

I Must Go to Jerusalem

August 27 – Acts 21:1-14

BiAY.org | Daily Reflections NT
Day 239 – 126 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

After his farewell visit with the elders from Ephesus (Acts 20:17-38), Paul and his team made their way to Jerusalem, stopping at various places along the way. He was taking a collection to the Christians in Jerusalem, who had fallen on hard times either from the famine or persecution or both (Rom. 15:25, 26). He was hoping to be in Jerusalem for Pentecost (Acts 20:16).

Luke recorded the many stops along the way, even mentioning the believers in each town with whom they stayed (Acts 21:4, 7, 8). This was a subtle way of noting how the gospel had spread throughout the region. There were Christians and churches everywhere they went, a fulfillment of Acts 1:8.

At two places where the team stopped, people who loved Paul attempted to discourage him from going to Jerusalem (Acts 21:4, 10-12). For example, a prophet named Agabus had been told by the Holy Spirit that “Paul would be bound and delivered into the hands of the Gentiles” (v.11). He even used Paul’s belt in a visible demonstration of what would happen to Paul if he carried out his plans.

But the same Spirit who was informing Paul about the danger of going to Jerusalem was also the one compelling him to go to Jerusalem (Acts 20:22-24). Although Agabus and others interpreted this prophecy as a warning not to go to Jerusalem, Paul viewed it as a “heads up” regarding what would take place. That way he could prepare himself for persecution. But Paul had faced that, and much worse, throughout his ministry. His friends’ pleas would not stop him.

Besides, we must understand that Paul did not view protecting or sparing his life as the most important priority. In fact, he said, “I am ready to be bound, even to die, for the name of the Lord Jesus” (21:13). He had a higher priority than living or surviving — obedience.

Remember when Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane? He knew what was about to happen to Him, the torture He was about to endure. **Still, rather than save His life, He desired to be obedient to the Father’s will** (Lk. 22:42). Though no one enjoys torture or persecution, Paul was not afraid of it. He was more afraid of being disobedient to the Lord’s commands or neglecting His will. His friends got the point. When they saw Paul’s conviction to be obedient, they, too, yielded and said, “The will of the Lord be done” (Acts 21:14).

Daily Reflection

Once, a father left his family to go to a foreign land to share the gospel. His son wrote him a letter while he was there, telling him that he was praying that the Lord would protect his life. The wise missionary wrote back to his son, **“Thank you for your prayers. But rather than pray that I will be safe, pray that I will be obedient. To me, right and wrong is far more important than life and death.”**

Take a minute to re-read Acts 20:24. Should fear ever be considered in our planning? Why or why not?

Is obeying the Lord your top priority? What has He asked of you that fear has obstructed?

Temple Trouble

August 28 – Acts 21:15-36

BiAY.org | Daily Reflections NT
Day 240 – 125 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

After being warned by his friends not to go to Jerusalem, Paul went to Jerusalem. He wanted to be there by Pentecost, a Jewish holy day, which meant that the city would be crowded (20:16; 1 Cor. 16:8, 9). He would use the opportunity to share the gospel of Christ, even though he knew what the outcome would be.

Upon arrival in Jerusalem, the Christians there received Paul gladly, no doubt referring to the financial contribution he had helped raise during his journeys (1 Cor. 16:1-9). Luke (the author of Acts) mentioned James, the brother of Jesus, by name, as the leader of the Jerusalem church (21:18). Even though James was not one of the Twelve Disciples, he had obviously known Jesus and spent time with Him, so he was technically considered an apostle. However, once the apostles were gone, local churches fell under the oversight of elders.

James and the elders enjoyed hearing about Paul's adventures, particularly as they pertained to the spread of the gospel to the Gentiles (v.19). However, they also warned Paul. Even though thousands of Jews had become Christ-followers, they were concerned about Paul's teaching (v.20, 21). They had heard that he was telling Jews everywhere to abandon the Mosaic Law and customs. To them, anyone who would reject their Jewish heritage was a traitor and should be eliminated.

After having read *Galatians*, *2 Corinthians*, and *Romans*, we know that these accusations are false. But we can understand how the Jews concluded that Paul's view of the Mosaic Law was negative. He taught that the Law did not save anyone, and that Jesus fulfilled the Law. His view of the Law was positive in that it revealed man's sinfulness. He never taught that the Jews should abandon their heritage but rather to see that their heritage was completed in Christ.

James suggested that Paul demonstrate his loyalty to Jewish customs by joining four men who were under a vow (probably the Nazarite vow, Num. 6). Thus, he could ceremonially purify himself (from being in Gentile lands), present himself in the Temple, and dispel all the rumors about his treason (Acts 21:22-26).

However, this backfired when Paul's old enemies from Asia (province) saw him in the Temple and stirred up the crowd against him (v.27-36). They leveled three charges against Paul, all of which were false (v.28). The people threw Paul out, shut the doors, and began beating him to death. But Roman soldiers stopped the violence, arrested Paul, and removed him from the crowd (thus fulfilling Agabus' prophecy, 21:10, 11).

Daily Reflection

Why was Paul there again? What was the point? Why did he agree to purify himself with a Jewish custom when he knew that it was of no benefit?

First, Paul was in Jerusalem because the Lord had led him there (Acts 20:22, 23). Second, God had His purposes for leading Paul to Jerusalem. Perhaps, it was to demonstrate the Jews' final rejection of the gospel. It's fitting that they closed the doors of the Temple to Paul (v.30). God used the Romans to destroy the Temple in 70 AD, as judgment for their hardened hearts. We also know that God allowed Paul to be arrested so that he could share the gospel with the Roman soldiers and governors, and eventually get to travel to Rome, which had been his hope.

Finally, as for Paul purifying himself by a Jewish custom, take a minute to read *1 Corinthians* 9:19-23. How would Paul answer this question?

A Citizen for the Savior

August 29 – Acts 21:37-22:29

BiAY.org | Daily Reflections NT
Day 241 – 124 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Paul was in Jerusalem, delivering the contributions he had raised for the saints there. But while he was in the city, he was arrested near the Temple for disturbing the peace (21:27-30). Angry Jews, who believed that Paul was a traitor to his people and heritage, stirred up the crowd and began beating him. However, Roman guards arrived just in time to save Paul's life. As he was being carried away to jail, Paul asked the commander if he could speak to the people (v.37-40). The commander relented.

The Roman fortress Antonia, named after the famous General and Consul Marc Antony, sat on the highest point in Jerusalem, above the Temple. Notice that the guards had to run down to the Temple to stop the chaos (21:32). Then, after Paul was put in chains, he was led to the stairs to return to headquarters (v.35). The scene of today's story took place on those stairs, so Paul was elevated above the people as he gave his defense (v.40).

What would Paul say to a crowd of Jews in Jerusalem during Pentecost? He told his conversion story, how Christ changed his life. First, he made sure they knew that he was a Jew, just like them, trained in the Mosaic Law by the very best, Gamaliel (22:3). Next, he told of how he hated Christians himself and sought permission to persecute them (v.4, 5). Then, Paul shared the day when he met Jesus, and his life was radically changed (v.6-20).

Finally, Paul shared God's call on his life, that he was to be a witness of the gospel to the Gentiles (v.21). But that was as long as the Jews were willing to listen. At the mention of Gentiles, they erupted in anger and cried out for Paul's death (v.22, 23). In their minds, Paul was indeed a traitor. Thus, the Roman guards carried Paul away to be examined, which meant that he was to be flogged until he gave up his true identity and purpose (v.24). The Romans believed one was guilty until proven innocent.

But Paul spoke up at that point and asked, "Is it lawful to scourge a man who is a Roman and uncondemned?" (v.25). In other words, **Paul revealed the fact that he was a Roman citizen. Roman citizens were not to be treated in such a manner but were to receive a hearing and trial.** Roman citizenship had its perks, and there were three ways to obtain it — by royal decree of Caesar, by bribing a corrupt official (as the commander had done, v.28), or by birth. **Paul was born a Roman citizen, which is the most special and protected level (v.28, 29). Thus, nothing could be done to Paul without a trial.**

Daily Reflection

Paul's appeal to his Roman status causes us to ask a question. Is it okay to be a citizen of a nation and enjoy the privileges of citizenship? The answer is yes. Remember *Romans 13*, in which Paul encouraged his readers to submit to the governing authorities and live a peaceable life. But Paul used his citizenship status to save his life (see also *Acts 16:37*). Wasn't that a little self-serving? But for Paul, "to live is Christ," meaning if he was given another day on the earth, he would use it to tell people about the gospel (*Phil. 1:21*). **Thus, in this case, Paul appealed to his Roman citizenship for the sake of the gospel. He lived another day, which allowed him to talk to more people about Jesus.**

What about your earthly citizenship? Is that acceptable in God's eyes? Could your citizenship be used for God's purposes? If so, explain how.

Standing By Your Side

August 30 – Acts 22:30-23:35

BiAY.org | Daily Reflections NT
Day 242 – 123 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Paul has been arrested in Jerusalem. The Jews were stirred up by his presence, believing falsely that he was a traitor who had abandoned their heritage. He was nearly flogged when he revealed that he was a Roman citizen, which meant that he would have a hearing and trial.

Paul's first hearing occurred before the Sanhedrin (22:30), which included Jewish leaders from both the Sadducees (priests and scribes) and Pharisees (experts in the Mosaic Law). This was the same group that condemned Jesus falsely and demanded His crucifixion. Thus, Paul admitted that his conscience condemned these men as hypocrites (23:1-3).

Once he recognized his audience and that he would not receive a fair hearing, he deliberately made a statement to pit them against each other. "I am a Pharisee," he said, "and I am on trial for the resurrection of the dead," referring to Jesus (v.6-9). By appealing to the Pharisees and raising the question of resurrection, he essentially divided the Council in argument. These two groups disagreed over the issue of resurrection and therefore could not work together to decide Paul's case. Once the arguing ensued, the Roman commander removed Paul from the scene.

Now that all Jerusalem had revolted against Paul, there arose a plot to kill him (v.12-22). But, as God would have it, Paul's nephew overheard the plot and revealed it to him and the Roman soldiers. Thus, the commander (Claudius Lysias) arranged to have Paul relocated from Jerusalem to Caesarea, where Felix the governor stayed (v.23-35).

Amid this craziness, the Lord encouraged Paul. "Take courage," He said, "for as you have solemnly witnessed to My cause at Jerusalem, so you must witness at Rome also" (v.11). Paul had already demonstrated tremendous courage by going into "enemy territory." Jerusalem was

the hotbed of Jewish hatred for Jesus, His Disciples, His followers (Christians), and His Church, yet Paul marched into the city and spoke up for Christ and His gospel. Incredible!

Daily Reflection

But even Paul had to be shaken by the chaos that had ensued by his arrival. Perhaps, he even wondered if this was the end of his ministry. But God not only intervened to save his life, He told Paul that his work was not yet complete and that he would get to see Rome, as he hoped.

Even though the Jews believed Paul to be a traitor, and even though the Jewish leaders wanted him dead, "the Lord stood by his side" (v.11). When it seemed that the whole world thought Paul was wrong, God praised Paul for defending what's right. We, too, should be greatly encouraged, that even in our darkest days, when it seems that no one is for us and everything is against us, God is by our side. If we will only commit ourselves to His cause and faithfully fulfill His call on our lives, we too can be of good courage knowing that He is with us.

Take a minute to read *Matthew 28:19, 20*. What promise does the Lord give us here? Why is that encouraging?

We often commend or approve ourselves, and we even seek the approval of others, but Paul wrote, "It is not he who commends himself that is approved, but he whom the Lord commends" (2 Cor. 10:18). God is always by our side, but is He the One we are living to please?

Clear or Convicted?

August 31 – Acts 24:1-27

BiAY.org | Daily Reflections NT
Day 243 – 122 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Paul, who had been arrested in Jerusalem, was relocated to Caesarea to stand trial before the governor, Felix (52-59 AD). His trial began five days later when Ananias the High Priest and a lawyer named Tertullus arrived (v.1). Tertullus charged Paul with being “a real pest” who stirred up trouble for the Jews, desecrated the Temple, and was a leader of the Nazarenes or followers of Christ (v.5). Of course, Paul’s opponents could not prove any of these charges, for he had done nothing wrong (v.13).

After Tertullus made his charges, Felix gave Paul a chance to defend himself. He admitted to being a Christian, but he assured the governor that he served the same God as the Jews and believed His Word in the Old Testament (v.14). Paul also assured the governor that he was not in Jerusalem to stir up trouble but to deliver a contribution raised for the Christians there (v.17). The people stirring up trouble were angry Jews from Asia (province) and the vindictive members of the Sanhedrin (v.18-21).

Having no witnesses or evidence for which to accuse Paul and knowing that Paul was not guilty of any crime, Felix dismissed the case until Lysias, the Roman commander, could arrive (v.22). In the meantime, Felix allowed Paul some personal freedom while in prison. Thus, people were able to visit him (v.23).

However, while they were waiting for Lysias, Felix spoke with Paul several times, no doubt hoping that Paul would offer him a bribe for his freedom (v.26). But rather than offer Felix money, Paul shared the gospel with him (v.24). **But, while talking about “righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come,” Felix was frightened and ordered Paul to go away (v.25).** What happened, and why was Felix afraid?

Historians have discovered that Drusilla was Felix’s third wife; and she was already married at the time, so both were committing adultery

by God’s standards. When Paul talked about God’s Law (righteousness) and self-control (which Felix had none), **the governor was convicted of his sin.** Then, when Paul mentioned that all men will stand before God for judgment, Felix couldn’t bear the thought of the outcome.

Daily Reflection

Though Felix spoke with Paul several times, we are not told that he ever repented of his sins and followed Jesus. The odds are that he didn’t, given that he was looking for a bribe (v.26). In fact, rather than declare Paul innocent and release him, Felix left Paul in jail for the next governor to handle (v.27).

While this story seems simple enough, it is a tale of two consciences. Remember, God gave us a conscience, that internal faculty of knowing right and wrong. **Notice that Paul’s conscience was clear.** He said, “I do my best to maintain always a clear conscience before God and men” (v.16). **But Felix’s conscience was unclear.** In fact, upon hearing God’s laws, his conscience condemned him. **Felix knew that his actions were wrong, and he felt guilt and shame.**

Why do you think Paul’s conscience was clear before God? Is yours?

What does it mean that Paul maintained a clear conscience before men? Do you?

Playing Your Cards

September 1 – Acts 25:1-27

BiAY.org | Daily Reflections NT
Day 244 – 121 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Paul stood trial before Governor Festus (60 AD). Festus succeeded Felix, who made no decision regarding Paul's case and left him in prison at Caesarea (24:27). Paul had been relocated to Caesarea from Jerusalem when he revealed his identity as a Roman citizen (22:25-27).

Compared to Felix, Governor Festus was an honorable man who truly wanted to judge rightly in Paul's case. However, the Jews still wanted Paul dead and, therefore, conspired to murder him if they could get him transferred back to Jerusalem (25:1-3). Festus would not move Paul, and instead urged the Jews to send their influential men to Caesarea for the trial (v.4, 5).

Once everyone was in Caesarea, the trial commenced (v.6-8). The Jews, of course, levied false charges against Paul, and Paul defended his innocence. It seemed that Paul would receive a fair trial until Festus asked a question, "Are you willing to go to Jerusalem to stand trial?" (v.9). In order to keep the peace, the governor wanted to do the Jews a favor, but Paul knew that was a bad idea.

At this point, Paul once again reasserted his Roman citizenship. He believed that his trial should take place in Caesarea, but he could see what was happening (v.10). Though Festus wanted to do the right thing, he was entertaining an idea that would not end with justice. Thus, Paul used another privilege of his Roman citizenship. He appealed to Caesar (v.11), meaning that he wanted to be sent to Rome to stand trial before Emperor Nero.

If Roman citizens did not think that justice had been served in their case, they could appeal to a higher court, in this case Caesar himself. The same idea exists in the American judicial system. If one does not believe justice has been served, then he could appeal to a higher court. Festus granted Paul's request (v.12).

However, for Paul to go to Rome meant that Festus had to send an explanation of the charges against him to Caesar, as well as his personal ruling in the matter. But he struggled to know what to write (v.13-27). Thus, when King Agrippa arrived in Caesarea, Festus asked for his advice. Therefore, Paul was called in to speak to them (26:1).

Daily Reflection

If Paul had been found innocent and released, the Jews would've hunted him like hounds after a fox. He would've been on the run to Rome. But, if Paul appealed to Caesar, Festus would have to send him to Rome with security and pay the expense. Either way, Paul ends up in Rome, which is what the Lord had told him (23:11).

It's difficult to know if Paul made the right decision here. **He had "a card" in his hand (appealing to Caesar), and he was waiting to play it at the right time.** The Lord could've certainly arranged for Paul to get to Rome another way, but Paul knew his rights and asserted them to pursue justice and fulfill God's will at the same time.

Praying for the Lord to act on our behalf is certainly biblical (1 Thess. 5:16-18), but so is acting. Take a minute to read *Exodus 14:13-16*. Moses told the people that God would intervene to save them from the Egyptians. However, what did God expect of them?

When should we pray, and when should we act?
When do we play "the cards" in our hand?

A Wonderful Witness

September 2 – Acts 26:1-32

BiAY.org | Daily Reflections NT
Day 245 – 120 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Paul defended himself before King Agrippa who was visiting Governor Festus in Caesarea. Since this was not a trial, and the angry Jews weren't there to accuse him, Paul was free to share whatever he wanted. Since Festus had already heard his testimony, **Paul aimed his comments at Agrippa, who was very familiar with Jewish scriptures, prophecies, and customs** (v.1-3).

After sharing a little of his background (v.4, 5), Paul summarized the accusations against him. He was on trial for believing "the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers" (v.6, 7). He was referring to hundreds of prophecies in the Old Testament that pointed to the Messiah. God had promised His people to redeem them through a Chosen Seed, someone who would reverse the curse of the serpent (*Gen. 3:15*). Then, Paul asked an important question. If the Jews believe God is real and powerful, then why would it be considered "incredible for Him to raise the dead?" (v.8).

Paul then proceeded to share his story of conversion on the road to Damascus, how he once persecuted Christ-followers until Jesus changed his life (v.9-18). He also expressed God's will for his life, to be "a minister and witness of the things he had seen" (v.16), to which he had been obedient (v.19-21). In his mind, Paul was doing nothing extraordinary. He was simply "testifying of what the Prophets and Moses said was going to take place" (v.22, 23).

The two men who listened to Paul responded in very different ways. Festus dismissed Paul as one who was "out of his mind" (v.24, 25). But Agrippa was listening intently. In fact, he was convinced that Paul was right (v.26-29).

However, **Paul put the King on the spot when he asked, "Do you believe the prophets?"** (v.27). If Agrippa said yes, then he would look foolish before Festus, and he would have to admit that Christianity was valid. If he said no, then he

would be denying his heritage, and he would anger the Jews. Agrippa dodged the question and skillfully changed the subject. After discussion, the two leaders determined that Paul was innocent. He should have been set free except that Paul had appealed to Caesar and must be sent to Rome (v.30-32).

Daily Reflection

This exchange is another great example of how to share the gospel. Paul knew his audience well (Agrippa and Bernice, both Jews) and used the Old Testament scriptures to support his arguments. He also shared his personal story, which is always a good strategy. Telling others how God changed your life is a powerful tool.

Re-read Verse 18. In just a few words, Paul summarized six of the gospel's effects. Can you spot them? Write them here.

We could learn a lot from Paul's well-crafted testimony. He knew his audience and catered to their understanding. He shared his personal story of transformation. He elevated the person and power of God. He summarized the hope and effects of the gospel without preaching at his listeners. He used God's Word to support his beliefs, and he asked for a personal response. While Agrippa did not believe in Christ that day, he may have come to believe in time. **All we can do is cast the seed and let God do the rest.**