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Acts 21

(2019)

Bible House of Grace contains an easy to read New and Old Testament commentary full of spiritual treasures and pearls, complete with an insightful resource guide illuminating God's love and grace.



Although I believe my aim is pure and God's will perfect this document is still the product of a human man, as to such I neither claim perfect knowledge or perfect understanding.

Acts 21.

Topics.

- Agabus a prophet tells Paul; Jews at Jerusalem will bind his hands and feet.
- Was Paul led by his spirit or the Holy Spirit?
- Thousands of Jews at Jerusalem have believed.
- Paul shaves his head according to a Jewish vow.
- Laws for Gentiles who believed the word of the Lord.
- The principle of life for the Jews and the Gentiles.
- All the city of Jerusalem seized Paul seeking to kill him.
- Agabus prophecy is fulfilled.

The previous chapter: in the previous chapter Paul gave an all-night Bible study at Troas and Eutychus (a young boy or teenager) overcome by sleep fell three floors. After a short stay in Troas Paul gives a very emotional farewell speech to the elders of Ephesus and then set sail to Jerusalem hoping to arrive before the day of Pentecost after which he desires to go to Rome.

NOTE: for information concerning people, places and the meaning of words see Map Locations and People of the Bible, and Bible Dictionary on Website Menu.

ACTS 21:1-7

Paul arrives in Tyre and then sails to Ptolemais.

- **Acts 21:1-7:** And when we had parted from them and set sail, we came by a straight course to Cos, and the next day to Rhodes, and from there to Patara. ²And having found a ship crossing to Phoenicia, we went aboard and set sail. ³When we had come in sight of Cyprus, leaving it on the left we sailed to Syria and landed at Tyre, for there the ship was to unload its cargo. ⁴And having sought out the disciples, we stayed there for seven days. And through the Spirit they were telling Paul not to go on to Jerusalem. ⁵When our days there were ended, we departed and went on our journey, and they all, with wives and children, accompanied us until we were outside the city. And kneeling down on the beach, we prayed ⁶and said farewell to one another. Then we went on board the ship, and they returned home. ⁷When we had finished the voyage from Tyre, we arrived at Ptolemais, and we greeted the brothers and stayed with them for one day.

After Paul and those with him had left the elders in Ephesus (the end of the previous chapter) and set sail to Jerusalem they stopped at Tyre where they remained for seven days, while there Paul sought out the disciples who through the Spirit warned him not to go to Jerusalem, but Paul was determined. The brothers, their wives and children leave the city of Tyre to say goodbye to Paul. They all kneel on the beach to pray and say farewell to each other. Paul, Luke and the brothers board the ship and sail from Tyre to Ptolemais where they stayed with their brothers for one day.

Kneeling in Prayer: it is interesting to notice the amount of times the disciples kneel in prayer. The Psalmist calls all to kneel, bow down and worship the LORD (Psalm 95:6). Solomon knelt on his knees in the presence of all the assembly of Israel and prayed (2 Chron. 6:13-14). Daniel got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave

thanks before his God, as was his normal practice (Dan 6:10). Jesus knelt down in the Garden of Gethsemane to pray to his Father (Luke 22:41). Stephen just prior to dying fell to his knees and prayed to the Lord not to hold the sin of those stoning him against them (Acts 7:60). Peter knelt down to pray for Tabitha to rise from the dead (Acts 9:40). Paul when saying farewell with the Ephesian elders knelt down and prayed with them (Acts 20:36). When Paul sailed from Tyre the brothers their wives and children knelt down and prayed on the beach (Acts 21:5).

Prayer comes in many forms: prayer can be made in many forms and styles and is manifested in different ways by various cultures, nations and individuals. The most common form of prayer throughout the world takes place in the silent self-talk of the mind. Some of the many other forms of prayer are expressed in worshippers standing with hands raised in joy and overwhelming gratitude praising God, others sitting relaxed in an armchair with a coffee talking to the Lord, while some lie on their bed in communion with the God while meditating over his word. Obviously, there are many other accepted time-honoured forms of prayer, but it seems when devastating, crushing and overwhelming circumstances or overwhelming awe-inspiring wonder and joy is involved the natural response seems to be to kneel as it is the ultimate and inborn mark of complete humbleness and surrender to a much higher power.

ACTS 21:8-14

Agabus a prophet tells Paul, Jews at Jerusalem will Bind his Hands and Feet.

- **Acts 21:8-14:** On the next day we departed and came to Caesarea, and we entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him. ⁹He had four unmarried daughters, who prophesied. ¹⁰While we were staying for many days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. ¹¹And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands and said, "Thus says the Holy Spirit, 'This is how the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'" ¹²When we heard this, we and the people there urged him not to go up to Jerusalem. ¹³Then Paul answered, "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." ¹⁴And since he would not be persuaded, we ceased and said, "Let the will of the Lord be done."

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After leaving Ptolemais (v7) Paul arrives in Caesarea, and enters the house of Philip the evangelist, who had four unmarried daughters, who prophesied.

Was Paul led by his spirit or the Holy Spirit?

It is interesting to notice in chapter nineteen we are told:

- Paul resolved in the Spirit to go to Jerusalem (Acts 19:21).

And then in chapter twenty Paul says:

- He is going to Jerusalem, constrained (bound in KJV) by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to him except that the Holy Spirit testifies to him in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await him (Acts 20:22-23).

And in chapter twenty-one Luke states:

- The disciples through the Spirit were telling Paul not to go on to Jerusalem (Acts 21:4).

And the prophet Agabus ties his own hands and feet with Paul's belt and said through the Holy Spirit:

- This is how the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles (Acts 21:11).

Upon hearing this all the brothers once again urged Paul not to leave, but he told them that his heart was set on going to Jerusalem even if it meant his death so the brothers could not persuade him to stay and then after doing all they could without any success to stop him going they make an amazing statement:

- Let the will of the Lord be done (Acts 21:10-14).

So, was Paul being led by his own spirit or the Holy Spirit? To understand the answer to this it is helpful to know that the word, constrained (Acts 20:22) can carry any of the following meanings, controlled, compelled, pressured, made, coerced, restrained or hindered and the word, bound (the Greek word deo) from Strong's Concordance literally or figuratively means to bind or be in bonds, it carries the idea of something necessary (i.e., must be, ought to, should do with the thought in the mind of something needful).

Putting it all together: it appears that Paul in his own spirit felt a responsibility to once again attempt to take the Gospel to his Jewish brothers at Jerusalem, we know he had an overwhelming love for them because he says:

- I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh (Rom 9:3).

BUT! through the checks he felt in his own spirit, through the brothers and the prophet Agabus warning him from going and through difficulties that hindered him it would appear that the Holy Spirit was constraining him from going, but Paul was determined most likely because of his love for his nation, the Jewish people and those he had spent his life growing up with in Jerusalem, so, the statement:

- Let the will of the Lord be done (Acts 21:10-14).

Seems to mean that even if the Lord attempts to warn us from danger what we end up doing for him is still counted as the will of the Lord, but we will suffer the consequences of such a choice.

A typical example: a natural example of this would be when an older and mature Christian man finds himself advising a new convert in the Lord not to take a certain path since being the older man he is able to see the end result of such an action, but being young and zealous the young man is determined that the path he is about to take is the right path so he ignores the older man's warning and does what he determined to do, in this scenario the older man can correctly say:

- Let the will of the Lord be done.

Even though he knows the path the young convert is taking will eventually lead to sorrow and hardship. This scenario happens in many Christian families there are times when our adult children are determined to take a path, we would prefer they didn't, sadly sometimes we have to say as the brothers did to Paul:

- Let the will of the Lord be done.

And rest in the fact that silver and gold cannot be produced without fire and though they may suffer in this world if their motive is right toward God, they may well be storing up treasure in heaven since the God we worship sees the intent of the heart.

ACTS 21:15-24

Thousands of Jews at Jerusalem have Believed.

- **Acts 21:15-24:** After these days we got ready and went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁶And some of the disciples from Caesarea went with us, bringing us to the house of Mnason of Cyprus,

an early disciple, with whom we should lodge. ¹⁷When we had come to Jerusalem, the brothers received us gladly. ¹⁸On the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present. ¹⁹After greeting them he related one by one the things that God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. ²⁰And when they heard it they glorified God. And they said to him, "You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed. They are all zealous for the law, ²¹and they have been told about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or walk according to our customs. ²²What then is to be done? They will certainly hear that you have come. ²³Do therefore what we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow; ²⁴take these men and purify yourself along with them and pay their expenses, so that they may shave their heads. Thus all will know that there is nothing in what they have been told about you, but that you yourself also live in observance of the law.

The brothers after unsuccessfully trying to stop Paul from going to Jerusalem resigning themselves to the fact Paul is determined they go with him. At Jerusalem they are welcomed by the brothers and stay in the house of Mnason an early disciple. Paul tells his Jewish brothers James and the elders the stunning miracles and wonders the Lord has been doing amongst the Gentiles and they are all thrilled and praise God.

At Jerusalem Paul receives advice from James and the elders: there are literally thousands of Jews who have embraced the word of the Lord, but they are still zealous for the laws and customs of Moses and have heard that Paul is telling the Gentiles not to circumcise their children or walk according to the Jewish customs. James and the elders advise Paul to shave his head and join the four men with them who are under a vow so that their Jewish brothers will know that Paul is still observing the laws of Moses and the customs of the Jewish people.

Paul shaves his head according to a Jewish vow: a vow refers to making a solemn promise to God the most valued vow was that of a Nazarite which involved shaving the head. Paul would willingly shave his head if it meant he would be received by the Jews and able to proclaim the Good News of the Gospel therefore Paul accepted the advice of James and the elders so as not to offend the Jews who had accepted the word of the Lord, but were still zealous for the customs of Moses and Jewish traditions. It is not wrong or against God or grace to keep a law, a custom or a tradition for the purpose of appeasing the anger of those opposed to Christ or for the purpose of sharing the Gospel.

Paul told the Corinthian Church that:

- Even though he is free from all, he has made himself a servant to all, that he might win more of them. To the Jews he became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law he became as one under the law (though not being himself under the law) that he might win those under the law. To those outside the law he became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that he might win those outside the law. To the weak he became weak, that he might win the weak. He became all things to all people that by all means he might save some. He does it all for the sake of the gospel, that he may share with them in its blessings" (1 Cor. 9:19-23).

Thus, Paul went along with James and the elders' advice for the following two reasons:

1. To avoid strife and contention from the Jewish brothers.
2. So, they would be far more accepting of him and his message.

ACTS 21:25

Laws for Gentiles who believed the Word of the Lord.

- **Acts 21:25:** But as for the Gentiles who have believed, we have sent a letter with our judgment that they should abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality."

This refers to the council the apostles held in Jerusalem over the question of whether the Gentiles should keep the laws and customs of Moses. It was decided by all apostles that Gentiles who had received the word of the Lord did not need to concern themselves with the customs of Moses, but they should abstain from eating animals that had been strangled and drinking their blood and abstain from idols and sexual immorality. For further information see:

- Chapter 15 in, Commentary New Testament (ON WEBSITE MENU).

The principle of life for the Jews and the Gentiles: it was fine for the Jewish brothers who had received the word of the Lord to keep the customs of Moses and their Jewish traditions which they had been steeped in for over 4000 years providing they were not keeping them to be saved or add to their salvation. Having faith in the Lord Jesus Christ does not mean a person has to stop their cultural customs, providing they are not against the law and providing they are not trusting in them to be saved or maintain their salvation. Moses customs and Jewish tradition in themselves are certainly not sinful, but if a person is keeping them to be saved or to add to their salvation they become sinful simply because once we are trusting in anything other than Christ we are trusting in our own works and nullifying what Christ achieved for us on the cross. It is perfectly OK before God for Jews who believe in Christ to continue keeping their ceremonies and feasts etc., if they are simply keeping them because it is their culture and not to be saved, but it becomes destructively sinful and enormously offensive to God when Jewish brothers in Christ who are continuing in Jewish customs judge and condemn others who choose not to continue in the traditions of the Jewish nation.

A simple example: some churches have been using the same hymn book for many generations, they believe these books contain the only songs God accepts in worship, because those who wrote them died for their faith, but others find more modern songs preferable because they are more joyful and the language is easier to understand. Many who use the older hymn book find it difficult to worship God with the more modern songs, but they do not need to change with the times, in fact it would be sin for some of them to do so, because it would go against what their conscience believes, but they should not judge those who prefer the more modern songs and may even be sinning when they do. Both groups should accept each other, because salvation comes as a pure gift from God through Jesus, but everyone is free to outwardly express that inward gift in whatever way they find best for them, providing it is morally decent and not illegal or against the law of God.

ACTS 21:26-40

All the city of Jerusalem seized Paul seeking to Kill Him.

- **Acts 21:26-40:** Then Paul took the men, and the next day he purified himself along with them and went into the temple giving notice when the days of purification would be fulfilled and the offering presented for each one of them. ²⁷When the seven days were almost completed, the Jews from Asia, seeing him in the temple stirred up the whole crowd and laid hands on him, ²⁸crying out, "Men of Israel, help! This is the man who is teaching everyone everywhere against the people (Jewish people) and the law (of Moses) and this place Moreover, he even brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place." ²⁹For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city and they supposed that Paul had brought him into the temple. ³⁰Then all the city was stirred up, and the people ran together. They seized Paul and dragged him out of the temple, and at once the gates were shut. ³¹And as they were seeking to kill him, word came to the tribune of the cohort that all Jerusalem was in confusion. ³²He at once took soldiers and centurions and ran down to them. And when they saw the tribune and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul. ³³Then the tribune came up and arrested him and ordered him to be bound with two chains. He inquired who he was and what he had done. ³⁴Some in the crowd were shouting one thing, some another. And as he could not learn the facts because

of the uproar, he ordered him to be brought into the barracks. ³⁵And when he came to the steps, he was actually carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the crowd, ³⁶for the mob of the people followed, crying out, "Away with him!" ³⁷As Paul was about to be brought into the barracks, he said to the tribune, "May I say something to you?" And he said, "Do you know Greek? ³⁸Are you not the Egyptian, then, who recently stirred up a revolt and led the four thousand men of the Assassins out into the wilderness?" ³⁹Paul replied, "I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no obscure city. I beg you, permit me to speak to the people." ⁴⁰And when he had given him permission, Paul, standing on the steps, motioned with his hand to the people. And when there was a great hush, he addressed them in the Hebrew language, saying:

Tribune: refers to the chief captain of a band of men. In the ancient Roman republic, a tribune was a representative annually elected to defend the rights of the common people. The tribune at this time was the chief captain Lysias (Acts 23:26) (Acts 24:7, 22).

Cohort: (speira) (Band in KJV) means a mass of men.

The next day Paul took the men who had made a vow, and purified himself with them and went into the temple, but radical Jews from Asia who were either jealous of Paul's success or misunderstood what he was saying turned the Jews against Paul telling them that he was teaching against the Jewish people, the customs of Moses and defiled the temple by taking Gentiles into it.

The population of Jerusalem in fury, anger and rage came together and dragged Paul out of the temple and intending to kill him began violently beating him. Had the tribune in Jerusalem not gone with soldiers to calm the crowd it is certain Paul would have been killed since by the time the tribune with the soldiers got to him he was so badly wounded he couldn't walk (v35).

Agabus prophecy is fulfilled: the tribune had Paul arrested and bound in two chains fulfilling the following words of Agabus the prophet when he took Paul's belt, tied his own hands and feet with it and said:

- Thus says the Holy Spirit, 'This is how the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles (v11-12).

Paul unable to walk is carried to the Roman barracks: as Paul was being taken into the barracks, he begged the tribune to allow him to speak to the people. The tribune at this time thought Paul was an Egyptian rebel who led a band of four-thousand Assassins (v35) so he is surprised when he hears Paul speak the Greek language, Paul realising the tribune had no idea of who he was quickly gives him a brief testimony. The tribune most likely fascinated after hearing Paul's testimony and wondering who this half dead man is that still desires to speak to the crowd who almost murdered him gives Paul permission. Paul, standing on the steps of the barracks, speaks to the Jewish crowd in Hebrew and there was a great hush because he spoke in their own language (to find out what Paul said see the next chapter).

Paul's amazing courage and unselfish devotion for the Jewish people: Paul understood that multitudes of lies and rumours had gone throughout the city of Jerusalem concerning him that had stirred up the Jews to such an extent they almost murdered him. Most it appears had no idea Paul was Jewish and most likely believed he was an uneducated rebel who spoke against God and the Jews causing riots wherever he went so Paul in his wisdom speaks to the Jewish crowd in their own Hebrew language and they are stunned.

NOTE: there is a certain amount of truth in the statement there were riots in most places Paul spoke, but it wasn't Paul causing them, but the Jews who were jealous of the crowds (of Jews and Gentiles) that he was converting over to the Lord Jesus Christ, thus in reality Paul was having massive revivals in every city he visited, but the Jews of those cities out of jealousy were stirring up the people and turning them into riots

As the founder of Bible House of Grace, I would like to thank the many Christian scholars, commentators and theologians who have gone before me, and the many today, who have freely made available their works to enhance the knowledge of the Bible to all people worldwide. It is only with the help of these faithful writers that much of Bible House of Grace exists as it does today.

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