

=THE BOOK OF ACTS=
Lesson 21
Paul's Supposed Mistake - Acts 21

AIM: to teach my pupils that Paul was human, as are all Christian leaders.

POINT OF CONTACT: Ask the class to share with you some mistakes that they have made in life—maybe a big one. Do not get into personal weaknesses or the morbid past. They might share some stupid mistakes they have made or humorous mistakes they have made. Take about two or three minutes to share mistakes, just to get them on the subject.

INTRODUCTION: Acts 21 is one of the more difficult chapters in the Bible. However, I think it will be interesting to teach. It is a chapter of Paul's going to Jerusalem from Ephesus (or Miletus). There were constant warnings from friends and seemingly from the Holy Spirit to Paul that he not go. However, Paul was determined to return to Jerusalem; and at any cost, he did return. There are those who think that Paul was out of the will of God in going to Jerusalem and that the Spirit was trying to warn him again and again. Then there are those who feel that Paul's good, sincere friends were afraid he would be hurt if he went to Jerusalem after causing all the trouble to Judaism around Asia Minor, Macedonia and Palestine. These feel that Paul was led to go to Jerusalem and that his well-meaning friends were afraid for him to go and warned him of danger to his life if he did return. Of course, each side has seemingly justifiable arguments.

Brother Hyles leaned toward feeling that Paul perhaps should not have gone, but was not too harsh on Paul, for Paul did love Jerusalem. Remember that from the age of 14, Paul was trained in Jerusalem at the feet of Gamaliel. Remember also his burden for the city and his desire to reach the city. Remember, this was the headquarters of Judaism, and Paul had once been a member of the Sanhedrin. This was the place of his early years and, in some respect, was his hometown. Consequently, though Paul maybe should not have gone to Jerusalem, it was a very human thing for him to want to do so; and we should not think harshly of his decision to go. Accepting the possibility that this was a mistake (and certainly the most optimistic follower of Paul must accept this possibility), let us look upon it as a mistake and proceed to learn some truths concerning this story.

- I. THE WARNING FROM THE DISCIPLES AT TYRE. Paul had left Miletus and had come to Tyre, which is not too far north and a little east of Jerusalem. Here some disciples warned Paul not to go to Jerusalem. (Acts 21:4)
- II. IT SEEMS ALSO THAT THE HOLY SPIRIT WAS WARNING PAUL NOT TO GO TO JERUSALEM. (Acts 21:4) This had happened before. You will recall back in Acts 16, when Paul was at Macedonia, he was warned not to go to certain places. In Acts 16:7, he was warned not to go to Bithynia. In Acts 16:6, he was warned not to go to Asia. These warnings, however, were easier to heed, as these cities held no sentimental place in Paul's life. Jerusalem did hold this place, and Paul wanted to go. Let us dwell a while here on the leadership of the Holy Spirit. In Romans 8:14, we find the Spirit of God leads us. The words "lead" and "led" imply the same thing as a railroad track leading a train. The train must follow the track. The track is laid out beforehand. God has His will for our lives. He has laid out our "track," so to speak. We will have tragedy, and a wreck is sure to happen if we leave the track! There is safety only in following the Holy Spirit.
- III. AGABUS WARNED PAUL NOT TO GO TO JERUSALEM. (Acts 21:10, 11) Agabus was a prophet and perhaps had been led of the Lord to warn Paul. At least this is the thinking of many Bible teachers. Agabus was a Christian prophet. In Acts 11:28, he predicted that a famine would take place in the reign of Claudius. This famine did take place. Agabus was Paul's friend and, no doubt, loved Paul and wanted to warn him not to leave the will of God. Now, it is not always necessary for us to take the advice of friends; but it is always wise for us to seek and consider the advice of friends. It is not always necessary for us to take the advice of the pastor, but it is always wise for us to consider the advice of the pastor. It is not always necessary to do everything the pastor says, but it is wise to consider what the pastor says. God places men like Agabus and others sometimes to warn us, sometimes to test us; but let us be very careful to spend time discerning which it is.

- IV. LUKE WARNED THE APOSTLE PAUL. In Acts 21:12, notice the word “we.” Luke is writing the book, and he adds his warning to Paul. Luke was a physician. He was a man of wisdom and discernment. Consequently, Paul had the advice of disciples, of a prophet and of a doctor. This does not mean he should not have gone to Jerusalem, but it does mean he should have weighed very carefully what they said. Solomon said, “There is safety in a multitude of counselors.”
- V. PHILIP AND HIS FAMILY ADVISED PAUL NOT TO GO TO JERUSALEM. In Acts 21:8, 12, notice that Paul was staying in the home of Philip, and also “...they of that place, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem.” This is the same Philip we find in Acts 8, who preached in Samaria and won the Ethiopian eunuch to Christ. It is the same Philip who, in Acts 6, was chosen to be a deacon. He was an evangelist as well as a deacon. This means that a deacon, an evangelist, a doctor, a pastor, a friend and disciples had warned Paul. There are times when we should do things only because we know they are to be done. Usually, however, it is best for us to consider carefully the advice of friends, especially when they are as varied a group as is this.
- VI. ONCE PAUL WAS IN JERUSALEM, THE LORD WARNED HIM TO LEAVE. Read Acts 22:17-19. This, of course, is a warning of the Lord. God is good, and if we do make a mistake, He gives us a second chance. So it was with Paul. Paul had gotten in trouble in Jerusalem, and his life was in danger, but God was still calling. Perhaps God realized that if Paul did make a mistake, his motives were good and holy; and though no mistake is justifiable, oftentimes a mistake is understandable.
- VII. ONE MISTAKE LEADS TO ANOTHER. Those who think Paul made a mistake in going to Jerusalem remind us that in going, Paul committed another error in Acts 21:26, when he participated in a Jewish ceremony. This is the same Paul who wrote Colossians 2:14-17 and the Paul who wrote Galatians 4:8-11. (Read these passages.) In reading these passages we find that Paul perhaps did not abide by his convictions. We will not condemn him for this, but simply remind ourselves that mistakes are easily made once we follow our own preferences rather than the Lord’s.
- VIII. CONCLUSIONS WE DRAW FROM THIS CHAPTER:
1. The mistakes of a man like Paul should make us pray even the more for our leaders. We must realize that even the best Christian leader is human and subject to error. We must not point out his weaknesses but realize that weaknesses are possible, driving us to pray more and more for our Christian leaders.
 2. It makes us realize that the stronger the leader, the more under attack he is to do wrong. In the Texas revolution, the order was given to shoot the ones with brass buttons. This meant, “Shoot the leaders.” The Devil does this. He is out to get the leaders. If the Devil can get the leader of an organization, he can rob the organization of its testimony.
 3. It makes us realize our own weaknesses. If one like Paul could make a mistake and is subject to error, how much more are we subject to error and mistakes.
 4. It should lead us to dependence upon the Holy Spirit. Paul said he buffeted his body daily lest he should become a castaway. Realizing that Paul could make a mistake, Peter could curse and swear, David could commit adultery, Samson could lose his power, etc. should make us aware that every day we must lean upon the Holy Spirit.
 5. It keeps us from keen disappointment. It is best for us to realize that all men are human and that even Christian leaders are imperfect. Many people stumble and fall into sin because they become disappointed in a Christian leader whom they thought to be perfect. Let us always allow for weakness and, therefore, avoid bitter disappointment.
 6. It should make us less critical. Realizing that none of us is perfect and that each of us is imperfect should make us more understanding and less critical of others.
 7. This also makes us realize the fact that the Bible is inspired. If a man had written this, or if this were a man’s book, weaknesses of our heroes would not be given. The fact that the Bible tells us about Abraham lying about Sarah, Paul making a mistake, Moses losing his temper, Peter cursing and swearing and denying the Lord makes us realize even more the Bible is God’s Book. He puts these things here for our own edification and our own warning that we might not be guilty of stumbling.