

**not to
be bound only
but also
to die**

Acts 21:1 – 25

~ Our Spiritual Safari expedition through the entire Word of God continues with the apostle Paul in this report as he is returning to Jerusalem after completing his third missionary journey two reports ago. If you have not read our previous two reports and, indeed, all twenty-five previous safari reports from the book of Acts, then I highly suggest you go back and do so now. A good Bible with a map set will also be helpful at this point in our study. This account from Paul's ministry seems to be some sort of a victory lap as he returns, almost defiantly, to Jerusalem. In our last report, the Holy Spirit warned Paul – but didn't prevent him – from returning as he departed Ephesus. These people loved Paul; and he loved them. In return, Paul warned them how wolves in sheep's clothing would come into the church and apostasy would begin and grow – and ultimately permeate the church. That process continues as I write this report and you read it, friends....

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:

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

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.

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

~ Some Bible teachers insist Paul made a mistake at this point by returning to Jerusalem; and they use this verse to support a position that declares the

Spirit spoke through these men, telling Paul not to go. Well, that would mean the Holy Spirit contradicted Himself, which is not possible. The logical conclusion in context is that the Holy Spirit, Who had previously warned Paul of the impending dangers in Jerusalem, is reaffirming Paul should not return to Jerusalem UNLESS he is prepared to make the ultimate sacrifice. Paul was willing; and did. I believe God always sends that type of spiritual confirmation to us when we are seeking a Scriptural path. We covered all of that in our previous reports, too.

Paul continues to assert he is perfectly willing to lay down his own life for the furtherance of the Gospel and cause of the Lord Jesus Christ. I believe that is the way this is to be understood. I don't see Paul stepping out of the will of God when he returned to Jerusalem at this time. Paul had an offering for the poor saints, and he wanted to deliver it to them personally. Paul had wasted that church with his own hands, and he needed to attempt to make that right; so, it is not unusual he wanted to present it by the same hands that had brought the church down, literally, to penury.

There are other reasons to believe Paul is not out of the will of God at this time, too. When he was in prison in Rome, the church at Philippi sent to him, you may recall. Paul wrote them back saying the trouble he was having was for the furtherance of the Gospel. None of the apostle's problems hindered the Gospel so Paul couldn't be considered out of the will of God. When Simon had been sent to pick Paul up from the dust of the Damascus road, Simon said Paul was a chosen vessel. We were told Paul was going to appear before kings and rulers; but Paul hasn't appeared before any of that type – yet. From here forward, kings and rulers are all Paul will appear before. His first appointment is with King Agrippa. After that, he is sent to Rome and likely appeared before Nero himself. Then, we discover in the epistle to the Philippians, that Paul appeared before all of Caesar's household.

With Paul divulging that historical information from a Mamertine Roman prison, it would be disingenuous to assert he was out of the will of God. Paul said he had finished his course when he came to the end of his life – in prison. I think if he had stepped out of the will of God for a period of time, he would have made a record of that. People tend to wax profoundly

honest on their deathbed when they see the end immediately in front of them. Personally, I can look back in this ministry and see a brief period where I stepped out of the will of God. Even so, I can see how the Lord has a way of making these things right in our lives; because I didn't do it purposefully – I did it ignorantly and by being headstrong. Many fine men in the ministry will disagree with me on this – but that's okay – I just pray for them and I'm confident the Lord will show them their error someday. One day we'll all get the right answer, and we'll likely discover we were ALL wrong in some way....

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.

~ Now, I won't be dogmatic about the proper position for prayer; but I believe kneeling is the reverent form. I realize we can pray at any time and in any place – and if you live in this city that I live in, you better learn to pray while driving. I also know that some of us may not get back up if we kneel. However, kneeling down on the seashore and praying is a lovely picture. I don't think we should miss an opportunity like that. If you have your Bible with maps, you will see Paul is moving down the coast now. I'm sure he knelt down and prayed on the beaches of that coast on myriad occasions. Also, I feel there were literally millions of believers in the Roman Empire by this time....

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

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

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.

9 And the same man had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy.

~ Another gift in the early church was prophecy. There was no written New Testament at this time; and this account also reveals women occupied prominent places in the church at the time in which we are studying. Today, the canons of Scripture are closed, my beloved; and there is no Scriptural prophecy being revealed to man by the Spirit of God. That book is now sealed. The 'gifty' people will tell me I'm wrong again, of course. Well, the Word of God isn't wrong – YOU are wrong if you think you're a prophet, know a prophet or are the son of a prophet. Alright, we'll just move along....

10 And as we tarried there many days, there came down from Judaea a certain prophet, named Agabus.

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.

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

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.

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

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

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.

17 And when we were come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly.

18 And the day following Paul went in with us unto James; and all the elders were present.

19 And when he had saluted them, he declared particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry.

20 And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord, and said unto him, Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law:

21 And they are informed of thee, that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs.

~ Paul is now a veteran preacher after his third missionary journey, and he bears the marks of apostleship in his body. It was physically demanding traveling the countryside. He's used to rejection. He's used to threats of violence. He's used to people twisting what he said and wrote; and he never said 'forsake Moses' Law.' Well, even with those false accusations dogging him, thousands were accepting Christ. The same grace that allowed the Gentiles not to adopt the Mosaic Law is the same grace that allowed the Jews to continue in the Mosaic System if they had that conviction. Peter had eaten nothing contrary to the Mosaic Law until he visited Paul in Antioch, you will recall. Well, the Jewish people had an outrageous abhorrence about eating anything sacrificed to idols. That's when Paul made it clear that meat does not commend us to God. We can eat or refrain from eating. Let's not criticize others for their customs.

1 Corinthians 7:17 But as God hath distributed to every man, as the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk. And so ordain I in all churches. 18 Is any man called being circumcised? let him not become uncircumcised. Is any called in uncircumcision? let him not be circumcised ~

1 Corinthians 9:19 For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. 20 And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; 21 To them

that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law. 22 To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. 23 And this I do for the gospel's sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you ~

Acts 21 ~

22 What is it therefore? the multitude must needs come together: for they will hear that thou art come.

23 Do therefore this that we say to thee: We have four men which have a vow on them;

24 Them take, and purify thyself with them, and be at charges with them, that they may shave their heads: and all may know that those things, whereof they were informed concerning thee, are nothing; but that thou thyself also walkest orderly, and keepest the law.

25 As touching the Gentiles which believe, we have written and concluded that they observe no such thing, save only that they keep themselves from things offered to idols, and from blood, and from strangled, and from fornication.

~ So, we end this report with Paul in Jerusalem and thousands learning and beginning to follow the ordinances of the Mosaic Law. Most of them had been raised this way, and they couldn't undo that strong upbringing. It was important they learn it properly, correctly and completely, for a change. Paul was a Jew, and he wanted to win more people to Christ, so he embraced the culture. The vow they took was not commanded in the Mosaic Law, either; it was something they could do voluntarily – or not. They did. You and I don't have to make any vows to God, but we can if we want to. I believe He wants us to. What vows have you ever made to God? Have you kept them?

We are under grace, and we have a right to do or not do as our conviction by the Holy Spirit instructing us leads through sound Scriptural doctrine. If you say you have that conviction, you better be studying to show yourself approved, my beloved. If not, you will not have joy. Whether we eat, drink or whatsoever we do, do all for the glory of God. Do the things you do offend others? Well, we're not done with this. We'll pursue it further in our next report. Are you attempting to work for your salvation? Have you placed your faith in the Only One Who can save you from your sins, the Lord Jesus Christ? Those are important questions, my safari friends, because the answers determine our eternal destiny ~
