Text: Acts 21:1-16
Title: End of the Third Missionary Tour
Truth: Missionary travel is a necessary part of gospel work, and our hospitality as a church to those who serve Christ this way is an essential help to them.
Date/Location: Sunday evening 1/12/2014 at FBC

Introduction

Remember the three missionary / church planting tours of Paul:

1. Acts 13:4-14:28 – Cyprus, Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe.

Jerusalem Council Acts 15:1-15:35 – the circumcision controversy.

2. Acts 15:36-18:22 – Syria, Cilicia, Derbe, Lystra, Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, Corinth.

3. Acts 18:23-21:16 – Galatia, Phrygia, Ephesus, Greece, Macedonia, Troas, Miletus (Ephesian elders), and then as we read in chapter 21, the journey ended with stops at Tyre, Ptolemais, and then Caesarea.

I. From Miletus to Tyre, v. 1-6

A. The NKJV has a very bland translation of the verb "to depart." The word describes things like drawing out a sword (Matt. 26:51); withdrawing away a distance (Luke 22:41); and drawing away disciples after false teachers (Acts 20:30). In this instance, it is more than "we left." It means "we had to extract ourselves so we could get going." The context lends an emotional overtone that shows this was hard to do because of the love they had for one another. No one wanted Paul to leave, but it had to be done.

B. Cos is a Greek island in the southeastern Aegean Sea. It was the site of the medical school of Hippocrates, started 500 years before Paul came.

C. Rhodes is also an island of Greece, smaller than Crete or Cyprus.

D. Patara. It took five days, according to one ancient preacher, to get from Patara to the next city on the list. This was a lengthy journey across the Mediterranean.

E. The sailing group passed Cyprus on the left, and then went on to Tyre where the ship unloaded. Tyre is in modern-day Lebanon. They stayed seven days and found a small church there.

F. The group gave Paul warnings not to go to Jerusalem. The text says, "to Paul they were repeatedly saying through the Spirit not to go up to Jerusalem." We need not interpret this as a direct command from the

Spirit not to go to Jerusalem, because later Agabus prophesied what would happen at Jerusalem. That is, the Spirit would not one day tell you to not go, and then tell you what is going to happen when you do go.

Rather, we can understand that those believers knew what was going to happen through the Spirit if Paul indeed went to Jerusalem, and they interpreted that as a sign that Paul should not go. Paul interpreted it oppositely, as what God had planned for him when he did go (see Acts 9:16). They naturally wanted him to be safe; he wanted to do God's will no matter what danger there was.

G. This does not appear to be a situation like David in Keilah where revelation from God redirected the situation so an otherwise inevitable outcome was avoided by David leaving the city. He used the prophecy as a warning and direction (1 Samuel 23:11-13).

H. Everyone accompanied the missionary team to the ship and prayed on shore. This is similar to what happened in Miletus.

I. **Note the love between believers!** These people were truly disciples of Christ, and we know that in part because they loved one another (John 13:35), despite probably not having met before. The two groups of people quickly became knitted together in just seven days. When you are brothers and sisters, that is a long time to become acquainted even if you had never known one another before!

II. From Tyre to Caesarea, v. 7-9

A. To Ptolemais. This was a city south of Tyre, on the Mediterranean coast. They stayed just one day.

B. They next went to Caesarea farther south. Here they came to the house of Philip the evangelist and stayed for quite a few days. Philip was very hospitable to them. He had been a Christian for a long time by this point.

C. About Philip. Luke reports that he was one of the seven. What does this mean? Luke recorded in Acts 6:5 that Philip was one of the first deacons. "And they chose…Philip…" along with six other men.

Then in Acts 8 we read about Philip evangelizing in Samaria and the Ethiopian government official. Then he evangelized in Azotus and towns about that region until he came to Caesarea in Acts 8:40. There he apparently "settled down" for a while (20 years?) and had a family.

He had four daughters. They were unmarried at least at this time. They each also had a prophetic gift. This was unusual.

D. Church history informs us that they all moved to Asia, near Hierapolis. The daughters, or some of them, lived to be very old, and were a great source of information for other believers about the early years of Christianity in Judea (Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 400).

E. Now that Paul was near the end of his journey, he could be more leisurely, since Jerusalem was "right around the corner" (65 miles away or so). Still, he would not be sidetracked from his goal.

III. Paul's Steadfastness to Go to Jerusalem, v. 10-14

A. Agabus shows up again, like before in Acts 11:28. He demonstrated his prophecy with words and actions, using Paul's belt in the prophecy.

Old Testament examples of action prophecy: 1 Kings 11:29-39, Isaiah 20:2-4, Ezekiel 4:1-3.

Had Paul followed the advice of the people who wanted him to run away, that would have made Agabus a false prophet. Is that possible, since he was a real prophet? Of course, sometimes the best way to get someone to do something is to tell them NOT to do it (see 1 Kings 22:17). The message Agabus brought was not new – see Acts 20:23. However, it was troubling to Paul's friends and to the Christians in Caesarea, so much so that they too begged him not to go to Jerusalem. Paul heard a similar request in Acts 19:30 regarding the Ephesus riot; he heeded it that time.

B. But Paul was resolved because He knew God had something for Him to accomplish. He did not want to be swayed by their crying and carrying on. So when they saw that they were not getting anywhere, even if they did not understand it, they said that God's will be done.

1. Paul was not in sin to "ignore" these prophecies. He knew God's will for him to go to Jerusalem and face persecution, ultimately so that he could minister in Rome. How much of that detail did he know? We are not clear on that, but we know he expected he might die at Jerusalem, as others before him had, and even as Jesus had.

2. But Paul's behavior is not normative for the Christian. That is, when persecution comes, the normal response is to flee, as it was for many Christians earlier in Acts (11:19) as well as throughout history. There is nothing wrong with fleeing persecution and in fact the Lord commanded this course of action in Matthew 10:23 and 13:14. Such a response serves to carry the Christian message farther to other locations that may be more receptive to it. In this way, persecution spreads the gospel instead of quashes it.

C. This section of Scripture calls to mind several passages about our Lord Jesus: Luke 9:51, Luke 22:42, Mark 10:33. Paul was behaving similarly, not just to copy-cat Jesus, but because that was God's will for him specifically.

D. We do not experience direct revelation of the sort Paul did, or Agabus, or Philip's daughters, because the gift of prophecy is not active now like it was then. It has ceased for the present (1 Cor. 13:8).

E. **We may experience circumstances where it costs us to be obedient** to the Lord. Your circumstances may be different, but the cost could be very high, especially if there are wicked people on the other side of the situation who are trying to enforce their immorality upon you.

IV. From Caesarea to Jerusalem, v. 15-16

A. After staying with Philip for some days, they gathered their things and traveled together to Jerusalem. A number of believers went with them. Travel is safer in numbers, and it is more enjoyable.

B. Hospitality of Mnason. This man was a Cypriot, that is, from the island of Cyprus. He offered the missionary to the Gentiles and his team lodging in Jerusalem. He was an "early disciple," meaning that he was a believer from the very early days of the church, perhaps 20 years earlier. Both Mnason and Philip are great examples of hospitality.

1. The importance of lodging can hardly be overstated. **Hospitality is an important Christian virtue**. It shows love. It shows service. It is safer than many places in the world. It is more flexible. It saves money. And the accommodations are often better!

2. For Christians, it is imperative to offer hospitality. Romans 12:13, 1 Timothy 3:2, Titus 1:8, 1 Peter 4:9.

3. Let us resolve to model hospitality to the church and our missionaries.

Conclusion

We see Paul embarking on a similar journey as Jesus did—to Jerusalem to be persecuted by the officials and "handed over" to the Gentiles. This was not a replay or re-enactment. It was a real, organic event in the life of Paul and of the gospel, necessary to propagate the gospel further than it had gone up to this point, all the way up to the top of the Roman empire, and to give Paul jail time to write critical letters which are at the heart of the New Testament.

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