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WHEN ALL WARNING FAILED AND PAUL MOVED ON TOWARD JERUSALEM

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF ACTS  
NUMBER 99  
ACTS 21:7-14

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ACTS 21:7-14 "And when we had finished our course from Tyre, we came to Ptolemais, and saluted the brethren, and abode with them one day. And the next day we that were of Paul's company departed, and came unto Caesarea: and we entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven; and abode with him. And the same man had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy. And as we tarried there many days, there came down from Judaea a certain prophet, named Agabus. And when he was come unto us, he took Paul's girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles. And when we heard these things, both we, and they of that place, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done."

The travelogue we began in our last study continues. Here we move with Paul and his traveling companions to Ptolemais. In Judges 1:31 this city is known as the ancient Accho. It had a beautiful harbor and when Alexander the Great came here he renamed the city of Accho and called it Ptolemais in honor of his great General, Ptolemy. Later Ptolemy became the ruler of Egypt. During the Crusades, Ptolemais was known as Achre, and it was a place where many battles took place. It is one of the very beautiful spots on the Mediterranean coast today and for many centuries it had a great fortification. Today the great city of Haifa is located on this spot. So here Paul saluted the brethren. Evidently they had quite a teaching session and after one day, Paul and his party moved on.

ACTS 21:7 "And when we had finished our course from Tyre, we came to Ptolemais, and saluted the brethren, and abode with them one day." This is the meaning of this verse and Paul moved on quickly so he would not be late in arriving at Jerusalem.

ACTS 21:8 "And the next day we that were of Paul's company departed, and came unto Caesarea: and we entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven; and abode with him." They moved on down the coast and came to beautiful Caesarea. Caesarea came into existence in 22 B.C. as a result of the genius of Herod the Great. Herod the Great did more building than anyone who lived in the ancient world. His construction company was larger than probably any construction company in all history. Quite often he would carry on great building projects in a dozen countries at the same time. One day Herod decided that a new city was needed on the coast between Ptolemais and Joppa. He decided he would build a great harbor. He brought in great blocks of limestone and built up two huge sea walls and on them erected great towers. Soon he had a manmade seaport that amazed the world. Right on the coast facing the Mediterranean Sea he built a temple in honor of Octavius. Octavius was the nephew of Julius Caesar. Herod was an excellent engineer and he built a beautiful city and so laid it out that with a minimum of directions you could easily reach any section of the vast area. They needed water in Caesarea and he brought in water with a great aqueduct which is in existence until this day. Octavius loved to come to this place and spend some time here in the city named for him. The games of Caesarea became more famous than the Olympic Games. Caesarea became the head of the government and they moved the government offices from Jerusalem to Caesarea.

When Paul came to this famous city he immediately found the house of Philip the evangelist. You might call Philip the ice-breaker of the early church. He was the first one to crack open the Samaritan country and gained the first converts there. He was the one God sent to the desert to intercept the treasurer of Ethiopia and lead him to Christ. So Philip had moved into Caesarea and was having a fantastic ministry there. Philip was one of the original seven deacons mentioned in Acts 6:5. So Paul and his companions remained in Caesarea for some days. Here in Caesarea we will see two more warnings given to Paul not to go to Jerusalem. All along the route Paul had been warned not to go to Jerusalem and that warning is going to be intensified here in Caesarea. He is in the process of moving out of the geographical will of God. Back in verse four we read how the Holy Spirit warned Paul not to go to Jerusalem.

ACTS 21:9 "And the same man had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy." The daughters of Philip were very famous for their prophesying ability. They had prophesied that Paul would fall into trouble when he went to Jerusalem. Here he is now in Caesarea facing these girls and also facing Philip. Paul is taking this big offering to the poor saints in Jerusalem and he just had to be a part of this deal. He was so sentimentally attached to Jerusalem that he just couldn't stand for them to go back there without him.

Here in Caesarea Paul was near Jerusalem, and here he will receive two sharp warnings not to go. I was tempted to call this paper "The Incident Of Paul's Girdle" but I knew it might shock some of you. I am sure some of you will be shocked to learn that Paul wore a girdle. But it just so happens that in that day a girdle was a belt, something like a belt with a holster worn by a cowboy. They would attach their papers or wallet to their belt and sometimes hang a canteen on it.

ACTS 21:10 "And as we tarried there many days, there came down from Judaea a certain prophet, named Agabus." There were many great believers in Caesarea and they were relaxed and Christians filled with the grace of God. They were very unlike the believers in Jerusalem, who were filled with legalism. There was a man who had quite a ministry traveling over the country between Jerusalem and Antioch. He had just arrived in Caesarea and his name was Agabus. Evidently Agabus was quite a prophet. He had prophesied about certain famines they had in that country. You recall we studied him back in Acts 11:28 when he prophesied that a terrible crop shortage would come.

ACTS 21:11 "And when he was come unto us, he took Paul's girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles." So Agabus came to Caesarea and during one of their meetings he got up and took Paul's belt and tied Paul's hands and feet. Tied him up so tight that he couldn't get loose. All the others sat there watching Agabus as he did this strange thing. Once Paul was tied up Agabus began his message. In building sermons they always teach you at theological school to always begin your sermon with something that will catch the eye and the ear of the people. Evidently Agabus would have made a very good grade on this point of his message. By the time he had tied up Paul, all the people were looking and everybody was listening. Thus as he had the attention of all he proceeded to say that this is exactly what would happen to Paul when he got to Jerusalem. Agabus proved that he was a true prophet for later this kind of thing certainly happened to Paul in Jerusalem. At Jerusalem, you remember, they will arrest Paul and will almost take his life, and had it not been for the Roman Government, Paul would have not only have been bound, but he would have been killed. So this is a very definite warning. We can call this the second warning. The first warning was back up in verse 4.

ACTS 21:12 "And when we heard these things, both we, and they of that place, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem."

When the people heard these things we read they "besought Paul" and this is in the imperfect tense and means they just kept on begging Paul not to go to Jerusalem. All the people joined in and they all begged him not to go. But Paul is a very hard-headed man. So everyone gets in on the act and they begged Paul not to go. But in spite of the warning in verse 4, then the warning by the daughters of Philip, and the warning here by Agabus and the pleading of all the people, Paul is still determined to go to Jerusalem. Now in this next verse Paul has an answer.

ACTS 21:13 "Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." "Then Paul answered" is so constructed in Greek that it means he already had the answer in his mind. The word for answer is "Apo krinomai" and means from the ultimate source of his own mind and soul he had an answer. Now Paul had a call from God to go to areas where the gospel had not gone and Paul was the most successful servant of Christ in this area of breaking new ground. This was Paul's peculiar contribution. But Paul had made a decision in his mind to go to Jerusalem and though he has been warned again and again, Paul has set his head to go.

Here is the real problem with Paul. He had emotional and sentimental attachments for Jerusalem. Paul kept these emotions well under wraps, but they were there. Being so set on going back he was determined to have a part in delivering that money to the poor saints in Jerusalem and then, too, he wanted to straighten out those Jews in Jerusalem on their theology and he was determined. Nothing could stop him.

Our translation says, "What mean ye" but literally he said, "What are you doing weeping and trying to break my heart?" All these people were caught up in this experience. The Holy Spirit was right. He always is. Agabus was right. The daughters of Philip were right. So they were all so emotionally involved they started weeping. Quite often people think they can get their way if they will just start weeping. Paul here is going to make a very noble speech, but he is moving in the wrong direction and even though his speech reveals some noble things, he is moving out of the geographical will of God. Look at this very impressive speech of Paul. He says, "I am ready". The word is "Echo" and means "I have readiness in my mind". Paul is combat ready. Paul had Bible doctrine in his mind but he is charging in the wrong direction. This is a very fine attitude and is based on right principles, but they are pointed in the wrong direction. You can have the right attitude but if you have it misplaced it can lead you astray. You can also have a wrong attitude and be in the right place. Now here Paul's attitude is right, it is just misplaced. In the last analysis, though he is at that moment the best servant of Christ in the earth, Paul still had the privilege of making his own decisions. So these people are going to stop warning him and allow the will of the Lord to take over. The point for us to apply here is this--make your own decisions and then stand on them. This is what Paul is going to do right here. He is wrong, but he is going to stand by his guns.

Every believer is a priest and every believer is to know the Word of God, and when we know the Word of God, then we will know the will of God. Paul's decision was a bad decision, but eventually God will turn cursing into blessing and Paul will be delivered.

And please notice something else--Paul's friends don't break with him just because he is wrong. They stay with him, even though they know he is wrong, and they say, "The will of the Lord be done".

ACTS 21:14 "And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done."



They tried to persuade Paul. They gave him information but they did not try to force Paul. We read "So they ceased". This word is "esuchazo" and it means to live peaceably in a relaxed manner. It means to allow someone to use their own volition even though you know they are wrong and you don't agree with them. In other words, you are to let people have their own rights, their own privacy.

The Doctrine Of Privacy

1. Every believer is a priest and must live his own life as unto the Lord. This is the meaning of "esuchazo".
2. To pursue the matter beyond this point would be an infringement on Paul's privacy. They present to him the facts in the issue, but they do not infringe on his privacy.
3. Paul is wrong and these people all know it, but they put him in the Lord's hands and ask the Lord to deal with him. They refuse to get in the way of the Lord. You can warn people but you must never try to force them.
4. Therefore, they must stay out of the Lord's way and allow Paul to have his privacy--regardless of right or wrong.
5. Therefore, the companions of Paul ceased---and this means they were relaxed about it and they didn't get mad and desert Paul and later say, "I told you so".  
Even though they knew he was wrong they didn't leave him.
6. The Lord will deal with Paul through discipline.
7. The grace of God will eventually turn cursing into blessing.
8. The application of this for us---put others in the Lord's hands and don't try to run their business for them. When you are able to do this, this is an indication you have become a mature believer. When you can do this consistently, you are well on the road toward spiritual maturity. The older you get the smarter you should get and this means you decide to live your own life and let others live their own lives as unto the Lord. Paul is wrong and they are right, but they don't pressure him. Rather they say, "The will of the Lord come to pass".