

ARRESTED: ACTS 21.7-22.9



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A Scriptorium Study from The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe

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To Jerusalem: Acts 21.7-22.9
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Introduction to Acts 21.7-22.9

Paul's arrival in Jerusalem is both glorious and disastrous – or, so it would seem.

He has much good news to bring concerning the ongoing work of Christ, but enemies are lurking. Paul, under advisement by the elders of Jerusalem, hoped to placate his enemies by demonstrating that he did not despise Jewish laws and traditions. But the effort blew up in his face.

Agabus' prophesy comes to fulfillment as Paul is beaten, taken captive, and set to be flogged. But the never-say-die apostle still has a few trump cards left in his hand, as we shall see.

There is much for us to learn here about courage, faithfulness, and being a witness to Christ.

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We hope you find this study of Acts instructive and helpful to equip you for your walk with and work for the Lord. Thank you for joining us.

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1 Undeterred

Read and meditate on Acts 21.7-16.

Paul is heading to Jerusalem, bearing the gifts collected from the churches in Macedonia, Achaia, and elsewhere (cf. Rom. 15.22-29). As we have seen, he is becoming aware that the enemies of the Gospel are ratcheting-up their efforts to silence him, but he is completely undeterred. He has a previous directive from the Lord on behalf of His people, and no amount of threat or danger is going to cause him to fail in his responsibility.

For reflection

1. Luke continues slowing down the trip to Jerusalem, as he relates Paul's southward movement from Tyre to Caesarea, and his staying there with Philip *many days*. These Christians seem to have had a knack for opening their homes to one another. What does this suggest about the unity in the Spirit (Eph. 4.3) these believers knew?
2. We feel the drama building to a pre-denouement height with the arrival of Agabus and his terrifying word of warning (v. 11). The Holy Spirit clearly revealed to Agabus that Paul would be arrested by the Jews and handed over to the Gentiles. But was that prophetic word contrary to Paul's reason for going to Jerusalem? Explain.
3. Not at all, even though the brethren in Caesarea seemed to have took it so. Even Luke became alarmed and joined with those who were pleading with Paul "not to go up to Jerusalem" ("we", v. 12). Paul rebuked his friends and companions, because he had already made up his mind that if he had to die for the Gospel, so be it. He would not deny either his commission or the Lord's directive. Our text ends with the arrival in Jerusalem, and we can fairly feel the tension and uncertainty. Should we as believers try to avoid being troubled or inconvenienced because of the Gospel? What are some forms such troubling might take?
4. Sometimes it can seem as though the will of the Lord is in contradiction. We saw this earlier with Barnabas and Paul. Now we see it again. How can it be God's will for Paul to go to Jerusalem and be arrested?
5. Paul could not have answered that question, although he may well have come to believe that such would be his fate. He had a mandate and a mission, and nothing in the warning from Agabus led him to believe someone else should fulfill his calling for him. Do you ever feel as though sometimes the will of God for your life seems to be in contradiction? What should you do when this is the case?

Summary

Paul is making his way to Jerusalem, stopping frequently to meet with and encourage other believers. Luke is using this travelogue to slow down the action, but we're also learning something about the ongoing work of Christ: In spite of continuous opposition, the Gospel has taken root in many places, and the believers have a strong sense of oneness in the Lord. What can we learn from this to help us in seeking the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph. 4.3)?

Closing Prayer

“If it had not been the LORD who was on our side,”
Let Israel now say—
“If it had not been the LORD who was on our side,
When men rose up against us,
Then they would have swallowed us alive,
When their wrath was kindled against us;
Then the waters would have overwhelmed us,
The stream would have gone over our soul;
Then the swollen waters
Would have gone over our soul.”
Blessed *be* the LORD,
Who has not given us *as* prey to their teeth.
Our soul has escaped as a bird from the snare of the fowlers;
The snare is broken, and we have escaped.
Our help *is* in the name of the LORD,
Who made heaven and earth.

Psalm 124

2 Condescension, not Compromise

Read and meditate on Acts 21.17-26.

Paul's first task in Jerusalem was to salute the Church and report to the leaders how God had blessed their decision concerning the Gentiles (Acts 15) through his ministry. Paul was not a "Lone Ranger" apostle; he was part of the larger Body of Christ and practiced appropriate submission to the brethren.

For reflection

1. They received the report from Paul with rejoicing. What do you imagine the effect of this report to have been on the faith of those Jerusalem saints?
2. James (the text says, "they", but it was probably James speaking on behalf of all) knew that what the Jews were saying about Paul was not true. Paul was not telling Jews not to circumcise their children or to abandon their traditions. He had circumcised Timothy, after all, and he'd made haste to be in Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost. He was a living refutation of the lies that were being told about him. Should unbelievers fear that the Gospel will eliminate or destroy all their most cherished traditions, values, and beliefs? Explain.
3. Nevertheless, James and the brethren wisely believed that some *condescension* to Jewish sentiments was appropriate, and Paul agreed. It would do no good in the end, as we shall see, but the message is clear: To the best of our ability, without compromising the Gospel, we must be ready to meet people where they are. What are the implications of this for you in your own Personal Mission Field?
4. Don't read anything negative or paternalistic into that word *condescension*. Jesus con(*with*)descended (*came down among*) to us in order to lift us up to the Father, and we recognize that as a supreme gesture of love. Paul hoped he might be able to do the same. But there are no guarantees. We can do our best to honor people and meet them where they are, but we should still expect the same kinds of reactions we saw in Acts 17.32-34. How should we prepare to respond to each of these?
5. Paul was not obligated to submit to the ceremonial laws or traditions of the Jews. He understood that, with the coming of the great High Priest, these laws had been abrogated (Heb. 7-9). But submitting to them was not sinful, at least, not to the extent Paul did. To offer a sacrifice would have been sinful, but submitting to a vow and a period of separation for the purpose of holiness is perfectly acceptable, within the appropriate context. The same is true of a great many traditions and practices from other cultures and even other religions. We can and should meet people "on their turf" to the extent that we can do so without violating the Gospel or the Law of God. Can you think of an example of how condescending to meet an unbeliever "on his turf" might be appropriate for you?

Summary

It would soon be known that Paul was in Jerusalem, and the believers there rightly hoped to defuse any explosive situations by giving Paul an opportunity to show good faith to the Jews. In our day, why do you think many unbelievers harbor hostility to the Gospel?

Closing Prayer

Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me!
For my soul trusts in You;
And in the shadow of Your wings I will make my refuge,
Until *these* calamities have passed by.
I will cry out to God Most High,
To God who performs *all things* for me.
He shall send from heaven and save me;
He reproaches the one who would swallow me up. *Selab*
God shall send forth His mercy and His truth.
My soul *is* among lions;
I lie *among* the sons of men
Who are set on fire,
Whose teeth *are* spears and arrows,
And their tongue a sharp sword.
Be exalted, O God, above the heavens;
Let Your glory *be* above all the earth.

Psalm 57.1-5

3 Lies (What Else?)

Read and meditate on Acts 21.27-36.

The “Jews from Asia” may have been from any of the cities where Paul had ministered, perhaps Ephesus (since they recognized Trophimus the Ephesian). These men, perhaps anticipating Paul’s arrival, or getting very busy once they learned he was in town, began gathering and laying tinder, to which (they knew) they would apply a spark at just the right time.

For reflection

1. They found Paul in the temple, evidently by himself. Then they struck the spark with lies. So what else is new? The enemies of the Gospel are not above using lies to mislead and inflame the masses against the Good News and those who bear it. What lies are being circulated in our day about Christians and Christianity? Are we doing anything to add fuel to this fire?
2. We must be prepared for the consequences, as Paul was. His attempt to condescend obviously had no effect. This mob was whipped up beyond reasoning. And so the formula kicks in: civil disorder + a mob = Roman soldiers. Great – really! How can you see the sovereignty of God at work here through a pagan government? Do governments often serve God’s good purposes, even without knowing or consenting to it? Explain.
3. By the time the Romans arrived, Paul was doubtless a bloody mess. What more could they do to him? The people show that they understand who’s in charge in Jerusalem – not the religious leaders but the guys with the swords. They kept shouting and demonstrating, but they left off beating the apostle. What cowards! Should we expect to encounter such people in our own Personal Mission Fields? How can we prepare for this?
4. The Romans, more reasonable perhaps, decided to isolate Paul so they could get at the truth of this situation. Which they intended to do by flogging it out of the apostle. Romans, you see, considered themselves more civilized than these brutes they held under their boot heels. Think of Paul: A future-thinker, committed to his mission, ready to die for the faith, doing nothing provocative, a faithful Jew and a faithful Christian: What do you suppose must have been going on in his mind during all this?
5. The amazing thing in this story, which represents the beginning of the denouement of the book of Acts, is the way Paul managed to keep his composure. Of course, he’d been through this before, so he had some experience and knew how to respond in his soul (cf. Acts 16). But, as we’ve seen, this situation didn’t sneak up on Paul. He had factored it into the possibilities involved in going to Jerusalem, and doubtless prepared himself for it, so that, long before the event, he was thinking, praying, and strategizing how to respond. Christians who live for the future will know how to live when it gets here, come what may. How well prepared are you for the fact that some people might resent your Christian faith and seek to do you ill?

Summary

Everything erupts into noise, violence, and irrationality as a mob forms and begins tearing Paul apart. Thank God for the Romans, eh? And for Roman citizenship for Paul, as we shall see.

Thinking of the Gospel, the freedoms we enjoy, and so forth, how should we thank God for our civil magistrates? How should we pray for them?

Closing Prayer

LORD, You have been favorable to Your land;
You have brought back the captivity of Jacob.
You have forgiven the iniquity of Your people;
You have covered all their sin. *Selah*
You have taken away all Your wrath;
You have turned from the fierceness of Your anger.
Restore us, O God of our salvation,
And cause Your anger toward us to cease.
Will You be angry with us forever?
Will You prolong Your anger to all generations?
Will You not revive us again,
That Your people may rejoice in You?
Show us Your mercy, LORD,
And grant us Your salvation.

Psalm 85.1-7

4 Never Say Die

Read and meditate on Acts 21.37-40.

Most men would have simply given up at this point, relieved to have been delivered from an irrational mob. But Paul is not most men. He's Paul, and he's always thinking: mission, mission, mission! Paul had the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2.16). Do we?

For reflection

1. So, bloodied, bruised, and borne away by Roman soldiers, he wanted an opportunity to defend himself before his fellow Jews. His courtesy toward the tribune is almost unbelievable. No ranting, no threats, no demanding his rights; he just asks permission, based on his status as a Roman citizen. Paul recognized the man's authority and respected it accordingly. His heart for his people is evident. What can we learn from Paul here about how to respond when people treat us harshly because of the Gospel? How can believers encourage one another at such times?
2. His asking in Greek surprised the Roman, who had obviously heard wild and crazy rumors about Paul (the enemies of the Gospel will stop at nothing to discredit faithful witnesses). Again, Paul played his citizenship card. As before in Philippi, he appealed to Roman protocol in order to continue his mission in the face of a mob that had been beating him to death. So he stood to speak – this time in Hebrew (Aramaic) – always thinking about the best way to fulfill his mission. Never-say-die Paul was always looking to give it one more try. How would you describe your plan for working your Personal Mission Field? Is it as determined and consistent as Paul's was?
3. These are the kind of people who turn the world rightside-up for Jesus Christ, people who will not stop seeking ways to proclaim the Lord until they've breathed their last. Paul commands us to imitate him (1 Cor. 11.1). What's one way you could imitate Paul in your Personal Mission Field today?
4. By the way, how do you think that mob must have felt, seeing Paul – battered and bloodied – standing up and gesturing to them, seeking to get their attention? Notice how they responded (v. 40). Do you think if we were bolder and more determined in sharing Christ with people, we might gain a similar hearing? Explain.
5. Agabus was right. The plan of James and the elders was good, but it failed. Paul was beaten within an inch of his life and taken captive by Rome. Who knows where that would lead? Was his journey to Jerusalem a mistake? Was he failing to discern the leading of the Spirit? Explain.

Summary

God was not finished with Paul yet – not by a long shot. Paul understood that suffering was part of the ongoing work of the Lord. But neither suffering nor captivity would keep him from seeking ways to fulfill his calling. How can believers encourage one another by the example of Paul?

Closing Prayer

My enemies reproach me all day long;
Those who deride me swear an oath against me.

For I have eaten ashes like bread,
And mingled my drink with weeping,
Because of Your indignation and Your wrath;
For You have lifted me up and cast me away.
My days *are* like a shadow that lengthens,
And I wither away like grass.
But You, O LORD, shall endure forever,
And the remembrance of Your name to all generations.
You will arise *and* have mercy on Zion;
For the time to favor her,
Yes, the set time, has come.

Psalm 102.8-13

5 The Explanation for Paul

Read and meditate on Acts 22.1-16.

Paul has just been rescued from an irrational mob which was seeking to take his life. But he insisted on treating his assailants as reasonable people, and he intended to give them a reason for the hope that was within him (cf. 1 Pet. 3.15).

For reflection

1. For the Jews, the masses were tools to manipulate for their own purposes. For the Romans they were rabble to be controlled or punished. For Paul they were men and women made in the image of God, with reasonable souls, who deserved a fair opportunity to understand him and to hear the Good News. Would you say this is the way you look at the people in your Personal Mission Field? Explain.
2. No hard feelings, just the facts: Paul relates his story about coming to faith in Jesus. A simple outline: here's who I was (vv. 3-5, 20), here's what happened to me (vv. 6-16), and here's why I'm doing what I'm doing now (vv. 17-21). Using that outline, briefly sketch out your own personal testimony of the hope that is within you because of Jesus.
3. No one can gainsay our experience of what Christ has done for us. We know Him. We know His presence, blessings, power, promises, Word, Spirit, truth, and love. We need to be ready to give an explanation of our hope whenever people ask a reason for it – and, sometimes, even when they don't. What kinds of things do people hope in, in our day? Is ours a better hope than this? Explain.
4. Look at the way Paul introduced Ananias into his story (vv. 11, 12). Why did he take this tack? How was Paul hoping this introduction would lend credibility to his testimony?
5. What might be some topics, situations, or other opportunities in which you could share some part of your testimony with someone in your Personal Mission Field? Put another way, how would you be able to recognize when God had cracked an “effective door” (1 Cor. 16.9) for you to talk about Jesus?

Summary

Paul relied on his testimony on more than one occasion. This suggests that we should, too. But what *is* your testimony? Paul could talk about the dramatic effects of the power of Christ on and in his life. What about you? Our testimony should be a growing thing. Why? If you need some help preparing your testimony, meditate on the vignettes offered in Psalm 107. Which of these seems most like your story?

Closing Prayer

Deliver me, O my God, out of the hand of the wicked,
Out of the hand of the unrighteous and cruel man.
For You are my hope, O Lord GOD;
You are my trust from my youth.
By You I have been upheld from birth;

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You are He who took me out of my mother's womb.
My praise *shall be* continually of You.
I have become as a wonder to many,
But You *are* my strong refuge.
Let my mouth be filled *with* Your praise
And with Your glory all the day.

Psalm 71.4-8

6 Reason in the Face of Passion

Read and meditate on Acts 22.17-22.

Amazingly enough, as we've seen, the people actually became quiet and listened to Paul – as much, I suspect, out of fear of the Romans as of interest in what Paul had to say. Apparently, they had no quarrel or quibble with Paul's story – how he'd seen the Lord, been baptized, began speaking the Good News. Nothing too offensive here just yet. But hold on.

For reflection

1. It was the mention of the "Gentiles" that sparked the next round of hubbub. Most of the Jews simply put up with the Romans. Many hated them. Pretty risky here to go ballistic at the mention of "Gentiles" when all around the courtyard Gentiles armed to the teeth are watching your every move. What are some topics that can cause people to flare up at us for our faith in Christ? Why?
2. These days it's the word "fundamentalists," or even "Christians," that drops the curtain down in many thinking people's minds and turns on the tap of irrational passion. Passion wrongly focused and whipped up to a fever pitch doesn't stop to think about what it does. It simply does it. Or if it does think, whatever it chooses to do against its hated opponent makes perfectly good sense – to those who are passionate, at any rate. How have you experienced this? How might you expect to experience it? Just like Paul and Jesus, eh?
3. Paul seems almost to have been explaining to the Lord why the Jews wouldn't believe his testimony (vv. 19, 20). After all, he himself had persecuted those who confessed His Name. Why should anyone believe he was now one of them? Is there anything in your life that might prevent people from believing your testimony about Jesus and His life-changing grace and power?
4. But Jesus had other plans for Paul, and his rejection at Jerusalem in Acts 9 was simply part of his preparation for the larger ministry for which Christ was calling and preparing him. Paul didn't preach the Gospel because those to whom he was talking were reasonable, or ready, or whatever else we say people should be before we'll venture to share our testimony with them. He preached to them because they were people. And they were lost. How can we grow in love for the lost people to whom God sends us each day?
5. Would you say that you have a *strategy* for sharing the Gospel with the people in your life sphere? If you were to develop such a strategy, where would prayer fit? What would a typical day look like as you were working your strategy?

Summary

We can't keep people from being offended by *the Gospel*. But we can try to keep them from being offended *at us*. This is an important part of what's involved in *being* a witness for the Lord (Acts 1.8). How can you see that Paul tried hard *not* to give offense?

Closing Prayer

O God, do not be far from me;
O my God, make haste to help me!

Arrested: Acts 21.7-22.9

Let them be confounded *and* consumed
Who are adversaries of my life;
Let them be covered *with* reproach and dishonor
Who seek my hurt.
But I will hope continually,
And will praise You yet more and more.
My mouth shall tell of Your righteousness
And Your salvation all the day,
For I do not know *their* limits.
I will go in the strength of the Lord GOD;
I will make mention of Your righteousness, of Yours only.

Psalm 71.12-16

7 Roman! (Whew!)

Read and meditate on Acts 22.22-29.

The commander was apparently not a very good listener. Or else he had a short memory, or had a little memory lapse about the niceties of Roman law. Paul had already explained that he was a citizen, meaning a Roman citizen in good standing. A commander could perhaps be excused for such ignorance; but not a centurion. You can bet Paul understood this.

For reflection

1. Paul “went over the head” of the commander in this situation. He did so graciously and tactfully, by *asking* the centurion about a fine point of Roman law. He trusted the centurion would take it from there. How could Paul remain so cool and collected in this situation, and what can we learn from him?

2. Paul was born into citizenship; he didn’t have to buy his way into it, like the commander (v. 28). His parents had obviously become Roman citizens before he was born. Do you think this bit of common ground might have affected the commander’s attitude toward Paul? Explain.

3. Here we get a look at Roman hinterland justice: beat the truth out of them. Inquiries, deliberations, hearings – all that takes time. Just flog ‘em ‘til they ‘fess up. Paul was familiar with that protocol and played the Roman citizenship card more forcefully than before. He thought the commander had understood the first time around. Now he needed to make sure. “Is it lawful...?” He would make the Romans live by their own code, or risk the consequences of violating it. It was a fearful thing to find oneself at odds with Roman justice. Paul would make Roman law work for him every way he could, even into the presence of the Emperor. When in Rome... Is there a principle here to guide our own witness for the Lord?

4. Paul had earlier written that government is God’s servant for good (Rom. 13.1-4). But it takes good citizens to make government do what’s right and good. It was not good that Paul be flogged, or turned over to the Jews. He would make Roman government serve God’s good purposes by invoking Roman law and public policy to the advantage of the Gospel. Should Christians try to influence the work of government in other ways? Explain.

5. What is our responsibility in helping American government fulfill its charge to be a servant of God for good? Is there anything in our Founding documents that might serve as a ground to stand on in trying to shape the actions of government toward a more Biblical mode? Explain.

Summary

God works through human governments, and God’s people need to understand how government can be invoked, appealed to, or otherwise influenced for the Kingdom purposes of God. What are the likely consequences, in an age such as ours, of Christians simply turning their backs on being involved in politics and government?

Summary

It’s a good thing someone in this situation had paid attention during civics class! Paul, a prisoner of

Rome, was now using Roman policy to extend his life – and his ministry. Was he being pragmatic, or merely practical? What's the difference?

Closing Prayer

Praise the LORD from the earth,
You great sea creatures and all the depths;
Fire and hail, snow and clouds;
Stormy wind, fulfilling His word;
Mountains and all hills;
Fruitful trees and all cedars;
Beasts and all cattle;
Creeping things and flying fowl;
Kings of the earth and all peoples;
Princes and all judges of the earth;
Both young men and maidens;
Old men and children.
Let them praise the name of the LORD,
For His name alone is exalted;
His glory *is* above the earth and heaven.

Psalm 148.7-13

For reflection or discussion

1. What can we learn from Paul's example about the use of our testimony in sharing the Good News of Jesus?
2. How can we remain calm and reasoning when someone begins to get loud or angry or threatening as we bear witness for the Lord?
3. Sharing the Gospel always entails some risk. People don't like being told they're sinners, or lost, or that they lack something in their lives. Some handle such information better than others. What is our responsibility in making sure our words are always seasoned with grace?
4. In what ways are you applying the teaching and example of Paul in your Personal Mission Field?
5. What's the most important insight or lesson you've learned from Acts 21.7-22.29?

Glory to Glory

We are transformed into the image of Jesus Christ *from* the glory we encounter in God's Word to the way we *live for His glory* in the world (2 Cor. 3.12-18; 1 Cor. 10.31).

What have you encountered *of* God's glory in our reading and meditations in this week's studies? How has He shown Himself to you more clearly? How can this help you live more consistently *for* His glory in the daily details of your life?

What have you learned about yourself from Acts 21.7-22.29 to help you in knowing more of the presence, promise, and power of the Kingdom?

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Thank you.