*DEVOTIONAL*

April 9 - 14

*The Jerusalem Christians*

**Monday, April 9 Acts 21:1-6**

*“They urged Paul not to go on to Jerusalem”*

Through the Spirit (i.e., probably through the operation of a prophetic gift) the Christians in Tyre urged Paul not to go on to Jerusalem. How do we reconcile this with Paul’s statement that his trip to Jerusalem was compelled by the Spirit (Acts 20:22)? The Spirit could not possibly have given two contradictory messages in such quick succession. Perhaps the solution lies in the fact that Paul himself placed the Spirit’s prediction about impending persecution alongside the compulsion of the Spirit to go to Jerusalem. What the Christians in Tyre received from the Spirit was a prophecy that Paul would have trouble in Jerusalem. Out of that they may have inferred that the Spirit was prompting Paul not to go to Jerusalem.

In the short time of one week a warm tie of love in Christ developed between Paul’s team and the Christians in Tyre, so that they come with their families to see them off. Since it was customary to stand when praying, the kneeling posture in public here reveals the intensity, solemnity and sincerity of the prayer for Paul and his fellow missionaries.

*We thank you, Lord, for mutual support within the Christian community. Amen.*

**Tuesday, April 10 Acts 21:7-14**

*“The will of the Lord be done”*

In Ptolemais, a few miles south of Tyre, Paul and his company stay only one day but again they greet believers there. Next they come to Caesarea, where they stay in the house of Philip – one of the Seven (Acts 6:5), who is called “the evangelist.” In Acts 8 we saw his giftedness as both a public evangelist through his ministry in Samaria and a personal evangelist with the Ethiopian eunuch.

In Caesarea the prophet Agabus predicts that Paul will be bound by the Jews and handed over to the Romans. He uses the form of an acted prophecy – a familiar method used by Old Testament prophets. The people plead with Paul not to go to Jerusalem and, for the first time, it seems, Paul’s traveling companions also join in the plea. The people weep as they try to persuade Paul. Paul’s answer that they are breaking his heart shows how hard all this is on him. But he explains his stand. He is not only willing to be bound but also to die for the cause. Finally the people give up, resigning themselves to the Lord’s will.

*May we be strong like Paul, Lord, to follow you no matter the consequences. Amen.*

**Wednesday, April 11 Acts 21:15-19**

*“The brothers and sisters in Jerusalem welcomed us”*

The journey from Caesarea to Jerusalem was sixty-four miles, so the company stops over somewhere along the way – we are not sure where – at the home on Mnason. Like Barnabas, he is from Cyprus and one of the early disciples. He probably provided Luke with valuable information about the early days of the church, some of which may have found its way into Luke’s account which we know as the book of Acts. Paul is warmly received by the believers on his arrival in Jerusalem. The next day he and his company meet James and the elders, and Paul tells them of God’s work among the Gentiles.

A few months before his arrival in Jerusalem, Paul had written the church at Rome about the stabilizing power of the Lord in the stresses of life, a power that he had known in his own life and that he longed for them to experience. As Paul comes to Jerusalem, the place to where the Spirit had both led him and warned that he would face persecution, he will once again need the Lord’s steadying power in his life.

*Steady us in you, Lord, so the pressures of life will not overwhelm us. Amen.*

*DEVOTIONAL*

April 9 - 14

*The Jerusalem Christians*

**Thursday, April 12 Acts 21:20-26**

*“There is no truth in these reports about you”*

For the sake of the many Christians who are zealous for the Jewish law, the church leaders in Jerusalem think it a good idea for Paul to dispel misrepresentations about his stand on the law by showing a willingness to submit to the law publicly. He can do this by paying for the expenses of four fellow Christians who have taken a vow. In order to do this he must purify himself along with these people, undergoing a seven day ritual which included reporting to one of the priests and being sprinkled with water of atonement on the third and seventh days.

Is Paul being inconsistent here? What about his opposition to works of the law? Paul was opposed to the belief that such works were *necessary* for salvation. He himself was not opposed to the law as such. He wrote in 1 Corinthians 9:20: “To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so that to win those under the law.” His actions in Jerusalem are consistent with the approach expressed in this verse.

*To help maintain unity, Lord, we sometimes do things we feel are unnecessary. Amen.*

**Friday, April 13 Acts 21:27-29**

*“He speaks against the temple”*

As Paul was coming to the end of his responsibilities regarding the vows, some Jews from Asia saw him in the temple. They had earlier seen Paul in the city with Trophimus, a Gentile companion from Asia, and they assumed that he was also in the temple. Had this been true, it would have desecrated the temple, for Gentiles could only go up to the outer court of the temple (“the Court of the Gentiles”). Notices in Latin and Greek were fixed to the barrier between the inner and outer courts, warning Gentiles that death was the penalty for going any further. Following up on their assumption, the Asian Jews incited their fellow Jews attack Paul.

Luke must surely have considered the interplay between Paul and the Jewish people as important, for he writes about it so many times in Acts. Even though Paul was primarily called to evangelize the Gentiles, he never gave up trying to minister to Jews and to build bridges between Judaism and Christianity. The attempt here ended in disaster, but he kept trying to win them over.

*In spite of injustice, Lord, we will continue to minister in your name. Amen.*

**Saturday, April 14 Acts 21:30-36**

*“Away with him!”*

The whole city was aroused, and the people dragged Paul out of the temple. The gates of the temple were shut, possibly to keep the chaos from further defiling the temple. The rioters began beating Paul to death. The timely intervention of the Roman commander and some of his soldiers prevented this from happening. Paul was arrested so that he could be given a proper trial, but because of the turmoil of the crowd he had to be carried by the soldiers as the crowd kept shouting, “Away with him.”

Luke would have felt the significance of the fact that some twenty-seven years earlier, another crowd had shouted, “Away with him!” at a spot nearby (Luke 23:18). The words here in Acts are the very words, “Aire auton” in Greek, used by Luke to translate the cry of the mob to Pilate when they chose Barabbas in preference to Jesus in the final hours before the crucifixion. Mobs are stirred up by prejudice and exclusivism, not by reason and just charges. Religious fervor is as dangerous as political hatred.

*The world hated you, Lord, and it continues to hate your followers. Amen.*