

A PRISONER BY THE PLAN OF GOD

Lesson Aim: Know the will of God and submit to His good, and acceptable, and perfect will.

Suggestion: Have the students read the Scriptures and answer the questions in the student lesson; then ask the following questions for class discussion.

Was Paul doing God's will or sinning against Him when he went to Jerusalem? 21:4

The problem centers on the meaning of the words "through the Spirit." Does it mean that Paul was told through the Spirit not to go to Jerusalem? Or, did these disciples know through the Spirit that Paul would suffer in Jerusalem and did not want him to go there? The Spirit did tell Paul in many cities that he would suffer bonds and afflictions in Jerusalem, but never told him he should not go there (20:23). Even when Agabus told him that the Jews in Jerusalem would bind him and deliver him to the Gentiles, he did not forbid him from going there (21:10-11). When Paul was determined to go to Jerusalem in spite of these dire forecasts, his friends said, "The will of the Lord be done" (21:14). After he suffered bonds and afflictions in Jerusalem, he testified before the Sanhedrin, "I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day" (23:1). He felt no guilt of sin against the Holy Spirit.

Why was Paul willing to be bound and even die in Jerusalem? 21:13; 2 Cor 9:12-14

Paul was returning to Jerusalem with the gift of money from the churches he had collected in Gentile cities for the poor Jewish Christians in Jerusalem. He felt that this generous gift would cause the Christians in Jerusalem to thank God for these Gentile brethren and cause them to pray for these Gentile Christians (2 Cor 9:12-14). This would bring unity between the Jewish and Gentile Christians and fulfill God's will. For this reason Paul was willing to be bound and even die to finish this task for the name of the Lord (Acts 21:13).

Was Paul doing the will of God when he took a Jewish vow? 21:20-26

James and the other pastors urged Paul to take a Jewish vow to show the Jewish believers that he kept the law and was not against the ceremonies of the law. He agreed to their request, because it agreed with the will of God as the Spirit directed him to write to the church in Corinth. He loved his nation and was willing to avoid needless offense to his Jewish countrymen (1 Cor 10:32). He became a Jew that he might gain the Jews (1 Cor 9:20). He was willing to forego his liberty and not offend their sensitive consciences (1 Cor 8:11, 12).

Did Paul believe it was God's will for sinners to wash away their sins by baptism? 22:16

Paul did not testify that his sins were washed away by baptism; it symbolizes the work of the Spirit when He baptizes us into Christ and into His body of believers (Rom 6:3-5; 1 Cor 12:13). It is not the water of baptism, but the blood of Jesus Christ that washes away sins (1 Jn 1:7; Rev 1:5; 7:9, 13-14). Paul's sins were washed away when he received Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior (Jn 1:12). So when did Paul do this? On the road to Damascus, Christ struck Paul (Saul) down by a bright light, made Himself known to him and gave him the gospel. He claimed that no man gave him the gospel and led him to receive Christ (Act 9:3-6; Gal 1:11-12). He had heard the testimony of Stephen, but had stoutly refused it. But when Paul heard the gospel from Christ, he called Him "Lord." He asked, "Lord, what will you have me to do?" That is when he was saved. When he was baptized several days later, he was calling on the Lord, but it does not say that he was calling for salvation. Those who believe baptism is necessary for salvation may believe he was calling on the Lord to save Him, but the verse does not say that. It is more likely that he was calling on the Lord, declaring that the Lord had saved him, which Romans 10:9-10 says a believer should do.