

Acts 21:1-36

A GROWING MOVEMENT

Resistance to the Calling


Life Group Leaders should read through this material and choose a few questions to talk over in your group. Your group will not have time to cover all the material. The guide is for personal study and for choosing a few questions that you and your life group would like to discuss.

Read Aloud Acts 21:1-16

Before we break down this section of Scripture, describe what is happening in your own WORDS. (Being able to summarize Scripture is a great way to see if we are comprehending what we have just read.)

Acts 21:1-3

The mission set before the Apostle Paul was a difficult one. We can overlook the fact that not only was Paul living in perilous times as a missionary/Apostle, but he was also overcoming significant odds in his traveling throughout the known world. The mission of God was not convenient for Paul; in fact, challenging may be an understatement. He traveled by foot, by caravan, by land, and by sea. By any means necessary, Paul sought to finish his race with joy. (Acts 20:24)


 **Question: We live in a society that worships convenience. The truth is following Christ will be inconvenient. What inconveniences can distract you or discourage you from being involved in the mission of Christ? Common barriers may include work schedules, raising children, hobbies, fatigue, and financial struggles to name a few.**

Acts 21:4-6

The early Church was not bound by buildings or “congregations.” The Church was connected as the Body of Christ through His blood and mission. The term “*apospoa*” is used to describe the parting of ways of the elders and Paul. This term is used for tearing or ripping something apart. This shows the deep connection that Paul and his team had with the elders in Ephesus. The Body of Christ should build deeply rooted relationships, yet at the same time be proactive in multiplying. This is a beautiful and yet painful reality as old relationships are left and new ones are formed.

Everywhere Paul went, it seems that he either started a church or quickly found disciples who were willing to take him in. The Body of Christ was connected by more than just community and familiarity, but rather by the Spirit of God.

During Paul's stay with these disciples, they challenged him about his plans to go to Jerusalem. Paul said in Acts 20 that the Lord was leading him to Jerusalem. As we see Acts unfold, it seems that Paul was correct. His calling to Jerusalem and imprisonment seems to be God's will based upon a few things. The persecution in Jerusalem would lead Paul to fulfill what Jesus spoke to him: that he would be a witness to the Gentiles and stand before kings.

 In this passage, we see dedicated disciples “by the Spirit” challenge Paul that he should not go to Jerusalem. This could mean a few things. This could mean that the Holy Spirit was speaking through them, warning Paul that it was not yet time. However, more than likely the cause for this statement is that the Holy Spirit was warning Paul, or even preparing him for the persecution that awaited him. In either case, despite their disagreement the disciples supported Paul and prayed for him, helping send him out for his mission.

Acts 21:7-16

1 Once again, Paul is connected with the Body of Christ as he travels. He finds himself at the house of Philip, who was “one of the seven.” This is referring to Acts 6 when the Apostles chose 7 men who were of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom. These men served as the first deacons. Later Philip is known as an evangelist who led powerful revivals in Samaria as recorded in Acts chapter 8.

Prophesying Daughters- In the Old Testament, the term “prophetess” is given to multiple women. This includes Miriam in Exodus 15:20, Deborah in Judges 4:4, Huldah in 2 Kings 22:14, Noadiah in Nehemiah 6:14, and the prophetess in Isaiah 8:3.

Prophecy is the act of revealing the will of God. This can come through the proclamation of the Word of God, spiritual discernment in alignment with God’s Word, or in foretelling future events. Foretelling events is the type of prophecy that Agabus displays in Acts 20 and in Acts 11. It is unclear what exactly Philip’s daughters did, but we know that in one form or another they were gifted by the Spirit of God to help reveal the will of God through the Scriptures and/or impending events/spiritual discernment that was in alignment with God’s Word.

2 This is now the second time that Paul is warned by the Spirit of God through believers about the trials that awaited him in Jerusalem. Agabus’s prophecies and the disciples concerns would ring true as Paul would soon be imprisoned. However, it is important to note that Paul was not seeking a certain outcome. He was not seeking to avoid suffering. Rather Paul was set on obeying the Lord at all costs.

The Lord can warn us and prepare us for certain trials without calling us to leave our calling or mission in the Lord. It seems that these events were matters of equipping and preparing Paul for what was ahead. This allowed Paul to count the cost. As is found in Luke 9:23-24, being a disciple of Jesus requires total commitment.

Following the calling of the Lord is not without pain. The concern of the disciples, broke Paul’s heart, however he was not going to make his decisions based upon others emotions. Although the disciples did not understand, they were able to give their turmoil to the Lord and trust Him.

? **Question: Sometimes discerning God’s will for our lives can be difficult. It is important to recognize that we cannot hear the voice of God for other people’s calling (unless it directly contradicts the Word of God). Do you find it hard to surrender to God’s will? Especially when it involves people you love and care about?**

Read Aloud Acts 21:17-36

Describe what is happening in your own words.

Acts 21:17-19

Once again, the theme of the body of Christ being united and receiving Paul continues. In addition to this, it is interesting to note that Paul reported to the elders at Jerusalem.

Although Paul was an Apostle sent by Christ, he was still held accountable to the Body of Christ. No matter how powerful a leader is in the Lord, they are never without fault or error. It is essential that the body of Christ submits itself to the structure that God has given us in His Word. Paul is a prime example of a leader who led by examples. Paul started churches that were led by elders, and he expected the church to submit to those elders. Paul also subjected himself to the elders at Jerusalem for his own accountability.

Acts 21:20-26

1 Paul's testimony of ministry brought joy to the Church. Yet in the midst of the joy there was concern about the continued conflict between the Jewish and Gentile believers. Below there is information to bring clarity to this conflict

A Zealous for the law - During this time, there were many Jews who were passionate about keeping the Law. They no longer performed the atoning sacrifices of the law, but they still observed the Sabbath, feasts, dietary laws, and other religious rituals. They did not view this as a means to salvation, but rather as a way to serve and please Christ through obedience to the Scriptures.

It is important to note that nowhere in the New Testament do the Apostles condemn Jews for having a passion to continue to follow the Law. The Law was instituted by God, and specifically given to the Jews. The only thing the Apostles reprimanded Jewish believers for was requiring obedience to the Law as a means of salvation, or causing division over the Law with Gentile believers.

B Forsake Moses - The false teachers that plagued Paul's ministry constantly attacked his teaching and witness. They tried to twist the Jews' passion for the Law as a means to discredit Paul. They told the Jews that Paul was actively preaching against the Law, and that the Jews should turn from God's commands.

C Purify yourself with them - This most likely refers to the fact that Paul was considered unclean in the temple due to his dealings with Gentiles. This would be an act of keeping the law in line with the Jews without compromising on Gospel truth. *However, it is interesting to note that conflict still ensued. Most likely following the law was not the answer, but more than likely finding unity in the Gospel was a better solution.*

D Pay their expenses - These men were most likely partaking in a Nazarite vow. There were considerable ceremonial expenses, hair cut expenses in the temple, as well as sacrifice expenses. To pay one's expenses in regard to a vow was seen as an act of sacrifice and holiness.

2 The elders were seeking to find peace amongst the brethren. However, conforming to the law and false teachers may not have been the best way to find it. The Elders did clarify the guidelines that they had sent to the Gentiles. The group of elders still held to salvation alone in Christ, but were trying their best to honor the Jews' zeal to uphold the law of God.

? **Question: Maintaining unity is hard. Do you think the elders made the right decision? What do you believe is the best way to resolve conflict?**

Acts 21:27-36

1 Crowd stirrers - The Judiazers that plagued Paul's ministry were quick to incite the crowd against him. Notice that they use God and religion as a means to attack Paul.

We can easily weaponize our beliefs and God's Word to get what we want. These false teachers wanted power, and as a result they tried to use God's Word and the temple as a weapon against Paul and the Gospel.

2 Trophimus - Paul had a companion in the Gospel who was Greek. Paul's accusers quickly made an assumption that Paul had brought him into the temple. There is no grounds to this accusation, and in fact it is very unlikely. If any Gentile passed the court of the Gentiles, the Romans had given the Jews permission to execute their laws. The Jewish Law was that any Gentile who unlawfully entered the temple could and should be executed. Therefore, the false teachers were falsely accusing Paul of helping a Gentile commit a capital crime.

3 Kill him - The accusation stirred up the crowd so severely that they sought to kill Paul. It is amazing how quickly a false accusation with no evidence can lead to a group of people wanting to take a man's life in the name of God. It is unclear that there were any believers in this group against Paul, but rather the general population of Jews who were gathering at the Temple.

A Protection - God can use any means to accomplish His purpose. In this case, God used the Roman government and judicial force to keep the crowd from killing Paul.

It is interesting to note that in the midst of the accusations there was confusion and chaos. The people gathered in hatred of Paul were not altogether sure why they were doing what they were doing.

? **Question: While we may not see ourselves as those who would seek to kill Paul, do we exhibit some of the qualities that this crowd displayed? Do you find yourself quick to accuse other people? Do you find yourself quickly believing one side of a story? Do you find yourself wanting to take justice into your own hands? If not, how have you found to deal with accusations in a Biblical manner?**

Weekly Challenge

Staying true to our calling in the midst of opposition is challenging. As the church, we have a corporate calling to advance the Gospel by sharing the Gospel and making disciples. However, do you feel like you have clarity on your specific role in the Body of Christ and in our community for the sake of the Gospel? Take some time this week to reflect on the skills and passions God has given you. How can you use those for the glory of God? What might God be calling you to?

Memory Verse

Acts 14:21-23 ESV

²¹ When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, ²² strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. ²³ And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.