

Acts 21 Questions

Living in the Will of God

Ice Breaker: Tell about a time you decided to do something against the advice or will of others. How did it turn out?

Unpacking the Passage:

Note: Acts 20:22-24 sets the stage for the events in Acts Chapter 21 and demonstrates Paul's willingness to follow the will of God by travelling to Jerusalem.

Read Acts 20:22-24 *"And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. 23 I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. 24 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."*

Read Acts 21:1-16 - Paul Sails to Jerusalem

Acts 21:1-16 *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. 2 We found a ship crossing over to Phoenicia, went on board and set sail. 3 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. 4 We sought out the disciples there and stayed with them seven days. Through the Spirit they urged Paul not to go on to Jerusalem. 5 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. 6 After saying goodbye to each other, we went aboard the ship, and they returned home.

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

10 After we had been there a number of days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. 11 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.'"

12 When we heard this, we and the people there pleaded with Paul not to go up to Jerusalem. 13 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." 14 When he would not be dissuaded, we gave up and said, "The Lord's will be done."

15 After this, we started on our way up to Jerusalem. 16 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.

1. When travelling, why do you think Paul and his companion looked up the disciples in each of the cities in which they stayed? (Acts 21:4,7,8,16)

2. While travelling or on vacation, have you visited other churches/believers? What experience stands out for you?

3. What do you think God is accomplishing by continually warning Paul about what would happen in Jerusalem, but compelling him to go Jerusalem by the Spirit? (Acts 20:22-24, 21: 4, 8-12; Acts 9:16)

4. What was Paul's response to the believers trying to convince him to not go to Jerusalem? (Acts 21:13-14) What does this say about Paul's character and commitment? (Revelation 12:11)

5. Have you made a decision that you knew was right, but would lead to suffering? Why did you decide to do it regardless?

Read Acts 21:17-26 - Paul at Jerusalem

Acts 21:17-26 *When we arrived at Jerusalem, the brothers and sisters received us warmly. 18 The next day Paul and the rest of us went to see James, and all the elders were present. 19 Paul greeted them and reported in detail what God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry.*

20 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. 21 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. 22 What shall we do? They will certainly hear that you have come, 23 so do what we tell you. There are four men with us who have made a vow. 24 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. 25 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."

26 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.

Note: Below is a timeline of Paul's Ministry, so far. It is provided for both answering the question and for a chance to get an overall sense of the time covered in the book of Acts.

(<https://www.christianitytoday.com/history/issues/issue-47/apostle-paul-and-his-times-christian-history-timeline.html>) The years are approximate and debated among scholars.

30-33 AD Paul persecutes followers of Jesus of Nazareth in Jerusalem and Judea

33-36 Converted on the way to Damascus; spends three years in Arabia; returns to Damascus to preach Jesus as Messiah

36 Flees Damascus because of persecution; visits Jerusalem and meets with the apostles

36-44 Preaches in Tarsus and surrounding region

44-46 Invited by Barnabas to teach in Antioch

46 With Barnabas visits Jerusalem to bring a famine relief offering

47-48 First missionary journey with Barnabas, to Cyprus and Galatia

49 At the Council of Jerusalem, Paul argues successfully that Gentile Christians need not follow Jewish law; returns to Antioch; confronts Peter over question of Jewish law

49-52 Second missionary journey with Silas, through Asia Minor and Greece; settles in Corinth; writes letters to Thessalonians

52 Visits Jerusalem and Antioch briefly; begins third missionary journey

52-55 Stays in Ephesus; writes the letters to Galatians and Corinthians

55-57 Travels through Greece and possibly Illyricum (modern Yugoslavia); writes letter to Romans

57-59 Returns to Jerusalem and arrested;

6. How much time has passed since Paul was last in Jerusalem? What was the response of the brethren, James and the Elders upon Paul's visit to Jerusalem?

7. What was the response of the Jewish believers to Paul? What was the solution the Elders suggest and why would this help to satisfy them?

8. Why would Paul agree with this approach? (1 Corinthians 9:19-23) How does this approach apply to us today?

Read Acts 21:27-40- Paul Seized in the Temple

Acts 21:27-40 *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, 28 shouting, "Fellow Israelites, 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." 29 (They had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with Paul and assumed that Paul had brought him into the temple.)*

30 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. 31 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. 32 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.

33 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. 34 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. 35 When Paul reached the steps, the violence of the mob was so great he had to be carried by the soldiers. 36 The crowd that followed kept shouting, "Get rid of him!"

37 As the soldiers were about to take Paul into the barracks, he asked the commander, "May I say something to you?"

"Do you speak Greek?" he replied. 38 "Aren't you the Egyptian who started a revolt and led four thousand terrorists out into the wilderness some time ago?"

39 Paul answered, "I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no ordinary city. Please let me speak to the people."

40 After receiving the commander's permission, Paul stood on the steps and motioned to the crowd. When they were all silent, he said to them in Aramaic:

9. Who were upset by Paul's presence in the temple and why were they upset? (Keep in mind that these Jews likely knew Paul during his ministry in Ephesus. See Acts 19)

10. How did this event fulfill the prophecy of Agabus in Acts 21:10-1?

11. In Acts 21:21, 28-29, and 38, Paul was the subject of false rumors or mistaken identity. How did Paul respond to these rumors? How should we respond to rumors and false stories?

Unpacking the Pastor Dave's Sermon:

Note: Pastor Dave's sermon focused on determining the will of God in our lives. Paul follows God's will in his decision to go to Jerusalem.

12. What are some questions we can ask to help determine whether a decision is within God's moral will? (Mark 12:28-31; Romans 12:1-2; Ephesians 5:15-17; Psalm 19:7-11) Are there other passages you consider when seeking God's will?

13. What is the Sovereign will of God? (Psalm 33:11; Isaiah 46:10; 1 Timothy 2:3-4)

14. How does one go about finding God's individual will for our decisions? (Psalm 32:8; Proverbs 3:5-6)

From Pastor Dave's Sermon: THREE TESTS FOR GOD'S INDIVIDUAL WILL

- **THE TEST OF TIME**
- **THE TEST OF SCRIPTURE**
- **THE TEST OF PEACE**

15. How does Paul know that it is God's will to go to Jerusalem? How does God's moral will, God's sovereign will and individual will play a part in Paul's decision to go to Jerusalem? (Acts 20:22-24)

Acts 20:22-24 *"And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. 23 I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. 24 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."*

16. Why is it important that we consider God's moral, sovereign and individual will in our decisions? How can this approach affect our witness?

Here's why you need this lesson: God's will is lived, not found.