

Acts Chapter 21

Acts 21:1 "And it came to pass, that after we were gotten from them, and had launched, we came with a straight course unto Coos, and the [day] following unto Rhodes, and from thence unto Patara:"

“Gotten from them”: Literally means “to tear away.” It reiterates the difficulty of Paul’s leaving the Ephesian elders (20:37-38).

“Straight course unto Coos”: The chief city of the island of Coos.

“Rhodes”: An island southeast of Coos; also, the name of its capital city. Its harbor was home to the great statue known as the Colossus of Rhodes, one of the 7 Wonders of the Ancient World.

“Patara”: A busy port city in the extreme southern portion of Asia Minor. Paul and the others had now rounded the southwestern corner of Asia Minor. Each of the ports they stopped in represented one day’s sailing; the ship did not sail at night.

We see here, Luke using “we” again. It appears that Luke was on this journey with Paul. They left Miletus and the elders from Asia. Coos was a small island in the Aegean Sea. Rhodes is an island in the Mediterranean Sea. Patara was a seaport on the coast of Lycia. These were not places where Paul stopped and ministered. They were on his way to Jerusalem.

Acts 21:2 "And finding a ship sailing over unto Phenicia, we went aboard, and set forth."

“Finding a ship ... unto Phenicia”: Realizing he would never reach Jerusalem in time for Pentecost if he continued to hug the coast, Paul decided to risk sailing directly across the Mediterranean Sea to Tyre (verse 3). The ship they embarked on would have been considerably larger than the small coastal vessels on which they had been sailing.

The ship that later took Paul on his ill-fated voyage to Rome held 276 people (27:37); this one was probably of comparable size.

This is an area on the Northeast side of the Mediterranean. It is near Lebanon and near Galilee.

Acts 21:3 "Now when we had discovered Cyprus, we left it on the left hand, and sailed into Syria, and landed at Tyre: for there the ship was to unlade her burden."

“Cyprus” (see note on 11:19).

“Tyre” (see note on 12:20; Joshua 19:29; Matt. 11:21). The voyage across the Mediterranean from Patara to Tyre normally took 5 days.

Paul was working his way toward Jerusalem. Now he is on the coast. He is just a short journey from Jerusalem. He had ministered in all of these areas here earlier and was well known.

Acts 21:4 "And finding disciples, we tarried there seven days: who said to Paul through the Spirit, that he should not go up to Jerusalem."

“Disciples”: The church in Tyre had been founded by some of those who fled Jerusalem after Stephen’s martyrdom (11:19), a persecution Paul himself had spearheaded.

“Said to Paul ... Not go up to Jerusalem”: This was not a command from the Spirit for Paul not to go to Jerusalem. Rather, the Spirit had revealed to the believers at Tyre that Paul would face suffering in Jerusalem.

Understandably, they tried (as his friends shortly would, verse 12), to dissuade him for going there. Paul’s mission to Jerusalem had been given him by the Lord Jesus (20:24); the Spirit would never command him to abandon it.

Whether “Paul” was right to “go up to Jerusalem” at this time has long been debated. This verse probably more than any other could be used to demonstrate that Paul was wrong in going. Yet, the total evidence seems to favor his decision.

First, though the word “Spirit” is capitalized here, the same word is not (in 20:22), but could be. Thus, Paul may be saying “I go bound in the Spirit unto Jerusalem.”

Second, Paul was often very sensitive to the leading of the Spirit (16:6-19).

Third, Paul’s reasons for going were proper (20:24; 24:11, 17).

Fourth, Paul never felt that he had made a mistake (21:14; 23:1; 24:16).

Fifth, Paul considered his life as well as his words ordained of God, which he states while in Roman bondage resulting from this trip to Jerusalem (Phil. 3:17; 4:9).

Sixth, these warnings were probably preparatory rather than prohibitive since the trip and the persecution conform to Paul’s commission (9:15-16).

These disciples, like Paul, had been told by the Holy Spirit that Paul will be imprisoned, if he goes to Jerusalem. Even though they are strong believers and they know it is the will of God for this to happen, they still (in the flesh), do not want this to happen. They visited together seven days.

Acts 21:5 "And when we had accomplished those days, we departed and went our way; and they all brought us on our way, with wives and children, till [we were] out of the city: and we kneeled down on the shore, and prayed."

Here again, this is a sad parting. They went as far as they could with Paul. He was loved by all: men, women, and children. Here again, kneeling on the shore before he leaves, Paul is probably praying for his people. He must leave and he places them in God's hands.

Acts 21:6 "And when we had taken our leave one of another, we took ship; and they returned home again."

This just explains that these disciples, that had come out to see Paul off, went back to Tyre. Notice again, that Luke is still with Paul here, because he again says, we took ship.

Acts 21:7 "And when we had finished [our] course from Tyre, we came to Ptolemais, and saluted the brethren, and abode with them one day."

“Ptolemais”: Old Testament Acco (Judges 1:31), located 25 miles south of Tyre.

We see that their sailing trip was over and they were near their destination.

Acts 21:8 "And the next [day] we that were of Paul's company departed, and came unto Caesarea: and we entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, which was [one] of the seven; and abode with him."

“Caesarea” (see note on 8:40).

“Philip the evangelist” (see note on 6:5). No one else in Scripture is called an evangelist, though Paul commanded Timothy to do the work of an evangelist (2 Tim. 4:5). Once enemies, Philip and Paul were now fellow preachers of God’s gospel of grace.

“The seven” (see note on 6:3).

They seemed to be now travelling by land. Ptolemais is not far from Caesarea (probably two days on foot). Philip had been ministering in this place, and now it appears he has settled down to live here.

He had previously been a deacon in Jerusalem, but because of all the problems there, Philip had begun to go out as an evangelist. How large the party with Paul that abode with Philip is, we do not know. This perhaps, is saying there were just seven evangelists at this time.

Acts 21:9 "And the same man had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy."

“Daughters, virgins”: That they were virgins may indicate that they had been called by God for special ministry (1 Cor. 7:34). The early church regarded these women as important sources of information in the early years of the church.

“Prophecy”: Luke does not reveal the nature of their prophecy. They may have had an ongoing prophetic ministry, or prophesied only once. Since women are not to be teachers in the church (1 Cor. 13:34-36; 1 Tim. 2:11-12), they probably ministered to individuals. For an explanation of New Testament prophets (see notes on 11:27; 1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11).

Philip’s “four daughters” are not described as women possessing the office of a prophet (verse 10), or possessing any leadership role. In the early church the Spirit gave the gift of prophecy to

anyone He might choose: leader or layman, man or woman (2:17; 1 Cor. 11:5). The prophet was merely the mouthpiece for some truth God desired to make known.

We see here, that Philip had four daughters who were preachers. Notice, that Paul does not say anything to them or to Philip about their preaching. Paul's statement (in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35), and in Timothy, has been badly misunderstood.

Paul being the bold man in the Lord that he was, would have said something to Philip and his daughters here, if he were really opposed to their preaching. Paul himself, wrote (in Galatians 3:28), that there was neither male nor female with God.

We also read (in Philippians 4:3), that Paul had women ministers traveling with him.

Joel 2:28-29 "And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out of my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions:" "And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit."

We can read the very same thing (in Acts 2:17-18). We see here two witnesses to the fact that women will prophesy, one by Joel and one by Luke. The statements (in 1 Corinthians and in Timothy), were both spoken by Paul and therefore were not to be taken as established doctrine, but preference.

Paul, himself wrote (in 2 Corinthians 13:1), "In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established."

Paul is only one person. I really do not believe that Paul intended to imply that this was for general practice, because all through his writings, he speaks of the women who ministered with him. Remember, in one instance, God sent Paul to Philippi to minister just to the women. It was such a correct thing to do that God gave Paul a night vision instructing him to go there.

Paul and Lydia started a church in her home as a result of this visit. There was no other place to have this church meet. We Christians have just misunderstood what Paul intended. Again I say, if Paul had been opposed, he would have spoken out against Philip's four daughters who prophesied (preached).

God has called women of our day to help bring souls into the kingdom. We can no longer hide behind the Scripture (in 1 Corinthians and the one Scripture in Timothy). God will not accept that excuse any more.

Acts 21:10 "And as we tarried [there] many days, there came down from Judea a certain prophet, named Agabus."

“Prophet, named Agabus” (see note on 11:28).

“Down from Judea”: Although it was located in Judea, the Jews considered Caesarea, seat of the Roman government, to be a foreign city (see note on 18:22).

Acts 21:11 "And when he was come unto us, he took Paul's girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver [him] into the hands of the Gentiles."

“Girdle”: Old Testament prophets sometimes acted out their prophecies (1 Kings 11:29-39; Isa. 20:2-6; Jer. 13:1-11; Ezek. 4, 5). Agabus’ action foreshadowed Paul’s arrest and imprisonment by the Romans.

“Hands of the Gentiles”: Though falsely accused by the Jews (verses 17-28), Paul was arrested and imprisoned by the Romans (verses 31-33).

This is just a confirmation of what the Holy Ghost had told Paul every time he stopped at one of the churches. Even though Paul knows he will be imprisoned when he gets to Jerusalem, he is headed for Jerusalem in spite of that.

Agabus was probably one of the early seventy followers of Jesus. Agabus, being a prophet, was told by the Holy Ghost what would happen ahead of time. We see the great dedication of Paul in this. He is going to Jerusalem, even if it means death for him.

Acts 21:12 "And when we heard these things, both we, and they of that place, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem."

“Both we, and they of that place”: Both Paul’s friends (Luke and the others traveling with him), and the Caesarean Christians.

The natural thing for all of those to do who loved Paul was to beg him not to go, and that is just what they did.

Acts 21:13 "Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."

“For the name”: Baptism (see note on 2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5), healing (3:6, 16; 4:10), signs and wonders (4:30), and preaching (4:18; 5:40; 8:12), were all done in the name of the Lord Jesus. His name represents all that He is.

Paul wants to do the will of the Lord, even to the losing of his life, but it is crushing Paul's heart to see them grieve over him. He asks them to accept his fate as being the will of God. The purposes of God are not always understood by man.

Acts 21:14 "And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done."

“Will of the Lord be done”: A confident expression of trust that God’s will is best (1 Sam. 3:18; Matt. 6:10; Luke 22:42; James 4:13-15).

We see here, that Luke and the others see the futility of trying to talk Paul out of going to Jerusalem and they finally give in and say, thy will be done, O Lord.

Acts 21:15 "And after those days we took up our carriages, and went up to Jerusalem."

“Up to Jerusalem”: Jerusalem was southeast of Caesarea, located on a plateau so travelers were always said to go up to it (11:2; 15:2; 18:22; Mark 10:32; Luke 2:22; John 2:13; Gal. 1:17-18).

“We took up our carriages” can more clearly be translated “We made preparations” (Greek verb episkeuazomai).

Acts 21:16 "There went with us also [certain] of the disciples of Caesarea, and brought with them one Mnason of Cyprus, an old disciple, with whom we should lodge."

“Mnason”: His Greek name may mean he was a Hellenistic Jew. If so, Paul and his Gentile companions may have chosen to stay with him because of his acquaintance with Greek culture. That would have made him more comfortable in housing a party of Gentiles than the Palestinian Jews would have been.

“An old disciple”: Possibly one of those saved on the Day of Pentecost. If so, Mnason could have been another source of historical information for Luke.

It seems as though a large group went with Paul to Jerusalem. At least they would be encouragement in his troubles. The certain disciple from Caesarea probably included Philip. This Mnason must have been a disciple before Stephen was stoned, or perhaps, he was of the first seventy. This is the only mention of him, which does not leave much information.

He was perhaps, well to do, to have a place large enough to furnish housing for all of them. The oldness could have been his age also, and not how long he had been a disciple.

Acts Chapter 21 Questions

1. In verse 1 we read of several towns along their route, what were they?
2. What town did they leave?
3. Where is Coos?
4. Where is Rhodes?
5. In verse 2, they found a ship sailing where?

6. What place was the ship to unload?
7. How long did Paul stay here?
8. What message did the disciples in Tyre give Paul?
9. Who went to the edge of the city to see Paul off?
10. What did they do on the seashore just before he sailed?
11. What is another name for Ptolemais?
12. Where was Philip's home?
13. What was special about Philip's four daughters?
14. What was the prophet's name that came down to see Paul?
15. What did he do and say to Paul?
16. When the believers heard what Agabus said, what did they try to do?
17. What did Paul say to the believers?
18. What did Paul say he was ready to do for the Lord?
19. When the believers saw that Paul would not be persuaded, what did they say?
20. How did they go to Jerusalem?
21. Who went with them?
22. Who would they stay with?
23. What kind of disciple was he called?
24. What do you think caused them to call Mnason an old disciple?