

The
ACTS
of the Apostles



Those who follow Christ
are called to share in the
weight of His mission

Acts 21

Introduction

- Paul and his companions have just said an emotional farewell to their church family in Ephesus and continue on their way to Jerusalem.
- Luke records for us the heavy burden of obedience that Paul shoulders.
- Despite impending danger, he remains faithful to God's call on his life, and models Christlike perseverance to everyone he ministers with along the way.

*We are not alone in
our journey to follow God*

Acts 21:1-16

Paul Leaves for Jerusalem

- Luke records the log of their seafaring journey, mapping their route from Cos to Rhodes to Patara.
- Upon landing, they immediately seek out the local church and spend 7 days with their fellow believers.
- Luke invites the reader to consider the miracle of God's Church being built from both Christian refugees (who fled Jerusalem after the stoning of Stephen, Acts 11:19) and the very man who once hunted them.

Paul Leaves for Jerusalem

- The Holy Spirit allows the Church to sense the immediate danger of Paul's journey, and they plead with him to change course.
- Note that Paul remains on pace to complete his trip, even at the risk of causing his friends to sorrow.
- The group prays together, a parallel scene to the end of Acts 20, and Paul's group boards their ship to continue their journey (verses 5–6).

Paul Leaves for Jerusalem

- Luke's mention of finding Philip in Caesarea connects us to Philip's last mission, when the Holy Spirit led him from a fruitful season in Samaria to evangelism on a lonely, dusty road, and then to another city prepared to hear the Gospel (Acts 8).
- It appears he remained in the port city of Caesarea and was instrumental in developing a community of believers there, where some regularly exercised the gift of prophecy (verse 9).

A Prophet's Warning

- In Caesarea, the prophet Agabus visits from Judea with an ominous message for Paul (verses 10–11).
- Agabus was instrumental in preparing the Judean Christians for famine by prompting the church in Antioch to send resources (Acts 11:27–30).
- God uses him again to confirm for Paul the sacrifice that his journey will culminate in.

A Prophet's Warning

- The warning greatly distresses the community at Caesarea, and they plead with Paul to reconsider, just as others had in previous cities (verse 12).
- But Paul, while deeply moved by their care for him, recommits to his mission in such a strong manner that those around him surrender their concern to the will of God (verses 13–14).

A Prophet's Warning

- This is the third time the Spirit of God has confirmed for Paul the dangers that await him in Jerusalem, but in accordance with Paul's passionate mission statement in Acts 20:24, "his resolve is strengthened on each occasion."
- Luke records the next leg of their journey, and mentions their next cross-cultural friendship: a Greek Christian named Mnason (verses 15–16).

Following God may lead
us through undeserved trials

Acts 21:17-26

Paul Visits James

- Upon their arrival, Paul's team is welcomed by the local family of believers (verse 17).
- Luke notes that James has stepped into leadership of the elders and the congregation, which is a dramatic change for someone who used to doubt and mock his brother, Jesus (verse 18; cf. John 7:1–9).
- The man who didn't believe in Jesus now leads and disciples the spiritual brothers and sisters of Jesus.

Paul Visits James

- Paul carefully recounts for the leaders everything God has done throughout his missionary journey.
- Though their initial efforts began among the Jews, Paul's team has experienced a great harvest among the Gentiles in every region.
- Their testimony causes the Jerusalem church to praise God, and in turn they give a report of the multiplication of faith that has been happening among the Jews.

Distorted Reports

- Some of the current tensions come to light, however, as the leaders inform Paul that distorted reports of his teaching have reached the religious Jewish converts.
- There is tension remaining among the Jewish converts to Christianity who still labor under the belief that obedience to the Law's instructions helps to secure righteousness.

Distorted Reports

- The apostles wrestled with this earlier, at the council meeting recorded in chapter 15.
- Those who are “zealous for the law” were ready to believe the rumors that they heard about Paul.
- Now the leaders are concerned that these tensions will come to a boil when the Jewish Christians hear of Paul’s visit (verse 22).

Distorted Reports

- A survey of Paul's teaching, both within and outside the pages of Acts, proves this report false.
- For example, in Romans 14–15 and 1 Corinthians 8–10, Paul defended the right of each group to its own views and the need for each to show toleration to the other.
- Paul doesn't reject the customs of religious groups but encourages believers to draw on the Holy Spirit's guidance to navigate each tradition with wisdom.

Distorted Reports

- Throughout his ministry, Paul's main criticism of circumcision and captivity to the Law is that these ordinances were never meant to provide salvation.
- Instead, they served as a guide, leading people to Jesus by showing them their need for a savior.
- Salvation fuels godly behavior and not the other way around.

Distorted Reports

- The local leaders recommend that Paul pacify the religious zealots by entering into his prescribed purification rites after a long journey among Gentile lands.
- This demonstration would be a visible display of Jewish piety, one that tells the agitated Jews that Paul is still one of them.

God orchestrates the
people and events in
our lives for His purposes

Acts 21:27-40

Paul Arrested

- Just as Paul is nearing the completion of his purification rituals, angry voices cry out in accusation, seeking to agitate the crowds that are already on edge (verse 27).
- These men have followed him from Asia and are certainly behaving in a similar manner to the previous crowds of devout Jewish who had harassed the apostles in Lystra and Berea (following him from Antioch and Iconium, and Thessalonica, respectively).

Paul Arrested

- The Jews from Asia provoke the crowd to act, and Paul is surrounded, dragged out of the temple, and attacked with the intent to kill (verse 30).
- The city was in such an uproar that the local Roman authorities, stationed near the temple to prevent uprisings, are notified of the riot (verse 31).

Paul Arrested

- This narrative closely mirrors Luke's account of Jesus' return to Nazareth.
- After preaching in the local synagogue about God's plan to save both Jew and Gentile, the congregation rises up against Him, drives Him out of the town, and threatens to throw Him off the cliff (Luke 4:16–30).
- Those familiar with the account remember Jesus calmly walking back through the crowd unharmed.

Paul Arrested

- The Roman soldiers arrive and rescue Paul from the fury of the mob, freeing him from his attackers, but binding him in chains in order to question him.
- Paul will later recall his repeated imprisonment for the sake of the Gospel in his letters, promising to his readers that God's purposes were still at work even while he was in chains.

Paul Arrested

- The presence of the guards is not enough to calm the agitated crowd.
- They continue to shout, creating chaos and prompting the Romans to physically carry Paul away to preserve his safety for further questioning.
- Luke signals to the reader that Paul's earthly journey is nearing its end by calling to mind the cries of the accusers of Jesus.

Paul Arrested

- Approaching the prison, Paul asks for an opportunity to speak, perhaps to defend himself (verse 37).
- The guard, in turn, begins questioning him to discern his identity and his purposes for instigating such an uproar (verse 38).
- The guard's reference to "the Egyptian" is confirmed by the ancient historian Josephus, who records the account of a failed uprising that occurred around A.D. 54.

Paul Speaks to the People

- Paul declares his pedigree, being of both Jewish descent and a citizen of an influential city in the region, and his request to speak to the crowd is granted (verse 39).
- Paul begins making his defense in the local Aramaic dialect (verse 40).
- We will look at that speech next week.

Application:

Caesarea and Jerusalem

Caesarea



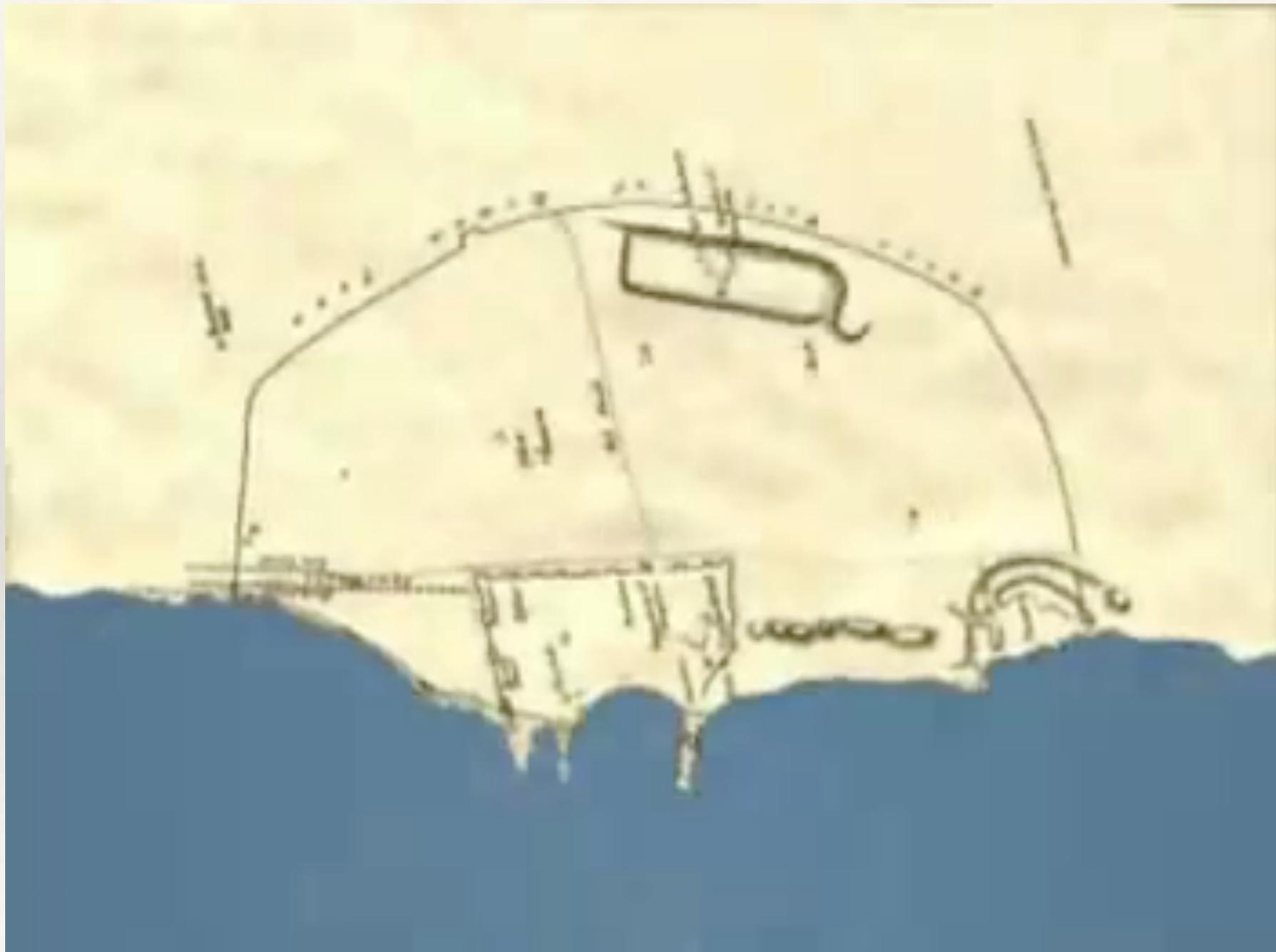
Caesarea



Caesarea



Caesarea



Caesarea - Aquaduct



Caesarea - Pilate



Caesarea



Jerusalem



Jerusalem - Temple



Jerusalem - Temple



PETER WALKER

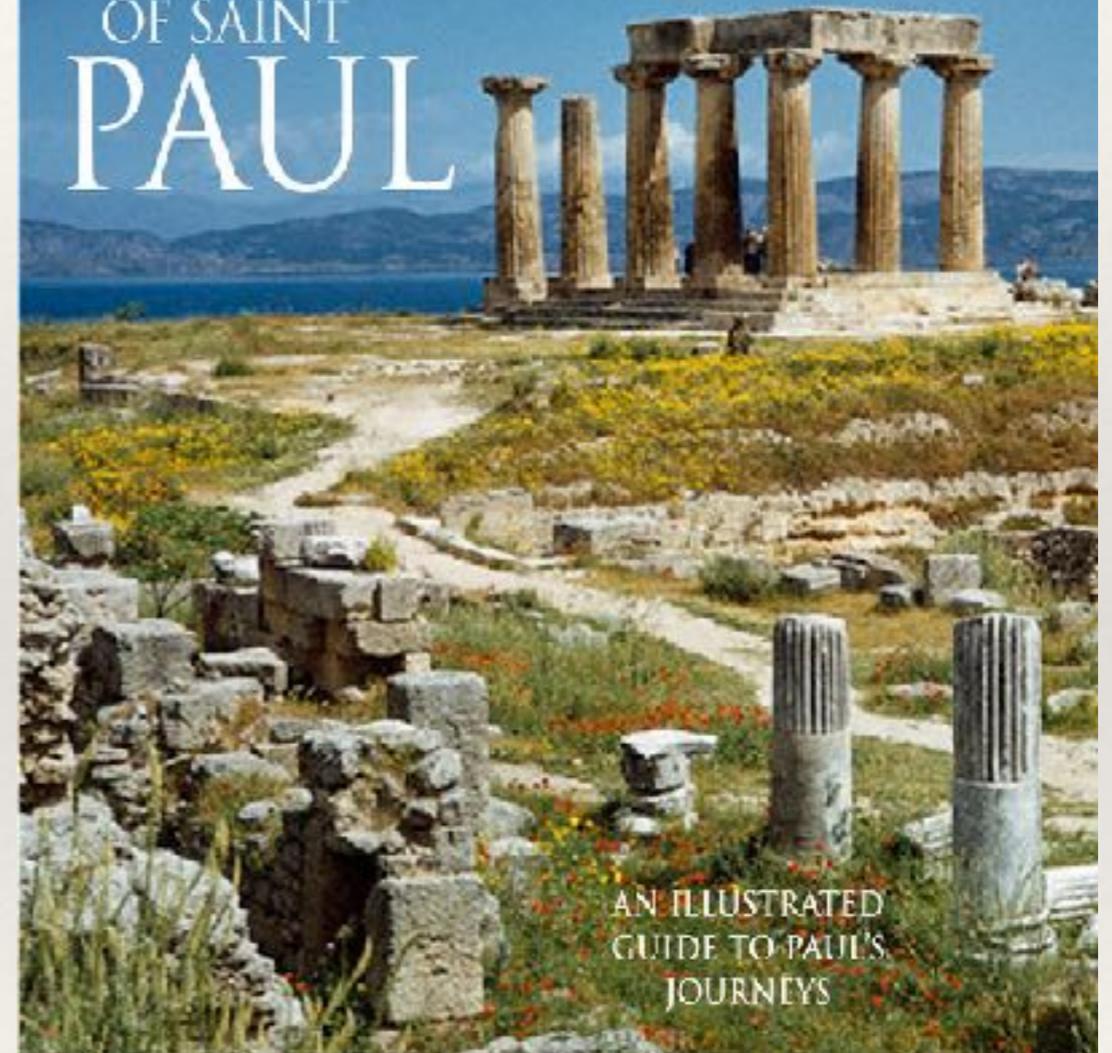


In the Steps of Jesus

AN ILLUSTRATED GUIDE TO
THE PLACES OF THE HOLY LAND

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IN THE STEPS OF SAINT PAUL



AN ILLUSTRATED
GUIDE TO PAUL'S
JOURNEYS