Preparing to Teach Acts 21-22

At the end of last session, Paul and company had an emotional prayer meeting and parting from the elders of the Ephesus church. To keep from complicating matters, as well as slowing down his trip where he felt called to Jerusalem, he had met with them at Miletus. It was emotional because, in his farewell address, it seemed clear that he might never see these church leaders from Ephesus again.

So, it is no wonder that Luke starts off the next chapter with the words, ***1) After it happened that we had pulled ourselves away from them, we raised our sails, sailing a straight course, we came to Kos. Then, the next day to Rhodes, and then to Patara.* [PJT]** To underscore the emotion here, Luke uses an old Greek verb that was often used for removing a sword from its scabbard [Bruce, F. F., *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Book of Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1974—original 1954), p. 420; Robertson, A. T., *Word Pictures in the New Testament: Volume III: The Acts of the Apostles* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1930), p. 354.]. The separation, as it is usually translated in English, was more abrupt and serious than we see in most English translations, as Paul needed to get on with his difficult trip to Jerusalem.

That Paul wanted to focus on Jerusalem is obvious in some other aspects of this brief travelogue. The word for putting out to sea has the root idea of “putting up” [Robertson, p. 358.], so I imagined the raising of sails. There being no obstacles such as we see on some of the sea journeys in Acts, Luke says they made a straight course to Kos/Cos. A 19th century examination of the voyage gave this interesting explanation for the straight course. He explained that the wind, during the late Spring and Summer months, in the Aegean Sea: “…generally blows from the north, beginning at a very early hour in the morning; in the late afternoon, it dies away; at sunset there is a dead calm, and thereafter a gentle south wind arises and blows during the night. The start would be made before sunrise; and it would be necessary for all passengers to go on board soon after midnight in order to be ready to sail with the first breath from the north.” [Ramsay, Sir William M*., St Paul the Traveller and the Roman Citizen* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1962—original, 1925), p. 293.]

And here’s where I start to see Paul’s intent in play. What do we know about Cos/Kos? We know it’s a Greek island today, and we know that there was a great medical school there [Du Veill, Carolus Maria, *A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (London: J. Haddon, 1851), p. 441; Gloag, Paton J., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles: Volume II* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1870), p. 178.] because Hippocrates was born there and associated with the city before the temple to Aesclepius (the Aesclepion) was built [and these temples always had a medical facility component to them]. Its ointments were also famous. It was associated with the arts because of Apelles the painter praised by Ovid [Du Veill, p. 441]. It was well-known for silk fabric (probably dyed purple) called *coa* [Du Veill, p. 441; Gloag, p. 258.], which was considered so sensuous that *coa* became a Latin nickname for a lustful woman [wearing “coan silk”]. It was also known for its wines, according to Pliny [Gloag, p. 258.]

So, it is no wonder that the missionaries were able to find a trip that would go straight to Cos/Kos, about 40 miles from Miletus. Yet, the process of unloading and loading cargo before heading for the next stop must not have given the missionaries any chance to have any significant encounters with the local population.

The next morning, they headed for Rhodes, around 50 miles south from Cos/Kos [Gloag, p. 259.]. Since the stop was intended to be expeditious, we can probably assume that this was the harbor named Rhodes and not some general stop on the island of the same name [Bruce, p. 420.]. At one point, the so-called “Colossus of Rhodes,” a “Statue of Liberty”-sized statue stood above the harbor in celebration of a victory over the Macedonians. Destroyed by an earthquake more than 200 years before Paul’s visit, it was still useful as a maritime port. At one time, Rhodes was noted for pirates, but the Romans had little patience with such, so that by the time of Paul’s journey, this was a minor provincial city where even the cult of the sun-god Helios was no longer a major factor [“Rhodes” in Butler, Trent C., *The Holman Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 1991), pp. 1191-1192.].

So, they headed off to Patara, a harbor on the coastline of Turkey that was often used by ships traveling eastward during the autumn months to take advantage of favorable winds [Maltsberger, David C., “Asia Minor, Cities of” in Butler, Trent C. (ed.), The Holman Bible Dictionary (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 1991), p. 115.]. Patara was not only a major port city in Lycia, but earlier considered the port to the Lycian capitol of Xanthus [Gloag, p. 260.]. It was reputed to have had an oracle of Apollo that rivaled the pilgrim shrine at Delphi [Robertson, p. 358.]. It has been suggested on the basis of the second verse that the stop in Patara involved a switch to a larger ship so they could cross the open water, bypass the southern coast of Cyprus (Paphos, where Paul stopped on his earlier voyage), and go straight to Phoenicia [Arrington, French L., *The Acts of the Apostles: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1988), p. 211.]. ***2) So, finding a ship crossing over to Phoenicia, we embarked, raising our sails.* [PJT]** At this point, Patara would have been primarily a seasonal port. Today, it is, at best, a marsh amongst the ruins.

Later texts of verse 1, such as the 8th century papyrus #41, the 5th century Bezae Manuscript, and various Old Latin versions from the 12th and 13th centuries add the port of Myra to the journey. This is a possible text addition and, while not of the best textual sources, it would not be unlikely. As one commentator put it: “…the ancient ships, even though they rarely made what sailors call ‘a long leg’ across the sea, were in the habit of running direct from Myra to Syria, or to the Egyptian coast.” [Ramsay, p. 298.] Hence, Ramsay believes that Paul’s ship did visit Myra as per these later texts. My perception is that they might have, but probably didn’t so that they could take advantage of the seasonal winds. [But in line with my belief that we take all of the readings into consideration, my assumption is that we have these limited references to Myra to demonstrate, as with the other references, that the journey was consecutive without any interruption.]

***3) Coming in sight of Cyprus, we passed by to the port side [lit. “left-hand side,” so south], we sailed to Syria, coming down to Tyre, for there, the ship was [as usual] unloading the cargo. 4) So, having searched out the disciples, we remained for seven days, some continuing to speak to Paul by means of the Spirit not to go up to Jerusalem.* [PJT]**

Since Cyprus was so fertile and Paphos such an accessible port, the mention of bypassing it to the south further underscores the speed and efficiency of the trip. Also, don’t be confused by the reference to Syria in verse 3. The entirety of what we know today as Israel proper (including the Palestinian Authority) and Phoenicia (what we know as Lebanon) were part of the Roman province of Syria. So, going to Tyre in Phoenicia was going to Syria. There’s no contradiction. [Trivia Question: In the Old Testament, what Princess of Phoenicia (though from Sidon rather than Tyre) was instrumental in corrupting the Northern Kingdom, Israel, into Baal worship? Answer: Jezebel.]

Also, since the Phoenicians were known as such successful maritime merchants (and according to Thucydides, pirates, too) [Du Veill, p. 443.], this may even have been a Phoenician trip that Paul and company were sailing on (which might also explain the by-pass of Cyprus as they focused on their home port). What is interesting to me, here, is that verse 4 indicates that they sought out and found “disciples.” This suggests that they knew some believers were likely to be there (see Acts 11:19 where some were scattered or driven to Phoenicia) [MacGregor, G. H. C., “The Acts of the Apostles: Exegesis” in Buttrick, G. A. et al. (eds.) *The Interpreter’s Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes: Volume IX: Acts-Romans* (New York, NY: Abingdon Press, 1954), p. 277.] Paul might even have known some from when he passed through Phoenicia on his way to the Jerusalem Conference (Acts 15:3) [Robertson, p. 359.].

The Reformer, Theodore Beza tried to make a distinction between Luke’s use of the word “disciples” as meaning believers who had not formed a church and “brethren” for those who had formed a church. Reading Acts 9:26 about the disciples in Damascus lowering Paul in the basket and Acts 11:29 and 14:28 about disciples in Antioch doesn’t support that idea [Du Veill, p. 445.]. To me, this also suggest that we ought to make some effort to connect with believers when we are out of town. It isn’t always easy and it isn’t always satisfying, but sometimes, God uses our effort, just as God obviously used Paul’s.

Before I explain how we know God used Paul’s effort here, let me point out what may or may not be significant. All of you know how I find the use of sevens in the Bible to be interesting. It seems like seven suggests God and the created order in right relationship, a type of divine timing. Well, even though it looks like it took the cargo ship seven days to unload, it seems like that was God’s timing for Paul’s ministry to the disciples at Tyre. It also seems like they wanted more, especially when they kept on speaking to Paul about the dangers of going on to Jerusalem.

This has always been something of a problem for me. Does the Holy Spirit inspire conflicting messages? How can one group reflect the Holy Spirit warning against something while another person is so sure the Holy Spirit was demanding it? I must not be the only one to have this problem because I found one famous commentary where it flatly states, “Though the warning is said to be through the Spirit, Paul ignores it, presumably doubting its implication.” [MacGregor, p. 277.] Others say that this appears to be contradictory, but just reflects that the Holy Spirit revealed Paul’s suffering while the believers extended their own concern to urge him not to go [Marshall, I. Howard, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: The Acts of the Apostles: An Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1983 reprint), pp. 338-339.].

My feeling is more like that expressed by French Arrington: “By these warnings the Spirit was not actually telling Paul not to go press on to Jerusalem. In spite of the warnings the Holy Spirit compelled the apostle to go to the dangerous city (20:22). Thus it becomes clear that Paul knew that captivity awaited him there, and he had counted the cost.” [Arrington, p. 211.]. The Holy Spirit gave the brethren a real sense of what the cost of Paul’s defense was going to be, but it was so that they could pray more effectively (or, at least, empathetically) for him as he endured the crisis and so that he could clearly count the cost before he continued to follow the Spirit’s leading, God often prepares us for difficult situations. As Paton Gloag warned us in his commentary so long ago, “We must here distinguish between the intimations of the Spirit, and the inferences drawn by men from these intimations.” [Gloag, p. 262.]

The fact of these Christians’ empathy for Paul and company is reflected in verses 5-6 where the believers, including women and children, gathered for a farewell prayer meeting/send-off reminiscent of the one at Miletus we considered earlier with the Ephesian elders. Paul hadn’t spent years with this group as he had with the Ephesians, but the love of Christ forged strong bonds even after a week [Bruce, p. 422.]

***5) So, when the days of outfitting [the ship] were over [lit. happened], we continued [lit. “went”] our voyage and everyone, along with women and children, accompanied us outside of the city, and kneeling (lit. “sitting down the knees”] on the beach, we prayed. 6) We said good-bye to each other and went up into the boat, but they returned to their [respective] places [idiom for “home”].* [PJT]**

Not everyone agrees with my translation of “outfitting” the ship [Gloag, pp. 262-263] but it is an old word with the root idea of “furnishing” [Roberston, p. 360.] and makes sense in explaining why, Paul stayed seven days despite being in such a hurry earlier in the trip [MacGregor, p. 277.]. I like this because it demonstrates how Paul’s sense of mission contributed to even using this week-long (or divinely appointed, as I believe) delay to accomplish God’s business. Translating this as “outfitting” seems logical, as well as underscoring the old cliché, “Disappointment: His Appointment.” [Smith, T. C., “Acts” in Allen, Clifton J. (ed.), *The Broadman Bible Commentary: Volume 10: Acts-1 Corinthians* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1970), p. 120 just thinks the larger ship had made such good time they were ahead of schedule and decided to minister.]

I also find myself in disagreement with commentators who suggest that mentioning the women and children was just Luke’s added detail for historical accuracy [Marshall, p. 339.]. I believe that this was the way of showing how Christian hospitality can generate genuine warmth, fellowship, and concern in a short period of time. The entire church was involved, not just the [presumably male] leaders. And this is important since: “Prayer and fellowship (20:36; 21:5) keep Paul going along each step of his foreboding journey to Rome.” [Willimon, William H., *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching: Acts* [Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1988), p. 159.]

“Luke draws a vivid picture of the farewell scene: all the disciples assemble with the travel party and escort them from the city to the harbor. The wives and children come along as well, highlighting the close bonds that developed between Paul, his companions, believers from Asia Minor, Greece, and Macedonia, and the families of believers in Tyre during the seven days.” [Schnabel, Eckhard J., *Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Book 5: Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2012), p. 1505.] We need to examine ourselves and see if we’re as hospitable as we should be toward other brothers and sisters in Christ, both within and from outside our fellowship.

***7) So, we completed [can be “continued”] our voyage from Tyre, we landed at Ptolemais [Acre, Acco] and greeted the brothers, and remained one day with them.* [PJT]** It took approximately ten hours to sail from Tyre to Ptolemais along the coast [Schnabel, p. 1505.]. You will probably have noticed that some translations read “completed” while some read “continued.” Some prefer the idea of “continued” even though the past tense suggests something that has already occurred that continues to have implications and the word is a combination of the root for accomplishing something plus the adjectival prefix for “thoroughly.” [Robertson, p. 361.] Bruce recognizes that there is some usage outside the New Testament for reading this as “continuing” [Bruce, p. 422, n. 7.], even though this is the only time the verb is used in the New Testament and it usually meant completing a journey in the classics [Gloag, p. 263; and Conzelmann, Hans, *Hermeneia: A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible: Acts of the Apostles* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1987), p. 178.]

Marshall is adamant that it is continued since he reasons: “It would be incomprehensible why Paul had waited a full week for a ship that merely went one day’s journey when he could have traveled the same distance more quickly by land.” [Marshall, p. 339; Arrington, p. 211; Bruce, p. 423, n. 9, follow the same assumption.] I, personally, continue to follow the idea that the week’s delay was “His appointment” and effected the desired result of ministry and fellowship with the church at Tyre. Further, I’m not certain that it was a convenient trip by land. Ptolemais had an excellent harbor and: “It was the key to the road down the coast between Syria and Egypt.” [Robertson, p. 361.] I tend to believe that Paul and company continued on the ship to avoid the land journey to Ptolemais so that they could be rested enough to minister for a limited time before moving onward to Caesarea Maritima (not to be confused with Caesarea Philippi near present-day Syria).

Named after Ptolemy, the original name (as found in Judges 1:31) was Acco (as it is today). During the time of the Crusades, this was referred to as St. Jean of Acre in the French [Bruce, p. 423, n. 8.] because it was a major fortress for the Knights of St. John. So, we read of Acre in the battles of the Crusades. All pictures on the slide are of Crusader era fortresses.

Again, I do not buy into the idea of Theodore Beza mentioned earlier where the believers at Ptolemais have formed a church so that they are called “brethren” while those at Tyre hadn’t formed a formal church so they are called “disciples.” We also don’t know whether this church was founded by those fleeing the persecution described in Acts 11:19 (since it was technically considered part of Phoenicia during this era), established by those converted through Peter’s ministry at the home of Cornelius in Caesarea, or, perhaps, founded by Philip’s influence since it was only about a day’s journey from his long-time headquarters in Caesarea Maritima.

***8) But the coming day we left, coming into Caesarea, then we entered into the house of Philip the Evangelist, one of the seven, remaining with him. 9) Now, he had four daughters, virgins who were prophesying.* [PJT]**

Caesarea, under the Romans, was the governmental seat of the province, the place where the procurator/governor lived [Knight, George W., “Caesarea” in Butler, Trent C., *The Holman Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 1991), pp. 218-219; Robertson, p. 361.]. Herod built a temple to Augustus Caesar and the city was clearly more Hellenistic [Greek] than Jewish. The slide shows a sacred fountain, the Mediterranean refreshed swimming pool from Herod’s palace, and the harbor structure.

One of the important points in these verses is that there is continuity and faithfulness within the early church. The last time we see Philip the Evangelist before this is in Acts 8:40 when he went to Caesarea. By the way, the actual term “Evangelist” is very rare in the New Testament, but it is used three times in Acts in association with Philip [Conzelmann, p. 178.]. Now, he’s been here long enough to have four mature daughters (over 20 years [Bruce, p. 424.] and they are both virgins and engaged in prophesying. What does that mean?

First of all, their identity as virgins doesn’t mean that they were the first Catholic nuns. Yet, it was probably vital in the 1st century because there were so many pagan priestesses who were actually cult prostitutes. Indeed, the fact that they were known as “virgins” assured those who needed to hear their prophesying that they were not equivalent to such priestesses. And this false equivalency between pagans and Christians, even the appearance of this false equivalency, is very likely why Paul came down so hard on the public role of women in the church. Yet, this verse is one example among many that: “The NT does not fail to note the ministry of women in the early church.” [Arrington, p. 211.] In fact, since these daughters are said to be prophesying before the arrival of Agabus, it seems like Luke is telling us that they were the same as Agabus. Of course, the interesting fact is that they don’t prophesy regarding Paul’s fate [Marshall, p. 340.].

The present participle, continuous present, tells us that they were continually, habitually prophesying. It was a major part of their identity and involvement with the community. Schnabel points out that some married women in Corinth prophesied and that there is a widow named Anna in Luke 2 that prophesied [Schnabel, p. 1507.], but I would suggest that Luke’s identification of them as virgins may have suggested that they had a public ministry and hence, needed no confusion.

Second, prophesying, of course, is not to be confused with fortune-telling. To prophesy is to speak to a situation. That situation may be forming a circumstance for the future or it may be a current crisis or even a gaping wound from the past that needs to be healed. According to 1 Corinthians, this ability to speak frankly to specific situations is more valuable to the church than speaking in an ecstatic tongue

***10) Then, as we were waiting more days [than we expected], a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea, 11) and coming before us and taking the belt from Paul, bound his own feet and his hands and said, “These things the Holy Spirit says, ‘The man to whom this belt belongs, the Jews will bind similarly in Jerusalem and hand [him] into custody in the hands of the Gentiles.’” 12) So, upon hearing this, we and the locals [lit. “those of that place”] urged [counseled, encouraged, challenged] him not to go up to Jerusalem. 13) This is how Paul answered, “What is causing you to weep and crush my heart? Because I not only hold myself ready to be bound, but even to die in Jerusalem on behalf of the name of the Lord Jesus.” 14) Since he was not convinced, we ceased [arguing] and said, “The will belonging to the Lord come to be.” [PJT]***

We probably met Agabus before. Remember the Agabus in Acts 11:28 who went from Jerusalem to Antioch [of Syria] and prophesied a famine? [Marshall, p. 340.] We should also realize that: “Acted parables as prophetic signs were a feature of several Old Testament prophets.” [Schnabel, p. 1508.] Think of Jeremiah burying a cloth beside the river and waiting until it became moldy to unearth it and preach about Israel being like that cloth, or breaking pottery to suggest judgment. Think of Ezekiel playing toy soldiers in the street to declare the fate of Jerusalem. Think of Isaiah walking naked for three years to indicate that the Jews would become prisoners of war.

In this case Agabus uses Paul’s belt, not leather like we think of as a belt, but a cloth that would wrap around the waist to keep the outer robe together, as pictured as pictured on the slide. In another comparison with Old Testament prophets, “The verbal prophecy is introduced by a formula that asserts divine authority for the following prediction; the phrase ‘thus says the Holy Spirit’ replaces the customary ‘thus says the Lord.’” [Schnabel, p. 1509.] And, since we notice this very important emphasis on the prophecy as coming from the Lord, let’s not be careless in our interpretation of the prophecy. Notice that the Holy Spirit does not say through Agabus that Paul should NOT go to Jerusalem; we merely hear what the cost of going to Jerusalem will be [Bruce, p. 425.]

Of course, some quibble that the prophecy wasn’t exactly as advertised. When Paul gets to Jerusalem, the Jews do not proactively turn Paul over to the Romans; the Romans rescue him from the lynch mob of Jews [Marshall, p. 340.]. I believe Luke worded it that way to show the parallel between what happened to Jesus in Jerusalem and what would happen to Paul. The Jews may not have intended to hand him over into custody, but they surrendered him involuntarily at the insistence of the Romans.

Now, because I am so bad about reading myself into whatever I’m reading, I’ve always been a little annoyed at Paul. As one writer put it: “His unyielding determination to go to Jerusalem in spite of what might happen appalls us. Though we have our doubts about his wisdom in going, we cannot question his courage.” [Smith, p. 121.] It must have been very difficult for Paul to stick to his intent to face Jerusalem when his friends and loved ones in Christ were weeping and begging him not to go to Jerusalem [Marshall, p. 341.] Again, though, we must remember that the Spirit didn’t tell Paul NOT to go to Jerusalem but that was how everyone but Paul was interpreting it.

And they were significantly affected by it: “The imperfect tense of “we … urged” suggests that they pleaded with Paul for some time. Paul’s reply v. 13 indicates that they are weeping (κλαίοντες), the present tense of the participle also suggesting continuous action.” [Schnabel, p. 1510.] In fact, they weren’t the only ones affected. It was: “Not that he was unmoved by their weeping; he felt his determination weakening under it, and entreated them in turn to desist.” [Bruce, p. 425.] In fact, he tells them that they are “crushing his heart.” So, he makes it clear that he has counted the cost and that he is willing, not only, to be imprisoned but to die in the cause of the Lord’s reputation and authority.

As usual, I like the way William H. Willimon summarizes the narrative: “The writer of Acts, with his stress upon the empowerment of the Spirit, corrects misconceptions which might have arisen about the cost of discipleship. The age of the Spirit has begun at Pentecost in the resurrection and ascension of Jesus. Yet, it does not end sickness, suffering, evil, injustice, ignorance, and rejection.” [Willimon, p. 160.] Are we willing to face those in the cause of the Lord’s reputation and authority? That’s what it means when we pray in the name of Jesus.

***15) After these days, we packed up [mounted up?], going up to Jerusalem. 16) So, some of the disciples from Caesarea went along with us, guided us toward Mnason, someone from Cyprus, with whom we would lodge, an early disciple [long-standing].* [PJT]**

There may be a hint here to a question Fred asked me last week. He asked if these missionaries walked everywhere. I answered that it was very likely, but there was a possibility of using donkeys or horses, even though that was usually only for the wealthy. The verb used for getting their gear together and often translating as “packing up” was also used in classical Greek for saddling a mount [MacGregor, p. 279; Ramsay, p. 302]. Ramsay doesn’t think, given Paul’s health, that his doctor (Luke) would have allowed him to walk 64 miles from Caesarea to Jerusalem. Given Paul’s determination, they may have saddled up donkeys or horses.

And why is Mnason mentioned? It might be because he was one of those converted on that first missionary journey where Paul and Barnabas went to Cyprus. “Mnason the Cypriote was evidently one who had been a Christian from the first, and is introduced to show that the original converts were favorable to Paul, whose arrival was expected and provided for.” [Foakes-Jackson, F. J., *The Moffatt Commentary: Acts* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1931), p. 195.] It may simply be to indicate that God had provided, through earlier believers, for Paul to make an overnight stop on the way other than to try to make the difficult trek to Jerusalem in one day [MacGregor, p. 280.]. There is a much later text that suggests Mnason was an overnight stop on the way [Marshall, p. 341.]. Regardless, I think Foakes-Jackson had the right idea in suggesting that stopping with Mnason was a way of taking the temperature of earlier converts to see how Paul stood in their eyes.

Speaking of taking the temperature, what about the suggestion from the leaders of the Jerusalem church? We read that the missionary team has been greeted warmly by James and the others. They share about the success with the Gentiles who have been saved, and everyone rejoices. That’s the step forward. But listen to the step back in verses 20-22:

**20**And when they heard *about them*, they *began* glorifying God; and they said to him, “You see, brother, how many [[d](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Acts%2021&version=NASB#fen-NASB-27675d)]thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed, and they are all zealous for the Law; **21**and they have been told about you, that you are teaching all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to abandon Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children nor to [[e](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Acts%2021&version=NASB#fen-NASB-27676e)]walk according to the customs. **22**So what is *to be done*? They will certainly hear that you have come.

Remember the principle about for every action there is a reaction? I know in physics that’s an equal and opposite reaction, but in spiritual warfare, we can’t say it’s equal because God is stronger and He will win. In the meantime, it’s pretty uncomfortable to have people accusing you. Has Paul said to forsake the Law? Did he tell converted Jews not to circumcise their children? Didn’t he even have Timothy do so? Did he tell them to forsake their customs? No, he may even have taken a Nazirite vow himself in Achaia. In his idea of freedom from the Law, you didn’t just get rid of it, you unloaded the idea that the Law could make you worthy of salvation.

To tell you the truth, I think of such controversies as “red flag” issues. A lot of times the red flag that is waved is not what the issue is about. And to show you how that’s true, look what happens. James suggests that Paul sponsor four males going through a Nazirite vow. That isn’t that unusual. In fact, Josephus (in Antiquities, XIX.6.1) talks about Herod Agrippa I often paying the expenses of Nazirites to glean favor with the Jews [MacGregor, p. 282.]. “The plan was intended to reduce its [the Jerusalem church’s] lack of confidence in Paul and at the same time make clear to non-Christian Jews that the mother church did not welcome an enemy of the Law and of God with open arms for the sake of money.” [Bornkamm, Gunther, *Paul* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1969), p. 100.] That may also be why Luke doesn’t specifically mention the collection coming from the younger churches. He doesn’t want to get money issues mixed up with the existing problem.

There’s an ironic saying in English: “Don’t confuse me with facts, my mind is made up.” The seven ceremonial days aren’t even finished before these supposedly pious Jews interrupt things. I’m going to read the New American Standard Bible translation of the next few verses. Listen and see how many similarities to what happened to Jesus you can name.

*27When the seven days were almost over, the Jews from Asia, upon seeing him in the temple, began to stir up all the crowd and laid hands on him, 28crying out, “Men of Israel, help! This is the man who instructs everyone everywhere against our people and the Law and this place; and besides, he has even brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place!” 29For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with him, and they thought that Paul had brought him into the temple. 30Then the whole city was provoked and the people rushed together, and taking hold of Paul they dragged him out of the temple, and immediately the doors were shut. 31While they were intent on killing him, a report came up to the commander of the Roman cohort that all Jerusalem was in confusion. 32He immediately took along some soldiers and centurions and ran down to the crowd; and when they saw the commander and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul. 33Then the commander came up and took hold of him, and ordered that he be bound with two chains; and he began asking who he was and what he had done. 34But among the crowd, some were shouting one thing and some another, and when he could not find out the facts because of the uproar, he ordered that Paul be brought into the barracks. 35When Paul got to the stairs, it came about that he was carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the mob; 36for the multitude of people kept following them, shouting, “Away with him!”*

There seem to be some parallels here between the way the mob treated Jesus and the way the mob treated Paul. One of the slides does a comparison showing a short approach, and I would ask my students to identify similarities between the two events. Following is my take on it.

First, I see an accusation of blaspheming/defiling the temple (v. 28). Weren’t they upset that Jesus talked about rebuilding the temple of His body in three days? Didn’t they accuse Him, via a false witness, of blaspheming the temple? Why did they do that? It’s because in Jewish Law, defiling the temple was a capital offense. Notice also that they thought the worst—guilt by association. They had seen Paul in the company of Trophimus, the Egyptian, and assumed that Paul had smuggled him into the temple.

That leads to the next point. They were intent on killing him (v. 31 and v. 36). They didn’t shout “Crucify Him!” but the mob’s bloodthirstiness was apparent when they shouted “Away with him!” in verse 36.

Third, we don’t find out until verse 32 that they were beating Paul. It’s the Jews beating Paul while it was Roman soldiers beating Jesus. But both were beaten.

Fourth, the Roman authority asked who Paul was and what he had done (v. 33), reminding me of Pilate’s interrogation of Jesus.

And, of course, the crowd is shouting and interrupting the interrogation (v. 34).

Let’s continue with the New American Standard Bible.

*37As Paul was about to be brought into the barracks, he \*said to the commander, “May I say something to you?” And he said, “Do you know Greek? 38Then you are not the Egyptian who some time ago stirred up a revolt and led the four thousand men of the Assassins out into the wilderness?” 39But Paul said, “I am a Jew of Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no insignificant city; and I beg you, allow me to speak to the people.” 40When he had given him permission, Paul, standing on the stairs, motioned to the people with his hand; and when there was a great silence, he spoke to them in the Hebrew dialect, saying, …*

Notice the power of language. Speaking Greek to the commander proves he is not the rabble-rousing Egyptian. Speaking in the Hebrew dialect (Aramaic) settles the crowd down enough that they pay some semblance of attention, as observed in v. 40 here and verse 2 of Chapter 22.

Although Paul says that he is making a defense, he isn’t directly addressing the charges. On the slides, I provided Schnabel’s outline of the defense [Schnabel, p. 1568]. Paul does defend his Jewish heritage, but says nothing of the false accusations that he is trying to get Jews to abandon the Law. Ironically, the most direct he gets to answering the accusations is to share about the vision of the Lord sending him to the Gentiles that he received in the Temple. As Luke unveils this, it is new information to us. That doesn’t mean it is something Paul made up.

The truth is that people who have a genuine vision don’t always share it in public. This is because it would seem immodest. So, in Acts 9 when we read of Paul’s conversion, this part of Paul’s calling wasn’t necessary. Now, however, Paul shares it because it has relevance to the idea that he would blaspheme the Temple. Why would he blaspheme the space where God spoke to him? While this may seem an indirect defense, it is a defense nonetheless.

What I did not do in the session was go over the differences in the conversion account here and in Acts. So, for good measure, I have added a slide to the presentation since the session to be certain that it is available to you.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  |  |  |
|

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Acts 9:1-19** | **Acts 22:6-21** | **Acts 26:12-18** |
| Paul falls to ground in v. 4 | Paul falls to ground in v. 7 | All fall to ground in v. 14 |
| Paul surrounded by the light v. 3 | Companions see the light v. 9 | Paul only saw the light v. 13 |
| Companions hear the voice v. 7 | None heard the voice v. 9 | Paul only heard Aramaic words v. 14 |
| Sent to Damascus for commissioning v. 6 | To Damascus for commission v. 10 | Commissioned in Temple vision vv. 16-17 |
| Jesus is speaking vv. 15, 17 | Ananias is speaking vv. 14-16 | Jesus is speaking vv. 16-18 |

 |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |

The first comparison specifically states that Paul fell to the ground in Acts 9 and 22 while all of the company falls to the ground in Acts 26. There isn’t any conflict here, since Acts 9:7 suggests that Paul’s companions rose to their feet after hearing the sound. [Harrisville, Roy A., “Expository Article: Acts 22:6-21” in *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 42:2 (April, 1986), p. 181.]

The second comparison has Paul surrounded by the light in Acts 9:3 while the companions see the light but no idea of the speaking voice in Acts 22:9 and Paul is the only one who sees the light in Acts 26:13, though it surrounded Paul and his companions according to the end of the verse. I don’t see significant conflict here since taking the three accounts together merely emphasizes that the spotlight was on Paul (actually Saul at this point). And as we’ll see in a quotation in a moment, this merely confirms that Luke uses all three accounts to emphasize that Paul (Saul) is the one being encountered by God’s bright, glorious presence.

“Similarly, in 22:9 it is not stated that none heard a sound, but that none heard ‘the voice of the one who was speaking.’ Clearly, Luke’s purpose is to restrict the ‘Christophany’ to Paul.” [Harrisville, pp. 181-182.] So, in all three accounts, the interaction is between Paul and the Lord Jesus with the companions experiencing some of the phenomena, but not getting the total picture.

For me, the toughest difference to reconcile is that Jesus gives Paul (then, Saul) his instructions in Acts 9 and Acts 26, but Ananias gives the instructions in Acts 22. Why? We can get around it by suggesting that Ananias’ speech reiterates Jesus’ instructions [Harrisville, p. 182.]. While that may be true, I also like the idea that, in particular, the last two speeches were subtly adapted for the audiences to whom they were spoken [Bruce, p.440.].

So, as I pointed out in the session, he mentions learning from Gamaliel, the famous rabbi (v. 3) and his pre-conversion zeal similar to the hostility present in the mob on that day (vv. 3-4), as well as his cooperation with the high priest in procuring those letters of authority (v. 5). In this account, Ananias plays an important role because he is a devout observer of the law (v. 12). That even explains why the words of Ananias are expanded from the bare essentials of Acts 9. “It was important to emphasize on the present occasion that the commission that Paul received from the risen Christ was to a large extent communicated by the lips of this pious and believing Jew, Ananias of Damascus.” [Bruce, pp. 441-442.]

In Acts 9, we have no reference to Paul receiving a vision in Jerusalem while he is in a trance. He does have to leave quickly because of threats against his life. In Acts 22:17-18, the Lord speaks to him (via a trance) in the temple and sends him away, even when Paul protests that there is work to be done in Jerusalem.

I also want to clarify the point I was making in comparing Paul’s experience and that of Ezekiel. Paul wasn’t merely converted, but he was called or commissioned to his task. For example, the word often translated as “chosen” or “appointed” in Acts 22:14 is an Old Testament idea much like commissioning Moses or one of the prophets. It is used more often in Acts than any other book in the New Testament, demonstrating that God is in charge of sending men out to preach the gospel [Harrisville, p. 183.]. Harrisville is not the only scholar who has seen this element of commissioning in this account. A 2016 article emphasized the similarity between Ezekiel’s call and that of Paul.

Here’s that chart again:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Call/ Commissioning** | **Ezekiel** | **Acts** |
| Saw the divine Glory | 1:28 | 22:11 |
| Heard revelatory voice | 1:28-2:8 | 22:7-10 |
| Fall on ground | 1:28 | 22:07 |
| Both stand on their feet | 2:1-2 | 22:10-11 |

The scholar was tipped to this comparison by noting the emphasis on “light” in Paul’s conversion/commissioning accounts. He observes: “It is only in Ezekiel 1-2 that the element of heavenly light is emphasized—and that in dramatic and repeated fashion: ‘brightness around it and fire flashing forth continually, something like gleaming amber’ (1:4); ‘something that looked like burning coals of fire, like torches moving to and fro among the living creatures; the fire was bright, and lightning issued from the fire’ (1:14); ‘shining like crystal’ (1:22); something like gleaming amber, that looked like fire enclosed all around…something that looked like first, and there was splendor all around’ (1:27)…” [Allison, Dale C. Jr., “Acts 9:1-9, 22:6-11, 26:12-18: Paul and Ezekiel” in *Journal of Biblical Literature* 135:4 (Winter, 2016), p. 813.]

I also think Allison is right to note that Ezekiel doesn’t claim to have seen the Lord. Rather, he has seen the “likeness” of the glory of the Lord. Paul says that he has “seen” the Lord, but it is in the experience of, as our text states, a light that was so bright that he couldn’t see and in Acts 26:13, a light brighter than the sun (which you would not look at directly). So, “Neither Ezekiel nor Paul gazes directly or without qualification at the heavenly ‘Lord.’” [Allison, p. 814.]

The point is that Paul may have either subconsciously or consciously used descriptions in his accounts which would have evoked Ezekiel’s experience in the telling. Even this intriguing parallel with a great Old Testament prophet should have established some legitimacy between Paul’s ministry and the Jewish traditions that he was supposedly sabotaging. I share it with you because I find it interesting, even if it wasn’t overtly intentional on Paul’s or Luke’s part.

The only really new emphasis in this chapter is the expansion of Ananias’ words to include the reference to “appointing” Paul and the vision in the Temple. Both were designed to enhance Paul’s defense by showing his Jewish connections. In fact, even Paul’s objection to Jesus’ command in the vision (v. 19) makes such a connection: “An objection to God’s commission is a motif widespread in the Old Testament.” [Conzelmann, p. 188.] I hadn’t really thought of that when reading this passage before, but Conzelmann is quite correct whether protesting that one is too young (Jeremiah), that one has unclean lips (Isaiah), or just trying to run away (Jonah).

It looks like they set sail the very next morning for Rhodes