

The Acts of the Holy Spirit

Gloria Dei Lutheran Church

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Paul & Co. Arrive in Jerusalem

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The Journey to Jerusalem ([21:1-16](#))

“Departed from them” could be more literally translated “tore ourselves away from them”. Paul had poured his life into these leaders from Ephesus and truly loved them, and that feeling was mutual.

Landed at Tyre ... and finding disciples: We don't know how the church was planted in Tyre, but there were disciples there. The Book of Acts gives us a lot of headlines, and a few details, but the early church's growth and activities clearly extend far beyond that which the Holy Spirit inspired to be recorded for us.

They told Paul through the Spirit not to go up to Jerusalem: This isn't the first time we've seen Paul's itinerary apparently interrupted or altered by God. In this case we're actually told how we was informed, by disciples worried about the danger that awaited in Jerusalem. That, per se, should not have been a surprise; Paul had been warned about such danger before (e.g. Acts 20:22-23).

They all accompanied us ... till we were out of the city: Accompanying a traveler to the outskirts of the city was not uncommon; it was a traditional practice. The practice of kneeling down on the shore together for prayer, however, was a uniquely Christian thing.

We came to Ptolemais, greeted the brethren, and stayed with them one day: It must have been gratifying and confirming for Paul and his travelling companions to find Christians in most every city they stopped in. These bonds of fellowship become all the more precious when one is traveling through as a stranger in a new city.

Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven: Philip, one of the seven chosen in Acts 6 to serve tables, apparently had settled in Caesarea, and had four daughters who had been given the gift of prophecy.

F. F. Bruce notes that we learn in extra-Biblical records that *"The daughters, or at least some of them, lived to a great age, and were highly esteemed as informants on persons and events belonging to the early years of Judean Christianity."*

A certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea: In the spirit of Old Testament prophets, Agabus "play-acts" his message to Paul, namely that certain danger awaits him at Jerusalem.

Note that the daughters of Philip did not prophesy about Paul's trip to Jerusalem, though we might have expected them to. The take-away? The Holy Spirit chooses whom He will for such manifestations of His interactions with His people, not us!

So shall the Jews at Jerusalem... deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles: The prophecy of Agabus was true, and genuinely from the Holy Spirit. But to this true word, they added a human dynamic; they pleaded with him not to go up to Jerusalem. That additional emotional plea was not taken by Paul as direction from the Lord, otherwise Paul would not have gone on to Jerusalem.

Intermixing human wants and thoughts in the midst of prophecy is easy to do – it happens in almost literally every sermon you've ever heard! We "add our two cents" to what God may be saying very naturally. We should never fall into the error, however, of thinking that the power or effectiveness of God's word is altered or enhanced in any way by our clever stories or oratory devices. The pure message of the Gospel is the power. And God manages to impart that to listeners or viewers in spite of our added effort, not because of it!

...I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus: Paul's insistence on going to Jerusalem despite the dangers predicted by the Holy Spirit was not a result of rebellion, but an obedient, faith-filled response to the prompting by the Holy Spirit in his heart. He was "bound" in the spirit to go to Jerusalem. The warnings from the Holy Spirit were intended to prepare Paul, not to stop him.

Paul Arrives in Jerusalem (21:17-26)

He told in detail those things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry: Upon arriving in Jerusalem, Paul meets with the leaders of the church -- James and all the elders -- and gave them a full report of his missionary activities. The Greek here carries the sense of recounting every detail, not merely surfing the headlines. The Christian Jews in Jerusalem were thankful for what God was doing among the Gentiles, yet they still wanted to maintain many of their familiar and time-honored Jewish customs and practices (“zealous for the law”).

Be purified with them, and pay their expenses: Leaders of the church in Jerusalem were concerned that Paul was arguing against Jewish customs that Jewish believers in Jerusalem still valued. So, the leaders here advise Paul to "sponsor" (read “pay the sacrificial expenses for”) four Christian Jews who are fulfilling a vow of consecration (likely the same or similar to Paul’s Nazarite vow in chapter 18). By doing this, Paul would be showing the community of Christian Jews in Jerusalem that he is not opposed to their continued observance of certain Jewish customs, even though he does not require such observance of those Gentiles who come to Jesus.

Then Paul took the men: Paul agreed to this and sponsored the four men taking the vow of consecration because there was never a hint that such things would be required of Gentiles as a test of righteousness. Even if certain ceremonies were useless in terms of salvation, they were not dangerous or destructive. They only become dangerous when they are depended upon for salvation.

Paul's explains his motive for sponsoring of these Christian Jews in 1 Corinthians 9:20: *“And to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law.”*

Mob Trouble and Roman Rescue (21:27-40)

Jews from Asia, seeing him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd: They claimed that Paul was against the people (Israel), the law, and this place (the temple), but of course all this was utterly unfounded. Paul simply rejected *trust in* any of these as a basis for righteousness before God, which comes, as he knew, proclaimed, and taught, only through Jesus Christ.

All the city was disturbed; and the people ran together: The crowd was larger than normal because it was feast time (see 20:16). They were enraged because they believed Paul not only preached against the people, the law, and the temple, but also profaned the temple by bringing a Gentile into its inner courts.

Trophimus the Ephesian ... whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple: It was strictly prohibited for Gentiles to go beyond the designated "Court of the Gentiles" in the temple grounds. Signs were posted in both Greek and Latin saying: "No foreigner may enter within the barricade which surrounds the temple and enclosure. Any one who is caught trespassing will bear personal responsibility for his ensuing death." The Romans were very careful about respecting temples of indigenous religions in order to keep peace in that town or region. So much so that they authorized the Jewish leaders to order the execution of anyone that violated this restriction, even if the offender was a Roman citizen!

Now as they were seeking to kill him: Paul has been seized by an enraged mob, and the mob didn't just want to take him out of the temple courts. They wanted to kill him, right there in the outer courtyard area of the temple mount. Paul had been threatened with death and attacked by murderous mobs before (Acts 14:5, 19), and must have thought, "Okay, Lord, here we go again!". That's not in the original Greek, but it's reasonable as far as pious speculation goes.

News came to the commander of the garrison that all Jerusalem was in an uproar: From the Tower of Antonia, at the northwest corner of the temple mount, 500 or more Roman soldiers would have been stationed only two flights of stairs from the court of the Gentiles. So this disruption would be obvious to all, and we know that Roman authorities would not tolerate an "uncontrollable" mob.

When they saw the commander and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul: The Romans didn't necessarily sympathize with Paul in any way, but they were interested in keeping public order, so they arrested Paul both for his own protection, and to remove the cause of the uproar. "Two chains" means Paul was handcuffed to a soldier on either side. One wonders if Paul at that moment recalled the prophecy of Agabus (21:11).

He might also have been recalled the "mob" he oversaw the stoning of Stephen (7:54-8:1), or perhaps even about the trial of Jesus ("Away with him!") some twenty-seven years before (Luke 23:18; John 19:15).

At first, the Roman tribune (commander) probably mistook Paul for a known terrorist, and was surprised that Paul was an educated man and could speak Greek.

“The Egyptian” mentioned here is also mentioned by Flavius Josephus, and led a ragged army of about four thousand men to the Mount of Olives where they declared they would take over the temple mount. Roman soldiers had quickly scattered them, but the leader, thought to be an Egyptian, got away.

I am a Jew from Tarsus, in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city: Paul identifies himself to the Roman commander, it put him in an entirely different standing. He was a citizen of Tarsus, not a suspected terrorist.

I implore you, permit me to speak to the people: This is so... Paul. At this very moment, with his life was in imminent danger from an angry mob, and under suspicion of being a dangerous criminal, Paul has exactly one thing on his mind: **"C'mon, man, let me preach the gospel!"** *(I confess that I heard Joe Biden's voice in my head when I typed that!)*

So when he had given him permission: Whoa, hold on just a minute. Why would the commander permit Paul to speak to the crowd? Because he had recognized that he had done wrong to Paul, a Roman citizen, when he put him in chains, and he no doubt hoped that Paul's words might dispel the commotion and quiet down the mob.

Paul stood on the stairs and... spoke to them in the Hebrew language: What a dramatic moment that must have been! Paul, standing on the stairs overlooking the massive open courtyard of the temple mount, makes a dramatic sweep of his hand, and the angry, rioting mob fell silent. Then Paul speaks to them **in Hebrew**, identifying himself with his Jewish audience, not with his Roman protectors.

A number of similarities between Jesus and Paul appear in chapters 20 and 21. Like Jesus, Paul:

- Traveled to Jerusalem with a group of disciples
- Had opposition from hostile Jews who plotted against his life
- Made or received three successive predictions of his coming sufferings in Jerusalem, including being handed over to the Gentiles
- Had followers who tried to discourage him from going to Jerusalem and the fate that awaited him there

- Declared his readiness to lay down his life
- Was determined to complete his ministry and not be deflected from it
- Expressed his abandonment to the will of God
- Came to Jerusalem to give something
- Was unjustly arrested on the basis of a false accusation
- Was arrested, while none of the other followers of Jesus were
- Heard the mob crying out, Away with him!
- Was not recognized by the Roman officer handling his case
- Was associated with zealots or terrorists by Roman officials

Paul's particular call and ministry make these similarities especially striking, but there is a lesson here for us, too, as followers of Jesus. We, like Paul, are “predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son” (Romans 8:29). So we shouldn't be surprised when events in our lives are like events in Jesus' life, perhaps especially the unpleasant ones!

There may be a time of “temptation in the wilderness”, a time when people come to us with needs only God can meet, a time when we seem at the mercy of a storm, a time when we just want to cry out to God as Jesus did in the Garden of Gethsemane, perhaps even a time when we must simply lay down our lives and trust that God will gloriously raise us up or deliver us.

However, Paul's experience was different from Jesus' in many ways, perhaps the most apparent of which was the manner in which Paul made a defense (more on that in the next chapter), while Jesus refused to defend Himself before His accusers.