

PAUL’S TRAVELS FROM EPHESUS TO JERUSALEM (Acts 19:21-21:16)

Acts 19: 21 to the end of Acts tells how Paul traveled to Rome. This is a big theme in Acts.

After all this had happened, Paul decided to go to Jerusalem, passing through Macedonia and Achaia. “After I have been there,” he said, “I must visit Rome also.” He sent two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, to Macedonia, while he stayed in the province of Asia a little longer (19:21-22)

A riot occurred in Ephesus as Paul was about to travel north to Troas (Acts 19: 23-41). The local government defended Paul. It said he was innocent. The city clerk said Paul had “*neither robbed temples nor blasphemed our goddess*” (Acts 19: 37). Also notice that some of the “*officials of the province*” were “*friends of Paul*” (Acts 19:31).

One of Luke’s purposes is to defend Christianity. Throughout Acts, Paul always finds favor in the eyes of the government. Christianity is the source of solutions, not problems.

The city clerk said Paul was right and the crowd was wrong. The clerk warned them not to riot. And he told them to follow the proper legal paths. Then he dismissed them all.

Acts 20:1-6 tells of Paul’s travels and the men who joined him. Now let’s look at Acts 19:21-21:16 and see four different attitudes.

A. THE ATTITUDE OF DEMETRIUS: Oppose the _____ to keep your customers.

Demetrius was the head of a group of craftsmen. They made these idols with their hands. Paul preached the truth. He said that “*man-made gods are no gods at all*” (Acts 19:26). Did Demetrius believe man could create

God? According to Rev. 9:20, many worship *“idols that cannot see or hear or walk.”*

Magic books were burning. Idol sales were falling. Demetrius was upset. Once again the preaching of the gospel had affected the economy. This was also true in Samaria and in Philippi (Acts 8:9-25 and 16:16-40). Demetrius represents those who see people as customers, not neighbors.

B. THE ATTITUDE OF FALSE SHEPHERDS: _____ the truth to seduce followers.

False shepherds turn the gospel into a business. They use the truth as a business tool. It is not an accident that these false shepherds distort truth.

I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them (Acts 20:29-30).

False shepherds twist truth to draw disciples. They want the attention and the money of believers. They do not love or care about the sheep. False shepherds care only about themselves, where the sheep should lay down their lives for the shepherd. They see life as a mirror, not a window.

The false apostles at Corinth served themselves. They used and abused believers (2 Cor. 11:20). These proud and greedy leaders sacrificed the sheep for their own lusts. Paul wrote about people like these in 2 Timothy 2:1-9. In Acts 20:29 he called these false shepherds *“savage wolves.”* Jesus referred to them as wolves in sheep’s clothing (Matt. 7:15). They attract believers by twisting Scripture into new teachings. They seduce sheep away from the flock, and then destroy them.

Luke records Paul’s parting words about these false teachers: *“So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I have never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears” (Acts 20:31).*

C. THE ATTITUDE OF PAUL: Preach the truth to _____ people.

“You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house” (Acts 20:20).

Paul lived to help others. Note the characteristics of his ministry in Acts 20:17-35:

- **He was humble and compassionate.**

“From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church. When they arrived, he said to them: ‘You know how I loved the whole time I was with you, from the first day I came into the province of Asia. I served the Lord with great humility and with tears” (Acts 20:17-19).

- **He persevered through hard times.**

“I was severely tested by the plots of the Jews” (Acts 20:19).

- **He did not hide the truth from anyone. He showed neither fear nor favoritism.**

“I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus” (Acts 20:21).

“I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God” (Acts 20:26-27).

- **He valued his life for only one reason. He lived for only one purpose.**

“However, I consider my life worthy nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the gospel of God’s grace” (Acts 20:24).

“I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 21:13).

- **He loved people, not things** (See Romans 9:1-3).
“I have not coveted anyone’s silver or gold or clothing” (Acts 20:33).
- **He worked hard to supply his own needs and help others.** *“You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’” (Acts 20:34-35).*
- **He was a model for Christian leaders.** He told the Ephesian elders to do two things.
“Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood” (Acts 20:28).

**D. THE ATTITUDE OF GOD: Reveal the truth so people can _____
in it.**

The Church belongs to God. *“He bought [her] with his own blood” (Acts 20:28).* The blood of Jesus was the blood of God. This is true because Jesus was God in the flesh.

Jesus was also the Word of God. That is, He was the message of God’s truth to us. In Him, we see truth as a person. He showed us what God is like. He revealed God’s truth to us. A part of this truth is that God loves us. He loves us so much that He bought us with His own blood. God reveals truth so people can walk in it.

Acts 20-21 gives us 4 examples of God revealing truth about the future:

- **The Holy Spirit revealed to Paul that the Ephesians would never see his face again.** The Spirit had already told Paul to expect prison and

hard times in every city (Acts 20:23). So persecution was not a surprise to Paul. God revealed the truth to Paul to prepare him. Paul was ready to face his enemies because God warned him.

- **Disciples at Tyre prophesied about Paul's trials in Jerusalem** (Acts 21:4). These prophecies were mostly for the disciples. Paul knew he would never be coming back. He was on a one-way trip to Rome and beyond. But the Holy Spirit was preparing the disciples to say farewell to Paul (Acts 21:5-6).
- **In Caesarea, the four daughters of Philip prophesied** (Acts 21:9). Philip had settled down there. His daughters prophesied when Paul arrived. It's likely that these prophecies were about Paul's future trouble in Jerusalem. The Holy Spirit was revealing truth to prepare believers.
- **A prophet named Agabus prophesied about Paul's future trouble.** *"After we had been there a number of days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. Coming over to us, he took Paul's belt, tied his own hands and feet with it and said, 'The Holy Spirit says, "In this way the Jews of Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentile'"* (Acts 21:10-11).

The purpose of prophecy is rarely to direct a believer. Agabus did not tell Paul not to go to Jerusalem. He warned only about trouble. Paul already knew that this would happen, so the prophecy was a confirmation. The prophecies informed younger believers of what God's mature apostle already knew. Then their faith was not shaken by his trials. So the prophecy was related to future comfort. (Compare with Philippians 1:12-14).

As the Spirit said, Paul was bound in Jerusalem. Here are four things we can learn from his arrest there:

1. GOD CALLS SOME TO BECOME HUMAN _____.

These human bridges become all things to all people. Paul was among those few. Recall his testimony in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23.

What challenges does a “human bridge” face?

- *People walk on bridges. They treat them roughly.*
- *A bridge must relate to the land on both ends. A human bridge must relate to two different groups.*
- *People walk across a bridge one step at a time. Likewise, people cross cultural bridges slowly.*
- How was Paul a bridge between Jews and Gentiles?
 - He always preached in the synagogues first. He took part in Jewish religious ceremonies (*Acts 18:18; 21:17-26*).
 - When there was a famine in Judea, he took an offering from the Gentile believers in Antioch (*Acts 11:29*). Later, he took an offering from Gentile believers in Macedonia and Achaia to help poor believers in Jerusalem (*2 Cor. 8:1-9:15*).
 - He attended a meeting to discuss relationships between Jewish and Gentile believers (*Acts 15:1-31*).
 - He had Timothy circumcised (*Acts 16:1-3*).
 - He hurried his journey to attend an important Jewish feast (*Acts 20:16*).
 - Late in his ministry, he wrote letters like Romans (A.D. 57), Ephesians, and Colossians (about A.D. 62). These three letters explained that Jews and Gentiles come to God by one path—Jesus Christ.

2. WE SHOULD NOT BELIEVE OR _____ ALL WE HEAR.

More are hurt by gossip than by bullets. Bullets kill a person's reputation. In Acts 21, we see three examples of lies, false assumptions, gossip, or rumors.

“They have been informed that you teach all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to turn away from Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or live according to our customs” (Acts 21:21). This was not true. But many believed it.

“Men of Israel, help us! This is the man who teaches all men everywhere against our people and our law and this place. And besides, he has brought Greeks into the temple area and defiled this holy place.” They had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with Paul and assumed that Paul had brought him into the temple area. (Acts 21:28-29). The crowd believed these lies.

“Aren't you the Egyptian who started a revolt and led four thousand terrorists out into the desert some time ago?” (Acts 21:38). The commander did not have the facts. He assumed Paul was an Egyptian terrorist!

Lies, false assumptions, gossip, and rumors all belong to the same family. They are all tools of the devil. As believers, let's not be quick to believe things that we hear. Let's not repeat things we do not know are true. May the Lord help us to walk and talk in the LIGHT.

3. THERE IS A TIME TO _____ WHAT WE BELIEVE.

“There is a time for everything...a time to be silent, and a time to speak” (Eccl. 3:1,7).

The book of Acts emphasizes that believers are witnesses for Jesus. Sometimes we witness through good deeds, good character and good attitudes. But there are times to speak. God can give us courage to speak at the most difficult times.

The crowd was rioting. They had been beating Paul, trying to kill him. The soldiers rescued God's apostle. So Paul said, "*Brothers and fathers, listen now to my defense*" (Acts 22:1). Then he defended himself by giving his testimony of being saved.

Our best defense of the gospel is the testimony of lives that Jesus has changed. There can be no argument against this. Do not overlook the power in telling what Jesus has done for you!

4. FORTY KILLERS ARE NOT ENOUGH TO KILL ONE PERSON

_____ **PROTECTS.**

God is sovereign. He allows some to suffer and die like Stephen and James. There are martyrs today.

Yet, God breaks into history and protects—Peter in prison. And God protected Paul from death at this point in history. 40 killers had taken a vow not to eat or drink until Paul was dead in the dirt.

- Fire fell on those who came against Elijah (2 Kings 1)
- Blindness fell on the entire army of Aram that tried to capture Elisha (2 Kings 6:8-23).
- No one will harm the two witnesses in the Tribulation while God protects them (Rev. 11).
- God will place the woman out the serpent's reach (Rev. 12:14).

Our Father has all the power in the universe. He is worthy of our trust. The attitude of the three Hebrew children is good for all of us. Read Daniel 3:16-18.

HOMEWORK:

1. What purposes can be found in suffering?
2. Do you feel called to be a human bridge in some way? Explain.
3. Why are reports of changed lives our best defense of the gospel?