



Walking Through the Scripture Together

September 21 - 27, 2008

Acts 21:1-36

# mad, mad world

**Text** Acts 21:1-36 (TNIV)

## On to Jerusalem

<sup>1</sup>After we had torn ourselves away from them, we put out to sea and sailed straight to Kos. The next day we went to Rhodes and from there to Patara. <sup>2</sup>We found a ship crossing over to Phoenicia, went on board and set sail. <sup>3</sup>After sighting Cyprus and passing to the south of it, we sailed on to Syria. We landed at Tyre, where our ship was to unload its cargo. <sup>4</sup>We sought out the disciples there and stayed with them seven days. Through the Spirit they urged Paul not to go on to Jerusalem. <sup>5</sup>When it was time to leave, we left and continued on our way. All of them, including wives and children, accompanied us out of the city, and there on the beach we knelt to pray. <sup>6</sup>After saying good-bye to each other, we went aboard the ship, and they returned home.

<sup>7</sup>We continued our voyage from Tyre and landed at Ptolemais, where we greeted the believers and stayed with them for a day. <sup>8</sup>Leaving the next day, we reached Caesarea and stayed at the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the Seven. <sup>9</sup>He had four unmarried daughters who prophesied.

<sup>10</sup>After we had been there a number of days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. <sup>11</sup>Coming over to us, he took Paul's belt, tied his own hands and feet with it and said, "The Holy Spirit says, 'In this way the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles.'"

<sup>12</sup>When we heard this, we and the people there pleaded with Paul not to go up to Jerusalem. <sup>13</sup>Then Paul answered, "Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." <sup>14</sup>When he would not be dissuaded, we gave up and said, "The Lord's will be done."

<sup>15</sup>After this, we started on our way up to Jerusalem. <sup>16</sup>Some of the disciples from Caesarea accompanied us and brought us to the home of Mnason, where we were to stay. He was a man from Cyprus and one of the early disciples.

## Paul's Arrival at Jerusalem

<sup>17</sup>When we arrived at Jerusalem, the believers received us warmly. <sup>18</sup>The next day Paul and the rest of us went to see James, and all the elders were present. <sup>19</sup>Paul greeted them and reported in detail what God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry.

<sup>20</sup>When they heard this, they praised God. Then they said to Paul: "You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews have believed, and all of them are zealous for the law. <sup>21</sup>They have been informed that you teach all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to turn away from Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or live according to our customs. <sup>22</sup>What shall we do? They will certainly hear that you have come, <sup>23</sup>so do what we tell you. There are four men with us who have made a vow. <sup>24</sup>Take these men, join in their purification rites and pay their expenses, so that they can have their heads shaved. Then everyone will know there is no truth in these reports about you, but that you yourself are living in obedience to the law. <sup>25</sup>As for the Gentile believers, we have written to them our decision that they should abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality."

<sup>26</sup>The next day Paul took the men and purified himself along with them. Then he went to the temple to give notice of the date when the days of purification would end and the offering would be made for each of them.

## Paul Arrested

<sup>27</sup>When the seven days were nearly over, some Jews from the province of Asia saw Paul at the temple. They stirred up the whole crowd and seized him, <sup>28</sup>shouting, "People of Israel, help us! This is the man who teaches everyone everywhere against our people and our law and this place. And besides, he has brought Greeks into the temple and defiled this holy place." <sup>29</sup>(They had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with Paul and assumed that Paul had brought him into the temple.)

<sup>30</sup>The whole city was aroused, and the people came running from all directions. Seizing Paul, they dragged him from the temple, and immediately the gates were shut. <sup>31</sup>While they were trying to kill him, news reached the commander of the Roman troops that the whole city of Jerusalem was in an uproar. <sup>32</sup>He at once took some officers and soldiers and ran down to the crowd. When the rioters saw the commander and his soldiers, they stopped beating Paul.

<sup>33</sup>The commander came up and arrested him and ordered him to be bound with two chains. Then he asked who he was and what he had done. <sup>34</sup>Some in the crowd shouted one thing and some another, and since the commander could not get at the truth because of the uproar, he ordered that Paul be taken into the barracks. <sup>35</sup>When Paul reached the steps, the violence of the mob was so great he had to be carried by the soldiers.

<sup>36</sup>The crowd that followed kept shouting, "Get rid of him!"

## Small Group Discussion Guide

### Lean In

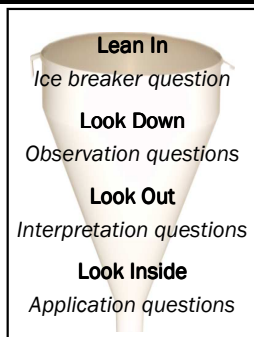
- Share about a time when you just about had to be dragged somewhere, for example to the dentist, to a new school, to the circus, etc. What happened?

### Look Down / Look Out

- If possible, trace Paul's journey on a map, noting each place, the distances involved, the time spent.
- What do you find striking about Paul's interactions with believers on his way to Jerusalem? What warning is sounded in Tyre? How does the faith community send Paul off? What impresses you about this scene?
- Where have we met Agabus before in Acts (see Acts 11)? What do you make of his rather interesting form of "prophetic delivery"? What effect did this prophecy have on the local believers?
- Why do you think Paul is refusing to listen to everyone's counsel? Do you think he is making the right decision? Why or why not?
- What kind of reception did Paul receive in Jerusalem? Why does there still seem to be a problem with Paul there? What perception was there about Paul? How accurate do you think this perception was? What counsel is Paul given?
- What was Paul accused of doing and by whom? On what basis did they make the accusation against him? How did the accusations affect the crowd in the temple? What was done with Paul? Who came to his rescue?

### Look Inside

- When have you made decisions against the wishes of people whom you trust and admire? How did things turn out? How do you know when to listen to the voices around you, and when to "stay the course" you feel compelled to pursue?
- What insight does this incident give us into the nature of assumptions we make about others? When have others had the totally wrong idea about you? How did you handle this?



## Family Discussion Guide

### Day One Acts 21:1-9

Describe the best friend you have ever had. What made this person your best friend? What's the trick to making friends like this?

### Day Two Acts 21:10-16

Do you think it's a good idea to listen to what others think before you make a big decision? Why or why not? Whose opinion would you ask for? How do you know when to listen or when you need to do something else?

### Day Three Acts 21:17-25

When have you really felt misunderstood by someone? What happened? How did you handle this? What can we learn from Paul's example here?

### Day Four Acts 21:26-29

What accusation did these people make against Paul? What did they say he had done? Why did they think this? What can help us not to make bad assumptions about other people?

### Day Five Acts 21:30-36

How did the accusations made against Paul affect other people in the temple? What did they do? Considering this story, why is it important to really think fairly before we talk about other people?

## Life in Bible Times

### Church politics, first century style

On arriving in Jerusalem, Paul "reported in detail what God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry." Undoubtedly he also presented the collection from the Gentile churches to James and the elders, for that was his chief motive for going to Jerusalem (see comments on vv.10-14). Nowhere in Acts (except later at 24:17) does Luke mention this collection, probably because he did not know how to explain to his Gentile readers (1) its significance as being much more than a way of currying favor and (2) Paul's fears that the Jerusalem Christians might not accept it. To understand Paul's fears, we must realize that the Jerusalem church was increasingly being caught between its allegiance to the nation and its fraternal relation to Paul's Gentile mission. To accept the contribution from the Gentile churches was to be identified further with that mission and to drive another wedge between themselves and their compatriots. True, they had accepted such a contribution earlier (cf. 11:27-30) and had declared their fellowship with Paul in previous meetings (cf. Gal 2:6-10; Ac 15:13-29). But with the rising tide of Jewish nationalism and a growing body of scrupulous believers in the Jerusalem church, Jewish Christian solidarity with the Gentile mission was becoming more and more difficult to affirm if the Jerusalem church's relations with the nation were to be maintained and opportunities for an outreach to Israel kept open. Undoubtedly Paul recognized the increased tensions at Jerusalem. No wonder he feared that James and the elders, for the sake of their Jewish relations and mission, might feel themselves constrained to reject the contribution (Ro 15:31), thus severing, in effect, the connection between the Pauline churches and the Jerusalem church.

James and the elders responded to Paul's report and the gift from the churches by praising God. Yet they also urged Paul to join with four Jewish Christians who were fulfilling their Nazirite vows and to pay for their required offerings. In effect, they were saying to Paul, "We can accept this gift from the churches and so identify ourselves openly with your Gentile mission, if you will join with these men and identify yourself openly with the nation." Thus they were protecting themselves against Jewish recriminations while at the same time affirming their connection with Paul and his mission. And, as they saw it, they were providing Paul with a way of protecting himself against a slanderous accusation floating about that he was teaching Jews to apostatize from Judaism. It doubtless seemed to all concerned a particularly happy solution to the vexing problems that both Paul and the Jerusalem church were facing.

Zondervan NIV Bible Commentary

## details, details...

### They urged Paul not to go up to Jerusalem

There are some interesting parallels between Jesus' final journey to Jerusalem and Paul's. Both journeys involved a threefold warning of what lay ahead (Jesus warning the disciples, the disciples warning Paul); more plotting of unbelieving Jews and involvement of the Romans; a steadfast resolution to do God's will. Of course the outcome was different. Agabus' prophecy didn't exactly play out as stated. Paul wasn't bound by Jews and handed over to the Romans, he was rescued by the Romans, mistakenly bound and then released — into their protective custody. The Roman centurion (we will learn later that his name was Claudius Lysias) was a better man than the procurator Jesus faced.

### After we had been there for a number of days

Paul and his party came to Caesarea, the magnificent harbor and city built by Herod the Great as the port of Jerusalem and the Roman provincial capital of Judea. There they stayed with Philip the evangelist, one of the seven who had been appointed in the early days of the Jerusalem church to take care of the daily distribution of food (cf. 6:1-6). He had evangelized in Samaria and the maritime plain of Palestine (cf. 8:4-40), after which he apparently settled at Caesarea for some twenty years. Paul stayed at his home for "a number of days." For a man in a hurry to get to Jerusalem, this delay of several days may seem strange. But he wanted to be in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost (cf. 20:16)—not just get there as early as possible. So Paul's stay in Caesarea was probably a deliberate matter of timing.