

*Missio Dei Fellowship exists to glorify God by delighting in Him and making Him known through the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

## *Paul, Prophecy & Politics*

### **Acts 21:1-36**

**Keywords:** Missions, 3<sup>rd</sup> Missionary Journey, Pastoral Ministry, Church Leadership, Elders

**PowerPoint Presentation included:** none

**SermonAudio Blurb:** Paul now begins the journey to Jerusalem where it has been abundantly shown that arrest and affliction await him. And in doing so we have a unique opportunity to see how prophets and prophecy seemed to occur in the early church and how someone like Paul would respond to it. We also have a unique opportunity to see how Paul worked within the various political systems of power as a Christian. This is helpful for us today as we see so much uncertainty in the world.

#### **I. Introduction.**

- A. Read 21:1-36.
- B. This passage is a good illustration of the nature of what is called "expository preaching."
  - 1. The very essence of this sort of preaching, which MDF is fully committed to, is that you preaching through a book of the bible. This requires us to deal with the bible in its entirety, including passages such as this one before us.
  - 2. This is not one of those sections that is full of wonderful doctrine or unique situations that preaches easily. As a result, passages such as this are easily passed by in search of more interesting ones.
  - 3. And yet, as I studied it, I realized that not only does it bring out some important details that help clarify certain doctrines; but also, it is like one of those puzzle pieces that you find that, when dropped into its place, helps finish the picture.
- C. Today, this passage will be approached two ways:
  - 1. First it will be the nature of prophecy which is shown here twice.
  - 2. Second, the storyline, ending with Paul being carried off by Roman soldiers.

#### **II. Paul and Prophecy.**

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- A. In this section we have the ongoing description of the final part of Paul's 3rd journey and the events that resulted in him being arrested and ultimately taken to Rome.
- B. There are some detail mentioned here that deserve some consideration as they help give a couple of real life examples of how prophecy worked in the NT.
  - 1. First, note in vs 4 how in the city of Tyre there were some disciples who spoke "through the Spirit," which would indicate that these disciples were not merely giving their own advice.
    - a. Though the terms "prophecy" or "prophecy" are not used, what we have described is just that sort of thing.
    - b. Some commentaries try to say that the disciples are aware via that Holy Spirit of the impending troubles of Paul and on their own they are urging him to not go.
  - 2. Second, we come to vs 10 where we are introduced to a man named Agabus. This man is a prophet and is mentioned in Acts 11 as well, there prophesying of a major famine coming.
    - a. But Agabus was a prophet who lived in Judea (10), which is slightly south of Jerusalem, which would be part of the province of Judea.
    - b. His prophecy is described in vs 11 and it has certain key elements to it:
      - (1) First, the Jews will bind you.
      - (2) Second, the Jews will deliver you into the hands of the Gentiles.
- C. But here is where it gets a bit challenging.
  - 1. In chapter 20 Paul is told by the Spirit that chains and afflictions await him. But we don't get any sense that the Spirit is telling him not to go therefore.
  - 2. But in chapter 21:4 the people, apparently prophets, are saying "through the Spirit" to not go to Jerusalem.
  - 3. Then, shortly after this he is in Caesarea and has another prophet, Agabus, tell him that the Jews will bind and deliver Paul to the Gentiles. But, in this account we have no command for Paul to not go.
- D. Behind all of this is a bigger issue of what is called "spiritual gifts."

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1. I deal with this in various sermons in greater detail so I won't here. You can search for those at [www.sermonaudio.com](http://www.sermonaudio.com) under our churches name. Key words would be "spiritual gifts" and "strange fire."
2. It is enough to know today that when a person believes the gospel and follows Christ, they are given by God certain gifts.
3. There is a debate between groups of Christians on whether all of the various gifts described in the New Testament still operate. And if so, how?
4. At issue for our time today is the nature of prophecy. I have no tolerance for anyone who claims a "Thus says the Lord,. . ."
5. But what about the prophecies in our passage?
  - a. Are they true?
  - b. And if true are they authoritative?
  - c. And must they come to pass in every detail?
  - d. And is every detail even provided for us in our passage? Or is it a summary?
  - e. Did Paul sin when he refused to obey what the people said in vs 4? They spoke "through the Spirit."
  - f. And when we compare what the prophet Agabus said with what happened. Note the specifics in vs 11: The Jews in Jerusalem will bind Paul. And, the Jews will deliver Paul to the Gentiles.
6. There are other passages that feed into this issue:
  - a. 1 Thessalonians 1:19-21
  - b. 1 Corinthians 14:1 and 29ff.
    - (1) Vs 1 elevates prophecy as a key gift.
    - (2) But then in vss 29ff we have Paul giving instructions for those who have a prophecy.
  - c. This leads me cautiously to conclude that in the New Testament prophecy was somewhat less authoritative than what we see with the Old Testament prophets.
  - d. Here we see Paul take the prophecies in stride. He chose to go to Jerusalem, knowing that he was told not to go. He accepted the consequences to that choice.

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- E. It is here that we can now look at the story and see how Paul, as a Christian, worked within the political systems that existed.

### **III. Paul and Politics.**

- A. We have watched Paul travel through three different missionary journeys for the sake of the gospel.
  - 1. He has traveled between 8-10 thousand miles, much of it on foot.
  - 2. He has encountered the political and religious systems of many cities and regions and has had to be beaten, jailed, and stand before city leaders on more than one occasion.
  - 3. And in all of this we must go back to Acts 9 to see the motivation that was always at work within the heart of Paul (9:10-16).
- B. When Paul heard the prophecies of suffering he viewed and responded to them through the lens of Acts 9.
  - 1. In those prophecies he is told he should not go and that if he does he will suffer.
  - 2. It appears that he took the statement that he should not go as a test by God. Would he go anyhow?
  - 3. This was the same response as before in other situations. He may leave a place after being there to save his life. But the threat of harm was not enough to keep him from first going and trying to bring the gospel.
  - 4. Vs 13 really defines Paul's mind set.
    - a. He was a normal man. His heart could break. But he would NOT make his decision based on emotion.
    - b. Rather, he had formed deep convictions already to be imprisoned or even killed for the name of Jesus.
- C. Paul's report to the church in Jerusalem (17-26).
  - 1. The church leaders, led by the Apostle James and the elders, met with Paul to hear his account of his travels and labors. Remember that around six years have passed since they last heard from Paul.
  - 2. (20)The report brought great joy from them, and it is here that the first sense of trouble comes out. (21) there is an ongoing idea being presented that he is telling the Jews in all these places he had visited to reject Moses, circumcision and the customs of the Jews.

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3. With this, the leaders come up with a simple plan to defuse the potentially explosive situation, take some men (23) under a vow to the temple and purify himself as well. And by doing this it will be obvious to all that Paul is not attacking the Law of Moses and their customs.
- D. The conflict (27-36).
  1. I have no doubt that Paul knew that doing the purification and sacrifice was not going to stop any problems. But I find it interesting that he did it anyhow for the sake of the consciences of the Jewish believers.
  2. But after he did these things certain Jews rose up against him..
  3. The commander of the Roman soldiers hears of a commotion (31b). And he goes and rescues Paul from his beatings. It is here that we find the soldiers binding him, assuming he is the trouble.
  4. Upon investigation the commander has no idea what really happened so he orders them to carry Paul into the barracks due to the anger and violence of the Jews.

#### **IV. Conclusion.**

- A. Here we must end but we will pick it up next week Lord willing as we see Paul make his first defense.
- B. What we see here thought is a man who is not motivated by anything but the gospel of Jesus Christ.
  1. He will accept suffering and affliction.
  2. He will embrace death.
  3. He will give up his freedoms in Christ and keep the Law of Moses.
  4. He will not fight back against mobs or the enforcers (police).
  5. All of these are secondary to Paul. He has one simple goal, go wherever the opportunity is available to him and when he does, go for the sake of the gospel.
- C. You will see in the upcoming chapters as Acts winds down how Paul never sought to foment rebellion against the governing authorities.
  1. He did not try to develop a biblical theology of political revolution.
  2. He accepted the fact that politics and governments exist and they are not righteous. They will do evil. They will not be perfect.

# M i s s i o      D e i      F e l l o w s h i p

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3. And you will see that he uses these political situations to proclaim the gospel.
4. And that is our challenge today. We have so many situations that we are in and we need to make sure that we adorn the gospel with how we act and talk. And we need to see that these are all opportunities to potentially speak of Jesus Christ.

## **Benediction**

**Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing the good news of Jesus Christ, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen**