

Paul Arrested in Jerusalem

(Acts 21:1-36)

Introduction

We have talked about all the trials and difficult situations that Paul found himself in as he traveled from place to place sharing the Good News with people.

Towards the end of his life, Paul wrote to the Corinthians and listed some of the persecution he had faced in his life.

2 Corinthians 11:23-28 [Teacher, read the following. He was comparing himself to false teachers who had been boasting.]

Are they servants of Christ? I know I sound like a madman, but I have served him far more! I have worked harder, been put in prison more often, been whipped times without number, and faced death again and again. (24) Five different times the Jewish leaders gave me thirty-nine lashes. (25) Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. Once I spent a whole night and a day adrift at sea. (26) I have traveled on many long journeys. I have faced danger from rivers and from robbers. I have faced danger from my own people, the Jews, as well as from the Gentiles. I have faced danger in the cities, in the deserts, and on the seas. And I have faced danger from men who claim to be believers but are not. (27) I have worked hard and long, enduring many sleepless nights. I have been hungry and thirsty and have often gone without food. I have shivered in the cold, without enough clothing to keep me warm. (28) Then, besides all this, I have the daily burden of my concern for all the churches.

Phew! That is a lot of persecution! The evil one is always at work trying to stop people from sharing the Good News. But Paul continued to obey the leading of the Holy Spirit because he knew Jesus was the true Messiah and he trusted that the Holy Spirit would protect him as he obeyed the Spirit's leading.

In our lesson last time, we learned that the Holy Spirit was urging Paul to go to Jerusalem. He didn't know why, but in every city he visited, the Holy Spirit warned him that prison and hardship were facing him.

Acts 20:22-23

"And now I am bound by the Spirit to go to Jerusalem. I don't know what awaits me, (23) except that the Holy Spirit tells me in city after city that jail and suffering lie ahead.

Boy, that kind of warning would make me want to stay in bed and not go anywhere. It would scare me. How would you feel?

As followers of Jesus, we are not to do anything in our own understanding (Proverbs 3:5-6). Paul knew that the Holy Spirit gave him the power and the confidence he needed to go through whatever situation he faced. And He will do the same for you.

Opening Prayer

Father, Paul faced so many hard situations, yet he didn't give up. He kept on being faithful to You. We ask that You give us the confidence we need to be faithful and true to You, no matter what we face in life. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Memory Verse

The LORD is my light and my salvation—so why should I be afraid? The LORD is my fortress, protecting me from danger, so why should I tremble? (Psalms 27:1)

Lesson

In our last lesson, we left Paul in Miletus where he had met with the elders from the church in Ephesus. This week Paul gets on a ship and heads to Jerusalem.

[Teacher, trace the voyage from Miletus to Tyre.]

Finally, the ship landed in the city of Tyre where it had to unload its cargo. So, Paul and his team went ashore.

Acts 21:4

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.

Again, the Holy Spirit was speaking through the believers there, telling Paul what to expect when he got to Jerusalem. They didn't want Paul to face danger, so they pleaded with him not to go. But Paul knew that he must go.

Acts 21:5-6

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, (6) and said our farewells. Then we went aboard, and they returned home.

Everyone went down to the docks with Paul to see him off. They prayed with him and said their good byes.

After leaving Tyre, they went on to Caesarea.

Acts 21:8

The next day we went on to Caesarea and stayed at the home of Philip the Evangelist, one of the seven men who had been chosen to distribute food.

We have met Philip in the book of Acts on several occasions. In chapter 7, we were first introduced to him as one of the seven men chosen to serve food to the widows along with Stephen who was stoned to death. In chapter 8, we learned that Philip shared the gospel with Simon the sorcerer, in Samaria. Then right after that, later in chapter 8, the Holy Spirit told Philip to share the Good News with the Ethiopian in the chariot.

While Paul and his team were staying with Philip, a prophet by the name of Agabus came to visit.

We met Agabus back in chapter 11 when he predicted that a great famine was coming upon the entire Roman world (Acts 11:28). If you remember, this prophesy prompted Paul to gather a gift to send down to the believers in Jerusalem.

While staying at Philip's house, Agabus did something kind of strange.

Acts 21:10-11

Several days later a man named Agabus, who also had the gift of prophecy, arrived from Judea. (11) 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.'"

Agabus did a little skit to act out the kind of persecution that Paul was going to face in Jerusalem. They all knew that certain danger was waiting for Paul, so the believers begged Paul not to go.

[Teacher, demonstrate this!]

Acts 21:12-14

When we heard this, we and the local believers all begged Paul not to go on to Jerusalem. (13) 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." (14) When it was clear that we couldn't persuade him, we gave up and said, "The Lord's will be done."

The believers meant well. They loved Paul and it was heart breaking for them to think of him facing danger. But the Holy Spirit had clearly told Paul what to do and he could not allow the concern of the others to keep him from obeying God. Paul had confidence that the Holy Spirit would enable him to face any situation.

When they arrived in Jerusalem, Paul and his team were welcomed by the believers there. Paul told them about all the wonderful things God had done among the Gentiles in each place he traveled.

Acts 21:20-22

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. (21) 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. (22) What should we do? They will certainly hear that you have come.

The Jewish believers had been misinformed about what Paul had been teaching the Gentiles. They were spreading outright lies about Paul. So, they suggested that Paul prove to the Jewish believers that there was no truth to these rumors.

Acts 21:23-24

“Here’s what we want you to do. We have four men here who have completed their vow. (24) 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.

They were telling Paul to prove to the Jewish believers that he was truly dedicated to God by going to the Temple and going through the Jewish purification ceremony. So, Paul said he would do it.

When Paul was at the Temple, trouble broke out just about the time the purification ceremony was over.

Acts 21:27-29

The seven days were almost ended when some Jews from the province of Asia saw Paul in the Temple and roused a mob against him. They grabbed him, (28) yelling, “Men of Israel, help us! This is the man who preaches against our people everywhere and tells everybody to disobey the Jewish laws. He speaks against the Temple—and even defiles this holy place by bringing in Gentiles.” (29) (For earlier that day they had seen him in the city with Trophimus, a Gentile from Ephesus, and they assumed Paul had taken him into the Temple.)

Unbelieving Jews had followed Paul all the way from Asia to Jerusalem. They stirred up trouble and accused Paul of taking a Gentile into the Temple area.

[Teacher, show a diagram of the Temple and point out that although Gentiles were not allowed inside the Temple, there were places Gentiles could worship.]

Paul had not disobeyed the traditions of the Jewish people but because he was traveling with a Gentile and was at the Temple, the crowds assumed he broke God’s laws.

The crowd went crazy and came from all directions and grabbed Paul.

Acts 21:30-32

The whole city was rocked by these accusations, and a great riot followed. Paul was grabbed and dragged out of the Temple, and immediately the gates were closed behind him. (31) As they were trying to kill him, word reached the commander of the Roman regiment that all Jerusalem was in an uproar. He immediately called out his soldiers and officers and ran down among the crowd. When the mob saw the commander and the troops coming, they stopped beating Paul.

Someone sent for the Roman army commander. When the rioters saw the commander and his soldiers coming, they stopped beating Paul.

The commander arrested Paul and ordered him to be bound with chains. Then the commander tried to find out what the problem was all about, but no one gave him a clear answer. Since the commander couldn’t get the real facts, he ordered that Paul be taken and placed in the barracks.

Acts 21:33-36

Then the commander arrested him and ordered him bound with two chains. He asked the crowd who he was and what he had done. (34) Some shouted one thing and some another. Since he couldn’t find out the truth in all the uproar and confusion, he ordered that Paul be taken to the fortress. (35) As Paul reached the stairs, the mob grew so violent the

soldiers had to lift him to their shoulders to protect him. (36) And the crowd followed behind, shouting, "Kill him, kill him!"

The crowd went crazy and Paul's life was in danger, so the soldiers picked Paul up and carried him out of the crowd. While the crowd shouted, "Kill him, kill him!" But Paul stayed calm!

Ask: How do you think Paul was able to stay calm in the midst of this riot and people shouting, "Kill him, kill him!"?

The Holy Spirit gave him courage. Paul trusted fully that God would take care of him. He had already been warned that bad things were going to happen to him so he wasn't surprised. He knew he could face anything as long as he obeyed God.

Next week we will learn more about Paul's arrest in Jerusalem.

Ask: How has Paul's example encouraged you to be strong in the Lord?

Let's say you are facing an important test at school. Or, maybe you have to deal with a bully. If you are a follower of Jesus, the Holy Spirit lives inside you and will help you with whatever situation you face.

CLOSING PRAYER

Father, Your word says, "*I can do all things through him who strengthen me*" (Phil 4:13). Thank You that you are always with us and will never leave us. Thank You that you will never allow us to go through anything we cannot handle with Your help. Thank You for the power of the Holy Spirit that gives us courage and strength to do everything that You have called us to do. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

GAME CENTER

Ping Pong Ball Toss

Write point numbers in the cups of two egg cartons. Place the two cartons long sides together. Divide the children into two teams. Give a child from each team 3 tosses of the ball for every right answer. The team with the highest points gets two pieces of candy while the other team gets one piece.

Or, use the following questions in another game or discussion.

1. Where was Paul traveling to? (Jerusalem.)
2. Why were the believers in Tyre urging Paul not to go to Jerusalem? (The Holy Spirit revealed to them that Paul would face difficulties there.)
3. What did the believers do at the beach before the ship set sail from Tyre? (Vs 5. Knelt in prayer.)
4. Who did Paul stay with in Caesarea? (Vs 8. Philip.)
5. What did Agabus prophesy about Paul? (Vs 11. He was going to be bound by Jews in Jerusalem and handed over to the Gentiles.)
6. How did Agabus tell Paul what to expect in Jerusalem? (Vs 11. took Paul's belt, and bound his own feet and hands with it.)
7. Why did Paul not allow the believers to change his mind about going to Jerusalem? (He knew the Holy Spirit told him to go to Jerusalem. He knew he needed to obey God. He trusted God to protect him. Paul had confidence that the Holy Spirit would enable him to face any situation.)

8. What did the believers in Jerusalem encourage Paul to do to prove he was a faithful follower of God? (Vs 24. Take a vow in the Jewish Temple.)
9. What did the unbelieving Jews accuse Paul of doing in Jerusalem? (Vs 28. Taking a Gentile into the temp courts.)
10. Who arrested Paul? (Vs 33. The Roman commander.)

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