

Acts 21: 1-15

And over the past several weeks we learned that the Holy Spirit was letting Paul know that it was time to head back to Jerusalem and then to go to Rome.

Acts 19:21 NKJV When these things were accomplished, Paul **purposed in the Spirit**, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, "After I have been there, I must also see Rome."

Did Paul “purpose in his spirit or in the Spirit”? While there are some different opinions among those who think about these things, I think that it is more consistent to believe the Holy Spirit impressed upon his heart the necessity of going up to Jerusalem.

And, also, while some scholars think that it was beneath an Apostle to deliver an offering from the Gentiles to the congregation in Jerusalem, Paul did represent them and show that they were willing to be generous to the “mother” church.

Acts 20:22-24 NKJV And see, now I go **bound** in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, **(23) except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me. (24)** But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the **ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.**

Acts 20:25 NKJV "And indeed, now I know that you all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, will see my face no more.

So, now he’s on his way, having said his goodbyes...

Certainly, he does not expect to come to the churches in Asia again.

Now, in the first 15 verses of Chapter 21, the Spirit of God is speaking through disciples and prophets; The Spirit has told Paul what he needed to do. But, like those elders from Ephesus, there is much anxiety about the future. Some even fear for Paul’s life....

Let’s look at the Word to see how the beginning of the story unfolds and what lessons the Spirit might have for us!

(Acts 21:1) 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. (2) And finding a ship sailing over to Phoenicia, we went aboard and set sail. (3) When we had sighted Cyprus, we passed it on the left, sailed to Syria, and landed at **Tyre**; for there the ship was to unload her cargo.

(Acts 21:4) And finding **disciples**, we stayed there seven days. They told Paul through the Spirit **not to go up** to

Jerusalem.

People are warning Paul about what lies ahead in Jerusalem. Luke doesn't record the details of the prophecies, but they were sure that he was **not** to go....

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

I love that picture! Men, women, children, Jew and Gentile united in the Love of Messiah – lifting up their prayers, petitions, worship and praise to the Living God.

(Acts 21:6) When we had taken our leave of one another, we boarded the ship, and they returned home.

(Acts 21:7) And when we had finished *our* voyage from Tyre, we came to **Ptolemais**, greeted the brethren, and stayed with them one day.

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

Philip was one of the 7 **deacons** appointed back in Acts 6:5. He went to Samaria to preach the Word of God and the Gospel of Christ Jesus. He was also the one who witnessed to the Ethiopian dignitary and then “took the Holy Spirit Jetliner” to Azotus where he then went on to Caesarea, where we find him still.

(Acts 21:9) Now this man had four virgin daughters who prophesied.

Whether they actually prophesied about Paul is not said. But perhaps Dr. Luke thought that this too was a continuing fulfillment of Joel 2.

Joel 2:28 “And it shall come to pass afterward That I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your old men shall dream dreams, Your young men shall see visions.

And if it happened much later after that incredible Pentecost where the Holy Spirit was poured INTO the first church, there's no reason to believe that this will not happen even today!

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

Once again Paul is warned about going to Jerusalem. This time the Spirit doesn't say not to go but He does confirm to Paul what he understood: Arrested by the Jews, delivered to the Gentiles.

Remember in verse 4, it said, “And finding **disciples**, we stayed there seven days. They told Paul through the Spirit not to go up to Jerusalem”.

Luke refers to them as “disciples” and not “prophets”. Might there be cause to question the source?

Not necessarily...but then again, was the prophesy just a warning about what to expect when he came to Jerusalem....and is it possible that they “discerned in the own spirit” a command not to go? This is my thinking....as well as others....

Pastor Tim always said that he was cautious about people coming up to him and saying “Tim, the Holy Spirit told me to tell you...”. He would wait until the Holy Spirit told him Himself!

(Acts 21:12) Now when we heard these things, both we and those from that place **pleaded** with him not to go up to Jerusalem. (13) **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.*"** (14) So when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, "**The will of the Lord be done.**"

What else could be said. Paul face was set like flint towards Jerusalem and while their pleas were powerful, he would not be persuaded.

We recall that this same attitude was in Jesus when he went up to Jerusalem for the last time.

Luke 9:51 NKJV Now it came to pass, when the time had come for Him to be received up, that He **steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem**

(Acts 21:15) And after those days we packed and went **up to Jerusalem.**

Our hero is heading to Jerusalem! What really awaits him there? Honor? Opportunity? Prison? Beatings? Death? Stay tuned for our next episode of “The Apostle Paul Goes to Jerusalem”.

But what is really going on here?

I think the key concept here is “obedience no matter what”.

In our current culture (really, ever since the Garden), there’s a **problem with obedience**. It seems that regardless of who the authority is, **people just don’t want to do what someone else tells us to do**. This is particularly evident with **teenagers** as they try to exert their “right” to become an adult! While growing up might be a “right”, becoming an adult is, IMHO, a privilege that comes with responsibility!

But it’s not just kids; All of us have been asked to do or been told to do something we just do not want to do. One of my sons always seemed to choose a job where the boss was a “total jerk”. After 4 or so of these jobs, we suggested that he look at the one common element in all the cases: **him!** He learned....and like all of us, he’s still learning!

At the core of this issue, like nearly all other sin we commit is **PRIDE**. **We know better; We want the glory** when we do it our way. And it’s always someone else’s fault if we fail.

There’s also another aspect to the call to obedience: “I’ll obey if I get something out of it” – or – in ‘religious-speak’ “Lord, You owe me a blessing because I did what You wanted me to do”. And some even expect a

blessing if they do what they were asked to do with a resentful spirit. Oh, yes, I am implying that the blessing that God owes them is material in nature! We are living in a materialistic, consumer-driven society.

And what does Scripture say?

Job 41:11 NKJV Who has preceded Me, that I should pay *him*? Everything under heaven is Mine.

Paul, using the Septuagint, quotes Job this way:

Romans 11:35 NKJV "OR WHO HAS FIRST GIVEN TO HIM AND IT SHALL BE REPAID TO HIM?"

The issue here is not salvation; the issue here is not even 'right living' by "commandment keeping". Some see the Bible as **just** a rule book. "**God said it and I will do it**" or as one church sign said, "God's Word as revealed in the Bible, contains all the rules we need to conduct our lives". They know all the commandments of GOD, but do they know the GOD of the commandments?

So, if all you do is follow the rules, how does that enhance or deepen your relationship with Jesus?

The Book of Acts is trying to teach us about a relationship we can have with our God that goes beyond the letter of the LAW. It is trying to teach us to **listen** for His Voice that will have us **do** the things He desires because those things will bring Glory to God and will bring deep spiritual blessings into your lives. If you are only seeking Him for material blessings or for quick fixes for the mess you have gotten yourself in, you will only experience Him in that single context – the here and now.

Obedience to the letter of the Law brings Death and misery. Obedience to the Spirit brings life and blessings beyond this world that will last for eternity. Obedience will bring a deep abiding peace even in this life.

There are greater purposes in obedience. It is to teach us

1. To learn to listen to His Voice only
2. To trust the One to whom we are obeying
3. To humble ourselves before Him
4. To be strong and to grow in the Grace and Knowledge of our LORD Jesus Christ.
5. To go beyond today's circumstances and to gain a true eternal perspective – You are living your eternal life right now!

Is there a cost of obedience? Yes. As with all the apostles who were martyred, the cost was their very lives. (but didn't they just exchange a temporary life for an eternal life?)

And sometimes the fruit is not even realized in one's life time:

Remember Abraham and Sarah (and their offspring, Isaac and Jacob)?

Hebrews 11:13 NKJV These all died in faith, not having received the **promises**, but having seen them afar off were **assured of them**, **embraced** *them* and **confessed** that they were strangers and pilgrims

on the earth.

But **sometimes** obedience to the One in charge is difficult, painful and causes much suffering. Perhaps it involves some sacrifice on your part – maybe time, maybe money, maybe family and friends. (But, in reality, are these things really yours?!?)

Remember those 5 men who went deep into the jungles of Ecuador to reach an isolated tribe? All of their attempts to contact them failed until having met them, these men were all murdered because they were strangers to these people. It would have been a total waste of time and lives if those same tribesmen had not eventually come to the LORD – but they did! These missionaries traded their earthly lives for the eternal lives of many others. (end of the spear movie).

And perhaps Jesus is asking you to forsake just the thing you cling to and refuse to let go! Like the rich young man in Matthew 19 who when asked to give all He had to the poor, went away full of sorrow... He would not let go of his riches when offered salvation!

So, perhaps the cost is high. You can count the cost but make sure you factor in **the One to whom obedience is given**. Consider Jesus who provides more than enough to finish what was started! The Holy Spirit will NOT ask you do something that will not bring Glory to God!!! And, there is NOTHING He won't provide after you obediently allow Him to Guide you!

Do you need strength?

2 Corinthians 12:9-10 NKJV (9) And He said to me, "**My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.**" Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. **(10)** Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Do you lack wisdom?

James 1:14 NKJV But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed.

James 3:17 NKJV But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, **willing to yield**, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.

Do you lack material things:

John 14:13 NKJV And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, **that the Father may be glorified in the Son.**

Do you need someone to help?

Matthew 11:28-30 NKJV Come to Me, all *you* who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. (29) Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. (30) For My yoke *is* easy and My burden is light."

Trust the One who is "Faithful and True"; Obey then Trust and do not concern yourself with outcomes, successes and failures; Just "make your Boss look good".

So, why did Paul want to continue his journey that might lead to suffering and even death?

He met his Messiah and understood at a very deep level how much he loved Him who saved him out of the fire and into life everlasting!