

Spiritual Growth Resources: From Discipleship to Apostleship

Acts of the Church

Early Church Faith for Today



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A Brief overview of Acts 21

Paul is on his way to Jerusalem. Everywhere he stopped, he seemed to know someone there. Just like in certain Christian circles, like Seventh-day Adventists, if you go to one of its schools, churches, or part of some institution, you are most likely to run into someone who knows some you know. People greet Paul with enthusiasm as he arrives, and the same people send him off in tears.

The book of Acts is coming full circle. Philip, “the evangelist,” returns into the story (Acts 6:5; 8:5). This time many years later. He now has four young daughters who prophesy. Agabus, the same prophet who told Paul about a coming famine to Judea (Acts 11:28), now vividly tells Paul his fate with the Gentiles. Knowing what is coming doesn’t stop Paul from continuing his journey.

Paul joins with the Jewish Christians leaders back in Jerusalem, and they receive the news of Paul’s work among the Gentiles with praise. Yet, some question his brand of Christianity. They ask Paul to perform a ritual to disprove the rumors that he is preaching a gospel that ignores Jewish laws.

The ritual wasn’t enough to avoid getting mobbed right in the Temple. Roman soldiers come to the rescue and prevent Paul’s untimely death.

What can I learn from this chapter? Let’s find out what we can know and grow, which prepares us to go.

KNOW | GROW | GO

Wherever God Leads

K N O W

Read Acts 21

- 1. What is the attraction with Jerusalem that Paul is compelled to go there?**
 - A. Paul will meet with the “church leaders” there to give a final report.
 - B. Jerusalem still has much to understand about God’s saving grace beyond the borders of Israel.
 - C. Paul wanted to get there by the day of Pentecost (Acts 20:16)
 - D. Paul represented the ministry to the Gentiles and wanted to make sure that the Jewish community and the Gentile community had no wall of partition.
 - E. Paul’s journey to Jerusalem is similar to Jesus’ final journey to Jerusalem.
 - F. Other.
- 2. If the Spirit leads Paul towards Jerusalem, why does Paul get an illustrated prophecy about his fate in Jerusalem? Acts 21:10-14**
 - A. So he would know what to expect.
 - B. So the people that are with Paul will know what to expect.
 - C. Maybe to give Paul a chance to change his mind.
 - D. Other.
- 3. How have the people in verses 7 through 14 played a role in Paul’s ministry? Acts 20:7-14**
 - A. Philip was one of those evangelists who fled Jerusalem because of Paul’s persecution. Acts 8:28
 - B. Philip now gives Paul room and board.
 - C. Agabus was the prophet who alerted the people of a famine (Acts 11:28)
 - D. Agabus now prophesies of Paul’s fate in Jerusalem.
 - E. Other.
- 4. How did the church receive Paul when he arrived in Jerusalem? Acts 21:17**
 - A. With joy.

- B. James, the leader of the church in Jerusalem and the local elders, met with Paul.
 - C. The elders “glorified God” when they heard what God had done among the Gentiles.
 - D. The elders wanted to dispel some rumors about Paul’s teachings, so they urge him to go through a purification ritual to show the community that he is not “against Moses.”
 - E. Other.
5. **Why would Paul go through a purification ritual when he didn’t really think such traditions had any redemptive value?** *Acts 20:23-26*
- A. Paul is more interested in making sure the Gospel is preached.
 - B. For the same reason he had Timothy circumcised, to minimize reasons for people not to hear the gospel.
 - C. To put an end to rumors that he is a “sell-out” Jew.
 - D. Paul probably fulfilled the days of purification to have seven days to reflect, meditate and pray and not fulfill a ritual.
 - E. Other.
6. **How the days of purification change people’s minds about Paul?** *Acts 21:27*
- A. Maybe for some, but Paul’s presence in the Temple infuriated a large crowd of people.
 - B. In spite of Paul’s purification, people couldn’t shake the notion that Paul was a trader.
 - C. Paul was not even safe in the Temple while worshiping.
 - D. People even made up stories about bringing a Gentile into the Temple as a reason to apprehend him. (Acts 21:28-29)
 - E. Other.
7. **In dealing with Paul, describe the contrast between the Jewish people and the Roman soldiers.** *Acts 21:31-40.*
- A. The Romans were trying to keep the peace just outside the Temple.
 - B. The Romans were judging the situation better than the angry crowd.
 - C. The Jews wanted to kill Paul for religious reasons, while the Romans were looking for any reason to arrest him.
 - D. The Roman barracks became a safe haven, while the Temple courts were too hostile of an environment.
 - E. Other.

8. **What are the similarities between Jesus' last days and Paul's experience in Jerusalem?**
- A. The Jews bring false accusations to arrest Jesus and Paul.
 - B. Both Jesus' and Paul's fate are in the hands of the Romans.
 - C. In Acts, the crowds shout "away with him," nearly 30 years previous, another crowd shouted a similar cry, "crucify him."
 - D. People jealous for the preservation of their religion, culture, and nation are not easy to persuade.
 - E. Other.

G R O W

Paul's arrival in Jerusalem meant **he was entering into the mindset of Jerusalem**. Paul's preaching didn't always align with all the traditions back in Jerusalem. Some accused Paul of not being Jewish enough in his preaching. Rumors had it that Paul was preaching against circumcision, Jewish customs, and the law of Moses. Some of these were not true, but we don't read of Paul defending his position on these issues.

Interestingly enough, we see **Paul submitting to James and the local elders**. We find here two brands of Christianity - Jewish and Gentile Christianity. Paul wants to ensure that these two "brands" don't become split over some theological, practical, ceremonial differences. Therefore, in humility, Paul gives in to their idea of going through seven days of purification. According to the Jewish leaders, this formal act will dispel rumors of Paul being "anti-Jewish."

For the sake of unity in the Early Church, Paul, the leader of the Gentile ministry, consents with James, the leader of the Jewish ministry, to go through this ritual. Did Paul consider this ritual to have any redemptive value? Maybe not in the eyes of God, but for the Jews, it had some weight that would bring some calm to their souls. This act would let the Jewish church know that Paul and James are on the same page.

To Paul, the purification ritual was not to prove his "Jewishness," I believe it was more about doing what was necessary to reach as many people as possible. Like he wrote to the Corinthians,

"To the Jews, I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law." - 1 Corinthians 9:20.

Paul's example shouts to us who like to put **rights and beliefs** above the need to reach as many as possible. I am not suggesting that we disobey God for the sake of evangelism. Paul taught that we are no longer under the ceremonial laws, but performing them wasn't sinful. Paul's trust was not in the ritual but in Jesus. So if he could go through this ritual to win some for Christ, then he was going to do it.

Humbly submitting to religious leaders who we may disagree with is not necessarily a sign of weakness but a sign of maturity. Our faith is ultimately in God. Paul had no issue recognizing who his Lord is. James was his friend in the ministry, and Paul was in James' territory.

Apply

1. How has Paul's decision to go through the days of purification opened my eyes to things I need to be flexible with to bring the "Jewish Christians" and "Gentile Christians" together?
2. Are you a Paul or James in our church to bridge the gap between the "traditional Adventist" and the "non-traditional Adventist"?
3. Think of a time when you did something that went against tradition or practiced a ritual you consider "non-essential" to your faith to bring down walls of separation.

G O

Going to Jerusalem was not to go there and make a statement. Paul had a goal in mind in what he wanted to accomplish. When you see Paul before James and the elders, you realize all along what he was there for. He needed to make sure that the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem didn't think of the Gentile Christians throughout the rest of the Middle East, Asia, and Greece as second-class Christians.

Paul brought with him the offerings that the "Gentile" churches had collected for the church back in Jerusalem. Paul wanted to make sure that he conveyed that the Gentile church considered themselves indebted to the Jewish church for the faith preached to them in their land. After all, the Jewish church sent Barnabas and later Paul to strengthen the churches.

From one boat to another, traveling so far by land, walking, and the horse was worth it to make sure that the church at large remained united.

To what lengths are we willing to go to ensure that the church remains united? It will be very inconvenient. But for the sake of God's church here on earth, men and women are called to GO to wherever God leads.

"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us." - Romans 8:18

Another reason Paul came to Jerusalem was to try and break down a wall that was still separating Jews from Gentile Christians. He couldn't leave this job to anyone else. He was the face of the Gentile church. Paul's background as a former Pharisee and student of Gamaliel gave him credibility among the Jews. A visit from Barnabas, Silas, Timothy, or any others wouldn't have the same effect, at least in Paul's eyes. Paul lived in both worlds. Moses had that similar dual citizenship, so to speak. Many times it will take someone like you to bridge the gap between groups to avoid unnecessary roadblocks. The goal is that the message is heard with less distraction, and we humans are getting in the way because of our shortsighted hangups. Sometimes we are asked to "get out of the way" so the gospel can flourish. Other times we are called to get right in the middle of it so that it can succeed. Getting out of the way doesn't mean passively stand idle. It means not blocking church growth because of traditions, personal preferences, and non-salvation beliefs.

In chapter 22, we will hear Paul's defense in front of the crowd trying to kill him. One of the last words in chapter 21 is that Paul spoke to them in their language, and suddenly they quieted down to listen. Back in Acts 2 the Holy Spirit gave the gifts of tongues to preach the gospel and that caught people's attention. Paul speaks in the language of the people. Between Acts 2 and Acts 21 who was speaking the language of the people? Who was reaching the Gentiles in Jerusalem?

Apply

1. Where do you need to GO in order bring peace between Jew and Gentile?
2. How do you figure out what to do when you sense God's leading in one direction and God's people saying the opposite?
3. Would you like to be part of a class to learn how to share your faith? (Contact Pastor Pedro at ptrinidad@carmsda.org)

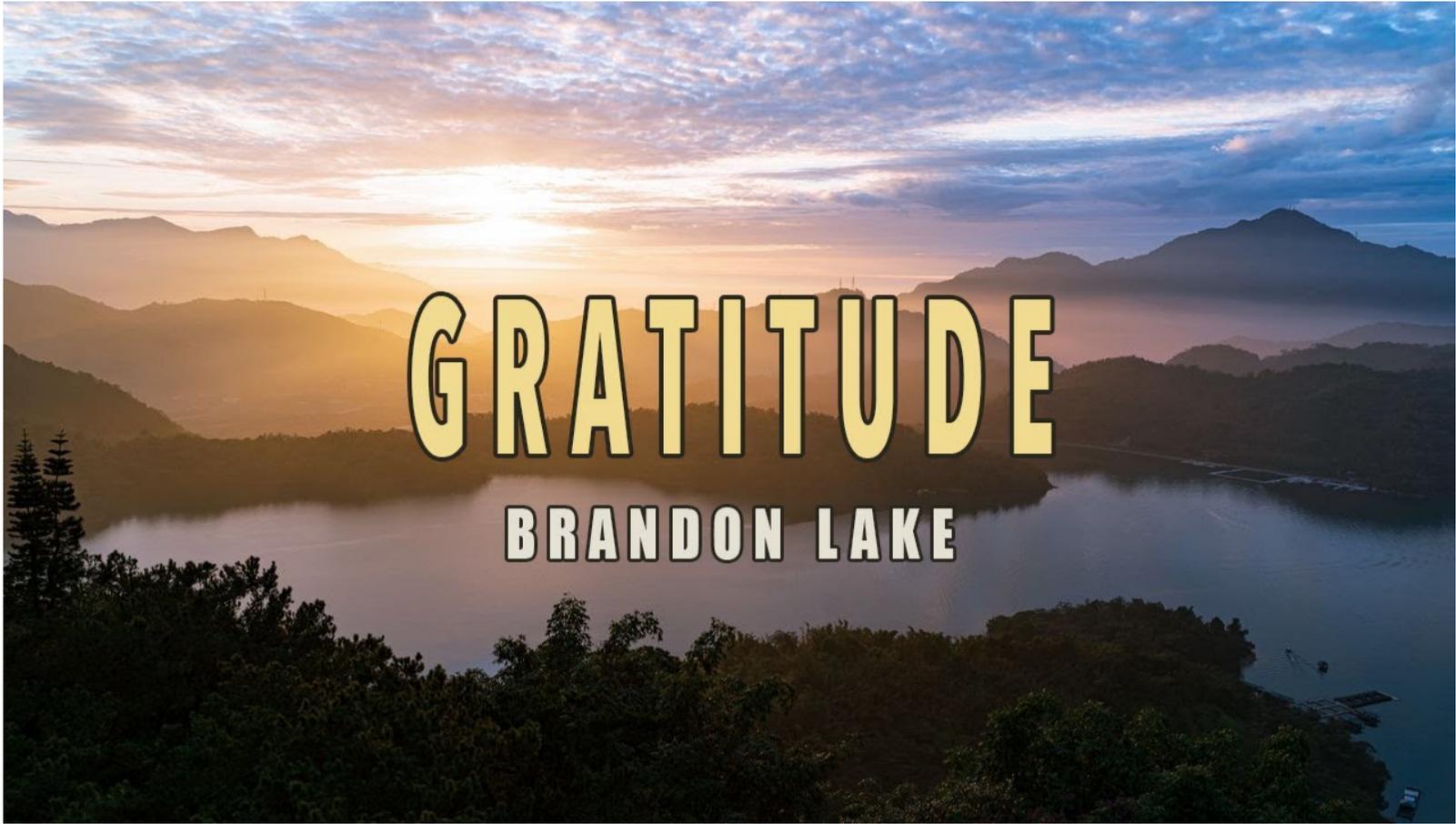
Scripture Memorization for this Week

When we had come to Jerusalem, the brothers received us gladly. Acts 21:17



Praise & Worship in Song





Trust in You by Lauren Daigle

