

Acts Chapter 21 (Notes shared from the following website:
<https://planobiblechapel.org/constable-notes/> Notes by Dr. Thomas L. Constable Former professor Dallas Theological Seminary.

The trip from Miletus to Tyre 21:1-6 The third "we" section of Acts (21:1-18) is of theological importance because it focuses on Paul's recapitulation of Jesus' passion. Note the similarities between Luke's accounts of Jesus' trip to Jerusalem and Paul's. Both stories involve a plot by the Jews and handing over to the Gentiles. There were triple predictions along the way of suffering in Jerusalem in both cases. Both Jesus and Paul steadfastly resolved to go there despite opposition, and both resigned themselves to God's will.

21:1-3 "Cos" was an island 40 miles from Miletus. "Rhodes" refers to the city on the island of Rhodes ("Rhodes" meaning "roses"), another 90 miles farther. A gigantic statue of Apollo, "The Colossus of Rhodes," one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, stood astride the entrance to this harbor years earlier, but it was now in ruins. From there, Paul's party continued east to "Patara," a 60-mile journey. Paul could have made these trips in three days. In Patara, the missionaries were able to transfer to a ship bound directly for Tyre 400 miles away, probably a grain or fruit ship. They sailed to the south of Cyprus.

21:4 Paul and his companions "stayed" in Tyre for "seven days," fellowshipping with the Christians. "Sea journeys in the ancient world depended on finding shipping available, and accepting delays arising from loading and unloading. It is therefore not inconsistent that Paul was in haste to reach Jerusalem by Pentecost, yet had stopped for a week at Tyre; he would have no choice." Duty called louder than warning to Paul even if both were the calls of God."

21:5-6 As they had done just before leaving the Ephesian elders, Paul and his fellow missionaries knelt down and prayed with these believers before they parted (cf. 20:36). This reflects Paul's ongoing commitment to and dependence on God. Then the missionaries reboarded the ship, and the Christians of Tyre "returned home." Paul's advance to Caesarea

21:7 "Ptolemais" (Acco of the Old Testament and modern Acre, located on the north side of the bay of Haifa) lay 25 miles south of Tyre. It was the southernmost Phoenician port. There also Paul met with the local Christians, while stevedores unloaded and loaded his ship.

21:8-9 "Caesarea" (Meritima) was 40 miles farther south, and Paul's party could have reached it by sea or by land. It was the capital of the province of Judea and the major port of Jerusalem. Philip may have settled in Caesarea after evangelizing the coastal plain of Palestine 20 years earlier (8:40; cf. 6:5). This man was not the Philip of the Gospels, who was a disciple of Jesus and

one of the Twelve. His "four daughters" had the prophetic gift. This may mean that they served as worship leaders (cf. 1 Chron. 25:1). According to early Church tradition, Philip and his daughters later moved to Hierapolis in Asia Minor. There these women imparted information about the early history of the Jerusalem church to Papias, a church father.

21:10-11 "Agabus" previously had gone from Jerusalem to Antioch to foretell the famine of A.D. 46 (11:26-27). Now he "came down" to Caesarea and prophesied Paul's arrest in Jerusalem (cf. Mark 9:31; 10:33; John 21:18). He illustrated his prediction graphically, as several Old Testament prophets had done (cf. 1 Kings 11:29-31; Isa. 20:2-4; Jer. 13:1-7; Ezek. 4). "This is what the Holy Spirit says" is the Christian equivalent of the Old Testament's "Thus saith the Lord." His revelation came as no surprise to Paul, of course (v. 4; 9:16). Perhaps another reason Luke emphasized these prophecies was to prove to his readers that Paul's arrest and its consequences were part of God's foreordained will for the church's expansion

21:12 It seemed clearer all the time to Paul's missionary companions, as well as to the "local" Christians ("residents"), that Paul was in great danger in Jerusalem. Consequently they tried to discourage him from proceeding.

21:13 From Paul's response to their entreaty, he seems not to have known whether his arrest would result in his death or not. Why did Paul avoid the possibility of death in Corinth (20:3), and other places, but not here? Paul's purpose to deliver the collection, and thus to strengthen the unity of the Gentile and Jewish believers, would have failed if he had died on board a ship between Corinth and Jerusalem. However, arrest in Jerusalem would not frustrate that purpose. For Paul, and eventually for his friends (v. 14), the Lord's will was more important than physical safety (cf. Luke 22:42). He believed the Spirit wanted him to go to Jerusalem (19:21; 20:22) so he "set his face" to go there (cf. Luke 9:51).

21:14 Unable to dissuade him, Paul's friends stopped urging him ("fell silent"), and committed the situation to the Lord. "Perhaps he regarded Caesarea as his temptation and Gethsemane. If so, the congregation, catching the thought, echoed the garden prayer of Christ: The will of the Lord be done ..." Widespread respect for Paul is indicated by the attention that he receives from figures associated with the mission in its early days:

21:15-16 Jerusalem was about 65 miles southeast of Caesarea, a long two-day trip. "Mnason" evidently became a Christian early in the history of the church, perhaps on the day of Pentecost. He was a Hellenistic Jewish Christian from Cyprus, like Barnabas was. As such, he would have been more open to entertaining a mixed group of Jewish and Gentile Christians, than many Hebrew Jewish Christians in Palestine would have been. Apparently he lived

about halfway between Caesarea and Jerusalem. Paul finally achieved the first phase of his plan to visit Jerusalem and then Rome (19:21). This plan unfolds in the rest of chapter 21. In all, Paul traveled about 2,700 miles on his third missionary journey (cf. 14:28; 18:22).²

Luke wrote these events partially to reveal God's methods to his readers. "The geographical extension of the church was not Luke's main interest; it was rather the movement of redemptive history from the Jews to the Gentiles. In keeping with this purpose, Luke devotes considerable space to the record of Paul's last visit to Jerusalem, not because the visit was important in itself, but because it showed the final rejection of the Gospel by Jerusalem." The advice of James and the elders

21:17-19 As he had done before, Paul related to a group of elders what God had done on his missionary journeys among the Gentiles (14:27; cf. 18:23). This undoubtedly helped the Jerusalem church accept the gift that Paul had brought from their Gentile brethren. Luke mentioned nothing about Paul's delivery of the monetary gift, Paul's main reason for going to Jerusalem (cf. Rom. 15:25-27; 1 Cor. 16:1-4). His purpose was primarily to emphasize the spread of the gospel. The Gentiles had remembered the poor as Paul had urged them to do (Gal. 2:10).

21:20-21 Having rejoiced ("glorified") over Paul's account of the Gentiles' conversion, the elders also added that "thousands" of "Jews" had become believers, many of them in Jerusalem. Estimates of the population of Jerusalem at this time range between 30,000 and 50,000. The elders explained that these Jewish Christians had some misgivings about Paul's ministry, about rumors they had heard. The word on the streets was that Paul was going beyond his actual practice of not requiring Gentile converts to undergo circumcision or to obey the Mosaic Law. The leaders in Jerusalem praised God for his successes. Still they had their own mission to the Jews to consider, and for that Paul was a distinct liability."

21:22-24 The elders' plan aimed to prove to the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem, and to all the Jews there, that Paul had not abandoned the customs of the Jews. Many commentators believed the "vow" in view here was a Nazarite vow, but that vow could not be taken for less than 30 days. The "four men" in question had taken (and were "under," or obligated to keep) a temporary "vow," as Paul had done recently (18:18). At the end of the vow, each of them had to bring an offering to the temple (cf. Num. 6:14-15). The elders suggested that Paul go with them to the temple, purify himself with them for temple worship, and show his support of the Jewish custom by paying for their offerings. Paul could do what the elders suggested, and did so without

compromising his convictions, since the Jews did not regard taking a vow as essential for acceptance by God. It was strictly voluntary.

21:25 James and the elders repeated their former conviction regarding the instruction of Gentile converts. This was simply a point of clarification designed to emphasize that the decision of the Jerusalem Council still stood

21:26 A Jew would normally announce the "completion" of his vow to the priest, and then seven days later present his offerings (cf. Num. 6:13-20). The Law did not prescribe a week's wait, but it was customary. Paul accompanied the four men "into the temple," and underwent the rites of "purification" with them, because he was paying the expenses of their vow.

21:27-28 The "Jews from Asia," possibly from Ephesus, were obviously unbelievers. They charged Paul with the same kind of crimes the unbelieving Jews had accused Stephen of committing (6:11, 13-14). The Jews permitted Gentiles in the outer court of the temple, the court of the Gentiles. They could not go in beyond the sacred enclosure: into the women's court, or into the court of Israel, much less into the court of the priests. Jewish men like Paul, who were not priests or Levites, could go no farther than the court of Israel. The priests had posted notices prohibiting Gentiles from entering the sacred enclosure, the area that included the courts of the women, Israel, and the priests. These notices were in Latin and Greek, and were on the barrier, the "Soreg," at the foot of the steps leading to this area of the temple.

Archaeologists have discovered two of these notices. One reads as follows: "No man of another nation to enter within the fence and enclosure round the temple. The Romans allowed the Jews to execute any Gentile, even a Roman citizen, for proceeding beyond this low, stone barrier.²

21:29 "Trophimus the Ephesian" was Paul's Gentile traveling companion from Asia (20:4). The Asian Jews had previously seen them together in the city, and had assumed that Paul had brought this Gentile into the sacred enclosure of the temple. "The possibility that Trophimus might have wandered of his own freewill into the forbidden area is about as likely as that somebody should wander into private rooms in the Kremlin for the purpose of sightseeing."

21:30 The rumor of Paul's alleged capital offense traveled quickly throughout Jerusalem, and brought a mob of zealous Jews into the temple courtyard. "All the city was aroused" is probably hyperbole. "... the Temple was a fetish for all Jews, but for none more so than fanatically devout pilgrims from the Diaspora, who had travelled far to celebrate the festival of Pentecost in the holy city. "The perspective of the Jews toward the temple was strikingly similar to that of Gentile worshipers of gods and goddesses like Artemis." Evidently the priests (Levites, temple police) "dragged" Paul "out of" one of the inner courts, and into the court of the Gentiles. The "doors" that Luke referred to, separated the court

of the Gentiles from the inner courts that were accessible only to Jews. The priests now closed these doors to prevent the defiling of the inner courts by the tumult and bloodshed.³

21:31-32 The Jews proceeded to beat Paul ("seeking to kill him") in the court of the Gentiles. This was the "rebel's beating" that the Jews commonly executed on people who supposedly openly defied the Mosaic Law or the teachings of the elders (cf. Luke 4:29; John 8:59; 10:31).⁴ News of this commotion reached the Roman "commander" of the Fortress of Antonia, which connected with the temple area on the northwest. Herod the Great had built this fortress to house the soldiers of the Tenth Legion. The commander's name was Claudius Lysias (23:26). He was responsible for the 1,000 soldiers stationed there. When he saw the riot, he summoned "soldiers and centurions" (commanders of 100 soldiers each) and "ran down" the steps of the fortress and into the court of the Gentiles. The Roman troops were responsible to keep peace in the whole city. The Jews "stopped beating Paul" when they "saw the commander and the [other] soldiers." "One thing Rome insisted on—civil order. A riot was an unforgivable sin both for the populace who staged it and the commander who allowed it." This is the sixth time in Acts that Paul's ministry had ignited a public disturbance (cf. 14:19; 16:19-22; 17:5-8, 13; 19:25-34).

21:33-34 The "commander" arrested ("took hold of") Paul, assuming that he was a criminal. The "two chains" the Roman guards placed on Paul probably bound him to two soldiers (cf. 12:6). When the commander tried to learn "who" Paul "was," and "what he had done," from some members of the crowd, he received conflicting information. So he ordered Paul brought into the "barracks," the Fortress of Antonia.

21:35-36 Stairs led up to the fortress from the city, both on its west side, and from the temple courtyard on its south side.⁴ Probably the "stairs" in verse 35 were one of the two south stairways leading from the temple courtyard into the fortress. The fury of the Jews was evident in their desire to tear Paul apart ("violence of the mob") immediately. Their cry ("Away with him!") recalls their words about Jesus

21:37-38 The commander had assumed that Paul was a certain "Egyptian" who had appeared in Jerusalem three years earlier. This man claimed to be a prophet of God and announced that the wall of Jerusalem would collapse at his command. He further claimed that he would lead his followers from the Mount of Olives into Jerusalem where they would defeat the Romans and throw off their yoke. The Romans, however, attacked this man's followers first, killing many of them, but he himself had escaped. The Egyptian's followers came from the ranks of "The Assassins" (lit. "The Daggermen"). These were radicals who would secretly mingle with crowds, holding daggers hidden under their cloaks,

and would stealthily stab to death Romans and pro-Roman Jews in an attempt to gain Jewish independence from Rome. Claudius Lysias evidently thought this Egyptian "freedom fighter" had returned to the temple area to recruit more

21:39 Paul explained that he was "a Jew," and thus had a right to be in the temple court of Israel. He was not a resident of Egypt, but "a Roman citizen" of the well-respected Roman city of "Tarsus." Tarsus was one of the three chief centers of learning in the ancient world (a "no insignificant city"), along with Athens and Alexandria. Strabo, the ancient Greek geographer, wrote that in all that related to philosophy, literature, and general education, the fame of Tarsus was exceeded that of Athens and Alexandria. Tarsus had several hundred thousand inhabitants and was noted for its textile industry. It was also the capital "of Cilicia," and a free city in the empire. "It is important to recognize that to a great extent in antiquity people were judged by the importance of the place where they were born. Their own personal honor and dignity was in part derived from the honor rating of the place from which they came." "We have good reason to believe that at the period of the Apostle's birth the Jews were unmolested at Tarsus, where his father lived and enjoyed the rights of a Roman citizen. It is a mistake to suppose that this citizenship was a privilege which belonged to the members of the family, as being natives of this city. ... It is more probable that it came to him as a reward of services rendered, during the civil wars, to some influential Roman. Great numbers of Jews were made slaves in the Civil Wars, and then manumitted. A slave manumitted with due formalities became a Roman citizen.

21:40 These credentials persuaded the Roman commander to let Paul address the mob. "Paul had shown respect for the tribune's authority, spoken an educated man's Greek, and made considerable honor and status claims. On these grounds the tribune's action is quite believable. He had no evidence that Paul was not who he claimed to be, and it was always very unwise to refuse or offend someone of equal or higher social status than oneself." Paul "motioned ... with his hand" to the crowd, a gesture designed to quiet them and rivet their attention (cf. 12:17). Paul spoke to the Jews in Aramaic ("the Hebrew dialect"), the vernacular of Palestinian Jews, rather than in Greek. This would have helped his hearers realize that he was one of them.