

Back to Jerusalem

Acts #24 | Acts 21:1-22:29

March 14, 2021

### Pre-Sermon Remarks | Two Year Period

- The final 8 chapters of Acts are like an ancient Grisham novel: death threats, courtroom drama, political intrigue.
- Luke meets the early disciples, his interviews for his two books
- Please read ahead! Let me set up these chapters with a long introduction

### The Setup

- Warned in advance | 21:1-14 (*what we will dig into today*)
- Warmly welcomed | 21:15-19 <sup>17</sup> When we reached Jerusalem, the brothers and sisters welcomed us warmly. <sup>18</sup> The following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present. <sup>19</sup> After greeting them, he reported in detail what God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry.
- Misguided plan | 21:20-25
  - Jewish followers of Jesus think you have rejected the Torah
  - Take these four men and perform vows in the temple, then they'll know!

### The Riot

- Accusations | 21:26-29
  - "He brought a Gentile into the temple!" Trophimus from Ephesus
- Utter chaos | 21:30-36
  - Dragging and beating Paul
  - Roman commander of the soldiers takes him into custody
  - Some people shouting one thing or another, takes Paul to the barracks
- Misunderstanding | 21:37-39
  - Commander: *how do you speak Greek? Aren't you that Egyptian revolutionary?*
  - Paul: um, no. Can I please speak to the people? **He wants to witness!**

### The Testimony | 21:40-22:21

- Paul's reputation | 21:40-22:5
  - Speaking in Aramaic (they become hushed)
  - Born in Tarsus of Cilicia but brought up in Jerusalem
  - Educated by Gamaliel according to the strictness of our ancestral law
  - Zealous persecution of The Way, jailing both men and women
- Encounter with Jesus | 22:6-9
- Damascus, Ananias, and baptism | 22:10-16
- Sent to the Gentiles | 22:17-21

### **The Legal Angle | 22:22-29**

<sup>22</sup> They listened to him up to this point. Then they raised their voices, shouting, “Wipe this man off the face of the earth! He should not be allowed to live!” <sup>23</sup> As they were yelling and flinging aside their garments and throwing dust into the air, <sup>24</sup> the commander ordered him to be brought into the barracks, directing that he be interrogated with the scourge to discover the reason they were shouting against him like this. <sup>25</sup> As they stretched him out for the lash, Paul said to the centurion standing by, “Is it legal for you to scourge a man who is a Roman citizen and is uncondemned?” <sup>26</sup> When the centurion heard this, he went and reported to the commander, saying, “What are you going to do? For this man is a Roman citizen.” <sup>27</sup> The commander came and said to him, “Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?” “Yes,” he said. <sup>28</sup> The commander replied, “I bought this citizenship for a large amount of money.” “But I was born a citizen,” Paul said. <sup>29</sup> So those who were about to examine him withdrew from him immediately. The commander too was alarmed when he realized Paul was a Roman citizen and he had bound him.

### **\*PRAYER\***

### **The Spirit Speaks**

<sup>1</sup> After we tore ourselves away from them, we set sail straight for Cos, the next day to Rhodes, and from there to Patara. <sup>2</sup> Finding a ship crossing over to Phoenicia, we boarded and set sail. <sup>3</sup> After we sighted Cyprus, passing to the south of it, we sailed on to Syria and arrived at Tyre, since the ship was to unload its cargo there. <sup>4</sup> We sought out the disciples and stayed there seven days. Through the Spirit they told Paul not to go to Jerusalem.

- Interesting! Because in 20:22 Paul said *And now I am on my way to Jerusalem, compelled by the Spirit...*
- Is one of them wrong???

<sup>5</sup> When our time had come to an end, we left to continue our journey, while all of them, with their wives and children, accompanied us out of the city. After kneeling down on the beach to pray, <sup>6</sup> we said farewell to one another and boarded the ship, and they returned home.

### **Young Lady Prophets**

<sup>7</sup> When we completed our voyage from Tyre, we reached Ptolemais, where we greeted the brothers and sisters and stayed with them for a day. <sup>8</sup> The next day we left and came to Caesarea, where we entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the Seven, and stayed with him. <sup>9</sup> This man had four virgin daughters who prophesied.

- We haven't seen Philip for a while! Apparently, he settled down with a lady he liked
- Four young (unmarried) daughters who prophesied
- Eusebius and Papias, early church historians, said that they were “sources of valuable information of what happened in the early years of Christianity.”

### **Agabus the Prophet**

<sup>10</sup> After we had been there for several days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea.

- Paul and Agabus met back in Acts 11, prophesied a great famine across the world

<sup>11</sup> He came to us, took Paul's belt, tied his own feet and hands, and said, "This is what the Holy Spirit says: 'In this way the Jews in Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him over to the Gentiles.'"

- Prophetic action like Jeremiah or Hosea, but always with a verbal message

<sup>12</sup> When we heard this, both we and the local people pleaded with him not to go up to Jerusalem. <sup>13</sup> Then Paul replied, "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." <sup>14</sup> Since he would not be persuaded, we said no more except, "The Lord's will be done."

### **Current Context: Edgar C. Whisenant publications**

- 1988 | 88 Reasons Why the Rapture Will Be in 1988
- 1989 | The Final Shout: Rapture Report 1989
- 1993 | 23 Reasons Why a Pre-Tribulation Rapture Looks Like it Will Occur on Rosh-Hashanah 1993
- 1994 | And Now the Earth's Destruction by Fire, Nuclear Bomb Fire

We can look at this and shake our head, but the sad reality is that this has shaped our reality

- Some are misguided, some are predatory, others are just plain *strange*
- When it comes to biblical prophecy, misunderstanding, confusion, and fear abound
- This affects our ability to come to a passage like Acts 21

### **Big idea: Prophecy is a good gift from God to build up his church**

#### **1. Prophecy is speaking the truth of God | Deuteronomy 18**

- Pop-culture understanding of prophecy is all predicting the future
  - Some of biblical prophecy is predictive, but the vast majority is not
- Listening to the voice of God as delivered through a person
- Deuteronomy 18 talks about divination practices of the ANE (vague)
  - But God communicates directly through prophets
- These prophets are where we get Scripture from | written down truth

#### **2. Prophecy is to build up, encourage, and comfort | 1 Corinthians 14:3**

- The person who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening, encouragement, and consolation.
- NOT to make the prophet look important or powerful
- Again, not necessarily to predict the future

#### **3. Prophecy is different before and after Jesus | Deuteronomy 18:20, 1 Thessalonians 5:20-21**

- But the prophet who presumes to speak a message in my name that I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods—that prophet must die.
- 20 Don't despise prophecies, 21 but test all things. Hold on to what is good.
- Joel 2 / Acts 2 - The Spirit is poured out on all flesh

#### 4. Prophecy can be admonition, prediction, or symbolic action | Acts 21:11

- Admonition - proclaiming, warning, calling out sin | **Majority**
- Prediction - Acts 21 and Agabus shows us that this
- Symbolic action - Again, Agabus does this meaningful act. Jeremiah's guerrilla theater
  - Lord's Supper and Baptism

#### 5. God's revelation is perfect, our grasp is imperfect | 1 Corinthians 14:29, 1 Thessalonians 5:20-21

- Why is there a seeming contradiction between Acts 20 and 21?
  - Paul was compelled by the Spirit to go, but the disciples through the Spirit told him not to go
- God's messages are right and true, but we are imperfect recipients of those messages
  - Analogy: Scripture is right and true, but our interpretations are not
- 29 Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should evaluate.
- 20 Don't despise prophecies, 21 but test all things. Hold on to what is good.

#### 6. Prophecy is and isn't for all | Joel 2:28-29, 1 Corinthians 12:29-30

- **Joel 2** <sup>28</sup> 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, and your young men shall see visions. <sup>29</sup> Even on the male and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit. (Peter's speech in Acts 2)
- **1 Corinthians 12** <sup>29</sup> Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? <sup>30</sup> Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?

#### 7. Prophecy's ultimate aim is to point us to Jesus

- Paul and Jesus compelled by the Spirit to go to Jerusalem, to face an angry mob, opposition from religious leaders and Roman political leaders, to be imprisoned and face death
- Big difference: Paul's actions were a prophetic symbol, Jesus' actions were the reality **GOSPEL**

#### Heart Check

1. Do you welcome the Spirit's guidance?
2. Do you eagerly desire the "greater gifts"?
  - a. 1 Corinthians 14:1 Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy.
3. Are you discerning or just plain skeptical?

#### Practical Guidance

1. Regularly ask the Spirit to speak to you | Impressions, words, pictures
2. If he speaks, tell it to someone | start with a close, trusted friend or spouse
3. Be bold, but be humble | always it must be tested by Scripture, by community
4. Be willing to listen to others | they might get it wrong, but we need this gift in our church
5. Be prophetic in your witness | 1 Cor 14:23-24 Paul says it's for that as well