

# THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

## ACTS 21-22

Before Jesus ascended to heaven He told His crew to take the Gospel into Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the world. *And they did!*

In fact, this becomes an outline for the book of Acts.

**Chapters 1-6** discuss the Church at Jerusalem. **Chapter 7-12** describe how the Gospel branched out into the surrounding neighborhoods, Judea and Samaria. Then in **Chapters 13-28** we're shown how Paul took the Gospel to the uttermost parts of the world, all the way to Rome, the capitol of the empire.

Paul embarked on three church planting ventures. In Chapter 21 he's on his third expedition. *His last lap...*

Paul has just left the Ephesian elders on the beach at Miletus, and he's headed to Jerusalem. His desire is to arrive by the Feast of Pentecost - in late spring.

*Let me comment on Paul's travels...* He crossed majestic mountains, strolled on Mediterranean beaches, walked marble streets, and viewed colossal buildings in the world's most magnificent cities. He witnessed *natural beauty* and *architectural wonders*.

Paul could've described enough *landscapes*, and *seascapes*, and *cityscapes* to fill a travel brochure, that would have caused the most avid tourist to salivate.

Yet scan Paul's letters - read Luke's accounts of his travels - and you'll never find a verbal postcard.

Not a single line of Paul's writings is wasted on pointing to his physical surroundings. **His focus was not on the beaches or the buildings, but on *the Lord He served and the souls that needed to be saved.***

On the Road to Damascus Paul was blinded by a bright light and the glory of Jesus. For the rest of his life he remained blind to everything else but the Lord and His Gospel! *It's a blindness we all should emulate.*

Acts 21 begins, **“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.”** Here a map is helpful...

These are all port cities on what is today the Turkish Riviera, or the Turquoise Coast in southwest Turkey.

Paul and his entourage were skipping along the coast, looking for passage on a larger ship that could cross the Mediterranean and land them in Israel.

**“And finding a ship sailing over to Phoenicia, we went aboard and set sail.”** The Phoenician ports of Tyre and Sidon are in modern-day Lebanon - north of the Israeli border. This was Paul and his pal's destination.

**“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.”** Obviously, Paul didn't wait for a first class cabin on a Carnival cruise. He hitched a ride on a freighter. ***The apostle's passion was who he could reach, not how he could roll.***

When the ship finally docked in Tyre it had carried Paul 400 miles - across the Mediterranean, under the island of Cyprus, and to the shores of Phoenicia.

Verse 4, “**And finding disciples, we stayed there seven days.**” I’m sure Paul was *tired* when he reached *Tyre*, but notice how he recharges his batteries...

Rather than isolate himself, he finds fellowship.

Never underestimate the renewing power of hanging out with other believers. Christian fellowship was strategic even for a hearty believer like Paul.

And pay attention to verse 4. The phrase translated “**finding disciples**” implies an extensive search. Paul went out of his way to locate the local Christians. He had to “**find**” fellowship. It didn’t just come to him.

And this is often what it takes for us to find meaningful fellowship. It takes nothing *to attend church*, but you have *to find fellowship*. You have to exert some initiative and search outside of your comfort zone. Rub shoulders until you find your niche.

It’s funny, talk to some people who attend our church for a few weeks, and they say they’ve made all kinds of connections. *This is the friendliest church on the planet...* Yet other folks have come for years, and still feel like a stranger. *They complain we’re unfriendly...*

*What’s the difference?* Well, those who really got plugged in went out to “**find disciples,**” whereas those who never did - “**sat back and waited to be found.**”

Paul found disciples, and they had a message for him, verse 4, “They told Paul through the Spirit not to go up to Jerusalem.” NT scholar FF Bruce translates “*through the Spirit*” as “*under prophetic inspiration.*”

Earlier in Acts 19:21 we're told, “Paul purposed in the Spirit... to go to Jerusalem.” Yet here the Holy Spirit throws up a warning sign. Thus a question arises, “was Paul obedient or disobedient in going to Jerusalem?”

And to me the answer is clear... ***I have no idea!***

And I'm not alone. Bible commentators are divided. Good men line up on both sides of the argument.

If you've been a Christian for very long you realize discerning God's will is not an exact science. Often, our vision gets murky... Yet Paul's life gives us hope...

Its twist and turns demonstrate, that if we're sincere, God is faithful. *He gets us to where we need to be!*

Verse 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.” In short order Paul and the Phoenicians became fast friends. When Paul set out for Jerusalem, the Phoenicians followed him to the outskirts of town.

It's interesting, though Paul rejected their warnings, the Phoenicians refused to be judgmental. Rather than get mad because he didn't take heed to their advice, they still love Paul, and pray for him, and support him.

I'm sure they trusted his intentions. They realized, it's up to each believer to follow God's will as they see fit.

Luke continues, "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." This was a short voyage down the coast. Ptolemais was the ancient name for the Israeli port of Acco - 9 miles north of modern Haifa.

And Paul also found fellowship there... For "On the next day we who were Paul's companions departed and came to Caesarea, and entered the house of Philip the evangelist..." Caesarea is 30 miles south of Acco. It was the Roman governor's headquarters in Israel. And if you've been with us to Caesarea you know why Philip settled there. It's a gorgeous, seaside town. The water and sky are the bluest blue.

And Paul "entered the house of Philip... who was *one of the seven, and stayed with him.*" Paul's host, Philip, appears three times in the book of Acts.

In **Chapter 6** Philip is "*one of the seven*" - the first seven deacons in Jerusalem... In **Chapter 8** he leads a revival in Samaria, and an Ethiopian to Christ... And **here**, he and his family have settled in Caesarea...

Verse 9, "Now this man had four virgin daughters who prophesied." Philip's girls were *sexually pure and spiritually sensitive*... Most dads are always reminding their daughters

of God's will, but Philip's daughters were speaking God's will to their dad and the church.

The Spirit had blessed them with prophetic gifts.

What a guy this Philip was... *a servant in the church, an evangelist to the lost, and a dad to his daughters.*

And this is the mark of a great man.

Can he juggle the balls at church, in the world, and at home... *Is he faithful in all three arenas?* It's been said, "We come into the world head first, we leave feet first, and in between its all a matter of balance."

Philip lived a blessed and balanced life. Some guys do well in the world - but fail at home and neglect their church... Other men serve the church and safeguard their home, but have no witness in the world... What made Philip great was he excelled in all three arenas!

Verse 10, "And as we stayed many days, a certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea." We met Agabus in 11:28 when he predicted a famine.

These two verses in Chapter 21, verses 9-10, give us a glimpse into the life of the early church, and the important role of prophesy. The Holy Spirit was active.

Through ecstatic messages God spoke through men and women, prophets and prophetesses, to the church. God IM'ed us through prophesy... *And He still does.*

And "When (Agabus) 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.” It was common for OT prophets to use visual aides to deliver their message.

Remember, Jeremiah buried a sash... Ezekiel laid on his side and dug a hole in the wall of his house...

Here Agabus also goes theatrical. He grabs Paul's belt and turns it into handcuffs. There's an arrest in Paul's future if he goes to Jerusalem. Twice now, the Holy Spirit has warned Paul of danger awaiting him.

Verse 12, “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.”

For a *sold-out Paul* it was Jerusalem or bust!

Nothing was going to persuade him to steer clear of Jerusalem - not even the threat of death. If necessary, he was ready to lay down his life for Jesus' sake.

The highest award given by the US government for acts of bravery in battle is the Congressional Medal Of Honor. Over the course of our history 3,522 medals have been awarded, usually by the President.

It's interesting, more Medals of Honor are awarded for falling on hand grenades to save comrades, than any other act of valor. Since falling on a live grenade is usually fatal these medals are awarded posthumously.

Yet, here Paul falls on a grenade before the pin gets pulled. He's told his trip will end in incarceration, but he doesn't care. He's determined - *wherever it takes him - whatever it costs him*. You have to admire his valor.

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

Apparently, everyone heard the prophecy correctly. If Paul went to Jerusalem he would be in danger.

*But they applied it differently.* In light of the warning, Paul stiffened his resolve to go anyway. Whereas his pals wanted him to reconsider and change his plans.

They all understood the prophecy. It had come from God, but they differed in its application. And this highlights how subjective it can be to discern God's will. The same warning can be discerned by one person as a mere caution, and another as a stop sign.

Paul and his friends obviously disagreed, and even debated the matter, but in the end they stuck together.

Paul's pals respected their leader. They recognized his authority, and followed him though they disagreed.

Here's a lesson for us. *What happens when you disagree with someone over God's will in a situation?* Especially when that someone is a person in authority.

*What do you do when your pastor, or boss, or a parent makes a determination concerning God's will - an interpretation that effects you - and you object?*



I believe Paul's pals had the right approach. They disagreed with their leader, and were not afraid to let him know. They were quite verbal. Yet when he rejected their advice, they submitted to his authority, trusted God to guide him, and they still followed.

They even helped Paul pack. Luke writes, "And after those days we packed and went up to Jerusalem."

For some of us this is a tough pill to swallow. It's difficult for us to submit to someone else's authority, especially when we differ on a critical issue.

It reminds me of the hand dryer in the employee restroom. Above it a disgruntled worker had written, "For a message from the boss, press the button."

Obviously, there was bitterness in the camp...

And it would've been easy for bitterness to develop in Paul's pals. It's no problem following, until the leader takes a path you don't want to travel. A friend once told me, "It's not really submission until you disagree."

Realize, I'm not talking about a decision that's *unbiblical or immoral or unethical*. Those are easy choices - you follow the right *principle* not the *person*.

What I'm talking about are subjective, amoral issues.

What do you do when your pastor - or husband - or boss chooses a path you're not so sure about? He even has you carry some baggage. The consequences of his decision are bound to effect you. *What do you do?*

Here's what Paul's friends did...

**First**, they recognized that Paul's intentions were good. Yes, he was *hard-headed*, but nobody doubted he was *soft-hearted*. He wanted to go to Jerusalem because of his love for Jesus and his love for the Jews.

**Second**, they might not have agreed with Paul in this matter, but they trusted God to guide him. Rather than abandon ship because they disagreed with the skipper, they remembered Who was ultimately at the helm.

On the Road to Damascus God knocked Paul off his high horse. He did it once, He could do it again if necessary. They believed two truths: that Paul followed Jesus, and even more so, that Jesus would lead Paul.

And **third, they kept the comma**. Read verse 14 without the first comma, "*We ceased saying, 'The will of the Lord be done.'*" "*We give up! Why waste our breath arguing with Paul? If he wants to jump off a cliff, let him jump!*" Thankfully, that wasn't their attitude.

No, they kept the comma... It reads, "*we ceased, saying, 'The will of the Lord be done.'*" They ceased their debating, and gave Paul the benefit of the doubt.

Paul's pals were a good example... They noted his **good intentions**. They **trusted God to override** any misdirection. They gave Paul the **benefit of the doubt**.

Verse 16, "*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.*" Notice, this man was called an "*early disciple.*"

The year is probably 57 AD. Jesus' resurrection had been over 25 years earlier. There were men and women who had now been believers for a quarter of a century. They were recognized as "*early disciples.*"

"And when we had come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly." It's 65 miles southeast from coastal Caesarea to Jerusalem. Paul gets a warm welcome.

"On the following *day* Paul went in with us to James..." This was the half-brother of our Lord Jesus, at the time he was the leader of the Jerusalem Church.

"And all the elders were present. When (Paul) had greeted them, he told in detail those things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry.

And when they heard *it*, they glorified the Lord." But with a stipulation... "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..."

The church leaders in Jerusalem appreciate the freedom enjoyed by the Gentiles. They acknowledge that a right standing with God is obtained NOT by keeping the Law, but by believing in Jesus. Yet there were Jewish believers in the church who leaned toward legalism, and had problems with this grace emphasis.

This lean is what prompted the book of Hebrews.

It proved to Jewish believers that Jesus is superior to Judaism, and that faith in Jesus supersedes the law. The work of Jesus eclipsed the religion of Judaism.

The leaders go on in verse 21, “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.” *And this just wasn’t true!*

Paul never told Jews they couldn’t circumcise their sons. Nor did he advocate abandoning Jewish custom. If a Jew wanted to maintain his Jewishness; then fine!

Paul just pointed out that adherence to the Law and Jewish custom, had nothing to do with being right with God. You could be a devout Jew and dead in your sins.

Righteousness is not achieved by religious deeds. It’s a gift of God’s grace. Thus, a right standing with God is both obtained and maintained by grace through faith in Jesus. And it was because Paul championed grace, that he was branded an enemy of Judaism.

And James knows Paul is headed for a showdown with the Jewish hierarchy. He predicts it in verse 22, “What then? The assembly (or the Sanhedrin) must certainly meet, for they will hear that you have come.”

James knows what’s about to happen, but his response is questionable... “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.”

James suggests a way for Paul to show the Jews that he’s still supportive of their customs and traditions.

Four men were scheduled for a vow. Here's how it might've worked... *They would take off some time from work. Enter the Temple and shave their head as a pledge to God. Over the duration of the vow their hair and beard would grow again. At the vow's conclusion the men returned to the Temple, shave a second time; then offer their shaved hair as a sacrifice to God.*

James is saying that if Paul financially supports the four vow-takers, while they're out of work - and even joins them in the ritual - he could make a statement to the Jews that he wasn't opposed to their rituals.

In James' mind this was simply a tip of the hat to the Jews. He saw it as a show of respect that stopped short of compromising the Gospel. Paul agreed.

In 1 Corinthians 9:20 Paul wrote, "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..." Paul was all things to all men. He built bridges for the Gospel sake.

He *related culturally* without *compromising biblically*. This is what Paul believed he was doing here.

James wants to be clear he's not compromising the Gospel. He reaffirms freedom for the Gentiles in verse 25, "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." James refers to the decision reached in Acts 15

by the Jerusalem Council, that was already guiding the Gentile churches.

“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 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.”

Recall that radical Jews followed Paul throughout Galatia and Asia, and opposed his teaching in their synagogues. They didn't like it that Paul was offering salvation to Gentiles without requiring them to be Jews.

These men were called “**Judaizers.**” Their home base was Jerusalem. So when they saw Paul in the Temple they falsely accused him to create an uproar.

It's been said, “**Everywhere Paul went he either sparked a riot or a revival.**” In Jerusalem, it was a riot!

Verse 29 tells us what happened, (For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.) 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.”

It's interesting, the outer court of the Temple was actually accessible to Gentiles. It was appropriately called, "[The Court of the Gentiles](#)." But going deeper into the Temple was the second court, "[The Court of Israel](#)." And a sign hung above its door, "[No foreigner may enter within the barricade which surrounds the sanctuary and enclosure. Anyone who is caught so doing will have himself to blame for his ensuing death.](#)"

A Gentile beyond this door would surely be stoned.

Now Jews from Ephesus recognized Paul's friend, Trophimus, and knew he was a Gentile. Just because they saw him with Paul in the streets that day they concluded that Paul had taken him into the Temple. It was an assumption born out of prejudice, a hatred for Paul, and a desire to find a reason to condemn him.

Remember how proud the Jews were of the Temple. It was *their* Temple. It set them apart from the Gentiles.

It was a nationalistic and religious symbol. And when the Jews heard that Paul had violated that symbol these so-called worshippers turned into a violent mob.

They grabbed Paul. Dragged him out of the Temple. They planned to stone him in the valley... "[Now as they were seeking to kill him, news came to the commander of the garrison that all Jerusalem was in an uproar.](#)"

On the northwest end of the Temple Mount the Romans had built a fortress. It was a police precinct in the Temple to help keep order. As many as 1000 troops were stationed in the Fortress of Antonio. When news of the mop reached the

Romans, a garrison was dispatched. It arrived in the nick-of-time to save Paul.

Verse 32, “(The commander) immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down to them.

And when they (the Jews) saw the commander and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul.” The Roman soldiers were able to break up an illegal lynching!

“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!” The Temple Mount was out-of-control. Police were fighting off a frenzied mob.

“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 4000 assassins out into the wilderness?”

Historians say that three years earlier an Egyptian led 4000 Jews outside the Temple to the Mount of Olives, and commanded the walls of Jerusalem to fall.

Of course, when the walls stayed upright, the gullible Jews realized they'd been duped. The false messiah narrowly



escaped with his life. But here, the commander mistakes Paul for this Egyptian. He thinks the villain has returned to the scene of his crime.

“But Paul said, “I am a Jew from Tarsus, in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city (Tarsus was a significant city); and I implore you, permit me to speak to the people.”

This is incredible poise under fire. If this had been me, and I'd been roughed up by a mob - and my life threatened - my top priority would've been to get to safety by any means possible. I'd beg the Romans to lock me up, and save me from the bloodthirsty Jews.

*But not Paul!* His purpose was to preach the Gospel.

And this is his opportunity. Paul came to Jerusalem with a message and he won't be satisfied until its delivered. He pursues his purpose even in the frenzy of the moment. He's fixated on his goal. *Paul is blind to everything else except the love and truth of the Gospel.*

“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...” This is the moment Paul had been waiting on for twenty years!

Paul had once been a Temple officer - a member of the Sanhedrin. In the same Temple he had ordered the stoning of Stephen. Now he finally gets a opportunity to preach to his former peeps - the Temple Jews.

He had spoken in Greek to the Romans, but he addresses the Jews in Hebrew, his mother-tongue!

He begins, “Brethren and fathers, hear my defense before you now. And when they heard that he spoke to them in the Hebrew language, they kept all the more silent. Then he said: “I am indeed a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, taught according to the strictness of our fathers’ law, and was zealous toward God as you all are today.” This is Paul’s big opportunity. He finally gets to preach to the Temple Jews, and I’m sure he’s been planning this sermon for years... *What will he say?*

It’s interesting, rather than expound OT prophecies, or launch into Levitical typology, or overview God’s redemptive plan... he uses a simpler approach... ***his testimony!*** He tells them what happened to him.

This should encourage us! For everyone has a testimony. You can argue with me over theology, or history, or apologetics - but you can’t deny a testimony.

It’s said, ***"A man with an experience is never at the mercy of a man with an argument."*** Testimonies are powerful. No one can dispute the change Jesus works.

Paul was a Jew who studied in Jerusalem under Gamaliel, one of Judaism’s greatest rabbis. And he adhered to a strict interpretation of the Law of Moses.

Paul thought he was being zealous for God, so much so, that he says, ***"I persecuted this Way (his name for Christianity) to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women, as also the high priest bears me witness, and all the council of the elders, from whom I also received letters to the brethren, and went to Damascus to***

bring in chains even those who were there to Jerusalem to be punished.”

Paul had served as the High Priest’s henchman. It was his job to round up the believers for punishment.

But Paul got intercepted. “Now it happened, as I journeyed and came near Damascus at about noon, suddenly a great light from heaven shone around me. And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’ So I answered, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ And He said to me, ‘I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.’

“And those who were with me indeed saw the light and were afraid, but they did not hear the voice of Him who spoke to me.” Before we go further, let me clear up a potential misunderstanding... When Luke records Paul's conversion in Acts 9:7 he says Paul's companions heard a voice, but saw no one. Here, Paul seems to contradict Luke. *They didn't hear the voice.*

Here's the solution... In Acts 9 the Greek word translated “hear” means “to hear a noise.” In Chapter 21 it's to “hear articulated sounds or words.” Evidently, they heard a voice, but couldn't grasp what was said.

Perhaps the risen Lord Jesus spoke to Paul in a language Paul's companions didn't understand.

But Paul understood!... the Jesus he had persecuted was the risen Lord! Verse 10, “So I said, ‘What shall I do, Lord?’ “Lord” which means “Master, Boss.” If Jesus is Lord - and

Paul loves God - then he has no other choice, but to bow and obey. And that's what he does.

“And the Lord said to me, ‘Arise and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all things which are appointed for you to do.’ Notice, Paul’s conversion begins with a “who,” and it ends with a “do.”

At first he says, “*Who are you, Lord?*” Then once Paul is converted he asks, “*What shall I do, Lord?*”

And this is how all conversions transition. When you see Jesus for who He really is, you’ll want to obey. “*What shall I do?*” is our only appropriate response.

Verse 11, “And since I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of those who were with me, I came into Damascus.” In a physical sense Paul was blind as a bat. He had been temporarily blinded.

But spiritually the rabbi had never seen clearer!

“Then a certain Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good testimony with all the Jews who dwelt *there*, came to me; and he stood and said to me, ‘Brother Saul, receive your sight.’ And at that same hour I looked up at him.” The last sight Paul saw before the lights went out was the Head of the Church, Jesus.

Now when the lights come back on the first sight he sees is a faithful servant of the Church, Ananias.

“Then (Ananias) said, ‘The God of our fathers has chosen you that you should know His will, and see the Just One, and hear the voice of His mouth. For you will be His witness to all

men of what you have seen and heard. And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins (baptism is a symbolic washing), calling on the name of the Lord.'

Paul was baptized in Damascus, but immediately returned to Jerusalem to witness to his fellow Jews.

"Now it happened, when I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, that I was in a trance and saw Him saying to me, 'Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, for they will not receive your testimony concerning Me.'" *Paul assumed since he thought like a Jew, and understood Jewish customs, surely, the Jews would listen to him... But not so.*

God used Paul to reach the Gentiles. He was called "the apostle to the Gentiles." Yet Paul never gave up trying to reach the Jews. I'm not sure he ever fully embraced his role. He loved the Jews with all his heart.

Verse 19, "So I said, 'Lord, they know that in every synagogue I imprisoned and beat those who believe on You. And when the blood of Your martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by consenting to his death (Rabbi Saul had actually overseen the grizzly murder), and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.'

Paul had actually guarded the warm-up jackets of the executioners who pummeled Stephen with stones. He assumed the Jews would listen to one of their own.

But the Lord had a different plan. "Then He said to me, 'Depart, for I will send you far from here to the Gentiles.'" It's ironic, where Paul thought he would be most effective, he

didn't make a dent; yet everywhere Paul went to preach to the Gentiles revival broke out.

It just goes to prove that relevance and relate-ability are great assets, but they're worthless if you're not in God's will. *Was Paul right or wrong to enter the Temple and take a Jewish vow?...* Nobody knows for sure.

*“And they (the crowd in the Temple) listened to him until this word...”* What word? *“Gentiles.”* They couldn't stand it that God would shower grace on the Gentiles.

*“And then they raised their voices and said, “Away with such a fellow from the earth, for he is not fit to live!” Then, as they cried out and tore off their clothes and threw dust into the air...”* These were all Jewish reactions to blasphemy. The rabbis at the time taught that God made Gentiles as kindling for the fires of hell. They were starter logs for hellfire. They considered Paul a heretic for believing God could save Gentiles.

Then *“the commander ordered him to be brought into the barracks, and said that he should be examined under scourging, so that he might know why they shouted so against him.”* The Romans were planning to interview Paul with enhanced interrogation techniques. Not waterboarding, but the flagellum. They were going to brutally beat the information out of him.

*“And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said to the centurion who stood by, “Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman, and uncondemned?”*

Realize, Paul is no masochist. He wasn't afraid to take a beating for the sake of Christ, *but neither does he relish one*. If he can avoid physical harm, great!

So once again he pulls out his trump card - his Roman citizenship. It was against Roman law to scourge a citizen of Rome without due process.

“When the centurion heard *that* (he was a Roman citizen), he went and told the commander, saying, “Take care what you do, for this man is a Roman.”

Then the commander came and said to him, “Tell me, are you a Roman?” He said, “Yes.”

The commander answered, “With a large sum I obtained this citizenship.” And Paul said, “But I was born *a citizen*.” The Roman commander had gained his citizenship through a bribe, but Paul being born in Cilicia - a Roman province - was a citizen by birth.

And again, Paul was not afraid to use his citizenship when it helped his cause. He was a shrewd dude.

Remember, Jesus told us to be smart as serpents.

It may surprise you to realize that shrewdness and cleverness can be Spirit-led, Christian virtues.

“Then immediately those who were about to examine him withdrew from him; and the commander was also afraid after he found out that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him.” The Commander realized he had gone overboard in handcuffing Paul. He wasn't about to add to his liability by beating Paul illegally.

For the moment, the Roman Commander backs off, but as we'll see, Paul's fate is far from settled...