



*the book of acts*  
**WEEK EIGHT**

**PAUL'S PROPHETIC WITNESS  
REACHES ROME**

*Compelled, Consecrated, and Kept by God*

Acts 20:1 — 23:11

# PAUL LEAVES EPHESUS

- A riot forces Paul to leave Ephesus so he returns back through Macedonia and Achaia (northern and souther Greece)
- Paul had moved up to Troas as he received back the news from Titus and the severe second letter to the Corinthians, he writes what we call 2 Corinthians.
- Paul writes Romans in 57AD while in Achaia (Acts 20: 2 -3)
- On his way back to Jerusalem, Paul goes north through Macedonia and south through Miletus



## PAUL'S THIRD MISSION ACTS 18:23 - 21:17 AD 53-57

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- (1) Syrian Antioch 18:23
- (2) Tarsus?
- (3) Derbe?
- (4) Lystra?
- (5) Iconium?
- (6) Pisidian Antioch? 18:23
- (7) Ephesus 19:1
- (8) Troas?
- (9) Neapolis? 20:1
- (10) Philippi? 20:1
- (11) Amphipolis? 20:1
- (12) Apollonia? 20:1
- (13) Thessalonica? 20:1
- (14) Berea? 20:1
- (15) Athens? 20:2
- (16) Corinth? 20:2
- (17) Athens? 20:2
- (18) Berea? 20:3
- (19) Thessalonica? 20:3
- (20) Apollonia? 20:3
- (21) Amphipolis? 20:3
- (22) Philippi? 20:6
- (23) Neapolis? 20:6
- (24) Troas 20:6
- (25) Assos 20:13
- (26) Mitylene 20:14
- (27) Chios 20:15
- (28) Samos 20:15
- (29) Miletus 20:15
- (30) Cos 21:1
- (31) Rhodes 21:1
- (32) Patara 21:1
- (33) Tyre 21:3
- (34) Ptolemais 21:7
- (35) Caesarea 21:8
- (36) Jerusalem 21:17



## Acts 20 | The Man Behind the Mission

Paul's entire life was organized around a single conviction: testify to the gospel of grace, whatever the cost.

- He was not trying to build a platform. He was serving the Lord 'with all humility, tears, and trials' (v.19)
- His route to Jerusalem was shaped by the Jerusalem offering — a concrete act of Gentile solidarity with Jewish believers (Rom 15:24–28)
- Two years in Ephesus; 1,500+ teaching hours at the school of Tyrannus verse-by-verse, house to house (Acts 19:9–10)
- His traveling companions were church representatives. They were not an entourage, but ambassadors bearing the gift (Longenecker)
- The 'we' narrative resumes at Philippi (v.6) — Luke is an eyewitness from here forward

ACTS 20 — PART ONE

## The Compelled Apostle: Finish the Race

δεδεμένος τῷ πνεύματι — 'bound in the Spirit' (Acts 20:22)

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# PAUL'S CONVICTIONS

- **General:**

- To know Him (Phil 3:10)
- To testify to the gospel of grace (Acts 20:24)

- **Very Specific (Rom 15:24-28):**

- I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain, and to be helped on my journey there by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a while. At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem bringing aid to the saints. For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem. For they were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material blessings. When therefore I have completed this and have delivered to them what has been collected, I will leave for Spain by way of you.

## Acts 20:22–24 | The Compelled Apostle

"And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. However, I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me — the task of testifying to the good news of God's grace."

*Three certainties: the Spirit compels, danger awaits, finishing matters more than surviving*

## Acts 20:26–31 | The Whole Counsel of God

A pastor's clearest conscience comes not from avoiding hard things, but from saying all of them.

- Greek: πᾶσαν τὴν βουλὴν τοῦ θεοῦ — 'the whole counsel of God' — literally every plan and purpose God has revealed
- Paul taught for years, publicly and house to house. Those who preach only what people want to hear are, in Paul's logic, 'guilty of the blood' of those they won't warn (v.26–27)
- Savage wolves from outside; twisted men from inside — both threats require a watchful, tear-stained shepherd
- Keener: the farewell speech was a recognized Greco-Roman literary form (the 'testament'); Luke uses it to give Paul's ministry a formal theological summary
- The Ephesian church 30 years later (Rev 2:2–4): commended for doctrinal watchfulness, but they had left their first love — the very danger Paul wept over

## Acts 20 | What Kind of Gospel Is Worth Dying For?

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There used to be a gospel in the world which consisted of facts which Christians never questioned. Men, to the teeth of tyrants, have proclaimed it, and have suffered the loss of all things, and gone to prison and to death for it, singing psalms all the while. Is there not such a gospel remaining?

— C.H. Spurgeon

*Paul called it 'the gospel of the grace of God' (v.24). Not the gospel of self-improvement. Not the gospel of religious tradition. The grace of God — unearned, undeserved, unstoppable.*

## Acts 20 | So What? Finish the Race

What would it mean to count your life 'worth nothing' for the sake of completing your calling?

- Paul's model: serve with humility + tears, preach the full word, protect the flock, give rather than receive
- He didn't just endure danger — he ran toward it because he was bound to something bigger than comfort
- A clear conscience before God is possible — not through perfection, but through faithfulness to the whole counsel
- Who are you 'commending to God and to the word of His grace' in your life right now? (v.32)
- The question Paul asks every teacher: Is the gospel I'm preaching worth dying for?

LATE 50S / EARLY 60S

GOSPELS OF  
LUKE + MARK  
ARE WRITTEN



# The Consecrated Journey: Warnings Are Not Stop Signs

θέλημα τοῦ κυρίου γινέσθω — 'The will of the Lord be done' (Acts 21:14)

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## Acts 21:1–14 | Three Warnings, One Direction

The Holy Spirit told Paul what was ahead in order to prepare him — not to stop him. Prophetic warning and divine commission can point the same direction.

- Warning 1 — Macedonia: 'chains and tribulations await' (Acts 20:23)
- Warning 2 — Tyre: disciples 'through the Spirit' plead with him not to go (21:4) — a true prophecy with a human application
- Warning 3 — Caesarea: Agabus binds his own hands and feet with Paul's belt (21:11) — OT prophetic sign-act style
- Key question: were the 'don't go' pleas Spirit-inspired or human responses to Spirit-given prophecy of danger? Bruce, Witherington, and Longenecker all favor the latter
- Even Luke (the author) tried to stop him: 'both we and those from that place pleaded with him' (v.12)
- The community's final word: 'The will of the Lord be done' — submission, not resignation

## Acts 21:11 | Word Study: προφητεύω (prophēteuō)

# προφητεύω

*pro-fay-TOO-oh*

To speak forth — foretell AND forthtell. Prophecy in Acts is as much proclamation as prediction.

Agabus's sign-act (binding himself with Paul's belt) is not fortune-telling — it is covenant announcement in the tradition of Jeremiah and Ezekiel. The Spirit announces what is coming so the community can receive it, not avoid it.

Significantly, Agabus gets the details right (arrest by Jews, handed to Gentiles) but the community gets the application wrong ('don't go'). This is a model for how prophecy functions: Spirit-given warning + Spirit-guided response require discernment.

*cf. Acts 11:28 (Agabus on famine); 1 Cor 14:3 (prophecy for edification/encouragement/consolation)*

## Acts 21:14 | What the Community Got Right and Wrong

### What the Spirit Said

- Paul will be bound by Jews in Jerusalem
- He will be handed over to the Gentiles
- Hardship and chains await him
- Three cities confirm this message
- The prophecy is accurate — Acts 21:33 fulfills it exactly

### What the Community Added

- 'Therefore don't go to Jerusalem'
- Loving, understandable — but not from the Lord
- Even Luke joined the plea (v.12)
- Paul: 'You are breaking my heart' — he heard it as pressure, not prohibition
- Final posture: 'The will of the Lord be done' — they submitted when Paul didn't yield

## PAUL'S FIRST ARREST (57 - 58AD)

- Read Acts 21: 16 - 26:32
- Paul's is arrested and held in Caerea
- It is possible that he wrote Hebrews during this time



## Acts 21:17–26 | Jerusalem: The Gift, the Rumors, the Compromise

Paul's arrival in Jerusalem was both a triumph and a test. The Gentile mission was bearing fruit — and bearing false accusations.

- The Jerusalem offering was Paul's concrete symbol of unity: Gentile churches materially serving Jewish believers (Rom 15:26–27)
- James and the elders received the report gladly and 'glorified God' — they saw the fruit (v.20)
- But: rumors had spread that Paul taught Jewish Christians to abandon Moses. False — but politically explosive
- Paul's actual position: Jewish Christians may observe their customs; Gentile Christians are not required to. Neither group earns righteousness by these practices. (Rom 14; 1 Cor 9:20–23)
- Witherington: Paul's sponsorship of the Nazirite vow was not hypocrisy — it was 1 Cor 9:20 in action: 'To the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews'
- The offering was not atonement — Paul absolutely understood only the cross atones. This was a dedication offering.

# PAUL'S CONVICTIONS

- **Because of his convictions Paul:**

- Obediently went to Jerusalem
- Humbly submitted to the elders
  - Acts 21:17-19 “When we had come to Jerusalem, the brothers received us gladly. On the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present. After greeting them, he related one by one the things that God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry.”
- Boldly faced his accusers
  - Acts 22:1-21
- Willing went to prison

## Acts 21:27–40 | The Arrest: Like Jesus, Like His Master

Paul's arrest at the temple is the pivot point of the entire book of Acts — and Luke frames it as a deliberate echo of the Passion narrative.

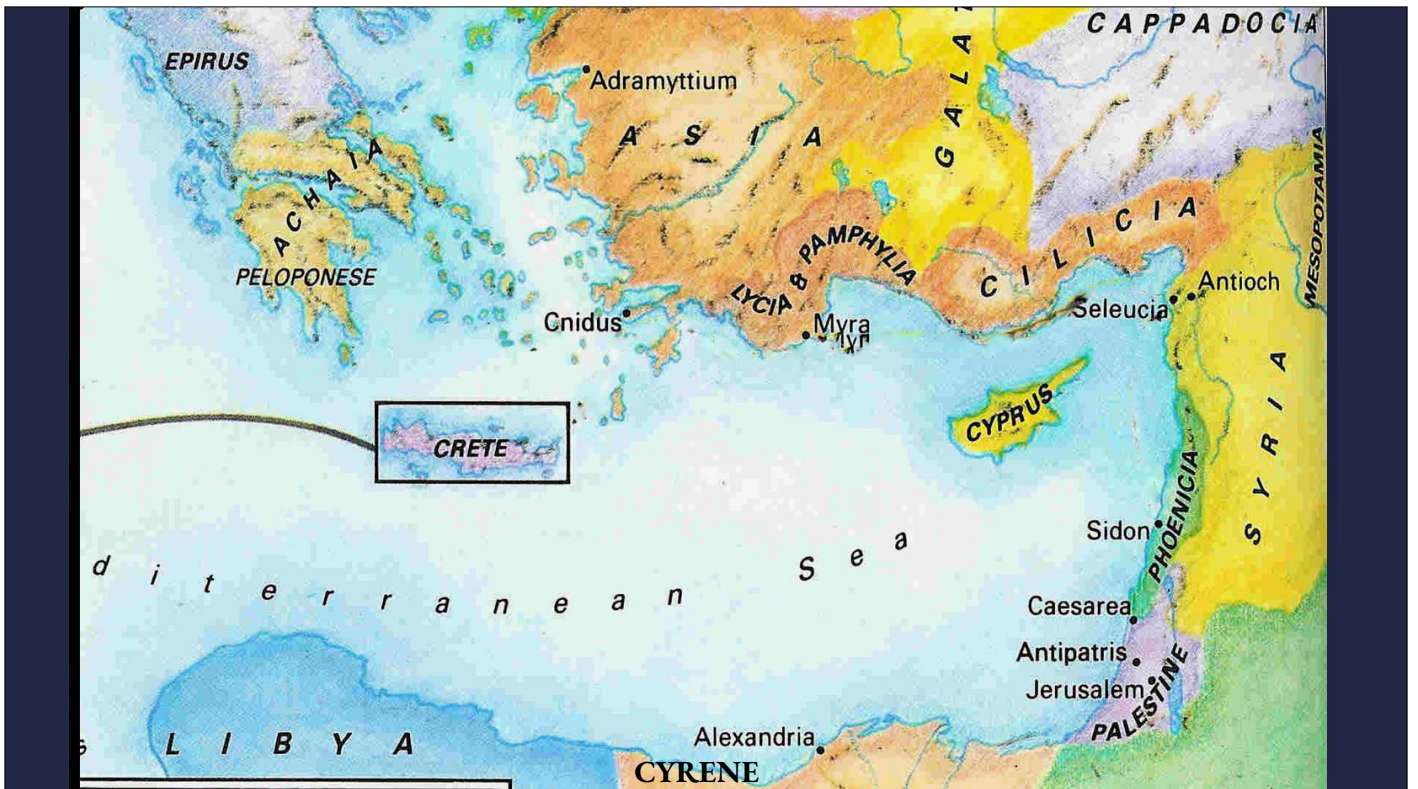
- False charge: 'He brought Greeks into the temple' — based on seeing Trophimus in the city, not the temple (v.29)
- Penalty for a Gentile crossing the court barrier: death. Signs posted in Greek and Latin. Rome authorized the Jews to execute violators — even Roman citizens (Josephus, Jewish War 5.194)
- The mob cries 'Away with him!' (v.36) — Bruce: this is verbatim the shout that demanded Jesus' death (Luke 23:18; John 19:15)
- The Tower of Antonia housed 500+ Roman soldiers — two flights of stairs from the Court of the Gentiles
- Paul's response to near-death: 'Permit me to speak to the people.' His one thought was the gospel.
- Luke's literary signal: Paul is following his Lord. The servant is not above his master (John 15:20).

ACTS 22

# The Gospel on Trial: A Life Spent as Testimony

ἀπολογία — apologia: a formal, reasoned defense (Acts 22:1)

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## Acts 22:1–16 | Paul's Conversion Story as Apologetic

Paul's sermon to the mob was not an argument — it was a life. His Damascus Road experience was the hinge of everything he preached.

- He addressed them in Hebrew/Aramaic — the crowd fell silent. Language as bridge, not barrier
- Strategy: establish common ground first. Born in Tarsus, raised in Jerusalem, trained under Gamaliel — 'a Hebrew of Hebrews' (Phil 3:5). He was one of them.
- Then the pivot: 'I was exactly like you — until I met Jesus.' His past persecution gave him credibility, not shame
- Ananias described carefully: not as a Christian leader, but as 'a devout man according to the law, with a good reputation among all the Jews' — Paul is speaking Jewish to a Jewish crowd
- Acts 22:14 — the three-fold call: know His will / see the Just One / hear His voice. Keener: this is the complete epistemology of discipleship.
- Conversion story used four ways in the NT: to persuade Jews (Acts 22), to persuade Gentiles (Acts 26), for theology (Phil 3), for encouragement (1 Tim 1)

## Acts 22:14 | Word Study: δίκαιος (dikaios)

δίκαιος

*DIK-ah-yos*

Righteous, just, upright — in legal, moral, and covenantal senses

Paul calls Jesus 'the Righteous One' (τὸν δίκαιον) — a deliberate messianic title. This echoes Acts 3:14 (Peter), Acts 7:52 (Stephen), and Isaiah 53:11 ('by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many').

Using this title before a Jewish crowd was not accidental. Paul was not introducing a new religion — he was naming the One whom all of Israel's righteousness language had always pointed toward.

*cf. Acts 3:14; Acts 7:52; Isa 53:11; 1 John 2:1*

The irony: the crowd was enraged at his righteousness language — they were trying to kill the witness of the Righteous One.

## Acts 22:17–21 | The Temple Vision: Called Away from Israel, Called Toward the World

"Return quickly from Jerusalem, because they will not accept your testimony about me." So I said, "Lord, they know that I imprisoned and beat those who believe in you... And when the blood of your martyr Stephen was shed, I stood there giving my approval..." Then the Lord said to me, "Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles."

*Paul's deepest desire (to reach Israel) redirected by Jesus to the world. Obedience costs him what he wanted most.*

## Acts 22:22–29 | One Word Riots a City

The crowd that listened intently to Paul's entire testimony — his Jewish upbringing, his conversion, his vision — erupted at one word: 'Gentiles.'

- They didn't object to Jesus per se — they objected to equal access for Gentiles
- Their theology: Gentiles could become Jews through circumcision and law-keeping. Paul's gospel: Jews and Gentiles come to God the same way — through faith in Jesus alone
- This is the theological fault line of the entire book of Acts (cf. Acts 10–11, Acts 15)
- Roman citizenship: Paul invokes it just in time — the flagellum (Roman scourge) was not the Jewish 39 lashes. Men died or were permanently crippled. Paul had 39 lashes five times already (2 Cor 11:24).
- Boice: Paul was 'a man unique in the ancient world' — educated Pharisee, Roman citizen, tentmaker, apostle. God used every part of his impossible background.
- His citizenship was not luck — it was providence. God had been equipping this witness for decades before Paul knew his assignment.

ACTS 23:1-11

# The Night the Lord Stood Near: Be of Good Cheer

θάρσει — tharsei: 'Take heart / Be of good cheer' — spoken only by Jesus (Acts 23:11)

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## Acts 23:1-10 | Before the Sanhedrin — Conscience, Conflict, and Tactics

Paul's appearance before the Sanhedrin was a mix of bold integrity, genuine outburst, quick recovery, and shrewd tactical thinking.

- Greek: συνείδησις (syneidēsis) — 'conscience' — Paul claims he has lived before God with a clear one. Not sinlessness; responsive obedience to what conscience revealed.
- High priest Ananias orders him struck — illegal under Deut 25:1-2 (only the condemned may be beaten). Josephus records Ananias as greedy, violent, pro-Roman; he was later assassinated by Jewish nationalists.
- 'Whitewashed wall' — whitened on the outside, corrupt within. Paul's rebuke was prophetically accurate; he immediately retracted the manner, not the content.
- His tactic: spot the Pharisee/Sadducee divide and call out the resurrection. True claim — his entire gospel centers on a risen Jesus. But Paul later called it 'wrongdoing' (Acts 24:20-21).
- Witherington: this was not Paul's finest hour — he was exhausted, beaten, and processing two failed opportunities. Luke does not sanitize the record.

## Acts 23:11 | Word Study: θάρσει (tharsei)

# θάρσει

*THAR-say*

Take heart! Be of good cheer! — an imperative of encouragement, courage, confidence

This single word appears only 5 times in the NT — every time spoken by Jesus:

- To the paralytic: 'Your sins are forgiven' (Matt 9:2)
- To the woman healed: 'Your faith has saved you' (Matt 9:22)
- To disciples on the sea: 'It is I — do not be afraid' (Matt 14:27)
- To the disciples before the cross: 'I have overcome the world' (John 16:33)
- And here — to Paul alone in a jail cell (Acts 23:11)

Jesus says this word only when the stakes are highest and the person most alone.

*The word implies: the situation is genuinely hard and Jesus knows it. This is not toxic positivity.*

## Acts 23:11 | The Night the Lord Stood Near

"The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, "Take heart! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome."

*Notice what Jesus said — and what He did not say. He did not say 'Don't worry, everything will be fine.' He said: there is more for you to do. That was the comfort.*

## Acts 23:11 | What Jesus Said to Paul in the Dark

Jesus met Paul not by delivering him out of the cell — but by standing in it with him. The night visit was not a rescue. It was a recommissioning.

- 'You have testified for Me in Jerusalem' — a job well done, even without visible results. The mob rioted; the council fought. Jesus still called it faithful testimony.
- 'So you must also testify in Rome' — the word δεῖ (dei): must, it is necessary. Divine necessity. Paul's future was not contingent on Rome's decisions — it was guaranteed by God's decree.
- Guzik: 'God knows where you are today. Paul was in jail — but the Lord knew exactly which jail.' Better in prison with Christ than free without Him.
- The promise of more work = a promise of continued life. 'No power on earth or under the earth can rob you of your future' (Spurgeon). Paul faced the 40 assassins the next day with calm — because God had already spoken.
- This is the theological center of the entire passage: God's prophetic purpose cannot be stopped by mobs, councils, chains, or assassins. The witness will reach Rome.

## Acts 23:11 | The Assurance That Carries Paul to Rome

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This assurance meant much to Paul during the delays and anxieties of the next two years, and goes far to account for the calm and dignified bearing which from now on marks him out as a master of events rather than their victim.

— F.F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*

*From Acts 23:11 forward, Paul is no longer reactive — he is a man with a word from God. Chains, trials, shipwrecks, and two years of imprisonment do not shake him. He knows where he is going.*

## So What? | Paul's Prophetic Witness and Ours

What does it look like to live as a person under divine compulsion rather than personal ambition?

- Warnings from God are preparation, not prohibition. The Spirit tells us what is ahead so we can receive it, not run from it.
- A clear conscience before God is possible — not through sinless performance, but through faithful responsiveness to what He has shown us
- The greatest comfort in the darkest night is not 'everything will be fine' — it is 'there is more for you to do'
- Paul's witness reached Rome not because he was invincible, but because he was indispensable to a purpose that was not his own
- The same God who stood in Paul's jail cell stands in yours. θάρσει — take heart. He knows where you are.