

40b ACTS

We're picking up our study now in Acts chapter 21 at verse 7. Luke says, When they had finished the voyage from Tyre, arrived at Ptolemaeus, greeting the brethren, stayed with them for a day. On the next day we left and came to Caesarea. Remember, Caesarea is the Roman capital of this province.

The Jews, of course, still consider Jerusalem to be the capital, but the Romans do not. Caesarea is the capital of this province of Syria. The Romans call it the province of Syria, and Caesarea is its capital.

The Jews would say no, we're the nation of Israel and our capital is Jerusalem, but they don't get to say because they've been defeated and they're under the Roman sandal, as it were. We came to Caesarea, entering the house of Philip the Evangelist. As was astutely pointed out on the break, you notice that Philip, who is one of the seven, and these are the seven original deacons in the Jerusalem church, is not in Jerusalem, hasn't been for many years.

And why is that? Well, James, who is not one of the seven, is running the Jerusalem church. And one might say running amok with the Jerusalem church. Every place the men from James come, bad things follow.

Peter gets tangled up with them, Paul gets tangled up with them, as we're going to see before long. And there are problems in the Jerusalem church. There are problems in Israel.

There are problems in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria. And it is not without significance that Philip, one of the original seven, is not an elder functioning in the church at Jerusalem. Philip is fruitful.

Philip is doing what he's supposed to do, but he can't seem to function. There is some disharmony where he's not in Jerusalem. In fact, most of the original disciples do not appear to be in Jerusalem.

And it is as though that church has taken on a life of its own, and those that God appointed, those that the Holy Spirit commissioned, don't seem to be in evidence. And instead, you have the half-brother of the Lord, who is not a disciple, who is not an apostle, who is not one of the seven, is the head of the church. So, this man had four virgin daughters who were prophetesses.

Now, a prophecy is about to be delivered to the apostle Paul. Which one of the four daughters gives it to Paul? None of them. Also, not without significance.

They are there, and they cover the bases, because Agabus can't be everywhere at once. He's evidently got more important things to do than hang around Caesarea. He's off

delivering the Word of God in other places.

And there are prophetesses who could give this message, but God says, the message that I'm going to give from the Holy Spirit to the apostle Paul is not going to come through any of the daughters of Philip. Philip is a great guy. Nothing wrong with the daughters.

They're filling a need. They are obviously in possession of a Holy Spirit-enabled gift. But, for the delivery of this message, God brings in someone from the outside.

Now, suppose you are... Let's just see if we can actually pull this off mentally. Suppose you are a virgin daughter of Philip, and you live in Caesarea. Well, think about it this way.

You've sort of stepped in. God has given you a gift, and you're filling a need. Obviously, they prophesy.

And it does some good. When people need a prophecy, one or more of these daughters speaks up, and here comes the Word from God. There's no New Testament, no epistles, no Gospels in circulation yet.

Got a lot of people coming to faith in Christ, and they need information. These women, these girls, speak up and deliver it. Well, you get to where you're functioning in that, and you expect if there's a Word of God to be delivered, one of the four of us is going to do it.

Here comes the Apostle Paul, and you think, wouldn't this be a great thing to be able to minister and give something to him? And God brings in somebody else. Brings in Agabus. And how would you feel? Well, it depends on how you think.

It depends on how you understand the plan and purpose of God. Hopefully, you say, I can't be all things to all people. I'll give you an analogy, if it's helpful, if it may be a little bit closer to home.

You can be someone who shares the Gospel with a family member or with a close friend, and they don't respond. And maybe you've had opportunities over the years to, if it's not a formal presentation of the Gospel, it's at least viewpoint from the Word of God. It is at least the suggestion of the things of God.

And this family member, and you're praying for them, and you love them, and you care about them. And all of a sudden, when you're not around, you get a phone call or something, oh, Fred just came to Christ. And it was Harry down there at the pumpkin patch that gave him the Gospel, and he got saved.

And you think, Lord, why not me? A pastor can labor, studying and teaching the Word of God, and can work and work and work, and then somebody may be hearing a guy on the

radio or read a book or pick up a pamphlet or just be struck by an idea in the middle of the night and come in and say, ah, it's all clear to me now. And you think, Lord, why not me? Why couldn't I be the one to pull back that curtain or turn on that light or whatever? But it's good for our objectivity. It's good for our humility to remember that it's not all about me.

If I'm a virgin daughter of Philip, or if I'm a pastor, or if I'm a family member or a friend in someone's periphery, the focus, the priority, is the accomplishment of God's plan. By whatever means God uses, praise God that it gets done. And it doesn't have to be me.

I don't have to be all things to all people. Praise God that He knows exactly the right tool for the job. I used to think about the bench of a woodworker, someone who does fine carving.

I know a guy back on the East Coast that is a just amazingly talented, divinely gifted worker in wood. You can't believe the things that this guy can do with wood. And his workbench, he's got all of these different little funny-shaped chisels.

And I look at some of them, and I don't see any difference. They look exactly the same to me. But there's a subtle difference in the sharpness and in the curve and in the width of this tip.

And when he's doing some fine scroll work, and he's putting a side on a cradle or a stair rail or all the myriads of different things that he makes, he makes these cut-out things that have spiral arms that intertwine and go down. And it's all hollow on the inside, and he carves it out, and it's just intricate and beautiful. But he'll go, and he knows exactly which one he needs.

They all look the same to me, in a different category, these little V-shaped ones and these little flat ones. But there'll be one that he knows is just exactly what he needs, and he'll just tickle away, and he gets exactly the right kind of little cut and exactly the right kind of little groove. I can't see the difference, but he can.

God knows the right time and the right place to get certain things done, and it isn't always going to be us. So I think about these virgin daughters. Why are they mentioned? They do nothing in this chapter, except sit there.

Why do we need to know this information? Who cares that Philip had any daughters, much less that they were virgins or that they were prophetesses? It's here for a reason. What is the reason? That they do nothing. That they are fully gifted and able to do this job, and they don't do it.

That's why it's here. This is an observation we can make. Sometimes we are present and accounted for.

We have got powder in the chamber. The breach is closed and locked. We have got the lanyard in our hand.

We are ready to fire, and somebody else gets the mission. And they fire. And we are standing there with the lanyard in our hand, powder, shot, everything ready to go.

We don't get to shoot the cannon. And we say, Lord, what about me? Well, God knows what He is doing. He uses whatever tool is perfect for the job.

In this case, these young ladies, not a thing wrong with them, but they don't get the job. Instead, look at what happens. As we were staying there for some days, the virgin daughters say nothing.

The virgin daughters don't make a peep. No prophesying from the virgin daughters as they stay there for some days. Instead, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea.

Now, this is the Agabus of Acts 11 fame, who stood up, Acts 11.28, began to indicate by the Spirit. Same phrase, by the way, that we have telling Paul, don't go to Jerusalem. By the Spirit, there would certainly be a great famine all over the world, and it took place in the reign of Claudius.

You go back to the Old Testament criteria for a prophet. If he is not a hundred percent, throw him out. Jean Dixon, she's not a hundred percent.

Or she wasn't. I guess she's probably not around anymore. Any of these others that make predictions, that kind of went out of favor, didn't it? I don't hear people making predictions like they used to.

I guess people realized that their success rate was really low. You have to be a hundred percent to be a prophet of God. Agabus, to my knowledge, never misses.

So here's Agabus. Paul knows about him going way back. Came down from Judea.

Can't be everywhere at once. Comes from Judea. Coming to us.

He took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands and said, this is what the Holy Spirit says. In this way, the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles. Now, you can't get any more dramatic than this.

You've got the premier, highest ranking prophet in the land. If John the Baptist was alive, it would have been John the Baptist. If it was Elijah's day, it would have been Elijah.

If it was David's day, it would have been Nathan. Your kingpin, primo, top of the heap prophet. God says, look, I've sent you message after message.

I've sent it with believers in this town and this town and this town and this town. I sent a whole crowd of them to you up here and you just don't seem to be changing direction. So here's Agabus.

There's nobody bigger than Agabus. There's nobody more famous as a prophet than Agabus. Agabus walks up to Paul, pulls his belt off, lays down on the ground, wraps his hands and feet in it and says, you see this? I mean, does he even need to speak? Do you see this? This is the Holy Spirit, Paul, talking to you.

In this way, the Jews in Jerusalem... Now, if this is what Paul is supposed to do, why is he getting these repeated warnings? I ask you. Is there any doubt that Paul is going to Jerusalem? He's heading like an arrow straight for Jerusalem. Was he waffling? Was Paul saying, you know, maybe I'll go back to Antioch.

Maybe those Ephesian elders, I think there was a couple of things I forgot to say to them. Maybe I'll just sail back. There's no doubt.

He's heading for Jerusalem. So why these messages? Because he's going the wrong way. Verse 4. The Holy Spirit spoke through the believers, do not go to Jerusalem.

He's going anyway. So now Agabus. This is his last chance to change course.

This is what the Holy Spirit says. This is what the Jews in Jerusalem will do. Bind the man who owns this belt.

Deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles. When we had heard this, we, as well as the local residents, began begging him not to go to Jerusalem. There are times when you can be too smart for your own good.

You know? Here's the apostle, and here's the companions and the people that live in Caesarea. Now it says, who are the local residents? Philip, daughter one, daughter two, daughter three, daughter four, other families in Caesarea, probably in the church that Philip is a part of, if not the head of. He is an evangelist after all.

But all of these people are saying, you know Paul, pretty clear to me. There's no doubt of interpretation here, is there? It isn't like, well Paul, we need to pray for you because it looks like rough times ahead. Maybe some of us should go with you.

You know, when Jesus said bad things are going to happen in the garden, the disciples said, should we take swords? I mean, you know, if everybody thought the will of the Holy Spirit was for Paul to go, but he was facing tribulation, what would you do? Paul, let's pray. Let's give you support. Let's go with you.

How can we help you through this? They're saying, do not go. Everybody, unanimously, is saying do not go. So it's clear to everybody except Paul.

Now, why are we belaboring this point? There's nobody on the planet in this year of our Lord, A.D. 50-whatever it is, that knows as much as Paul. He is the smartest man when it comes to the Word of God that there is, and yet he's going in the wrong direction. People who don't know as much as he does have a better sense of where the Holy Spirit is leading than Paul does.

How can this be? You would think that knowledge of the Word of God, study of the Word of God, preaching of the Word of God would ensure you, would prevent you from making a mistake of this nature, and yet Paul seems to have a blindness, seems to have an unteachableness, or an inability to turn in this area. Something is driving him toward Jerusalem, and God the Holy Spirit, sending everybody at him like bullets, can't deflect him from going to Jerusalem. Now, of course, to me, you can never convince a Calvinist, but I shouldn't say never.

You can seldom convince a Calvinist. I know a couple that have changed their minds. But this, to me, is a demonstration of the fact that God does not overrule human volition.

God sends the Holy Spirit with message after message, but He does not prevent Paul from going in this case, which He easily could. He could hem him in like He did on the second journey. He says, you better not go.

I'm telling you what's going to happen. You're going to be bound. So we, as well as the local residents, begging him not to go to Jerusalem.

Then Paul answered, What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. Now this sounds great, and this has been pointed to all down through the ages. Look at the dedication of the Apostle Paul.

I will lay my life on the altar of ministry. The problem is, he has not been called to lay his life down at Jerusalem. The Holy Spirit has never said he's going to lay down his life in Jerusalem.

And it is not his mission to go to Jerusalem. Philip doesn't even live in Jerusalem anymore. That is a hard-hearted bunch.

Hard-headed bunch. Legalistic. Stuck between the law and grace.

Since he would not be persuaded, we fell silent, remarking, The will of the Lord be done. How does this reconcile? When you say, The will of the Lord be done, what are you saying? God is going to have to work this out. We can't say anymore.

And there is a point at which when you have presented what you understand from the Word of God to someone, and their mind does not change, you don't just keep haranguing and pushing. You say, Well, I'm going to step back and place this in God's

hands. If the Word of God does not make a dent coming from me, then God is going to have to bring it from some other source, some other way.

So what do we learn from this? It is possible for even the most advanced, knowledgeable believers to get stubborn and miss the will of God, and to get outside the will of God. And Paul is not supposed to go to Jerusalem. Look at verse 4. The Holy Spirit says, Don't go.

He goes anyway. Paul rationalizes this. And this is our biggest enemy, is that we rationalize.

Now, he doesn't say, Well, I'm going to cave into a temptation here and go to Jerusalem. He couches it, This is my sacrifice for ministry. I'm ready to die for the Lord.

And you see people all the time today who for evangelism's sake will go to any extreme. I'll embarrass myself. I'll be rude.

I'll be rejected. You see people marching and demonstrating over one thing and another and making themselves odious and a stench in the nostrils of society, and saying, I am willing to be arrested as I protest outside this abortion clinic, or whatever it may be. I justify my civil disobedience.

It's in the name of the Lord. There are people who go to work and say, I'm going to read my Bible. I'm going to wear my Jesus shirt.

I'm going to do this and the other. And it is misplaced enthusiasm. The Word of God teaches that we are to work quietly.

We are to mind our own business. We are to let our light shine. Women can win their husbands without a word.

Believers can win the world without a word because it is the light of the glorious gospel of Christ who is the image of God that shines. And this is our call. But there are people who decide that there is a thing that should be done and they will dress it in the glory of God.

They will wrap it in the flag of the gospel and say, this is the right thing. Knowing this, seeing this, we look at ourselves and we say, now, am I justifying a course of action? Am I justifying a policy or some aspect of my way of life in this way? Have I become impermeable in some area to the teaching of the Word of God? Have I made up my mind in this area or on this subject and there is just no teaching me? The Holy Spirit can come right up and have Agabus fall at my feet and wrap Himself in my clothes and I'm not changing my mind. It's possible.

It happens here to the Apostle Paul. And if it can happen to him, it can sure enough happen to any one of us, right? Well, this is written for our instruction. If we honestly

want to please God in our life, if we want Him to be able to reach in and prune out the dead branches that don't bear fruit, we have to be teachable.

We have to open any subject for discussion, any area of our life and say, what does the Word of God say? What is God, the Holy Spirit, teaching me in this area? And fill in the blank. I can't even illustrate with examples except to point to the Apostle Paul. This is in the area of his calling.

This is in the area of his Christian life, if you will. It's the most important thing. It is what defines him.

And yet he is heading in precisely the wrong direction. If you look again at that map, look at the Third Missionary Journey map. When he heads out, in both the second and the third journey, what direction is he going? Northwest.

Heading up into Asia. Heading up into Philippi, Thessalonica, the whole region of Asia Minor. Very close to Rome, isn't he? Just beyond the left edge of that map, you can see the heel of the boot that is Rome.

And yet, after ministering, he suddenly lurches in the opposite direction. And suddenly now, instead of heading north and west, he is heading south and east. But it's Jerusalem.

I am a Jew. I am a Hebrew. The Hebrew is born on the 8th.

They read Romans 9 and 10 and 11 and get Paul's heart on Israel. It is so close to his heart. And this is the area where we tend to get tripped up.

Things that are near and dear. Things that are close. Things that we love.

Things that are part of our background. The things that we hold nearest and dearest are the hardest to put in perspective. When you hold something really close to your face, it's hard to get a perspective.

We're too close. And the only thing that can give us objectivity is the Word of God. And a commitment to the Word of God, a prayer to God, as the hymn says, open my eyes that I may see visions of truth thou hast for me.

If you turn your eyes on Jesus, look full in His wonderful face, the things of this earth will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and His grace. And the antidote to this kind of myopia, this kind of short-sightedness or blindness is a genuine, wholehearted dedication to God. Now, Paul seems to express that here when he says, I'm ready to lay down my life for the Gospel of Christ.

But he's not really thinking about the Word of God, is he? God gave him the nature of his mission. He said, You will preach before kings. You will take the Gospel of Christ to the Gentiles.

Paul says, You Jews are hard-hearted. We shake off the dust from our feet. We go to the Gentiles.

He's not going to the Gentiles. He's going back to Jerusalem. It's a matter of meditation.

It is a matter of concentration. It's a matter of focus. And this is what we need to do.

There are areas of our life where we just don't want to consider that there's something different, that there's something else, that the Word of God leads us in a different direction. We just don't want to hear it. And God is still going to work this together for good.

And Paul is going to see Rome, but it's going to be in a far different circumstance than if he had retained his freedom, if he had retained his focus. And God only knows what his ministry would have been had there been a full, fourth missionary journey. He had hoped to go to Spain.

He had hoped to go to regions far beyond where he's going to travel in chains. And instead of sitting chained between guards in the Mamertine dungeon, Paul could have been evangelizing the westward regions of the Roman Empire. And only the Lord knows what might have been.

God worked it together for good. God still accomplishes His purpose, but it's kind of like looking at Judas. Yes, Jesus is supposed to die on the cross, but woe to the man by whom these things come.

Something is lost when there is a failure. God will still get His purpose accomplished, but something is lost. And Paul is the one who loses out here.

Paul is going to go through a lot of needless suffering, a lot of needless imprisonment, a lot of needless downtime, because of this decision. But people pray for him, the will of the Lord be done. After these days we got ready and started on our way up to Jerusalem.

And this word for started on our way is from the same verb used by the believers who through the Spirit told Paul do not embark. This says, after these days we got ready and embarked on our way to Jerusalem. It's very clear in Greek.

The Spirit says don't embark. After these days, we embarked. It doesn't get much clearer than that.

Some of the disciples from Caesarea came with us, taking us to Nason of Cyprus, a disciple of longstanding with whom we were to lodge. After we arrived in Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly, so far so good. The following day, Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present.

Panic button, flag, buzzer. After he had greeted them, he began to relate one by one the

things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. When they heard it, they began glorifying God.

And they said to him, You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed, and they are all zealous for the law and have been told about you, that you are teaching all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, Now listen, look at this. Look at verse 19. Paul greets them and says, Let me tell you what is going on with the Gentiles.

They say, Ah, glory to God. Now let us tell you what is going on with the Jews. You are messing up our dope here.

You are causing a big problem here. Glory to God about the Gentiles, but, now here is the main thing, Paul. You are messing up the whole Jewish community here.

You are teaching the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children, not to walk according to the customs. What then is to be done, Paul? We have got to fix this problem. Now has this come up when Paul was in any of these other Gentile towns? No.

He comes to Jerusalem, and now this thing, and all is forgotten about the years he spent in Ephesus, and the time he spent in Corinth, and Philippi, and Thessalonica. The epistles that he has written are going to become a part of inspired scripture. None of that.

Paul, you are messing us up here. You are creating ripples. You are confusing the issue here, and we are all over the law of Moses.

We are keeping the law here. We are good law-abiding Jews. We have got our Bible here.

What then is to be done? They will certainly hear that you have come. Well, duh. That is why the Holy Spirit said, Don't go.

Therefore, do this that we tell you. Do this that we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow.

See, you have a little bit of a bracket here with the vow. You have Paul and Ken Crea taking a vow. We have got these four men who are taking a vow.

Take them and purify yourself along with them, and pay their expenses, so that they may shave their heads, and all will know that there is nothing to the things which they have been told about you. But you yourself also walk orderly, keeping the law. Nothing of Christ.

Nothing of salvation. Nothing of the great mysteries that have been revealed to Paul. He is the steward of the mysteries, the doctrines of Christ.

Does James say, Well, Paul, we hear that you have got some great truth that has never been on the planet before. We would like to have a Bible conference and have you teach a series here in Jerusalem and show us what great things God has done and the things that He has revealed and the things that you have learned under the tutelage of the Lord Jesus Himself. Teach us the Word.

There is nothing coming from Paul to them. It is all coming from them on Paul. You dance to our... Remember when the Lord Jesus said, John came and I have come, Jesus says, and it is like the children in the marketplace and they are complaining because when we piped, you didn't dance.

And when we cried, you didn't mourn. You are not playing our game. You are not doing what we want you to do.

John came not eating and not drinking and you said there is something the matter with him. I came eating and drinking and you say I am a wine bibber. You know, it is all about you are not meeting our standards.

Well, this is the very same thing. The problem has not changed. Take them, purify yourself along with them, pay their expenses.

All of this is legalistic and it is not even a part of the law of Moses. There is nothing in the law of Moses about shaving heads and taking vows and keeping the law. This is Phariseism.

This is tradition. This is meeting an expectation. Concerning the Gentiles who have believed, we wrote, we have already written a letter about those Gentiles.

We don't really need to hear any more about that having decided they should abstain from meat sacrifice to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from fornication. Once again, this is what we have said about the Gentiles. We don't want you telling us about the Gentiles.

Let us tell you about the Gentiles. Don't you remember we wrote the letter? We give our information to the Gentiles. Now we are giving some information to you.

And this is what you find when you fall into a legalistic situation. There is no longer a give and take. It is all take.

There is no longer a focus on the word of God. There is a focus on expectations. There is a focus on standards.

There is a focus on approval or the lack thereof. There is this sort of atmosphere that well, do I measure up or not to the expectation and the standard that has been created in this community or in this group or in this church or in this context. And one feels that

one must somehow demonstrate that one is united with the group and is one of the gang, so to speak.

And Christ leaves the equation. The Holy Spirit is out of the picture. The word of God is no longer in evidence.

And this is what you have now. Now, did you realize that there is a Christian book that has been on the New York Times bestseller list now for months. Do you know which one it is? The Purpose Driven Church.

Purpose Driven Church. Have you ever seen that book? You ought to check it out. It will remind you of Acts chapter 21.

It will remind you of a form of godliness that denies the power. It is a technique. It's a format.

It's a procedure. It's a way of getting your church to grow. It is a way that is all full of the right noises and the right sounds.

It will quote Scripture just like this. Walking orderly, is that a part of the plan of God? Of course. Things should be done decently and in good order.

Paul himself says this about the church. The Bible in this day is the law, isn't it? And is it right to refrain from blood and what is strangled and fornication? Is anybody going to argue about those being good things? But where is the power? Has anybody from the time that Paul showed up said anything about the Holy Spirit? Has anybody said anything about the mission of living to reflect the glory of Christ? No, this is living to reflect the glory of Moses. Living to reflect the glory of the law.

Living to reflect the glory of Judaism. And to conform to Judaism. And to make people who believe in Judaism happy.

And Paul, this is not where Paul makes a mistake. This is another in a series of moves in the wrong direction. Paul took the men and the next day purified himself along with them.

Went into the temple giving notice of the completion of the days of purification until the sacrifice was offered for each one of them. If you believe as I do that Paul wrote the book of Hebrews, there is no sacrifice that takes away sin. Christ is the end of the law.

Sacrifices have been completed. Those who continue to offer these ritual sacrifices crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh and put into an open shame. But what is happening here? Temple, Old Testament, sacrifices.

Twenty years after, twenty-five years after the Lord Jesus died on the cross. It is to appease people. Did God the Holy Spirit say, Paul, go to Jerusalem and offer a sacrifice

that will glorify Christ? Who thinks this is a good idea? James and the men from James.

Does Paul know what kind of troublemakers they are? Has he run into them before? Of course. He went into the temple giving notice of the completion of the days of purification until the sacrifice was offered for each one of them. When the seven days were almost over, the Jews from Asia, upon seeing him in the temple... Now, what is Asia? Jews from Asia? Where is Asia? John to the seven churches which are in Asia? Where are these people from? They are not the Gentiles in Asia that Paul is supposed to be ministering to.

They are the Jews from Asia who have come down like Paul for Pentecost from Asia. What happened in Asia? Remember Lystra and Derbe and Corinth and Ephesus and all the other places where the Jews caused problems. These people just will not leave him.

They have dogged him all the way back to Jerusalem. They find out that he is there in the temple and they are outraged. And there is this big gossip campaign.

These are not the Jews from Syria. The Roman province of Syria is Israel. This is Asia.

This is up where Paul just came from. Upon seeing him in the temple, stirred up all the crowd, laid hands on him, crying out, Men of Israel, come to our aid. This is the man who preaches to all men everywhere against our people and the law and this place.

And besides, he has even brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place. Does the Bible say that is a holy place? What is the standing of the temple and the Temple Mount in 50-something A.D.? What are these people basing their understanding on? It's just seven kinds of wrong, isn't it? This should never have happened. Paul should never have been here.

This is nothing but trouble. It confuses the issue. Paul the Apostle, the people are going to look at for 2,000 years.

You can't believe the confusion in the scholarly literature when people assume that he was golden and everything he did was right. Trying to reconcile and trying to talk about Jews in the church age, that it's okay for them to continue to observe and be observant because of what Paul does here. It has created no end of confusion.

Brought Greeks into the temple to defile this holy place. They had previously seen Trophimus, the Ephesian, in the city with him and they supposed that Paul had brought him into the temple which he had not done. All the city was provoked and the people rushed together, took hold of Paul, dragged him out of the temple.

Immediately the doors were shut. They were seeking to kill him. Report came up to the commander of the Roman cohort that all Jerusalem was in confusion.

So much for the triumphal return of Paul to Jerusalem to share the good news of God's work among the Gentiles to bring in the offering. What happened to the offering? Who knows? Paul doesn't get a chance to say anything about that, does he? A bunch of poor saints in Jerusalem he was going to try to minister to. We don't know what happened with that.

The commander of the Roman cohort took soldiers, centurions, ran down to them, saw the commander and the soldiers. They stopped beating Paul. God doesn't really preserve him from this beating any more than he did a lot of the others.

Commander came and took hold of him, ordered him to be bound with two chains and began asking who he was and what he had done. Among the crowd some were shouting one thing, some another. When he could not find out the facts because of the uproar, he ordered him to be brought into the barracks.

Fulfillment of the prophecy of Agabus, fulfillment of the word of the Holy Spirit in every city that Paul visited on the way down here. And what of the gospel has been preached? What progress has been made in Paul's ministry here? Zero. The one thing it has done is shown the decrepitude of the church's witness in Jerusalem and in Judea because huge segments of Judaism are as they were in the days of the Lord Jesus.

Unteachable, unrepentant, un-Christian, unconvinced by everything that God has done in the last 20, 25 years with regard to demonstrations of the Spirit and of power, demonstrating that Christ is the Son of God, that He is the Messiah, by His resurrection from the dead. These people hear and see none of it. And James and the Jerusalem church, how are they getting along? Why is there no furor and uproar with them? They have caved, they have compromised, they have accommodated, they are one with the Jewish community.

Everybody's, you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours. If Paul believes the same as the others in Jerusalem, why is the appearance of Paul raising such a ruckus? Because the church in Jerusalem is not taking the stand that Paul takes, is not teaching the doctrine that Paul teaches. And this just brings it out.

He is the litmus paper stuck into the acid and going bright red. He brings out the worst in these people. Well, God knew it already.

Jesus has already foretold the destruction of Jerusalem. We don't need this demonstration. It's a waste of time in that sense.

But here he is. He got to the stairs. He was carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the mob.

The multitude of the people kept following, shouting, away with him. Kind of reminds you of earlier days. Paul was about to be brought into the barracks.

He said to the commander, may I say something to you? He said, do you know Greek? Then you are not the Egyptian who some time ago stirred up the revolt and led 4,000 men of the assassins out into the wilderness. Paul said, no. I am a Jew of Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no insignificant city, and I beg you, allow me to speak to the people.

Well, Paul still has not awakened to the futility of this mission, of his binding in the Spirit. And it isn't until he tries to make this speech that it's going to come clear. Well, we're going to have to leave Paul in custody, crying out for an opportunity to be heard at this point.

But, what do we conclude? If we want to live our lives to please the Lord, we pray the prayer, Lord, open my eyes. If we ask, it will be given. If we seek, we will find.

If we knock, the door will be opened. It is a strong likelihood that all of us have areas of blindness, where we think that something is right, and we have justified, even from the Word of God, a viewpoint or an attitude or an opinion or a policy or some aspect of our life. Paul is doing a lot of things right, and God is still blessing his ministry as an apostle, but in this he is wrong.

He should not be here. He should not be going in this direction. He should not be trying to speak to the Jews.

And he is impervious to the witness of the Spirit. We want to ask God to reveal that to us. We want to not be an impenetrable block of granite when it comes to the witness from God's Word and God's Spirit.

We want to have God's highest and God's best at work in our lives. And it is possible. It is a matter of desire.

It's a matter of attitude. If we ask, God will drop the scales from our eyes. He will deliver us from our own blindness and our own hardness of heart.

But we have to want it. We have to ask for it. And we have to be willing to hear when the Holy Spirit speaks.

Otherwise, we can get a drubbing. We can end up in chains. We can end up bound and unable to do the things that God has for us.

Well, better things are coming in the rest of this chapter, and we'll see it next time. Father, thank you for the privilege of seeing the truth of your Word. We pray that God the Holy Spirit will be able to minister it to our hearts, that we will be receptive, that we will be teachable, and that your glory will be reflected in our lives each and every day.

We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.