

A Practical Study of ACTS:

Take It To Them!

“Putting the GO Back in the Gospel”

Study Number Seventeen – Acts 21:1-40

The apostle Paul has been a Christian for about 24-25 years. The church has been in existence about 29 years as the scene of our study opens. Paul has been on three missionary journeys and he’s also written about 6 of the 13 or 14 books of the New Testament that he is going to write.

As the scene of this study opens, he is hurrying to get to the city of Jerusalem in time for the Feast of Pentecost.

We read these verses to set the stage for our text:

Acts 19:21

Now after these things were finished, Paul purposed in the spirit to go to Jerusalem after he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, saying, “After I have been there, I must also see Rome.”

Acts 20:16

For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus in order that he

might not have to spend time in Asia, for he was hurrying to be in Jerusalem, if possible, on the Day of Pentecost.

There's a big question in our study:

Is Paul in the will of God or is he out of the will of God in going to Jerusalem?

Can a person hurry and still be in the will of God?

The apostle is saying, "I must get to Jerusalem."

Now there are a lot of reasons why he needs to get there. He frankly feels like a Brinks armored truck because he is loaded with offerings that have been given for the poor saints in Jerusalem. He has a lot of money with him.

The other reason he wants to get to Jerusalem by Pentecost is there are three feasts a year when all the Jews are there and he has a captive audience if he can make it for this 29th anniversary of the founding of the church. And so he wants to get there for both of these reasons.

Is he right in hurrying to get there? There are great men on both sides of the fence.

There are people who say Paul is out of the will of God—definitely—in what he's getting ready to do. In other words, this is one of his last great acts of defiance. It shows us that Paul is human. He has made a mistake. He's leaving the will

of God.

The apostle Paul now has just said goodbye—a very emotional and tearful goodbye—to the elders of the Ephesian church. He passed by Ephesus and landed at Miletus. And while they were at Miletus, he had second thoughts and so he asked the elders from the church at Ephesus, where he had spent the longest part of his ministry, to come down to see him at Miletus. Miletus was about a 20 or 30 mile trip for these fellas to come down there.

And in Acts 20 he gives this very tearful goodbye that they'll never see his face again. He wants them to be sensitive to the fact that wolves are going to come in and things are going to be difficult. And he prays for them. Then they have a tearful goodbye. They've just said goodbye now as they're on the boat and they're ready to go and are heading for Jerusalem in a real big hurry, as the scene of the study opens.

Let's pick up at verse 1.

v. 1 And it came about when we set sail, having parted from them, having run a straight course, we came to Cos, and the next day to Rhodes and from there to Patara;

“And it came about when we set sail, having parted from them,”—that is the Ephesian elders at Miletus—“having run a straight course, we came to Cos, and the next day to Rhodes and from there to Patara;”

Now 50 miles south of Miletus is the little island of Cos. The only thing it's famous for is it is the birthplace of Hippocrates—the father of modern medicine.

Then go 50 or 60 more miles southwest and we come to the island of Rhodes. Rhodes is a beautiful island. The apostle Paul lands here at Rhodes.

And then he goes on from there to the city of Patara, which is another 50 or 60 miles southwest from there. Patara, as a city is the place where they're just going to stop long enough to change planes. They're really going to change boats.

They have to get a boat now that's going to head toward the coast of the land of Palestine. And the closest they can get is they can take a boat that's going to Phoenicia. Phoenicia is way north.

They're going to land in the city of Tyre. Tyre and Sidon and then Beirut Lebanon—they're all up there on that northern Mediterranean coast. And so they're kind of heading for this.

v. 2 and having found a ship crossing over to Phoenicia, having gone on board, we set sail.

They have a 400 mile sailing trip ahead of them. It's southeast of their present location at Patara, so it's 400 miles over the water to get where they're going. And it says:

“having gone on board, we set sail.”

“having found a ship crossing over to Phoenicia, having gone on board, we set sail.”

v. 3 And when we came in sight of Cyprus, and having left it on the left, we were sailing to Syria and landed at Tyre, for there the ship was unloading its cargo.

“And when we came in sight of Cyprus, and having left it on the left, we were sailing to Syria and landed at Tyre, for there the ship was unloading its cargo.”

Where is the island of Cyprus in the Mediterranean Sea? It's in the northeast corner of the Mediterranean Sea.

The reason he mentions the island of Cyprus is for two reasons:

1. it's the half-way point.

When we go on trips we say, “Are we ever going to get there?” And someone says, “We're half-way!” And everybody says, “We don't have as far to go as we've been.” And we're just excited we're half-way.

Cyprus was 200 miles from Patara and 200 miles from Tyre and so it was half-way.

They sailed with it to the “left”—so what does that mean? They sailed down on the seaside of that island.

Cyprus is also mentioned by the very fact that a lot of wonderful things happened there when Paul started his ministry. On his very first missionary journey, when he had Barnabas with him, they went to Cyprus. They stopped at Salamis, crossed the island southwest of Paphos and had a ministry there.

That is also Barnabas' home island so there are a lot of memories flooding into his mind. They're sailing right past Paphos and that's where Sergius Paulus had come to know the Lord. And Bar-Jesus was struck blind there as the apostle Paul had the ministry in that place. So he's flooded with a bunch of memories as the island of Cyprus comes up on the left side of the ship as they're sailing on toward the city of Tyre.

Then they get there and they land in Tyre and they're unloading all of the ship's cargo. Now here we go.

v. 4 And after a search, having found the disciples, we stayed there seven days; and they were telling Paul through the Spirit that he should not be setting foot in Jerusalem.

“And after a search, having found the disciples, we stayed there seven days;”

Isn't that incredible? This fella can land anywhere and if he doesn't have friends, he'll make some. But he's been through Tyre and Sidon. When they came down to the Jerusalem Council from Antioch, they always stopped off here part way down. And we saw that earlier in Acts 15.

And so he gets out his little black book and says, "Let's see, who's in Tyre?" And he starts collecting them altogether and he said they "found the disciples, [and] we stayed there"—a whole week—"seven days;"

And what did the disciples say when they got together for a little bit of fellowship and talk?

"and they were telling Paul through the Spirit that he should not be setting foot in Jerusalem."

We say, "Well there's absolutely no question. Nobody can say anything through the spirit about what you're not supposed to do. And if you violate that, you're leaving the will of God. I've already made my decision."

Is it possible for somebody to say through the spirit don't go to Jerusalem simply because they've formed their own convictions about what's going to happen?

In the Christian community we have developed a fire station mentality. If it's not safe, it's not the will of God. If it involves sacrifice and the possibility of death, then God certainly wouldn't want us in that set of circumstances.

It is in the realm of possibility that these people, having heard that Paul was going to pay a tremendous price in Jerusalem have told him, “Don’t go because we love you so much we don’t want you to get hurt. Bad things are going to happen there.”

Could it be that the Holy Spirit is saying to Paul through these saints in Tyre, “Don’t go to Jerusalem unless you’re prepared to make the sacrifice necessary for walking in the center of My will.”

We’ve also developed a mentality among believers today that to be in the middle of the will of God is to be in the middle of the realm of prosperity, health and everything else. And frankly, we don’t see any of that kind of thing in the Bible. We see a lot of poor people who are really stripped of everything and they’ve counted everything but loss, and they suffer shipwreck and everything else in the middle of the will of God for the glory of God. And they’re made into very Christlike people as a result of what happens.

We need to think before we formulate our final opinion. Come what may, Paul is going to march breast-forward and into the center of the will of God.

Isn’t it amazing in the body of Christ how many people we can find who know the will of God for our life? Huh? How many can we find? We can find them all over the place. They know the will of God for our life and we don’t even know it. And they have it all figured out.

And these folks say don't go.

v. 5 And when it came about that our days there were ended, having departed, we were going on our way while they all, with wives and children, were accompanying us until we were out of the city. And having kneeled upon our knees upon the beach, having prayed, we said farewell to one another.

“And when it came about that our days there were ended,”—in other words, they'd been there 7 days—“having departed, we were going on our way while they all, with wives and children, were accompanying us until we were out of the city. And having kneeled upon our knees upon the beach, having prayed, we said farewell to one another.”

We cannot imagine in our wildest dreams what these dear saints said in their prayers. As a result of already telling Paul through the spirit, “don't go,” and Paul hadn't listened.

Notice how easy it is to tell something to somebody in prayer because we can close our eyes and bounce it off the ceiling and it's so much easier?

“Oh God! We've done everything we can for them and they're going, please help them to lose their luggage!” or

“Please God create a hurricane!”

“Lord, we did everything You told us and what we could, but they’re dead set against us and they’re going! And God we love them so much.”

And it must have been a very tearful farewell there.

v. 6 Then we went on board the ship, and they returned home again.

“Then we went on board the ship, and they returned home again.”

v. 7 Now when we finished the voyage from Tyre, we arrived at Ptolemais; and having greeted the brethren, we remained one day with them.

“Now when we finished the voyage from Tyre, we arrived at Ptolemais;”

All they’re doing is sailing south down the Mediterranean Sea coast. From up here in Tyre they’re just sailing down to the point of Caesarea.

Caesarea is the last point on the Mediterranean Sea before they go over land 50-60 miles south and east into the city of Jerusalem. So they’re sailing down the coast. Now they have about 25 miles from Tyre to Ptolemais on this particular day.

“and having greeted the brethren, we remained one day with them.”

It's just a short layover here for one day.

v. 8 And on the next day having departed we came to Caesarea; and having entered the house of Philip the evangelist, he being one of the seven, we stayed with him.

“And on the next day having departed we came to Caesarea; and having entered the house of Philip the evangelist, he being one of the seven, we stayed with him.”

Now Caesarea is just 40 miles further south so that's the end of the sail. When they get to Caesarea they stay with a man by the name of Philip.

Now don't get the Philips mixed up. Remember there was Philip the disciple? This is not Philip the disciple. This is a Philip in the book of Acts that we meet, first of all, in Acts 6.

Remember in Acts 6 when the Meals on Wheels program was missing some stops with the Greek widows and they got really upset? And they selected seven men from among them, filled with the Spirit of God, to take care of this program? Philip was one of those.

Then Philip in Acts 8 is the one who goes north to Samaria to bring about the evangelism in the north and the spreading of the Gospel to the Samaritans.

The next time we see him was at the end of Acts 8 when he's down with the Ethiopian eunuch leading him to the Lord on the Gaza Strip.

Now after that he drops out of the picture in Acts 8. That's been, what? About 15-20 years ago. What he did was decide to settle on the sea coast and so he went north to Caesarea and evidently got married and tried to have a boy and has four girls.

And he is given to the gift of hospitality and so he invites Paul and his company—Dr. Luke is with him and the others—to stay with him while they're in Caesarea before they go on down to Jerusalem. So that's what it means “he being one of the seven.”

v. 9 Now this man was having four virgin daughters who were prophetesses.

“Now this man was having four virgin daughters who were prophetesses.”

He's had four girls since the last time we saw him. Now the stage is set. Ready for resistance #2?

Resistance #1 was in Tyre and it was through the spirit, don't go to Jerusalem.

Now here we're rolling out all the artillery. Ready for the big one? We're going to say after this, there's absolutely no

grounds to ever think that he's in the will of God in going to Jerusalem.

v. 10 And while we were staying there for some days, a certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea.

“And while we were staying there for some days, a certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea.”

Now remember they got their compass tipped upside down in the book of Acts. They go down north and up south. Remember that?

Well he came north, 50-60 miles from Judea—Jerusalem area—and he's coming up to Caesarea. He has a mission.

We met Agabus in Acts 11 when he predicted a famine during the time of Claudius and it happened—Acts 11:27-28. Now here comes the resistance.

v. 11 And having come to us, and having taken Paul's belt, having bound his own feet and hands, he said: “This is what the Holy Spirit is saying: ‘In this way the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who is owning this belt and will deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.’”

“And having come to us,”—this is Agabus—“and having taken Paul's belt,”—he walks over, takes his belt—“having bound his

own feet and hands,”

He gives an object lesson here.

“he said: ‘This is what the Holy Spirit is saying: “In this way the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who is owning this belt and will deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.”””

Now this is what’s going to happen. Talk about a dramatic object lesson. Here are four prophetesses, Philip and all of Paul’s team sitting here in a dramatic array. All of a sudden Agabus walks in, he binds his hands, binds his feet, and he says, “This is my message through the Holy Spirit. This is what is going to happen to the man who owns this belt when he goes to Jerusalem.”

Is it possible—first in the form of a question—for God to prepare us ahead of time for the trauma that we’re going to face in our life by our study of the Word of God, by our prayer and our walk with Him? Is that possible?

Notice there’s one thing missing in Agabus’ prophecy. And what is it? There’s not one word that says, “Don’t go to Jerusalem!” It’s only telling him what’s going to happen. He doesn’t say don’t go.

Luke always uses “we” when he’s involved. He wasn’t affected in Tyre when those saints talked up there. But notice the word “we” in verse 12 tells us now that Luke has joined the other side too, and Paul must be standing all alone with no one on

his side.

v. 12 And when we heard this, we as well as the local residents were begging him not to be going up to Jerusalem.

“And when we heard this, we as well as the local residents were begging him not to be going up to Jerusalem.”

Paul probably feels that. He is all alone in this and feels terrible. When we have the local residents, we have four virgin daughters that are prophetesses, we have Philip, Dr. Luke, and Agabus, the heavy prophet coming in with a prophecy of what’s going to happen. All we need is a voice booming from the sky saying, “Paul don’t go!”

And it would have been nice if he’d have had a vision that would have said, “Stay away from Jerusalem.” We can almost hear them all start singing:

I wandered far away from God,
And now I’m coming home.
(source unknown)

“Paul, you’re really missing it this time.”

Just wondering, were any angels arguing with Jesus about going since they knew it was going to cost Him His life when He came to earth?

Philippians 2 describes it so dramatically that He emptied Himself and took on the form of a servant and He was made in the likeness of men. (ref. Philippians 2:5-11)

Out of their love and adoration of the Son of God, would they have wanted to discourage Him from going because it was going to cost Him His life for the redemption of mankind?

The angels know nothing of this! They desire to look into it, Peter says. And to know the magnitude of God's loving act of grace in sending His Son.

Principle: Just because it's going to be tough doesn't mean that it's not God's will for our life.

That'll solve so many problems when we think God's trying to get even with us when it gets rough and difficult.

Realize that God hasn't promised us a rose garden. God hasn't promised that He's going to do everything just fine for us. God has one purpose and that's to make us like Jesus Christ. And He's going to do whatever is necessary in our life to accomplish that purpose. God is fully able to protect and to vindicate His own.

v. 13 Then Paul answered, "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."

“Then Paul answered, ‘What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.’”

There’s a wonderful verse in Galatians that helps us understand this a little better:

Galatians 1:10

For am I now seeking the favor of men or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ.

Now we have one of two choices:

1. We can say this is Paul’s last great act of defiance, or
2. we can say let’s go out in a blaze of glory.

We should prefer the latter. The apostle Paul is in the center of the will of God and that we will see that demonstrated in much of the passage that is left.

Paul records over and over again, “I don’t count my life dear to myself. I want Christ magnified in my body, whether by life or by death.” (Philippians 1:20)

We have to know when to stand in there and we have to know when to turn and walk away.

Paul already knows it's God's will for him to go to Jerusalem. That's settled! And all he's doing right now is being tested and he needs to be steadfast, unmoveable here. (ref. 1 Cor. 15:58)

God loves to test us with stress, for out of it God has an opportunity to prove Himself faithful to us in those stresses and circumstances. It also gives Paul an opportunity to demonstrate to the world of his determined desire to fulfill the will of God.

Jesus Christ set His face like a flint to do the will of God, to go to Jerusalem and to give His life. (ref. Luke 9:51)

We can imagine a lot of the disciples said don't go to Jerusalem too. Jesus was willing to do it—and so was Paul in this situation.

Now notice verse 14 because here comes the KEY to the argument.

v. 14 And since he would not be persuaded, we remained silent, having said, “The will of the Lord, let it be done.”

“And since he would not be persuaded, we remained silent, having said, “The will of the Paul, let it be done.””

Now is that what the text says?

““The will of the Lord, let it be done.””

They have watched this man long enough that they know that they can have confidence in this man walking in the will of God. They've seen him walk with God for a lot of years. And even though they don't agree with him, and even though they've shared with him everything they know, they finally come to a moment of silent resignation. And it's interesting, their statement is, "The will of the Lord, let it be done."

The apostle Paul is ready to go.

v. 15 And after these days, having packed our luggage, we were going up to Jerusalem.

"And after these days, having packed their luggage, we were going up to Jerusalem."

That's about 50-60 miles away.

v. 16 And some of the disciples from Caesarea also came with us, taking us to Mnason of Cyprus, a disciple of long standing with whom we were to lodge.

"And some of the disciples from Caesarea also came with us, taking us to Mnason of Cyprus, a disciple of long standing with whom we were to lodge."

Isn't that great? Here's a Christian businessman who gets his name in the Bible because he loans his Jerusalem condominium to the boys. Isn't that good? Just think what we

can do to loan our condominium or vacation home to ministers? We might get a little star in our crown for something like that.

Here he has a home on Cyprus but he also has himself a condominium in Jerusalem for feast times and special festivals. He loans it to these fellas to stay there, and he gets his name in the Bible for doing that.

v. 17 And when we came to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly.

“And when we came to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly.”

The initial response vindicates Paul, doesn't it? He gets a glad reception. He hasn't been here for a lot of years. It's probably been somewhere around 13-14 years since he's been back. So this is really coming home. It's really special to him.

One writer said:

“Christianity was never meant to withdraw man from life, but to equip him better for it. It does not offer us an easy peace but a triumphant warfare. It does not offer us a life in which troubles are escaped or evaded, but a life in which troubles are faced and conquered.”

(source unknown)

Paul is facing it head-on here.

v. 18 Now, on the next day, Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present.

“Now, on the next day, Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present.”

James is the head honcho of the church. James is the one who wrote the epistle of James. He is the half-brother of our Lord. He’s the first son born to Mary and Joseph after the virgin birth of Christ. He is not one of the Jameses—there were two of them among the twelve. But he is the James who was in the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 and he has a legalistic bent about him.

He had a problem with Gentile salvation. So Paul is going to face a little bit of that resistance here as he begins to share his ministry “among the Gentiles.”

And as he begins to do that, notice there’s not one person who has yet come up and said, “Paul, we know you’re in the will of God. We want to affirm you. We want to thank you for having the courage to stand and to do it.”

All the encouragers are silent. Paul is all alone in this as he stands here in Jerusalem. And everybody’s waiting to see something happen that’ll be negative so they can say, “See what happens, Paul, when you leave the will of God?” That’s just the way human nature is sometimes when a person could really use a warm body, a slap on the back and a “hey, keep

hanging in there and keep going for it.”

v. 19 And after he greeted them he was reporting one by one the things which God did among the Gentiles through his ministry.

“And after he greeted them he was reporting one by one the things which God did among the Gentiles through his ministry.”

He takes all three of the journeys. He probably just walks through them. He talks about the conflict with Barnabas. And he talks about he and Silas and all the cities, of all the shipwrecks and all the stonings. And everything they’d been through in all these cities—Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, Syria, Antioch, Pisidia, Philippi, Thessalonica, Athens, Corinth and most recently in Ephesus for the last three years. He shares all that.

Now look how they respond to that—verse 20.

v. 20 And when they heard it they were glorifying God; and they said to him: “You are seeing, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed, and they are all zealous for the Law.

“And when they heard it they were glorifying God; and they said to him: ‘You are seeing, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed, and

they are all zealous for the Law.”

Ouch! It’s an amazing thing when Christians get together to talk about statistics or successes, how quick the flesh can get in it.

Paul has his one moment in the light as he tells them about all the results and their response is, “Let us tell you about what’s been going on locally, buddy. And we also want”—it’s a barb. That last statement is really a barb. “We want you to notice that how many of these here ‘have believed, and they are all zealous for the Law.’”

This is just saying, “It didn’t make any difference that we had the Jerusalem Council and we settled this whole thing years ago—about Gentile salvation and being free from the Law when we come to the grace of God and receive Jesus Christ. And you’re treating me now as though that’s the main issue and that’s not right.”

v. 21 And they have been told about you that you are teaching all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to be circumcising their children, nor to be walking according to the customs.

“And they have been told about you that you are teaching all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to be circumcising their children, not to be walking according to the customs.”

What's wrong with that verse? **THREE BIG LIES**—all of them.

1. The apostle Paul is not teaching “the Gentiles to forsake [the Law of] Moses.”
2. He is not teaching them “not to be circumcising their children.” And he could have said, “Listen, I had young Timothy circumcised so he could have a greater ministry.”
3. Thirdly, he has not told them not “to walk according to the customs” of our fathers.

Paul doesn't get bitter, he doesn't get defensive and he doesn't get resentful over all of this misunderstanding that's going on here.

It would be great if James would read some of his own stuff. If he would read the third chapter of his epistle on the evils of the tongue, it might help a whole lot right now in this situation. Because the tongue is causing great damage here.

v. 22 What then is to be done? They will certainly hear that you have come.

“What then is to be done? They will certainly hear that you have come.”

It would have been awesome if they would have just dropped

on their knees and prayed together about what ought to be done. Because they've misunderstood Paul's ministry to the Gentiles instead of saying, "Look, we've got to do something because these people don't understand and frankly we're not going to stand up for you in front of all these people and lose our status with them."

If they really loved Paul and they really cared, they'd have prayed together and they'd have joined together in a compromise that would have brought a great blessing to the city of Jerusalem.

But they're just not going to get in that! We find that when a person's in controversy and in difficulty, sometimes all the saints shove him in the isolation ward and see if he's going to recover. And then maybe they'll get involved and help him. Nobody wants to put their lives on the line to help or encourage here. They leave him alone.

But notice what they say to him—verse 23.

v. 23 Therefore do this that we are telling you: There are with us four men who are having a vow on them.

"Therefore do this that we are telling you: There are with us four men who are having a vow on them."

v. 24 Having taken them, purify yourself along with them and pay their expenses in order that they may

shave their head; and all will know that there is nothing to the things which they have been told about you, but you also are ordering your behavior according to rule, keeping the Law.

“Having taken them, purify yourself along with them and pay their expenses in order that they may shave their head; and all will know that there is nothing to the things which they have been told about you, but you also are ordering your behavior according to rule, keeping the Law.”

“We’ve got an idea! You take these fellas, you pay their expenses for the haircut, you go into the vow with them and everybody will look at you and they’ll say there’s nothing to this fact about the Law.”

And then they add one other thing.

v. 25 But concerning the Gentiles who have believed, we wrote, having decided that they are to be keeping themselves from meat sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from fornication.”

“But concerning the Gentiles who have believed, we wrote, having decided that they are to be keeping themselves from meat sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from fornication.”

Those are the four things that were said at the Jerusalem

Council. And if Paul should have said, “Yes, I went down and I ran off copies of those and I delivered them to every Gentile church I preached to because Acts 16 tells us that.”

He delivered that message to every one of the churches, exactly what was written right there.

Now see the devastation of the tongue and of criticism and coldness and indifference?

v. 26 Then Paul, having taken the men the next day, having purified himself along with them went into the temple, declaring the fulfillment of the days of the purification, until the sacrifice was offered for each one of them.

“Then Paul, having taken the men the next day, having purified himself along with them went into the temple, declaring the fulfillment of the days of the purification, until the sacrifice was offered for each one of them.”

Now some people look at that and they say that is the tragedy of being out of the will of God. Paul is going back under the Law.

Can we present another side of that? Chew on this one for a little bit:

1 Corinthians 9:20

And to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win the Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law, though not being myself under the Law, that I might win those who are under the Law...

Paul loved people so much that he would build a bridge by identifying with them where they were in order to win them to Christ. He had this incredible love and sensitivity, that if it meant going through a vow which meant nothing to him, he would be willing to do that if he could touch people during this Feast of Pentecost while he is here in the city of Jerusalem.

So he's not going back under the Law. He's simply doing what's necessary to touch lives. But now watch while he does it—verse 27.

v. 27 And when the seven days were about to be completed, the Jews from Asia, having seen him in the temple, were stirring up all the multitude, and they laid their hands on him,

“And when the seven days were about to be completed, the Jews from Asia, having seen him in the temple, were stirring up all the multitude, and they laid their hands on him,”

What happened? See it's the Feast of Pentecost so all the Jews are supposed to come to town during one of these three feasts. And these are some Jews from either up in Ephesus or Thessalonica or Philippi—somewhere where he's had a ministry and they recognize him. And so immediately they stir

up the multitude and they lay their hands on them.

And when they did that, they cried out. Here come FIVE MORE LIES:

v. 28 crying out, “Men of Israel, be coming to our aid! This is the man who is teaching to all men everywhere against our people and the Law and this place; and besides he even brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place.”

“crying out, ‘Men of Israel, be coming to our aid! This is the man who is teaching to all men everywhere against our people and the Law and this place; and besides he even brought Greeks into the temple and he has defiled this holy place.’”

If we take those five things, they can’t prove even one of them. And the last one is the most damaging.

1. He’s teaching people “everywhere against our people,”—Israel.

No he’s not. He would desire to be accursed that Israel might come to know Jesus Christ, he tells us in Romans 10.

2. He’s teaching “all men everywhere against [our] Law.”

No, the function of the Law is to drive us to grace in Jesus Christ.

3. He's "teaching to all men everywhere against this place,"—the temple.

He does not. He has come to worship in this place.

4. "and besides he even brought Greeks into the temple," and

5. he "defiled this holy place."

No he didn't.

The apostle Paul had Trophimus, an Ephesian Greek, who had come to know Christ and he was showing him around the city.

And they are assuming that because he loved the temple and that he wanted to, he took Trophimus into the temple and violated the Law to show Trophimus the temple. And he didn't do that!

v. 29 For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with him, whom they were supposing that Paul brought into the temple.

"For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with him, whom they were supposing that Paul brought into the temple."

Isn't it amazing what the tongue can do to batter, to destroy

and to damage the reputation of someone else?

There's a great book called *Tongue in Check* by Joseph M. Stowell. This is what he says:

(Tongue in Check by Joseph M. Stowell)

In regions of South America there is a snake called the “Two-Step” snake. If it bites you, you take two steps and die. Its venom swiftly paralyzes your nervous system which stops your heart. Words can be like that. They have the potential to swiftly kill a relationship, paralyze love, poison minds, destroy faith, stain purity, and deface reputations.

An old-time couple, well up in years, were riding in their horse-drawn wagon one evening. They had experienced a rocky marriage. As the two horses, separated only by the tongue of the wagon, pulled them along in the moonlight, something of the early romance grew in the heart of the wife. Noticing how gracefully and cooperatively the horses drew their wagon, she snuggled up to her husband, took his arm, and remarked about how nicely the horses worked together. The husband, after a second of thought, drawled, “We probably could too if we only had one tongue between us.” (source unknown)

Now look what happens—verse 30.

v. 30 And all the city was aroused, and a running together of the people occurred; and having seized

Paul, they were dragging him out of the temple; and immediately the doors were shut.

“And all the city was aroused, and a running together of the people occurred; and having seized Paul, they were dragging him out of the temple; and immediately the doors were shut.”

Well we have a riot in the city.

v. 31 And while they were seeking to kill him, a report came up to the commander of the cohort that all Jerusalem was in confusion.

“And while they were seeking to kill him, a report came up to the commander of the cohort that all Jerusalem was in confusion.”

We’re going to meet Claudius Lysias. He’s the commander. We call him C.L. for short because we’re going to laugh at him in the next four or five studies. He is quite a person and it is so fun to put him in play now and meet him.

On the emergency hotline he gets word that there is an uprising at the temple. And so he sends a couple hundred of his men down there as quickly as he can.

v. 32 Who at once, having taken soldiers and centurions, ran down to them; and when they saw the commander and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul.

“Who at once, having taken soldiers and centurions, ran down to them; and when they saw the commander and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul.”

They'd already decided they were going to kill Paul and they were heading toward the rock pile and on their way the commander comes to them.

It's like when kids are fighting at school. They're going at it until someone says, “Here comes the principal!” or “Here comes the coach!” Everybody scattered quickly so nobody would get caught.

Well that's what happened. They said, “Here comes C.L.!” That just stopped the fight and they come running in and they save Paul's life.

v. 33 Then the commander when he came up took hold of him and ordered him to be bound with two chains; and he was asking who he might be and what it is he had done.

“Then the commander when he came up took hold of him and ordered him to be bound with two chains; and he was asking who he might be and what it is he had done.”

v. 34 But among the crowd some were shouting one thing and some another, and when he was not able

to come to know the truth on account of the uproar, he ordered him to be brought into the barracks.

“But among the crowd some were shouting one thing and some another, and when he was not able to come to know the truth on account of the uproar, he ordered him to be brought into the barracks.”

v. 35 And when he got to the stairs, it so happened that he was being carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the mob;

“And when he got to the stairs, it so happened that he was being carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the mob;”

It’s like carrying a victorious football coach off the field to protect him from the mob. They are so adamant with their violence, they want to kill him. And there are those who are thinking, “See Paul, if you’d have just listened to us you’d have been in the center of the will of God and you wouldn’t have had to suffer like this.”

Was Paul in the will of God when he got stoned at Lystra and drug out of the city for dead? Was Paul in the will of God when he got his back whipped and he was in a prison late at night singing hymns at midnight with his buddy Silas in Philippi? When he was stripped and beaten and stoned, was he in the will of God then?

That mentality comes out that it'll always be health, wealth and prosperity when we're in the middle of the will of God and we can always recognize when we aren't because we'll lose it all. That is not true.

1 Peter 2:21

For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in His steps.

1 Peter 4:12

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you.

v. 36 for the multitude of the people were following behind, crying out: “Be doing away with him.”

“for the multitude of the people were following behind, crying out: ‘Be doing away with him.’”

Does that remind us of the streets of Jerusalem 29 years earlier when they said, “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!”

Was Jesus in the center of the will of God? He tested the Father the night before:

Luke 22:42

“Father if it be possible, let this cup pass from me. Nevertheless, not my will but yours be done.”

Why shouldn't we have it rough? Why shouldn't we have it difficult? So God can build the qualities in our lives that reflect Christlikeness.

The multitude is crying out: “Be doing away with him.”

Ron Lee Davis in his book *Gold in the Making* says:

(Gold in the Making by Ron Lee Davis)

The Scriptures are totally clear on God's primary objective, relative to each of us as Christians, and His eternal purpose is not my happiness or yours. Certainly, He is interested in our health and our physical well-being. But God's central, overriding concern for each of us is that we be conformed into the image of Jesus Christ.

(source unknown)

v. 37 And as Paul was about to be brought into the barracks, he is saying to the commander, “Is it lawful for me to say something to you?” And he said: “Are you knowing Greek?”

“And as Paul was about to be brought into the barracks, he says to the commander, ‘Is it lawful for me to say something to you?’

And old C.L. turns around and says: “Are you knowing Greek?”

He stops the commander on the stairs while they’re heading in the barracks and he says, “I feel awful. Is it lawful?”

Get the picture in mind—he looks like the last scene in Rocky II. He’s battered, he’s bruised, he’s beaten, he’s bloody. He looks down at that belt around the middle and he’s thinking about what Agabus said and he’s just dripping with sweat and concern and anxiety about all this.

And what’s the first thing that should be uppermost in his mind? “Above all, save your life and get away from this crowd!”

Is that the way he acts? No.

“Give me my shot at them. I want to preach to them!”

“Is it lawful for me to say something to you?”

And C.L. turns around and says, “Hey, you know Greek?”

And then C.L. says something like it came right out of the Old Testament, and that’s the way rumors are.

v. 38 “Then you are not the Egyptian who some time ago stirred up a revolt and led the four thousand men of the Assassins out into the wilderness?”

“Then you are not the Egyptian who some time ago stirred up a revolt and led the four thousand men of the Assassins out into the wilderness?”

Doesn't that look like that came out of the book of 2 Samuel or 1 Kings or something? That's the wildest thing in the world!

“you are not that Egyptian” because you speak fluent Greek!

That's exactly what the press does to stories and happenings in our world today. That's the kind of story we get.

How often Satan, by suppositions and surmisings, slays the reputation of the servant of the Most High? He is “not an Egyptian.” Now look at what Paul says in verse 39.

v. 39 But Paul said: “I am indeed a man, a Jew of Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no unimportant city; and I am begging you, allow me to speak to the people.”

“But Paul said: ‘I am indeed a man, a Jew of Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no unimportant city; and I am begging you, allow me to speak to the people.’”

And C.L. can't believe he wants to stand there and talk to this crowd. But he gives him permission—verse 40.

v. 40 And when he gave him permission, Paul, having taken his stand on the stairs, motioned to the people with his hand; and when there was a great hush, he addressed them in the Hebrew dialect, saying,

“And when he gave him permission, Paul, having taken his stand on the stairs, motioned to the people with his hand; and when there was a great hush, he addressed them in the Hebrew dialect, saying,”

Notice he talks to C.L. in Greek and he turns to his beloved brethren and begins to speak to them in Hebrew. And it is a tremendous message and it's going to be so fun to study.

Here are the lessons we get from the study.

Lesson #1: Paul is tested twice in our passage with regard to the will of God.

First it's up at Tyre and then in Caesarea.

Lesson #2: We need to refrain from determining the will of God for someone else's life.

Lesson #3: Just because it's going to be tough doesn't mean that it's not His will.

Lesson #4: Pleasing God rather than men ought to be our

primary objective.

Lesson #5: You will never legislate genuine godliness by the law.

Lesson #6: How have you used your tongue in the last 24 hours?

How have we used our tongue in the last 24 hours? Stop and think how many words of encouragement and affirmation have we used and how much criticism and critical spirit and running down? It's a very revealing exercise.

Lesson #7: It is far better to ENCOURAGE and AFFIRM rather than CRITICIZE and CONDEMN.

Lesson #8: Paul makes no defense, he doesn't get angry, resentful or bitter in the face of these lies.

Lesson #9: Circumstantial evidence and false suppositions can be devastating.

They said he had Trophimus in the city and surely he took him to the temple, but he didn't.

Lesson #10: God is able to protect and vindicate His own.

C.L. got there in time. Paul didn't lose his life and he's getting his chance to preach to them as he stands on the stairs of the barracks. And we're going to see that in our next study.

Let's close with a poem by Helen Steiner Rice:

(The Family Album edited by Arthur and Nancy DeMoss)

Dear God, I keep praying
For the things I desire,
You tell me I'm selfish
And "playing with fire"—
It is hard to believe
I am selfish and vain.
My desires seem so real
And my needs seem so sane,
And yet You are wiser
And Your vision is wide
And You look down on me
And You see deep inside,
You know it's so easy
To change and distort,
And things that are evil
Seem so harmless a sport—
Oh, teach me, dear God,
To not rush ahead
But to pray for Your guidance
And to trust You instead,
For You know what I need
And that I'm only a slave
To the things that I want
And desire and crave—
Oh, God, in your mercy

Look down on me now
And see in my heart
That I love You somehow,
Although in my rashness,
Impatience and greed
I pray for the things
That I want and don't need—
And instead of a crown
Please send me a cross
And teach me to know
That all gain is but loss,
And show me the way
To joy without end.
With You as my Father,
Redeemer and Friend—
And send me the things
That are hardest to bear,
And keep me forever
Safe in Thy care.
(source unknown)

That's the apostle. "Send me things that are hard. Just keep me safe in Your care."

God's will is for him to go to Jerusalem and then ultimately to Rome. And before this is over, he's going to get to Rome.

Father, we thank You for Your Word and thank You for the privilege of study. May You take some of these lessons and strike them home to our hearts and bless and edify us by

them. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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A Practical Study of ACTS:

Take It To Them!

“Putting the GO Back in the Gospel”

STUDY NUMBER SEVENTEEN – ACTS 21:1-40 NOTES

v. 1 And it came about when we set sail, having parted from them, having run a straight course, we came to Cos, and the next day to Rhodes and from there to Patara;

v. 2 and having found a ship crossing over to Phoenicia, having gone on board, we set sail.

v. 3 And when we came in sight of Cyprus, and having left it on the left, we were sailing to Syria and landed at Tyre, for there the ship was unloading its cargo.

v. 4 And after a search, having found the disciples, we stayed there seven days; and they were telling Paul through the Spirit that he should not be setting foot in Jerusalem.

v. 5 And when it came about that our days there were ended, having departed, we were going on our way while they all, with wives and children, were accompanying us until we were out of the city. And having kneeled upon our knees upon the beach, having prayed, we said farewell to one another.

v. 6 Then we went on board the ship, and they returned home again.

v. 7 Now when we finished the voyage from Tyre, we arrived at Ptolemais; and having greeted the brethren, we remained one day with them.

v. 8 And on the next day having departed we came to Caesarea; and having entered the house of Philip the evangelist, he being one of the seven, we stayed with him.

v. 9 Now this man was having four virgin daughters who were prophetesses.

v. 10 And while we were staying there for some days, a certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea.

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v. 11 And having come to us, and having taken Paul's belt, having bound his own feet and hands, he said: "This is what the Holy Spirit is saying: 'In this way the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who is owning this belt and will deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'"

v. 12 And when we heard this, we as well as the local residents were begging him not to be going up to Jerusalem.

v. 13 Then Paul answered, "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."

v. 14 And since he would not be persuaded, we remained silent, having said, "The will of the Lord, let it be done."

v. 15 And after these days, having packed our luggage, we were going up to Jerusalem.

v. 16 And some of the disciples from Caesarea also came with us, taking us to Mnason of Cyprus, a disciple of long standing with whom we were to lodge.

v. 17 And when we came to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly.

v. 18 Now, on the next day, Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present.

v. 19 And after he greeted them he was reporting one by one the things which God did among the Gentiles through his ministry.

v. 20 And when they heard it they were glorifying God; and they said to him: "You are seeing, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed, and they are all zealous for the Law.

v. 21 And they have been told about you that you are teaching all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to be circumcising their children, nor to be walking according to the customs.

v. 22 What then is to be done? They will certainly hear that you have come.

v.23 Therefore do this that we are telling you: There are with us four men who are having a vow on them.

v. 24 Having taken them, purify yourself along with them and pay their expenses in order that they may shave their head; and all will know that there is nothing to the things which they have been told about you, but you also are ordering your behavior according to rule, keeping the Law.

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v. 25 But concerning the Gentiles who have believed, we wrote, having decided that they are to be keeping themselves from meat sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from fornication.”

v. 26 Then Paul, having taken the men the next day, having purified himself along with them went into the temple, declaring the fulfillment of the days of the purification, until the sacrifice was offered for each one of them.

v. 27 And when the seven days were about to be completed, the Jews from Asia, having seen him in the temple, were stirring up all the multitude, and they laid their hands on him,

v. 28 crying out, “Men of Israel, be coming to our aid! This is the man who is teaching to all men everywhere against our people and the Law and this place; and besides he even brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place.”

v. 29 For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with him, whom they were supposing that Paul brought into the temple.

v. 30 And all the city was aroused, and a running together of the people occurred; and having seized Paul, they were dragging him out of the temple; and immediately the doors were shut.

v. 31 And while they were seeking to kill him, a report came up to the commander of the cohort that all Jerusalem was in confusion.

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QUESTIONS:

1. Read Acts 21:1-40 and in your own words pull out the main thought of this passage.

2. What did the disciples in Tyre tell Paul about his intention to go to Jerusalem, according to verse 4?

3. What did the prophet Agabus say to Paul in verse 11?

4. How did Paul respond to this warning, according to verse 13?

5. What was the initial response of the brethren when they arrived in Jerusalem, according to verse 17?

6. What did the Jews do when they found Paul in the temple, according to verse 28?

7. Who comes to Paul's rescue, according to verses 31 & 32?

8. What is Paul's request of the commander in the last part of the chapter?

9. What verse in the study has meant the most to you?

10. What lesson have you learned from this study?

LESSONS FROM THE PASSAGE:

What are some of the lessons we can learn from this particular study?

LESSON #1: Paul is tested twice in our passage with regard to the will of God.

LESSON #2: We need to refrain from determining the will of God for someone else's life.

LESSON #3: Just because it is going to be tough does not mean it is not His will.

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