

# Exploring Acts

The Continuing Ministry of Jesus Christ  
Through the Holy Spirit

## Lesson 17

### Day One: Returning to Jerusalem

Exhibiting characteristics and actions similar to those of his Lord before him, Paul set his face to go to Jerusalem, contrary to the dire warnings he'd received from the followers who loved him. Repeatedly told of the dangers facing him there, the prophecy of Agabus would be fulfilled before the chapter ends. Of course at the time of writing, Luke was aware it was not time for Paul to die at Jerusalem but, in reflecting back, Luke is able to help with the details of what was in Paul's mind and heart as he headed home.

When facing trials, is it possible to know the will of God for a certainty before setting out on a charted course? Did the Apostle Paul struggle with this question? We can assume he did in light of the counsel he received and the consequences of his decision. But we can also be sure that Paul never lost his determined resolve to obey God by fulfilling his mission—even if it put him in harm's way.

#### Read Acts 21:1–40; and 22:1–29.

Open your Bible and lesson each day by beginning with a word of prayer. Come to your time of study expectant to receive something from the Lord. Write down your first impressions.

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Memory verse: 1 Corinthians 15:10 Write the verse; repeat it each day to commit it to memory.

*By the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain;  
but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the  
grace of God which was with me.*

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We saw how difficult it was for Paul to depart from the Ephesian elders for the last time. His party sailed from Miletas to Cos—then Rhodes—then on to Patara (3 days journey). There Paul found a ship that would sail directly to Tyre, a trip of approximately 400 miles. They stayed a week with the believers while waiting for the ship to reload fresh cargo. Look on your Bible maps to trace the route taken by Paul.

1. In Tyre Paul encounters disciples that make an urgent plea; what is it? Vv. 4–6
  - a. Describe the scene at the shore and those who were present.
  - b. Why do *you think* the same Holy Spirit leading Paul to go would also lead these dear believers to try to stop him?

In Caesarea we find Philip and his four prophesying daughters, in addition to the prophet Agabus (previously mentioned in Acts 11).

2. Describe Agabus' dramatic portrayal of what would happen to Paul in Jerusalem? Vv. 11–14
  - a. Who else joined in the appeals entreating Paul not to go on? How does Paul respond to their emotional pleas?

Faced with Paul's determination, the believers could only give up their appeals by aligning their will with that of God's for him.

3. Do *you* think that Paul was wrong not to heed them? Support your answer.

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- a. Personal: Can you recall a time when your fellow believers warned you not to do something; but that God's Spirit clearly gave you a steady resolve to follow through? What happened?

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## Day Two:

## Mixed Reviews at Home

Read Acts 21:15–40 for review.

Arriving at Jerusalem, Paul's third missionary journey comes to an end. He and his missionary team receive a warm welcome from the believers that await them and from Mnason, an early disciple, whose name means "reminding." He was a man of wealth, capable of housing Paul and his companions. Luke doesn't give us many details of Paul's time there but we can imagine the days were spent sharing stories and building up one another's faith. The following day Paul went to see James and all the elders, describing in detail—literally item by item—the things which God had done among the Gentiles (v.19). The team would also have handed off the generous gift being offered from the Gentile churches to those in Jerusalem.

1. How did the elders receive Paul's news? v. 20
  - a. At the same time, what rumor did the elders share with Paul that was circulating all over the city about him? Vv. 20–22

Paul was told about the thousands of Jews that had become Christians while he was away; and many of these new believers were zealous to hang onto the law and its old customs. Word had gone out that Paul was turning Gentiles away from Moses, circumcision, and the law. Paul's reputation had become so distorted that his homecoming presented an embarrassing situation for the elders.

2. "What shall we do?" It was a rhetorical question; what did they want Paul to do? Vv. 23–24
  - a. What did Paul choose to do? v. 26
3. What additional charge did he have to deal with? Vv. 27–29

The situation escalated to a riot with Paul being physically dragged from the temple and its doors shut behind him! They intended to kill Paul while *all of Jerusalem was in an uproar* (v. 31).

4. What did the commander order? Vv. 32–34
  - a. What was the multitude crying out? v. 36 What does this scene remind you of?
5. In verses 37–40, Paul takes matters into his own hands. What step does he take that will change everything?

When facing outer turmoil and inner fears, our part is to know God's will and to respond accordingly—His part is to work out the details. But how can we know His will for sure? There are three things here worth pondering . . .

- 1) We know God's will through His Word
- 2) We know God's will through the inner witness of the Holy Spirit
- 3) We know God's will through the supportive counsel of others

When all three are in agreement we can be assured of the next move to make. When all three are *not* in agreement, ask God to make the way clear before proceeding. Remember to trust God's Word and your inner witness above the opinions of well-meaning Christians. Always wait until God makes His way clear. He is never in a hurry—He puts your eternal well-being ahead of your temporal comfort.

6. Personal: Please share your thoughts on the above; relate the points to your current circumstances.

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### Day Three: Paul Addresses the Jerusalem Mob

Read Acts 22:1–29 for review.

When Paul was given permission, he stood on the stairs and motioned with his hand to the people. And when there was a great silence, he spoke to them in the Hebrew language (v. 40). Looking at Vv. 1–21, summarize the following:

1. How did Paul describe himself and his early life?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Briefly restate how he met Christ on the Damascus road.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. What did Jesus commission him to do?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. To whom did the Lord command that Paul be sent?

5. How did the crowd respond to the mention of the Gentiles? Vv. 22–23

6. As Paul was about to be scourged, what question does he raise?

If the centurion was fearful of Paul being wrongly accused and beaten—the commander even more so! He had already committed a crime by putting a Roman citizen in chains. To have scourged him as well was unthinkable.

The commander had purchased his citizenship for a big price, but Paul was born a citizen. We aren't told how Paul's family obtained citizenship, but theologians speculate one of Paul's ancestors likely received it in return for valuable services rendered to a Roman ruler or administrator.

### Selah ~

Was Paul surprised by the sudden turn of events? Probably not; he no doubt repeatedly recalled the counsel of the loving believers when he was headed home and the prophecy of Agabus warning him what awaited. He knew the turmoil in Jerusalem was coming and he didn't waver for a moment.

Courage is coming to terms with your fears in the face of your enemy and opting to obey God's will—even if it results in personal harm. Mediate for a moment on 2 Corinthians 5:9–10; 14.

- What was always Paul's aim? Why?

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- What was the governing motive that compelled Paul in every situation?

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- What is your take-away truth from today's study?

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## Day Four:

## On Being God's Mouthpiece

Agabus is mentioned twice in scripture: Acts 11:27–28, where he predicts a great famine fulfilled during the reign of Emperor Claudius; and in Acts 21:10–11, at Caesarea where he enacted the prediction of Paul's fate in Jerusalem. (Theologians have also come to think that Agabus may have been included in the *seventy* Luke writes about in his gospel account in Luke 10:1.)

The first man God called to the office of prophet was Abraham, but it was Moses who set the standard. There are three words used for the title: *Nabi*—always translated *prophet*; *Rohe*—translated *seer*; and *Hozeh*—translated as *prophet* (Isaiah 30:10) or *seer* (1 Chronicles 29:29). By whichever title, God's man became His mouthpiece to the people, speaking about situations through warnings and exhortations concerning the future. His mission was received and carried out as *the word of the Lord came*. (Meaning, the Lord became actively present to convey his message.) All that a prophet foretold had to come to pass for him to be believed (1 Samuel 9:6), and God repeatedly used prophets to urge His people to turn to Him (Jeremiah 7:23–25). In the New Testament we find Jesus proclaiming these words: “Among those born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist” (Luke 7:28).

### Deeper Discoveries ~

Looking closer we find that the prophets were eager to know of God's grace as foretold in both the Old and New Testaments. Using 1 Peter 1:6–12 as your text, look for a lesson (what is God saying?) as well as a personal application (what does it mean to me?). The first couple of verses are done for you as an example.

Vv. 6–7 Lesson: The genuineness of faith is tested through trials to be found praiseworthy. Such testing will cause grief but won't last forever—it is only for a little while.

Application: As *my* faith is tested, will it praise and glorify the Lord? Will He be evident?

v. 8 Lesson: \_\_\_\_\_

Application: \_\_\_\_\_

v. 9 Lesson: \_\_\_\_\_

Application: \_\_\_\_\_

v. 10 Lesson: \_\_\_\_\_

Application: \_\_\_\_\_

v. 11 Lesson: \_\_\_\_\_

Application: \_\_\_\_\_

v. 12 Lesson: \_\_\_\_\_

Application: \_\_\_\_\_

Personal: Compare Amos 3:7 with John 15:15. Think about it: God has made known to *you* the very things that the prophets of old and even the angels desire to look into. How are *you* sharing what you are privileged to believe?

Day Five: Selah . . . Pause and Ponder the Week in Review

This section of the lesson is intended to be an at-a-glance, user-friendly recap of what you've learned this week. Go back over your lesson with a marking pen or highlighter and mark what stands out to you. Use the margins to make personal notations. Be sure to indicate which points or questions you'd like to share in your discussion group.

1. What is your take-away-truth? How are you working to make it a part of your daily walk?

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2. Write out this week's verse from memory.

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3. What does this week's verse reveal to you?

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4. Personal: Ask God to help you appreciate all He has revealed to you through His Word, and to act on it accordingly.

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**Prayer Time:** Write down the people in your group to keep in prayer this next week.

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