

Reading Together
New Testament Bible Reading
June 6 – June 12

Monday, June 06 – Acts 20: 13 – 38

These verses contain a very touching scene as Paul says goodbye to the church leaders in Ephesus. As you read verse 38 it is clear that Paul knows that he will never see these folks again in this life, so the words Paul says to them are important words that he will want them to remember. There are several themes that run through these verses that we should be sure to take note of. First, notice Paul's sense of purpose and mission. He wants to arrive in Jerusalem in time for Pentecost (50 days after Passover and the day the Holy Spirit filled the room where the disciples had gathered after Jesus had ascended into heaven), so he doesn't go to Ephesus where he might be delayed, but instead he sends for the leaders of the church to come to him. Paul's sense of purpose is also seen in verses 22-24 as Paul knows that danger and hardship await him no matter where he goes, but he knows he must go anyway, because the Holy Spirit is compelling him to go, and his life is worth nothing unless he finishes the work Christ has given him to do. Next in verse 26 Paul says that, "He is innocent of the blood of all men." Why could Paul say this? Because Paul knew that he had been faithful to proclaim the gospel at every opportunity, so if someone were to go to Hell it would not be because they chose not to listen rather than did not hear the Gospel. Next Paul reminds them that he worked hard when he was with them (probably making tents), so that he wasn't a burden to anyone. Paul warned the elders to follow his example and to be on guard for false teachers who might distort the gospel for their own gain.

Tuesday, June 07 – Acts 21: 1 – 16

In this passage, Paul gets a glimpse into what lies ahead of him as he continues on to Jerusalem. First, he is warned not to go to Jerusalem by disciples in the city of Tyre. Luke even makes a point that this warning came by way of the Holy Spirit, and then Agabus, the prophet who had earlier warned of the famine that was coming to Jerusalem, comes to Paul and binds himself with Paul's belt to show what is going to happen to Paul. But Paul is insistent on going to Jerusalem in spite of all of the dire warnings, because Paul is ready to die for the name of Jesus. Did God warn Paul, so that Paul wouldn't go? Was Paul wrong to go instead of heeding the warnings? 2000 years later it is hard to

know the answer to that, but we do know this, because of what Paul did, Paul ended up first in Jerusalem, where he blessed the church with a huge gift that helped to ease their suffering as a result of the famine. But we also know that this decision ultimately led to Paul's arrest and his being taken to Rome and as a result Paul could write this years later: **Philippians 1: 12 – 14** Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel. ¹³ As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. ¹⁴ And because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear.

Sometimes we worry so much about God's will should we stay or should we go, and we forget that God can work through not just our right decisions, but even our wrong ones.

Wednesday, June 08 – Acts 21:17 – 36

As Paul arrives in Jerusalem the controversy he had been warned of immediately erupted. As you read the rest of the Book of Acts keep in mind that it was God's plan all along for all of this to happen to Paul, so that Paul will end up in Rome and spread the Gospel there. While the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem are happy with all the work Paul has done to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles, there is also an undercurrent of rumors that Paul has abandoned the Jewish Laws and ceremonies in his own personal life. You can see two things as you read this. First, notice how in the effort to put these rumors to rest only drags Paul into more trouble and controversy—that is part of the danger of gossip and rumors. Second, notice how there is somewhat of a double standard for Jewish Christians, who were still expected to keep and follow the Jewish law, and Gentiles who were exempt from it. Notice how hard Paul worked, and how willing Paul was to try to keep any of this controversy from affecting the spread of the Gospel. Paul knew what was really important, and he didn't let unimportant things get in the way of either Jew or Gentile from knowing Christ.

In spite of Paul's best efforts, a controversy erupts that Paul brought an uncircumcised Gentile into the temple (which he didn't do). This controversy, stirred up by evil men, and Paul's subsequent arrest were used by God to bring Paul under the protection and control of the Roman Empire. What Satan intended for harm, God used instead for good.

Thursday, June 9 – Acts 21: 37 – 22: 29

As this story unfolds, we get a very clear and sharp picture of who Paul is. Paul was able to speak several different languages. First he speaks to the Roman commander in Greek, the common language of the world in Paul's day, and then he addresses the mob in Aramaic, the common language of that area. Paul also was clearly well versed in Hebrew having been trained to read the Hebrew Scriptures (The Old Testament). The Roman commander who has taken Paul into custody believes Paul is an Egyptian who was part of leading a revolt in the past. Paul first denies what isn't true, that he was that Egyptian, and then Paul goes on to tell the truth about who he is and how Christ has transformed his life. It is interesting that the Jewish mob seems okay with Paul until Paul says in verses 17-21 that the Lord told him to give up on the Jews and go to the Gentiles with the Gospel. This puts the crowd into an uproar, which the Roman commander does not understand. Wanting to get at the truth the Roman commander orders Paul to be flogged. The problem was that it is not right to flog a Roman citizen, which Paul was, without a trial. In fact, Paul is actually a higher class Roman citizen than the commander was, because Paul was born into his citizenship and the commander had to pay for his. The commander realizes that he is now in over his head, so he puts Paul in chains to await a trial with a higher authority. All of this is part of God's plan to get Paul to Rome.

Friday, June 10 – Acts 22: 30 – 23: 11

In an effort to get at the truth of who Paul is, and realizing that at the heart of the matter is a dispute about the Jewish religion, the Roman commander who arrested Paul arranges for a trial of Paul by the Jewish ruling council, the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin was composed of both Pharisees who believed in the resurrection, but not in Jesus, and the Sadducees, who did not believe in the resurrection. I think Paul wanted no part of a trial in a Jewish court, because he knew justice wouldn't be done, and he also wanted to go to Rome and preach the Gospel there. Using his knowledge of the difference within Judaism Paul starts a religious battle by claiming that he is on trial because he believes in the resurrection. This immediately divided the court into a very violent dispute, so the commander had him taken away for his own protection. Notice in verse 11 that it is clearly God's plan for Paul to end up in Rome.

Saturday, June 11 – Acts 23 :12 – 35

The Jews want Paul dead and so they take an oath to not eat until they have killed him. They hatch a plot to have Paul brought before the Sanhedrin once again under the pretext of trying to learn more about what Paul is teaching, but that is just a cover for an ambush. In God's providence one of Paul's nephews is there as the plot is being discussed. The nephew first warns Paul of the danger, and then is sent to the commander to warn him as well. The commander seems to have had enough of this situation, realizes he is in over his head and that Paul is in danger, so he makes arrangements for Paul to be transported to a higher authority, the regional governor, Felix, under the protection of a Roman guard and under the cover of night. Notice how in the letter he sends along with Paul the commander makes a point of saying he can find no basis for punishing Paul based on the accusations of the Jews. God's hand is on Paul watching over him and protecting him from all danger.

Sunday, June 12 – Acts 24: 1 – 27

Paul's first trial in the Roman court system takes place in front of the Roman Governor Felix. Notice in verse 1 that Jewish leaders who are accusing Paul bring a Roman lawyer, Tertullus, to represent their case against Paul, while Paul represents himself. In verses 2-3 Tertullus begins by buttering up Felix with some kind words, and then accuses Paul of being a troublemaker in verses 5-8. This was a serious charge in the Roman Empire, as the Roman authorities wanted peace in their empire; that is why Tertellus brings this as the charge against Paul. It moves the dispute from a religious one to a civil one that can be punished under Roman law. Paul's defense is simply that he is not a rabble-rouser. He has complied in every way with both Jewish ceremonial law and Roman civil law. As Paul defends himself he also opens a way to share the Gospel with Felix by opening the door once again to a discussion of the resurrection in verses 15, 16 and 21. It is interesting that Luke, the writer of this account, makes a point of telling us that Felix was already familiar with "The Way" (Christianity) and keeps inviting Paul back to discuss Christianity with both him and his wife. It does not appear though that Felix ever became a true believer in Christ. In fact, Felix continues to operate in a very political way keeping Paul under arrest and hoping Paul will offer him a bribe even though in his heart he clearly knew Paul was innocent.