

A PRISONER BY THE PLAN OF GOD

PLEASE do not read these comments until you have read the Scripture for this lesson. First let the Holy Spirit teach you directly from His Word.

Introduction:

The central truth gleaned from these three chapters reveals that God controls all the circumstances of a Christian's life when he is yielded to Him. Therefore, he should not fret because of his circumstances, because God works all things together for good to them that love Him (Rom 8:28). Providence is that action of God by which He makes all the events of the physical and moral universe fulfill the original design for which He created it. "... He works all things after the counsel of His will" (Eph 1:11). With a Biblical philosophy of life, a Christian should be able to live above the circumstances of his life (Eph 2:10; Acts 21:13). He simply has to wait for God to work out His plan (Ps 62:5).

I. Paul's Return to Jerusalem — 21:1-17

A. Tyre — 21:1-6

21:1-3 - Paul departed from Miletus and followed old established sailing routes to arrive at Tyre. History indicates that this 400 mile journey was normally made by day because of favorable winds while the ship would cast anchor for the night. When Paul arrived at Patara he changed to a larger ship and sailed across the open sea to Tyre where he and his companions remained seven days while the ship's cargo was unloaded.

21:4 - The church at Tyre had been evangelized following Stephen's death (11:19). While there, many disciples attempted to dissuade Paul from going to Jerusalem, but he believed he was Spirit-led (Rom 8:16; Acts 16:6-10) and had God's purposes in mind (20:16, 24; 24:11, 12; 20:23).

21:5-6 - Note again the strong bond of fellowship between Paul and this church (cf. **20:36-38**).

B. Ptolemais — 21:7

21:7 - One day was spent at Ptolemais (modern Acre; Accho in Judges 1:31).

C. Caesarea — 21:8-16

21:8, 9 - Paul continued on to Caesarea but it is not certain whether by land or by sea. He stayed with Philip the evangelist (cf. Acts 6:5; 8:5-40) who was one of the seven deacons in the early Jerusalem church. Now, twenty years later, he was established at the church of Caesarea where his four virgin daughters served as prophetesses. Their contribution to the church was useful because the New Testament was not yet complete (cf. 1 Cor 11:5; 14:34-35; 1 Tim 2:11-12).

21:10-12 - Agabus (cf. 11:28) came to Caesarea and warned Paul of the bonds that he would receive at Jerusalem. Agabus only revealed what awaited Paul; he did not try to change Paul's mind.

21:13 - Others tried to change Paul's mind, but he was not moved by their entreaties. He most likely saw these as temptations to escape God's perfect will for his life. He would not let his own life be directed away from the path of obedience.

21:14-16 - When they could not detain Paul, they asked that the will of the Lord be accomplished. Mnason of Cyprus was either an early convert to Christ, who had a home in Jerusalem, or he had a home located between Caesarea and Jerusalem and he provided overnight lodging for them on the way to Jerusalem.

D. Jerusalem — 21:17

21:17 - Paul's arrival in Jerusalem was well received by the brethren.

II. Paul's Reunion at Jerusalem — 21:18-26

A. Recollection of God's Blessings — 21:18-20

21:18-20 - Paul reviewed his third missionary journey with the pastors of the Jerusalem church. (Note that James was specially named which shows that he was the senior pastor.) They all glorified the Lord over the success of his ministry among the Gentiles. No doubt it was at this time that he presented the offering from the churches in Macedonia and Achaia to the church at Jerusalem. This would have given them further cause for thanksgiving to God (2 Cor 9:12-14).

B. Reconciliation of the Brethren — 21:20-26

1, The Problem — 21:20-21

21:20-21 - The pastors then reminded Paul that there were thousands of Jewish believers in Jerusalem and these converts were still devoted to the law. Now these had been told that Paul taught the Jews in Gentile lands to disregard the law and this disturbed them. This information, however, was not true as one can see by his circumcision of Timothy (16:1-3), and by his own vow (18:18). Paul never showed disrespect for the law or for his Jewish brethren (1 Cor 9:19, 20).

2. The Plan — 21:22-26

21:22-26 - The pastors thought it would be wise for Paul to participate in a Jewish vow with four men to demonstrate his respect for the law (cf. Num 6:1-21). They also asked him to pay for their **expenses** - "be at charges with them." Paul agreed to this arrangement. The Jewish church did not believe the keeping of the law was necessary for salvation because they did not ask the Gentiles to observe it (v. 25), but they believed it was a necessary part of the Jewish way of worship. This was true of the Jewish believers until the temple was destroyed in A.D. 70.

III. Paul's Rejection at Jerusalem — 21:27 - 23:10

A. Reaction to Abolish His Ministry — 21:27-40

21:27-29 - Seven days for purification were required because the four men apparently had defiled themselves in some manner. Near the end of this period it was the Jews of Asia who saw Paul and stirred the people into riot against him (cf. 13:50; 14:2, 5, 19). These men were unsaved Jews who had returned to Jerusalem for Pentecost and had misrepresented Paul's ministry.

21:30-31 - Mob psychology resulted and Paul was dragged out to the Court of the Gentiles where they planned to beat him to death.

21:32-36 - A Roman centurion, Claudius Lysias (23:26), took soldiers and rescued Paul, bound him with two chains and told him to explain what happened. The crowd would not cooperate, however, so Paul was carried away by the soldiers to their fortress.

21:37-40 - As Paul was being led into the fortress Antonia (adjacent to the temple and residence of the Roman soldiers), he asked in the Greek language for permission to speak to the Jews. The Roman captain was surprised that he could speak Greek because he thought Paul was the Egyptian who had recently led an uprising. He had four thousand men and Josephus says that four hundred of them were killed in a skirmish with the Romans. But Paul identified himself as a Jew of Tarsus to the captain and so he was granted permission to speak to the Jews who had just tried to kill him.

B. Refusal to Accept His Calling — 22:1-22

22:1-22 - This section gives Paul's testimony previously recorded in Acts 9. New information is given in Acts 22:17-21. It tells of a later temple vision in which he received a special Gentile commission.

He was careful as he spoke to the Jews to make every attempt to appease them. He spoke to them in Hebrew (Jewish Aramaic), he acknowledged them as being very zealous toward God (22:3) and he spoke favorably of the law (22:12). He did not mention the Gentiles by name until no alternative was left (22:21), but when he did, they openly rebelled (22:22). They simply refused to accept God's specific commission for him to go to the Gentiles. As Paul went through this trial, his own words to the Roman church must have echoed in his ears (Rom 8:31; 35-39).

Note on Acts 22:16: baptism does not wash away sins; it symbolizes Jesus Christ's blood 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 (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. No man gave him the gospel and led him to salvation (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" and asked what He wanted him to do; that is when he was saved. At his baptism several days later, he was calling on the Lord, but it does not say what he was saying when he was calling on the Lord. Those who believe baptism is necessary for salvation believe he was calling for 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 He had saved him, which Romans 10:9-10 says a believer should do.

C. Review to Ascertain His Doctrine — 22:23 - 23:10

1. The Roman attempt — 22:23-30

22:23-24 - The mob violently reacted when they heard of Paul's commission to go to the Gentiles. They cast handfuls of dirt in the air. While this action seems rather bestial, it was an oriental method displaying anger. Claudius Lysias then ordered Paul to be examined by scourging, a means of torture which would cause the victim to confess. This may refer to the scourge which had leather straps weighted with rough pieces of bone or metal. This whip was not the same as the rod (**16:23**), or the lash (5:40), but was capable of causing death or at least a permanent handicap.

22:25-30 - Paul pleaded his Roman citizenship which he had received from birth and never had to purchase it. Scourging was a penalty from which Roman citizens were exempt, but history indicates it was a serious crime to claim Roman citizenship falsely to escape a scourging and could be punished with death. The captain believed Paul's claim and immediately released Paul from his bonds. Claudius Lysias then determined to have Paul appear before the Sanhedrin.

2. The Jewish attempt — 23:1-10

23:1 - "Council" was also known as **the** Sanhedrin. This religious council was the highest Jewish authority (before A.D. 70). It was composed of 71 members, chosen from the Sadducees and Pharisees. History is replete with illustrations of the political nature and abuse of this group. Paul took the initiative in his defense by declaring a good conscience before God.

23:2 – Ananias, the high priest, ordered Paul to be struck on his mouth. Josephus has recorded in his history some of the wicked practices of Ananias. He was guilty of stealing tithes designated for the common priests and went so far as to use violence and assassination after he was deposed from his office. He was killed in 66 A.D. by zealous Jews because of his pro-Roman policy. Imagine a man of such wicked nature sitting in judgment of Paul, God's righteous servant!!

23:3 - Paul reacted to being struck on the mouth and called Ananias a white-washed wall. Recall that Jesus had called the Pharisees "white-washed tombs" (Mt 23:27) because of their hypocrisy. Ananias likewise was a hypocrite: he sat as a judge in spiritual matters, yet he acted contrary to Jewish law. In Jewish law, Paul was supposed to be considered innocent until he was proven guilty. Paul had not yet been formally charged with any crime when he was struck on the mouth.

23:4-5 - Paul's statement that he was unaware that Ananias was the high priest may be explained in several ways: (1) ironic, that is, his actions did not reveal that he was the high priest; (2) Paul did not realize that the words were from the high priest, because of his poor eyesight, and so he did not see who the speaker was; (3) Paul was truly unaware of the identity of the high priest, because he had been absent from Jerusalem for almost 20 years; (4) Paul used the word, "knew," in the sense of "acknowledge" and admitted he had not properly acknowledged the office of the high priest. At any rate, he admitted his error and quickly subjugated himself to the authority of the Old Testament (Ex 22:28).

23:6-10 - Paul then used a new approach to the problem, one which actually changed the subject under consideration from himself to a particular doctrine, but let no one think that he was merely doing this for strategy. His statement concerning the resurrection of the dead was the very basis of his ministry (1 Cor 15:12ff; Acts 17:18; Gal 1:1-10). Luke then recounts how a controversy developed between the Sadducees and the Pharisees over Paul's doctrine of the resurrection. The Sadducees denied it and the Pharisees affirmed it, so he was pulled by both sides. He was removed from the council for his own safety.

IV Paul's Removal from Jerusalem — 23:11-35

A. Revelation of God's Purpose — 23:11

23:11 - It appears that Paul was discouraged in his defense before the Jews. Just at that time the Lord appeared to him with encouragement and told him that he would also be His witness in Rome. The Lord also appeared to Paul on other occasions to encourage him (18:9-10; 9:4; 22:17; 27:23-24). There is no evidence that Paul was out of God's will; in fact he was accomplishing God's plan.

B. Realization of God's Plan — 23:12-35

1. The conspiracy plotted — 23:12-15

23:12-13 - About 40 men vowed that they would neither eat nor drink until they had put Paul to death. There were, however, provisions for relief from such a vow if it were impossible to keep it.

23:14-15 - These wicked men knew the corruption in the priesthood and religious leaders or they would not have presented such a plan to them. They planned to have the Sanhedrin request another meeting with Paul, under the pretense of determining more clearly his doctrine. Then these 40 men would somehow kill him.

2. The conspiracy revealed — 23:16-22

23:16-22 - Paul's sister's son somehow heard of this plot against Paul and told him about it. The providence of God leaves no details lacking. The plot was then revealed to Claudius Lysias.

3. The conspiracy foiled — 23:23-35

23:23-25 - Claudius Lysias recognized the danger of the situation (especially since Paul was a Roman citizen). He ordered troops to transfer Paul. He wrote a letter to Felix to acquaint him with the case. The essence of the letter shows that Claudius recognized the religious nature of the case. Paul was taken from Jerusalem under heavy guard for his protection about 9 p.m. When he arrived in Caesarea, Felix agreed to hear Paul's case when his accusers arrived. Felix was a most sinful and bestial man, but God used him to protect his servant. Paul was free from threat of death by the Jews and had the promise of God that he would go to Rome to be His witness in that city (23:11).