

Bi134 Acts

Lesson Bi134-38 To Jerusalem: Journey, Arrival, and Arrest

In God's work, we are sometimes called to lead and other times called to follow. Most often, we are called to do both at the same time. Whether leading or following we must do so with grace and humility. In today's lesson, we see Paul leading his missionary team to Jerusalem. Then, when he arrived in the city, he humbly submitted himself to the leaders of the Jerusalem church. As a result, God's will was done, and his kingdom was advanced.

Leaving Miletus, Paul and his team continued on their journey to Jerusalem. They travelled as far as Caesarea, where God had first poured out his Spirit on the Gentiles. There, Philip the evangelist welcomed them into his house. Philip was one of the seven deacons who, years before, was chosen to care for the Grecian widows in Jerusalem. By now, he had four unmarried daughters who prophesied.

Soon after their arrival in Caesarea, a prophet named Agabus arrived from Judea. He approached Paul, slid the apostle's belt from around his waist, and tied his own hands and feet. Then he said, "The Holy Spirit says, 'This is how the Jews of Jerusalem will bind Paul. Then they will hand him over to the Gentiles.'"

When the brothers and sisters heard this, they begged Paul not to go to Jerusalem. Paul replied, "My dear friends, why are you weeping? You are breaking my heart. Not only am I ready to be jailed in Jerusalem, I am ready to die for Jesus' sake." Seeing how determined Paul was, the people gave up, saying, "The Lord's will be done." Paul and his colleagues then proceeded to Jerusalem. When they arrived, the brothers welcomed them warmly (Acts 21:8-17).

The next day Paul met with James and the church elders. Paul gave them a detailed report of all that God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. When they heard this, they shouted, "Praise the Lord!"

The brothers then asked Paul if he would be willing to join some local Jewish brothers in observing certain purifications rites in the temple. This would help the Jewish believers in Jerusalem know that Paul was one of them. He was not teaching those Jews who were becoming Christians that they must forsake their Jewish heritage.

Paul agreed to the plan; so, the next day he purified himself along with four other men. He went with them to the temple to arrange for the necessary offerings. On the seventh day of the rite, some Jews from Asia saw Paul in the temple court. They grabbed him and started shouting, "Men of Israel, help us! This is the man who is leading people away from Judaism all over the world. He speaks against this temple. He has defiled it by bringing in unclean Gentiles." They had seen Paul in the city with a Gentile and just assumed that Paul had brought him into the temple.

This false claim rocked the whole city, and many people rushed into the temple. They seized Paul and dragged him outside, slamming the temple gates behind them. They then began

to pound him with their fists. If some Roman soldiers had not rescued him, they would beaten him to death. The commander of the garrison ordered that Paul be bound with chains. Then, he asked Paul, "What have you done to incite such an uproar?"

Overhearing this, the crowd began to shout one thing then another. They became so worked up that the soldiers had to lift Paul off his feet and carry him away. The mob followed and kept shouting, "Kill him, kill him!" As they were about to enter the barracks, Paul asked the commander, "Will you allow me to speak to the people?" Seeing that the crowd had calmed down a bit, the commander agreed (Acts 21:18-40).

In the next lesson, we will examine what Paul said to the crowd. For now, let's look at the actions of Paul in today's story. From them we can learn three valuable ministry lessons.

The first lesson we learn from Paul's actions is that we must be led by the Spirit of God. Paul was directed by the Spirit to go to Jerusalem. He told the Ephesian elders; "The Holy Spirit is compelling me to go to Jerusalem" (Acts 20:22). Throughout his ministry, he was guided by the Spirit. During Paul's second missionary journey, the Holy Spirit had directed him to go to Macedonia. Now, the Spirit had told him to go to Jerusalem.

The leadership of the Spirit is a key theme in Acts. Luke wants us to know that the Holy Spirit is the true Director of the work of missions. If we are going to be effective in the work, we like Paul, must know how to hear the Spirit's voice. And, when he speaks, we must be quick to obey. Paul wrote, "Those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God" (Rom 8:14).

The second lesson we learn from Paul's actions in this story is that we must humbly submit ourselves to our spiritual leaders. When Paul arrived in Jerusalem, he immediately went to James and other church leaders. He did this to show his respect for them and to give a report of his work among the Gentiles.

In that meeting, the leaders asked him to participate in a Jewish purification ritual. On his own, Paul would have never done this. He believed that Christ had liberated him from practicing Jewish rituals. Years earlier, he wrote to the new Christians in Galatia and warned them against returning to Jewish rituals. He asked them, "Now that you know God...how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again?" (Gal 4:9-10). He then exhorted them to "stand firm" in the freedom that Christ had given them.

On this occasion, however, in order to help the leaders of the Jerusalem church resolve a pressing church problem, Paul graciously submitted himself to their leadership. We should do the same. We should always show proper respect to those whom God has placed in spiritual leadership. We should willingly submit ourselves to their authority. Ultimately, Paul's arrest in Jerusalem turned out for the best. Even though he was captured and imprisoned, his capture resulted in his going to Rome as God had intended.

A third lesson we learn from Paul's actions in our story is that we must always remain

committed to our God-given mission. As Paul moved steadily toward Jerusalem, the Spirit warned him danger and imprisonment awaited him there. Many of his colleagues interpreted this to mean that he was not to go to Jerusalem. Paul understood their fears; however, he knew God's will. He was committed to fulfilling the mission Christ had given him. He told them, "I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." (Acts 21:13). His chief ambition in life was to fulfill the ministry Christ had given him. He testified, "I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace." (Acts 20:24). Today, Christ has called us to make the same commitment to him and his mission. "Be faithful, even to the point of death," he promises, "and I will give you the crown of life" (Rev 2:10).

This lesson is **important** because in it we learn what we must do when we are tempted to abandon the work that God has given us.

The **main truth** we learn from this lesson is we must submit ourselves to the will of God and never forsake the work that Christ has given us, that is, the work of testifying to the gospel.

Let's **review** some important truths we have learned from this lesson.

1. Why did Paul say he was going to Jerusalem?
A. [PAUSE] If you answered that Paul said that the Holy Spirit was compelling him to go to Jerusalem, you answered correctly.
2. What happened to Paul once he arrived in Jerusalem?
A. [PAUSE] If you answered, "Paul was falsely accused, captured, and thrown into prison," you are correct.
3. What did Paul do when James and the elders of the church in Jerusalem asked him to participate in a Jewish ritual in the temple?
A. [PAUSE] If you answered that Paul willingly submitted to their leadership and did what they asked, you are right.
4. What was Paul's chief ambition in life?
A. [PAUSE] If you answered, that Paul's chief ambition in life was to fulfill the ministry Christ had given him, you answered correctly.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to listen to it until you can tell others the story of Paul's journey to Jerusalem and his capture there. You should also be able to teach the three lessons learned from this story. Finally, find a place of prayer and commit yourself once again to Christ and his mission.