

**6. Background:** It seems Paul would join four other men (v. 23) in taking a Nazirite vow for a limited time. (Numbers 6:2-8) During that time they could not drink alcohol or have their hair cut. By doing this and by paying for the sacrifices at the Temple, Paul would demonstrate to the Jews that he was still a practicing Jew

**7. Discussion:** (a) How did the elders in Jerusalem receive Paul's report about the results of his ministry throughout the Roman Empire? (b) What false rumors had been spreading about Paul among the Jews in Jerusalem? (c) Why were some people confused about the way Paul ministered to both Jews and Gentiles? [Note: How were Paul's requirements for the Jews different than what was expected of the Gentiles?](d) How did the elders suggest Paul might be able to prove the rumors to be false? (e) How do differing cultures, in the United States, sometimes cause misunderstandings, even among people of faith? [Note: Each ethnic group in the U. S. has some unique cultural preferences such as favorite foods, ways of speaking and dressing, prejudices about racial and national backgrounds other than their own, etc.] (f) What are some ways that people who love God can learn to overcome these differences and learn how to communicate God's love across these cultural boundaries?

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## An Interactive Life Application Bible Study of the Acts of the Apostles for Small Groups

Key: Blue = New Testament Red = Words of Jesus

Green = Old Testament Quotes

### Lesson 27

#### 1. Paul Begins His Journey back to Jerusalem

Acts 21:1-6 After saying farewell to the Ephesian elders, we [that is, Paul and his team], sailed straight to the island of Cos [Southwest of modern Turkey]. The next day we reached Rhodes [An island southeast of Cos] and then went to Patara [A mainland port East of Rhodes].<sup>2</sup> There we boarded a ship sailing for Phoenicia [Modern Lebanon].<sup>3</sup> We sighted the island of Cyprus [West of Syria], passed it on our left, and landed at the harbor of Tyre, in Syria [Today Tyre is a port in Lebanon], where the ship was to unload its cargo.

<sup>4</sup> We went ashore, found the local believers, and stayed with them a week. These believers prophesied through the Holy Spirit that Paul should not go on to Jerusalem.<sup>5</sup> When we returned to the ship at the end of the week, the entire congregation, including women and children, left the city and came down to the shore with us. There we knelt, prayed,<sup>6</sup> and said our farewells. Then we went aboard, and they returned home.

**2. Discussion:** (a) How do you picture the opportunities Paul and his team had for ministry while on their journeys? (b) What was the purpose of the prophetic warning?

#### 3. Paul Continues His Journey toward Jerusalem

Acts 21:7-14 The next stop after leaving Tyre was Ptolemais [South of Tyre], where we greeted the brothers and sisters and stayed for one day.<sup>8</sup> The next day we went on to Caesarea [South of Ptolemais] and stayed at the home of Philip the Evangelist [See Acts 6:5; 8:5; 8:26-40], one of the seven men who had been chosen to distribute food].<sup>9</sup> He

had four unmarried daughters who had the gift of prophecy.

<sup>10</sup> Several days later a man named Agabus, who also had the gift of prophecy, arrived from Judea. <sup>11</sup> He came over, took Paul's belt, and bound his own feet and hands with it. Then he said, "The Holy Spirit declares, 'So shall the owner of this belt be bound by the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem and turned over to the Gentiles.'" <sup>12</sup> When we heard this, we and the local believers all begged Paul not to go on to Jerusalem.

<sup>13</sup> But he said, "Why all this weeping? You are breaking my heart! I am ready not only to be jailed at Jerusalem but even to die for the sake of the Lord Jesus." <sup>14</sup> When it was clear that we couldn't persuade him, we gave up and said, "The Lord's will be done."

Paul must have also known about these warnings of Jesus: ". . . There will be terrifying things and great miraculous signs from heaven. But before this occurs there will be a time of great persecution. You will be dragged into synagogues and prisons, and you will stand before kings and governors because you are my followers. But this will be your opportunity to tell them about me. . . . I will give you the right words and such wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to . . . refute you. . . . They will even kill some of you. And everyone will hate you because you are my followers." (Luke 21:11b-17 NLT)

**4. Discussion:** (a) What do you remember about Philip? (If you need to, look up the references in Acts 6 and 8. See P. 1) (b) How do you explain the contrast between the prophecies warning Paul not to go to Jerusalem, and Paul's determination to go, even though he knew he would likely face persecution or even death? (c) Was it merciful or unmerciful for God to give Paul these warnings? Why? (d) Many believers face similar persecutions today in other parts of the world. If such threats were to come to our country, how ready are you to stand true to your faith in Jesus as Lord?

## 5. Paul Arrives at Jerusalem

Acts 21:15-26 After this we packed our things and left for Jerusalem. <sup>16</sup> Some believers from Caesarea accompanied us, and they took us to the home of Mnason, a man originally from Cyprus and one of the early believers. <sup>17</sup> When we arrived, the brothers and sisters in Jerusalem welcomed us warmly.

<sup>18</sup> The next day Paul went with us to meet with James, and all the elders of the Jerusalem church were present. <sup>19</sup> After greeting them, Paul gave a detailed account of the things God had accomplished among the Gentiles through his ministry.

<sup>20</sup> After hearing this, they praised God. And then they said, "You know, dear brother, how many thousands of Jews have also believed, and they all follow the law of Moses very seriously. <sup>21</sup> But the Jewish believers here in Jerusalem have been told that you are teaching all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to turn their backs on the laws of Moses. They've heard that you teach them not to circumcise their children or follow other Jewish customs. <sup>22</sup> What should we do? They will certainly hear that you have come.

<sup>23</sup> "Here's what we want you to do. We have four men here who have completed their vow. <sup>24</sup> Go with them to the Temple and join them in the purification ceremony, paying for them to have their heads ritually shaved. Then everyone will know that the rumors are all false and that you yourself observe the Jewish laws.

<sup>25</sup> "As for the Gentile believers, they should do what we already told them in a letter: They should abstain from eating food offered to idols, from consuming blood or the meat of strangled animals, and from sexual immorality."

<sup>26</sup> So Paul went to the Temple the next day with the other men. They had already started the purification ritual, so he publicly announced the date when their vows would end and sacrifices would be offered for each of them.