, it served its purpose. All the city was thrown into an uproar. The mob seized Paul, and dragged him out of the temple area, closing the gates of the inner courts behind them. As they proceeded to kill him, word reached the chiliarch, a military commander in charge of the garrison of Antonia. He came in a hurry with some of his soldiers and took Paul from the infuriated mob, bound him with two chains, and asked who he was and what he had done. The mob was, of course, incoherent and confused. Some ... cried one thing and some another. The frustrated officer commanded the soldiers to bring the prisoner into the barracks so he could find out more definitely what was going on. Even in the attempt to do this, the mob surged forward with such determination that Paul had to be carried by the soldiers up the stairs. – Believers' Bible Commentary

Paul Speaks to the People

Act 21:37-39 *Then as Paul was about to be led into the barracks, he said to the commander, "May I speak to you?" He replied, "Can you speak Greek? Are you not the Egyptian who some time ago stirred up a rebellion and led the four thousand assassins out into the wilderness?" But Paul said, "I am a Jew from Tarsus, in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city; and I implore you, permit me to speak to the people."*

Just as they were about to take Paul into the barracks, he asked the officer if he could say something. The officer was startled to hear Paul speaking Greek. He apparently thought he had arrested an Egyptian who had stirred up a rebellion and led four thousand men called assassins out into the wilderness. Paul quickly assured him that he was a Jew from the city of Tarsus, in Cilicia. As such, he was a citizen of no mean city; it was famous as a place of culture, education, and commerce, and had been declared a "free city" by Augustus. With characteristic fearlessness, the apostle requested permission to speak to the people. – Believers' Bible Commentary

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Act 21:40 So when he had given him permission, Paul stood on the stairs and motioned with his hand to the people. And when there was a great silence, he spoke to them in the Hebrew language, saying,

Although Paul speaks to the captain in Greek, when he addresses this Jewish mob, he speaks in their native tongue, Hebrew. And the minute he begins to address them in Hebrew, the language they love and understand, they listen to him. - McGee