

## 41b ACTS

Let's pick up our study now in Acts chapter 21. We've seen the prophet Agabus come down and warn Paul, but he goes on his way. Anyhow, some of the disciples from Caesarea come along.

Look at verse 16. I wanted to point something out here just in passing because it has become something of a fascination for me to look at the names that God includes in Scripture. Why would we need to know who Paul stayed with when he came to Jerusalem? What difference could it possibly make? It didn't tell us who he stayed with in Tyre and he was there for a week.

But this guy, he barely gets to stow his toothbrush one night and then he's off getting arrested and leaving in a far different way than he came. But verse 15 says, After these days we got ready and started on our way up to Jerusalem. Some of the disciples from Caesarea also came with us, taking us to Manasson of Cyprus, a disciple of longstanding with whom we were to lodge.

You get the idea here that Manasson is of Cyprus but he lives in Jerusalem. It doesn't specifically say he's in Jerusalem but it would be kind of silly to name him if he's in some village outside and then when he gets to Jerusalem we don't find out who he's staying with. So, Paul is coming to Jerusalem but there's not been an advance party going in and contacting James and saying, reserve the luxury suite for the famed apostle who's coming in with a big loan of money for the poor saints.

Instead, Paul sort of makes his own arrangements and these disciples from Caesarea take him to Manasson of Cyprus so they know him. Well, just take a guess. You've got a 50% chance of being right.

Is Manasson a Hebrew name or not? No, it's not. It doesn't have a Yah or an El or anything else in it. And so, of the two kinds of Jews that would be living in the vicinity of Jerusalem, what kind would Manasson be? He's a Greekified, he's a Hellenized Jew.

This makes sense. His connections are over in Caesarea. He is from Cyprus.

What do we know about Cyprus? Well, you can go back to Acts chapter 4 and verse 36. Remember, this is back before the stoning of Stephen in Acts chapter 7. Go to Acts chapter 4 and in verse 35 it says that all of these proceeds of things that were sold were laid at the apostles' feet. They distributed as each one had need.

Joseph, who is also named Barnabas by the apostles, which is translated son of encouragement, a Levite of the country of Cyprus. Barnabas, Joseph by name, is from Cyprus. And of course, he is one of the Hellenistic-oriented Jews as well.

Very polished speaker in Greek and so on. You flip forward to Acts chapter 11 and verse

19 and you find that when they heard these things they were silent. They glorified God saying, God has also granted the Gentiles repentance to life.

Now, those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch preaching the word to no one but the Jews only. Barnabas is Jewish, but he is Hellenized. These people that are scattered after the stoning of Stephen go preaching the gospel to the Jews in Cyprus.

So, we know that there were Cypriot Jews. And this Nason is from Cyprus, but he now dwells in Jerusalem. So, he could have gotten the word of the gospel and been sort of a... Initially, it was kind of a combination.

They thought of Christianity as a sect of Judaism. So, he may have come to Jerusalem to get the hot scoop from the preaching apostles in that region. But he's here now.

But his name is not Hebrew in origin. It is Hellenistic in origin. It's a Greek word.

And when you look it up in a lexicon, it says we don't know where it came from. We don't know what it's associated with. However, I can tell you one thing it's associated with.

You remember back when Paul was on Mars Hill and there were the two groups. One of those groups were the Stoics. Remember we went into Stoicism and Zeno? What was the big thing with the Stoics? Who remembers? Order.

Peace through control. We can have a peaceful life if we keep everything under control. Stoicism, you gut it out.

You plow the narrow path. You go no matter what. Stoic has come to be synonymous with enduring in the physical realm because controlling things is what gives you peace.

Right? Stay with the order. Follow the rules. That's the idea.

Follow the rules. There's a lot of other stuff. Boy, you just can't believe when you get into philosophy and read this philosophy, thought this and that, and I was trying to absorb the whole Stoic.

None of the writings of Zeno survive. Only people writing about Zeno a couple of hundred years later have survived. And so little quotes and snippets.

But the vast majority of Stoicism perished. And I say good riddance. It's bad enough getting the excerpts.

But Zeno was the guy. It was about 300 B.C. And he taught his pupils under the porch, or the stoa. And that's where they got their name, the Stoics.

You remember all this. Well, Zeno's father's name was Manassas. It's just one letter

different than this.

Manassas. The M.N. infix here, the M.N. configuration, the only place it occurs in Greek is in words associated with memory. We have mnemonics.

Mnemonuo is the Greek verb for remembering. So any word beginning with M.N. tends to suggest this whole mneios, mnemonuo type of thing that has to do with memory. But it also would suggest to anyone in the ancient Greek world Zeno, son of Manassas, and the whole idea of Stoicism.

You would think, well, that's just sort of a glancing, you can't really make too much out of that, and you'd be right. However, when you come on down and get into the conversation of James, verse 20, you see, brother, how many myriads, when it says thousands there, it's not thousands, it's myriads. A myriad in Greek, technically, was 10,000.

When it says 10,000 times 10,000 over in Revelation, that's myriades myriadas. Myriad technically means 10,000, but it's used to mean just an uncounted multitude. You see how many myriads there are among the Jews of those who have believed.

There have been people who argue with the idea of thousands or 10,000 because the population of Jerusalem at this time is not more than several thousand, and obviously most of them are not Christianized Jews. So what are these people saying? Well, myriads, it just means just slathers, incredible multitudes of them. Among the Jews of those who have believed, they are all zealous for the law.

Now, zeal. We talked about that earlier. What does Paul say about the Jews in Romans? I testify they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.

Zeal is a dangerous thing, especially when it's ignorant, because it blinds. Now, we are going to see a head-on collision here between two zeals. The zeal of these Jews who are zealous for the law, and the zeal of Paul the Apostle who is zealous for the Jews.

What drives him to Jerusalem? What did he tell us over in Romans? What did he tell us in Corinthians? Taking up this offering, want to minister to the saints in Jerusalem. What does he tell us in Romans 9, 10, and 11? I would sacrifice every reward coming to me in glory for the sake of the Jews. They are my brethren.

I am a Hebrew of the Hebrews, etc. He's got a zeal for them. And yet, God called him in a different direction.

God didn't call him in the area of his zeal. He could have gone down there and talked Pharisee for years in Jerusalem. Nose-to-nose, Scripture-to-Scripture, toe-to-toe with the Pharisees down there.

He could have knocked them dead. Silenced the Sadducees on resurrection and all of that. God says, no.

I want you to take all the stuff you learned as a Pharisee, everything you know about the law, all of the Old Testament truth you have that is now enlightened and galvanized and energized by the mystery doctrines of the church, and you go take it to the Gentiles. How big would our New Testament be if Paul had not written epistles to Gentile churches? Let's go through the New Testament. Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, James, 1 and 2 Peter, 1 and 2 Peter, 1 and 2 John, Jude, and Revelation, right? Pretty sizable hole blown in the New Testament if Paul doesn't do his job of going to the Gentiles, right? I would include Hebrews, as you notice, in that mix.

But, zealous for the law, zeal for the law, coming from this direction, zeal for the Jews and for grace and for Christ, coming from this direction. We are to be a people zealous of good works. That's what scripture says.

That Christ died, glorious church without spot or wrinkle, any such thing, holy and without blemish. We are to be zealous of good works, it says somewhere. This is zeal for the Jews, zeal for the law.

There is this collision. These zealous people have been told about you. That you are teaching all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses.

Telling them not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs. Now, is this a fair accusation? Well, you go through Galatians chapter 2, chapter 3. Was it Galatians 3? You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you? Abraham believed God who was reckoned. Those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham the believer.

Verse 10, as many as are of the works of the law are under a curse. For it is written, cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law. If you go back under the law, you are cut off from Christ.

You are fallen from grace, etc. etc. I mean, these are pretty strong words.

He says, don't give in to these who are trying to drag you as Gentiles under the law. Well, what does the Jew think? Well, these applications of true things about the law, what is the Jewish Christian supposed to do? Paul is down here saying the law is fulfilled. The law has served its purpose.

There is now a new higher law. Well, so is this a fair accusation? It's not necessarily Paul's mission in life to get all of the Jews weaned off of the law. He himself obviously observes Sabbath.

He observes feasts. He keeps a vow. He shaves his head.

He's operating under the law. But, his teachings can certainly be legitimately, this is kind of like in the political campaigns. You can get a sound bite of President Bush.

Did you hear the one he did this week? The faux pas that he committed where he's talking about the people over there and the people over here. They're dedicated to promulgating their way of life and so are we. They're dedicated to mayhem and destruction and so are we.

He didn't let one fly before he fully got it armed there. And so people will just make hay with something like that forever or take you out of context or go back 30 years and find something you said and just wave it around. But yet, this is a valid conclusion to draw from Paul's teaching.

It is not a false accusation. It's twisted. It's got the wrong emphasis, but it's not false.

How many times have we been accused of something? How many times has someone put a bad face on what we were doing? We don't have complete plausible deniability because there is an element of truth in what they're saying, but they're just putting the worst face on it. A little kid comes to the door selling Girl Scout cookies. You've already got three boxes that you bought from the first three Girl Scouts that came by.

The fourth Girl Scout comes by and you say, oh, thanks, not today. Oh, so you're not buying Girl Scout cookies. So you're anti-Girl Scout.

So you're anti-industry. You're anti-free enterprise. People can just draw all kinds of conclusions, and it's a half-truth.

This is exactly what's happening with Paul, and it is a great weapon to whip up your self-defense mechanism. Add it to the blindness due to zeal. It's just a recipe for disaster because we ask ourselves, this is the Apostle Paul.

This is the inspired author of two-thirds of the New Testament, certainly in terms of its doctrinal content, and he's going to go in and offer sacrifices and shave his head and do all these temple things. What is he thinking? Well, this is what he's thinking. These people are slandering my good name.

They're taking what I'm doing and twisting it around. I came in with all of this money to help these poor people, and all they can do is turn around and make a bunch of slanderous accusations about me, impugn my love of God, impugn my understanding of his word. I'm impugned.

And it just, there is no, for some of us especially, there is no better leverage to pry your armor off and get underneath and really jab it in good than an accusation like this, where we feel the need to justify ourselves and say, you're wrong. I'll show you who's being impugned around here, and we want to take things into our hands. But where is the

derailment? Where did this get started? It got started being too worried about what the Jews think to begin with.

Paul the Apostle, in an objective cold light of day, wouldn't give a flying shekel what any of the Jews think about him. The Jews didn't strike him down on the road to Damascus. They're going to try to strike him down here, but it's the Lord Jesus who commissioned him.

It's the Lord Jesus who gave him his calling and his apostleship, who taught him the mysteries of the doctrines of Christ, that only he knows. Can you imagine if one of these overzealous Jews had knocked Paul in the head with a rock before he finished, didn't get to write the pastoral epistles? Where would we be without 1st and 2nd Timothy and Titus? I mean, God has to intervene to preserve Paul here, so that he can do what he's supposed to do in his calling as an apostle. Well, again, we don't want to be just so involved in the Apostle Paul.

That's the same thing that can happen when you look at King David. You say, wow, David, you know, Uriah, Bathsheba, you wrote the Psalms. I mean, the guy that wrote Psalm 23 is murdering Uriah.

You're just going to hardly reconcile the two. But God put people in the Bible, flaws and all, so that we could learn, because we are all operating with a similar set of predilections and tendencies and failures that can creep up on us. So, what happens here? You go back to Acts chapter 21, and as Paul hears these things, he's asked a question in verse 22.

They have been told about you. You're teaching these things, telling them not to circumcise their children, nor to walk according to the customs. What, then, is to be done? I wish you could see this in Greek.

In verse 22, it's just, *tioun estin*? What, therefore, is it? What's this going to be? It's a real short, pungent little question in Greek. *Tioun* means therefore. *Estin* is from *ami*, which means to be.

*Estin* means it is. And *tioun* is what? Therefore, what's it going to be? What's it going to be, Paul? Are we going to let this false accusation stand? Are we going to let these rumors fly? In colloquial translation, they say, what's it going to be? What are you going to do about this? They will certainly hear you have come. Therefore, do this.

We've asked the question. We don't even need to hear your answer. We've already got the answer.

Do this, we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow. Take them, purify yourself along with them.

Pay their expenses so that they may shave their heads. Shaving the head is at the fulfillment phase of a vow. There's been a lot of speculation and study trying to figure out this seems to be some form of Nazirite vow, only because it's the only vow we know about that involves shaving the head or the length of the hair and that sort of thing.

But Nazirite vows typically take 30 days. And Paul, he does this like overnight. This whole thing takes like seven or eight days.

And so he could not have started a Nazirite vow. But many people would come for the feast, as Paul has done, and would purify themselves before the feast. So what Paul has done is begin a period of purification.

These guys have got a vow underway and he has timed the finish of his purification to coincide with the end of these four guys' Nazirite vow. Notice it's perfect. They have taken a vow.

They've already started. But they need somebody to sponsor them. Sponsoring somebody in a vow was a close identification.

It was kind of a vicarious participation. If you couldn't actually do the vow, you sponsor somebody else who does the vow. So even though you weren't there to start this, you can chip in and kind of piggyback on their vow.

And four guys' vows, you piggyback, you pay all four of their expenses. Well, where's the money going to come from to pay these expenses? Four guys? Have you seen motel rates lately? Money, meals, expense, and all of that? He's going to pay the expenses for four guys. What money does Paul have? He's got the freewill offerings of all those believers.

Now, I'm not saying that that's what he used. I'm just asking. Somewhere he has to come up with this money.

Purify yourself along with them. 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 because you yourself also walk orderly, keeping the law. The verb here for walk orderly is stoicheo.

Stoicheo. Sounds a lot like stoic, doesn't it? Walk orderly. Stoicism.

The reason they call it stoicism is not only did he teach under the stoa, but it was sort of a word play because it was all about order. It's the order no matter what. You suffer the slings and arrows.

You're stoic. You go on through. This is the way.

Hew to the line. Come thick or thin. This is the path of peace, is control and order.

And so what are they doing? They're appealing. And there's almost a warning here. Now, it's a stretch with Manassas and his name.

But why are we given his name? The only association in any lexicon or any Greek reference that you can find to this individual's name is the father of Zeno, who is himself the father of stoicism. And it says he's a believer of longstanding. So you've got a longstanding... This guy's been around a long time.

He's one of the early converts. And Paul is staying at his house. And right away, as soon as they hear the news and they rejoice, they take him to James and everything starts going downhill.

And they say, we want you to take the stoic path. Come back to the old ways. Show that you're not out in the weeds.

You're not a wild-eyed radical upsetting the order. There's nothing to this. At a stroke, Paul can undo the impact of his three missionary journeys and all of the teaching that he has done.

The same Jews from Asia and Asia Minor who travel down here to cause problems for Paul can travel the other direction and say, you know all that stuff Paul was saying up here in Ephesus and Miletus and everywhere else? Well, he's down there in the temple. You misunderstood him when he said don't go under the law. He shaved his head.

He sponsored four guys. He's offered sacrifices. By the way, the sacrifices, that's a part of the sponsoring.

You know how much a bull costs? Money had to come from somewhere and he's already spent a lot on his trip chartering the boat and so on. All will know that there is nothing to the things they have been told, and yet the things they have been told are valid. The things they have been told are true.

The things they have been told are documented in Galatians and in Ephesians and in Timothy. If you haven't written these passages down, you can look them up. Galatians 4.9 Galatians 5.6 through 11 Romans 2.25 Romans 10.4 Romans 10.4 Christ is the end of the law to those who believe.

It doesn't get any clearer than that. And he's already written that letter. Christ is the end of the law for those who believe.

And yet, all will know there is nothing to the things that have been told about you. You yourself also walk order keeping the law. Now which is it? Christ is the end of the law? You can ask that question at the beginning of verse 22.

What is it? What's it going to be? Are you going to go this... And see that the appeal, the

subtle... This is not a simple test. It's not an intermediate test. This is an advanced test for an advanced believer because there's a lot of rationale.

There's a lot of justification. I'm ready to suffer for the cause of Christ. I'm not going to be held back because it's difficult.

I won't be held back because it's threatening or dangerous or a little scary or that I may not come out of it with my life. And so there is a dedication. There is a sort of stoic attitude that Paul has.

He says, I'm ready to suffer and to die in Jerusalem if need be. It's all for Christ. But it is misplaced zeal because it is zeal outside of his call.

It's not a sinful thing to preach to the Jews unless you're Paul and you've been called to go to the Gentiles. It's not a sinful thing to suffer and to die for the cause of Christ unless you're doing it at the wrong place and the wrong time. And Paul is not going to suffer and he's not going to die.

Remember the Holy Spirit said, bonds and chains await you if you go to Jerusalem. And yet, Paul said, you Ephesian elders, I'll never see your face again. I'm prepared to die in Jerusalem.

But he's not going to die. If Paul is the one with the Spirit, then how come he doesn't know that he's not going to die in Jerusalem? He's telling everybody, I probably will die in Jerusalem. Last time I see you, goodbye.

Watch out for the wolves. Shepherd the flock of God. It's been nice knowing you.

I'm off to Jerusalem to die. Who has the Spirit? The people wanting him not to go because he's going to get locked up. Or Paul who says, this is my coup de grace.

Well, you also yourself walk orderly, keeping the law. But concerning the Gentiles who had believed, now we're going to find out about the offering, right? We appreciate the warmth of their generosity and the love in Christ that is expressed in their sacrificial giving on our behalf. Is that what he says? Look, we've dealt with them.

We wrote them a letter. We told them what they need to do. We've given them the modified law.

You know, this stuff about Christ is the end of the law and don't get circumcised and all that. Look, we wrote the letter. Remember the letter, Paul? Abstain from each sacrifice to idols.

Abstain from blood. Abstain from what is strangled and from fornication. And Paul took them in.

There's no argument. You don't hear what Paul replies. He doesn't say he stayed up all night praying about it or anything else.

Paul just says, show me the men. He took the men. And the next day, he purified himself along with them.

He went into the temple and gave notice announcing the expiration of the days of purification at which time an offering should be made for each one of them. He's giving the announcement because he's buying the offerings. He's buying the bulls.

He's paying all the expenses for these guys and their vows as well as his own offerings for purification in anticipation of the feast. When the seven days were almost ended, the Jews from Asia... Remember, where's the Roman province of Asia? This is up where the seven churches are that John will write under the Lord's direction in Revelation 2 and 3. Jews from Asia. These are the ones that hounded him from pillar to post up there and got him run out of town and got him out of the synagogue and everything else.

A lot of them have come down for the feast as well. And they say, there's that rabble-rousing Paul. So they saw him in the temple and it all went the way James said.

They've seen him in the temple and they say, oh, well, he's not really teaching these things after all. This plan didn't even come close to working, did it? Just the opposite. They say, well, you're corrupting the people abroad.

Now you've come to the very heart of Judaism and you're going to corrupt it here. Because they have a zeal. They stirred up the whole crowd.

They laid hands on him crying out, Men of Israel, help. This is the man who teaches all men everywhere against the people, against the law, against this place. And furthermore, he has brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place.

For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple. He hadn't, but at this point, nobody knows the difference. All the city was disturbed.

The people ran together, seized Paul, dragged him out of the temple and immediately the doors were shut. Now, as they were seeking to kill him, news came to the commander of the garrison that all Jerusalem was in an uproar. Who is the garrison? This is not the temple priest police that we've seen in the past, is it? The garrison are the Romans.

The garrison are the Greek speaking, iron clad Roman soldiers. The commander of the garrison immediately took soldiers and centurions and ran down to them and when they saw the commander and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul. The reserve with which this story is told is really stunning.

We didn't know that they were beating Paul until this guy arrives. The commander came near and took him and commanded him to be bound with two chains and asked who he was and what he had done. Some among the multitude cried one thing and some another.

When he could not ascertain the truth because of the tumult, he commanded him to be taken into the barracks. This is like protective custody until he can figure out what's going on. So, Paul, who has come to minister to the Jews, has instead been ministered to by the Jews.

He has been administered a drubbing at a minimum, a severe beating and he is delivered from his own people by the Gentiles. I mean, does it get any more ironic than coming into Jerusalem with an offering for your brethren, your brethren try to kill you and the Gentiles that you left at your back to come help your people are now the ones pulling your fat out of the fire and putting you in protective custody so that these wonderful, beloved, poor saints that you're trying to help don't kill you. When he reached the stairs, he had to be carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the mob.

This is the violence to his person. He probably has his breath knocked out, is probably bleeding from various places, bruised, battered. I mean, they had nearly killed him.

God sends the Romans to deliver Paul from the Jews. The multitude of the people followed after, crying out, away with him. Zeal blinds people to the truth, even good people, even apostles.

Then as Paul was about to be led into the barracks, he said to the commander, May I speak to you? He replied, Can you speak Greek? Are you not the Egyptian who some time ago stirred up a rebellion and led 4,000 assassins out in the wilderness? Paul said, No, I'm a Jew from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city. I implore you, permit me to speak to the people. The light has not yet filtered through the shingles being torn off of Paul's roof here, right? He still thinks that he can do some good by speaking to the people.

So the commander says, Knock yourself out. Paul stood on the stairs and motioned with his hand to the people. When there was a great silence, he spoke to them in the Hebrew language, saying, and then we get a new chapter, Brethren and fathers, hear my defense before you now.

When they heard that he spoke to them in the Hebrew language, they kept all the more silent. This would be like going to a fight and fundy convention and opening out of the King James Bible. King James only crowd will say, well, at least he's got the right Bible.

Say on. Then he said, I am indeed a Jew born in Tarsus of Cilicia but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel. A little name dropping there.

Taught according to the strictness of our father's law and was zealous toward God as you all are today. Zealous. I persecuted this way to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women, as also the high priest bears me witness and all the council of elders, Sanhedrin, from whom I also received letters to the brethren, went to Damascus to bring in chains, even those who were there to Jerusalem to be punished.

Now he's going to give the account of his conversion. I just want you to skip down. He's going to tell all of the details down to verse 21.

Jesus appears to him on the road and as soon as he quotes the Lord Jesus, Depart, I will send you far from here to the Gentiles. They listened to him until this word, verse 22, and then they raised their voices and said, Away with such a fellow from the earth. He is not fit to live.

They will listen as long as they like what you're saying, but this is the Jews only, Hebrew only, law only crowd. He tells this story and they listen and as soon as he says this word, it's back to pandemonium. They cried out.

They tore off their clothes and threw dust in the air. The commander ordered him to be brought into the barracks and said he should be examined under scourging so he might know why they shouted so against him. And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said to the centurion who stood by, Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman and uncondemned? So now, having been completely unsuccessful as a Hebrew among the Hebrews, Paul will flip his coat inside out and be a Roman among the Romans.

Well, it's a sad time for the apostle Paul. It's a sad day when he has to be reminded in this dramatic fashion that he has not been called. Here's one application and it's an easy one because we understand the nature of evangelism and who is the evangelist.

But we can have a zeal and a love for people and want to evangelize them. But if we go where the Holy Spirit has not plowed the ground, we do no good. The apostle Paul, it is a good thing.

The Jews need to hear the word of God. And God has commissioned eleven men, ten of whom are still alive, to witness to the Lord Jesus Christ in Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria. It is not Paul's area.

He has been assigned a different area. There's one thing you learn in the military. It is that when you have an assigned area of responsibility, that's your focus.

You do your stuff in there. And if something is going to cross over into somebody else's area of responsibility, you had better coordinate with them. You had better let them control their stuff and you control yours.

You can't run your trucks through somebody else's interlocking fields of fire without

some kind of coordination. It doesn't belong to you. That's theirs.

You can't say, well, go secure that little hillock there because I think it's tactically important. That belongs to someone else. You don't jump in somebody else's bailiwick.

You have your hands full looking at your own. Paul has taken it upon himself to go into an area that God has assigned to ten other living apostles. And the Holy Spirit has not plowed the ground.

Nothing wrong with the concept. Nothing wrong with preaching Christ and glorifying God among the Jews, except it's not Paul's mission. He has not been given that function and he's doing it anyway.

You and I today have lots of opportunities. We get things in the mail. We are encouraged.

Depending on our environment, we can be encouraged in a lot of different directions. And we have to ask ourselves the question, what do I know about my calling, my responsibilities? What does God require? When we had the church in Tahlequah one Sunday, I had the scripture reading. The things that God requires.

What does God require? And pulled all of those verses out of the Bible. What does the Lord require of you, O man, but to do justice, to love mercy, to walk humbly with your God? Whatever we do, it has to meet that criteria. God says, I desire mercy and not sacrifice.

God says, work quietly with your own hands. God says, be ready to give an answer to every man that asks you a reason for the hope that is in you. He says, be a good parent, be a good husband, be a good wife, be a good son or daughter, be a good citizen.

Obey the rule of those over you. Pray for those who are in authority. We have lots of clear, distinct, crystal clear guidance from God on things to do.

And everything else that is of a discretionary or uncertain nature has to fit within that criteria. This decision on Paul's part to go and continue to try to talk to the Jews flies in the face of everything the Lord Jesus has told him. He's never once been given an instruction to go to Jerusalem.

He's not the apostle to the Jews. And it breaks his heart, but it does no good. These people, even when they give him a hearing, one little thing that he says and it's all wiped out because their hearts are hard.

The ground is not plowed by the Holy Spirit. They're not receptive. Now he's going to be bound.

And very soon, the Romans are going to send him back in the direction he was supposed

to be going the first time, but in a completely different mode of travel. Instead of controlling the boat and deciding which ports of call he will go into and which groups of elders he will visit and how long he will stay and with whom he will stay, now he's going to have a nice Roman escort all the way back ultimately to Rome. His life is not over.

His apostolic mission is not over. God anticipated this and wove it into his plan. But there's a lot more suffering for Paul.

There is a lot less opportunity for Paul. His vision of going to Spain never going to happen. His vision of revisiting a lot of the churches that he planted and strengthening the disciples is not going to happen.

God is going to send him to places where there are Roman garrisons and where there are Roman soldiers. And he's going to sit talking to Felix for a couple of years. He's going to sit talking to Portius Festus for a while.

He's going to go one place and another. A very different path. God only knows what might have happened, what might have been.

Obviously, God is able to work all of this together into his plan. And the same is true for us. So on the positive side, if we do make a mistake like this, it's not the end of the world.

God's will for our life is not a path that once you leave it, well, your life is over. You can never get back on the path. God saw it coming.

God uses the Absalom rebellion. God uses the Bathsheba incident. We wouldn't have Solomon without that aberration.

But, woe to those by whom it comes. There is a lot of needless suffering. There is a lot of needless machination that God has to do with us.

The Israelites eventually get into the land of Canaan, but what a shame that a whole generation had to wander for 40 years and drop in the wilderness to do it. If there had been a different decision, if there had been faith, if there had been an understanding of the calling, if there had been recognition of the promise and faith in it, the first generation could have all walked across the Jordan and gone into the land. Now God wove it together.

We learn a lot watching those people fail and fall. But, we have a choice as to whether we are going to be an example of failure and falling or whether we are going to be an example of those who by faith and patience inherit the promises. I say, like General Patton, to paraphrase him, let some other poor slob die for his country.

Let some other poor slob drop in the wilderness and not inherit. Let me be one of those

that God can bounce His glory off of. Let me be one who remembers what the Word says, who loves God, who is called according to His purpose, who He can justify and glorify and use in a positive way in His service.

It is up to us. We are going to have failures. The Apostle Paul, certainly his career still is a benchmark against which pretty much everybody else can be measured.

But, this is a shortfall. This is a shortcoming. This is an example of realizing that you can't rest on your laurels.

You can't rely on momentum from the past. Every day we wake up is a new day. Every day we have to apply the same principles.

Tiger Woods, when he comes up to address the ball and swing the club, every day has to remember the very same basics. He never gets so good that he doesn't have to have the classic stance and the classic grip and the classic swing that he has developed. If he, any given time that he comes up for a stroke there, if he forgets the basics, he can fail and send himself into the swamp.

He can cost himself a tournament by one lapse in concentration, one failure and we can do the same thing. God calls us to be perfect. God calls us to be faithful.

It is by, we have need of endurance so that we can inherit the promises and we just can be greatly edified by seeing that even someone with everything going for him like the Apostle, what is it that got him? What was his Achilles heel? In this case, zeal. He wanted to impress the Jews. He wanted to enlighten the Jews.

He had an idea of how he could do it. He said, let me show them how far the Gentiles have come. Let me show them the Gentiles generosity.

There is no greater example, there is no greater picture of what the Gospel can do among the pagan, heathen, unclean, uncircumcised than this free will offering, sacrificial giving on their behalf. Paul sees it for what it is. It is glorious.

It is wonderful. It secures blessings in heaven for those Gentiles. It is lost on the Jews.

They don't even mention it. They don't even see it. We don't even know what happened to it at the point that he gets arrested and carried off.

These things are written for our instruction to make our decisions, to chart our course. We have to operate off our known points. We have to constantly go back to what we know.

What has God told us? What is the certain, true, infallible, unchanging Word of God as it applies to us? By meditating on that day and night, we can make the decisions in areas that are not so clear. We get our bearings from those known points. We see in failure to

do so the circuitous path that Paul is going to have to take to eventually arrive in Rome.

Well, we'll pick up here at the threshold of chapter 23 next time. Let's close in a word of prayer. Father, thank you for giving us the clear examples in your Word of how to live the life that you have called us to.

We thank you for the gift of the Spirit. We pray that our souls will be teachable and susceptible to the Spirit's ministry that we can remember and see the application in the days ahead of what we have learned here tonight. We pray that God and the Holy Spirit will cause us to grow in grace and in knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

We pray it in His name. Amen.