



"REASONS TO REJOICE"

"Your Words were found and I ate them, and Your Word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart." Jeremiah 15:16

"RIDING THROUGH"

THE BOOK OF ACTS-LESSON 21

In Acts chapter 21, Paul sails south from Asia Minor towards the coast of Israel. Leaving from Miletus, the team took a coastal vessel which stopped at the islands of Cos and Rhodes, then proceeded to the mainland port of Patara (Acts 21:1). From there they transferred to a larger merchant ship and continued on to Phoenicia. This was about a three-day journey.

We sense an approaching storm as Paul gets closer and closer to Jerusalem. Paul felt "bound in the Spirit" (20:22) to go, but his friends didn't seem to agree. Has this ever happened to you?

First Day

1. Read Acts 21:1-39. (We'll take verse 40 with chapter 22.)
2. Do you remember who was on this team?
3. Where did they depart from? (Acts 20:17)
4. We've broken this chapter into four sections. Title each section. List the people you meet (old and new), write a summary sentence for each, and choose a key verse.

Section I: Acts 21:1-6

Section II: Acts 21:7-16

Section III: Acts 21:17-26

Section IV: Acts 21:27-39

5. Do you find any repeated words, phrases, or thoughts in this chapter?

6. How many warnings did Paul receive in this chapter? What were the reasons for the warnings?

Sea journey at this time in the ancient world depended on finding ships that were available. Often times the ships were delayed, due to loading and unloading. This is probably the reason that Paul was in such a hurry to leave for Jerusalem (20:16).

7. Reread Acts 21:1-6. Where did Paul's team land? (Acts 21:3)

8. Whom did they meet?

The city of Tyre had most likely been evangelized after Stephen's death (Acts 11:19). The disciples there were excited to welcome Paul and the team. It's so awesome to see how God knits together the hearts of believers.

9. What warning did these disciples have for Paul? (Acts 21:4)

The word "told" in verse 4 literally means **"to keep telling"**. They were strongly urging him to change his mind.

Was Paul disobeying the Holy Spirit by going to Jerusalem? Some commentators believe that the Spirit was using these disciples to keep him from going. Verse 4 and 11 say that the warnings were "through the Spirit". Why does Luke use this terminology?

It's hard to believe that Paul would directly disobey the Holy Spirit. His whole ministry was built on being sensitive to the Holy Spirit, and His leading and directing (16:6-10). Paul believed that the Holy Spirit was forewarning him about the dangers so that he could be spiritually prepared for what would happen (20:22-23). Paul felt "constraint" by the Spirit to go (19:21, 20:22). Paul never gave an indication that he thought he made a mistake (23:1, 24:16).

10. What were Paul's reasons for going to Jerusalem? (20:16, 24:11, 24:17, Romans 15:25-27)

11. How could knowing the dangers ahead "spiritually prepare" Paul for his journey?
12. Has God ever warned you about something that was ahead? What was it? What did you do?
13. Read Acts 9:15-16. What had the Lord said about Paul? How was this part of his commission?
14. Describe Paul's farewell in Tyre. (vs 5)

Paul and the team set sail again. (I wonder if they ever got seasick?) Can you feel the tension in the air? I wonder what Paul was feeling? Afraid? Nervous? Excited? I'm sure all of the above. We can **rejoice** that God can give us His peace while we're in the center of the storm! I read a quote today that described Paul's life: **"To see God in everything makes life the greatest adventure there is."** Does that describe your life?

Memory Verse of the Week: "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.'" Acts 21:13

Second Day

Review your memory verse. Are you ready to die?

1. Read Acts 21:7-16. What was Paul's next stop? How long did he stay?

It was about 27 miles from Tyre to Ptolemais. This city is presently known as Acre. In Judges 1:31, it is referred to as Accho. It was approximately 40 miles from Ptolemais to Caesarea. It is not known if they traveled by land or sea.

2. Whom did the team stay with in Caesarea? (vs 8)

3. Read Acts 6:1-6 and 8:5 to get reacquainted with Philip the evangelist (not the apostle). He was one of the seven "what"?
4. What does the text tell us about Philip's daughters?
5. How is this a testimony of how Philip raised his family?

This meeting of Paul and Philip is about 20 years after Philip had been snatched away to Azotus and proceeded to settle in Caesarea (Acts 8:40). It's exciting to see Philip and his family still serving the Lord after 20 years!

6. How long have you been saved? Are you still fervently serving the Lord? If not, what's holding you back?

Paul and Philip had probably met before. Philip was one of Stephen's friends and colleagues. Stephen's death and the persecution of the Christians (led by Saul), was what forced Philip out into Samaria (8:1-5).

7. Philip let Paul stay in his home. What does this tell us about Philip's character?
8. Have you shown the same grace and forgiveness to those in your past that have hurt you? What can we learn from the example of Philip? Is there someone that you need to show mercy to? What enabled Philip to be able to do this?
9. Who enters the scene in verse 10? Read Acts 11:28. What was his message last time we met him?
10. Describe the warning he gave Paul.

Along with Agabus, verse 12 tells us that all his friends were begging and pleading with him not to go. I'm sure that they all loved Paul and were concerned for his safety. Sometimes our well-meaning friends don't seem to give us the right counsel. How do we know when their counsel is "from the Lord"?

In his commentary on Acts, Charles Swindoll says that we can receive three sources of advice that can lead us astray:

A. Our own consciences can lead us astray. Read Exodus 3:11.
How did Moses' own conscience lead him astray?

B. Other people can lead us astray. What would have happened if Noah would have listened to the advice of the others?

C. Traditions and logic can lead us astray. Tradition told Jonah that the Jews didn't associate with pagans like the Ninevites. His logic told him that the Ninevites would never repent. What happened to Jonah when he followed traditions instead of God? (Jonah 1:17)

11. Should we ever get advice from others? Read Proverbs 11:14.

Here are a few tips by Swindoll when giving or receiving counsel:

A. If you're seeking advice, be discerning. Choose whom you go to carefully.
J. Grant Howard cautions:

"Be careful, go to the right sidelines! Get your counsel and advice from those on your team. And when you go to the sidelines, go to the coach, not to the water boy. As for time-outs, they are unlimited. Call one whenever you need one. One other point: Go while the game is still in progress. For example, a man who knows things are not going well in his marriage but is convinced he can handle it by himself may discover that when he finally goes to the sidelines for help, the game is over and it's too late. Time has run out."

B. If you give advice, be wise. Listen carefully. First put yourself in their shoes to understand how they see the problem. But then step away and look at the problem from God's viewpoint. To do this, you need to know your Bible. J. Grant Howard again tells us:

"When we give Word-oriented counsel, it will be instructive. When we give experience-centered counsel, it may be nothing more than opinion. Our personal attitudes, opinions, and biases always need to be related to the Word before we prescribe them as the right medicine for others."

C. Be careful. Consider all the consequences involved with the decision. The consequences don't determine your course of action, but help you to better make the decision.

We always need to weigh what others tell us, but in the end, follow the leading and directing of the Holy Spirit. Paul was a perfect example of this. He didn't let his friends talk him out of what God had called him to do.

12. Have your friends ever tried to talk you out of something you knew was the Lord? Can you share? How did you know it was the Lord?

13. Read Paul's response to his friends in verse 13. What did he mean they were "breaking his heart"?

14. Did his friends finally accept his decision? (vs 14)

Paul's journey from Caesarea to Jerusalem was 65 miles, about a three-day trip by foot. Verse 15 says that "we" packed up, so they didn't send Paul off alone.

15. Explain the dangers of getting counsel from friends and family who are non-believers. Where do you usually go to get advice?

16. Who should we always go to first for counsel? Read Psalm 147:5 and Isaiah 40:28

This ends our lesson for today. A lot of reading, but well worth it! My "**Reason to Rejoice**" is that our God is so wise, and we will never be led astray if we seek His wisdom for our life!

Third Day

What's your memory verse?

Imagine Paul's feelings as he entered Jerusalem. Perhaps he was excited to see his old friends, deliver the money to the church, and introduce the new Gentile Christians to the Jewish believers! On the other hand, I'm sure he couldn't shake the fear of knowing what dangers faced him. His heart must have been racing.

Have you ever felt like this? Excited about something, but scared to death at the same time? Let's see how Paul handled it ...

1. Read Acts 21:17-26. How was Paul received when he first entered Jerusalem?
2. How did the elders receive him? How did they respond to the news of what God had done with the Gentiles?
3. What rumors were circulating around Jerusalem about Paul? Who started them?

There were many Jewish believers who still practiced the law, especially in Jerusalem. The Jews were highly sensitive to their heritage and traditions. It must also have been difficult to live among all the hard core, Orthodox Jews, who simply tolerated them because they observed the Jewish laws and traditions. We need to remember that this was still a period of transition.

The rumors about Paul were not true. Paul never denied his Jewish heritage, nor demanded that the Jewish believers do it either. He never told the Jewish believers that it was wrong to practice their customs, as long as they did not trust in those customs to save them, or demand the Gentiles to respect their customs. These customs were not to be a test of fellowship (Romans 14:1-15:7). The Jews had the freedom to worship as they pleased, but the same freedom was allowed for the Gentiles. Paul also never forced the Gentiles to comply with the Jewish customs, a decision that was backed by the Jerusalem counsel (Acts 15:19-20). Paul had been extremely sensitive as to not offend a Jew by deliberately violating their customs.

4. What did the elders suggest Paul do as a possible solution? (vs 23-24)
5. Why did the elders think this was a good idea? How would it show respect for the Jewish believers?

We read about the Nazarite vow in Acts 18. When a person would pay the expense of the sacrifice for someone taking a vow, this was seen as an act of charity. This was commonly recognized as a demonstration of piety.

6. Did Paul do as the elders asked? Do you think it was hard for him? Read 1 Corinthians 9:19-20 and Romans 12:18 to get a glimpse of Paul's heart.

The elders knew that the Jews would find out that Paul was in Jerusalem. They wanted to tackle the problem head on, rather than hide Paul from them. Verse 25 simply reiterates the words of the Jerusalem Counsel in Acts 15:20, 29.

7. How did Paul respond to the rumors being passed around about him? Did he get angry? Did he defend himself? What did he do?

Rumors are terrible, hurtful things. We've all had rumors started about us, and I'm sure we've all started rumors about others at some time in our life. Rumors can ruin reputations, break up friendships, and destroy lives.

8. Have you ever experienced a break-up of a relationship that you later found out was a result of a rumor? (If it was your fault, did you go back and repent and ask forgiveness?)
9. Write down some verses that warn us about the danger our tongues can do. Can you find any that specifically relate to rumors?

10. Have you recently believed a story about someone, without hearing the other side? I challenge you to check the story out fully before passing any judgments.

That's it for today. Rumors are nasty things. We see the damage they did in Paul's life. Tomorrow we'll see the result of these rumors. Lord, help me not to believe everything I hear! Help us to not give the devil an opportunity to cause us to sin and cause disunity in the body of Christ!

Fourth Day

Review your memory verse. Are you willing to obey for Jesus?

The Jews couldn't wait until the seven days of purification were over. They decided to react -- attack!

1. Read Acts 21:27-39. Who stirred up the crowd?
2. What did they "suppose" Paul did, according to verse 29?

Paul was probably in the Court of Israel. Anyone could go into the outer courtyard of the temple. Beyond that, there was a sign that read: "No foreigner is allowed to enter this enclosure around the temple area. Whoever is caught will have himself to blame for the death which will follow."

This sign is known as the "Soreg" and separates the court of Gentiles from the Court of Jews. The signs were posted in Greek and Latin. Two of these signs have been discovered.

How often we "suppose" things by what we see.

3. Search your heart. Is there any "supposing" about anyone or anything going on? What are the dangers of supposing?
4. What did the crowd do to Paul? What was their intent? (vs 30-31)

5. Who stopped Paul's beating?

Rome didn't tolerate civil unrest in its colonies. A riot of this nature was a sign that the commander lacked control and would have to be punished. Notice how quickly the commander stopped the riot (vs 32-33).

It's interesting to notice that it was a *Gentile* who was responsible for stopping the beatings to Paul. Not the believers, but a *Gentile*.

6. What did the commander do when he heard about the riot? Whom did he bring with him?

The commander came with at least 200 men. There were 100 men in a century. The Roman troops in Jerusalem were stationed in the Antonia Fortress. This was in the NW corner of the temple and had 760 foot soldiers and 240 horsemen. The soldiers were responsible for breaking up riots in the city and keeping peace in the temple area.

7. Read Acts 23:26. What was the name of this commander?

8. What questions did the commander ask Paul in verse 33?

9. Why couldn't the commander figure out what was going on?

10. What was the cry of the people in verse 36? Read Luke 23:18 and John 19:15 to see the similarities between this and the trial of Jesus.

11. Why was the soldier startled when Paul spoke to him? Whom did he think Paul was?

12. When Paul was asked who he was, why did he answer like he did?

This ends today's lesson. I pray that we never "suppose" about people. It's a frightful thing to see how vicious and hateful people can be. I'm **rejoicing** that the persecution we face is nothing like what Paul faced. If Paul can trust God in this situation, how can we not trust the Lord with ours?

Fifth Day

Write your verse by memory. How did it speak to you this week?

For our lesson today, we are going to look at a few things we can learn from chapter 21.

1. Where was the "church" when Paul was in trouble?
2. Did Paul blame the church or the other believers for not helping him in his time of need? Did he blame them for his problems? Did he seem to wonder why he was getting persecuted and not them?

Oftentimes as Christians we blame others for not helping us. We forget that God is our deliverer, not man. In 2 Timothy 3:10-11 Paul says, speaking about his persecutions, that "the Lord delivered me out of them all." It wasn't the Romans, or the Christians -- it was God Himself.

3. Are you blaming someone else for what's happening to you? Do you depend more on the church, or your friends, to get you "out of something"?
4. What lesson did you learn from Paul this week that ministered to you?

Many people today are still saying "Away with Him." This didn't make Paul mad, it made him want to tell them about Jesus. Persecution from others should cause us to pray more fervently, rather than feel hurt or give up. Remember when we said, "Away with Him"? Praise the Lord God didn't give up on us!

5. Wherever Paul went, he either caused a revival or a riot. What reaction do you bring out in others? (Fun to think about, isn't it?)

I wanted to bring out one more thing about verse 5. **Jon Courson**, in his commentary on Acts, makes a point that I found very interesting. Jon is speaking about when the people in Tyre came out to say good-bye to Paul:

"The disciples took their families with them on this journey to be with Paul, to listen to Paul, and to pray for Paul. Sometimes I hear people say, 'We don't go to church on Wednesday night because its family night;' or 'We don't make it to church on Sunday evening because it's family time.' As if coming to church as a family, hearing the Word of God, driving home discussing what was said, and praying together doesn't qualify as family time. I strongly believe it's a fallacy in this age of emphasis upon the family to say that 'family time' and church attendance are mutually exclusive. As one who grew up in the church, I believe there's nothing you can do that will be more beneficial to your family than to come to church."

6. What do you think?

This ends our lesson for today. What was your "**Reason to Rejoice**" this week? I pray that as the waves get rough in your journey, you remember that Jesus Himself is in your boat. He is our peace -- who calms every storm. Read Psalm 107:25-31 and thank Him for His goodness!