SMITH FOR CHRIST PUBLISHING · BEREAN DASHBOARD STUDY

Acts 21

Ready to Die for the Name — O·I·A, integrated with the Deep Dive

OBSERVATION · INTERPRETATION · APPLICATION · 2026-11-10 · NASB 1995

"Seeking God diligently — examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so." — Acts 17:11

CHAPTER THEME

Paul walks toward Jerusalem with his eyes open — the Spirit has told him chains are waiting, his friends beg him to stop, and he goes anyway for the name of the Lord Jesus. Doing the right thing gets him beaten and arrested, and God uses even that to keep him alive and carry the gospel further.

00 The Text

ACTS 21 (NASB95), MARKED

HOW THIS STUDY IS MARKED — God — His character & actions · Command / instruction · Key repeated word · Sin / warning · Promise / blessing · Time / place / contrast

1 When we had parted from them and had set sail, we
ran a straight course to Cos and the next day to Rhodes
and from there to Patara;

2 and having found a ship crossing over to Phoenicia, we
went aboard and set sail.

3 When we came in sight of Cyprus, leaving it on the left,
we kept sailing to Syria and landed at Tyre; for there the
ship was to unload its cargo.

4 After looking up the disciples, we stayed there seven
days; and they kept telling Paul ⚠ through the Spirit not
to set foot in Jerusalem.

5 When our days there were ended, we left and started on
our journey, while they all, with wives and children,
escorted us until we were out of the city.
After kneeling down on the beach and praying, we
said farewell to one another.

6 Then we went on board the ship, and they returned
home again.

7 When we had finished the voyage from Tyre, we arrived
at Ptolemais, and after greeting the brethren, we stayed
with them for a day.

8 On the next day we left and came to Caesarea, and
entering the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one
of the seven, we stayed with him.

9 Now this man had ☆ four virgin daughters who were
prophetesses.

10 As we were staying there for some days, a prophet
named Agabus came down from Judea.

11 And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and ⟲ bound his
own feet and hands, and said, "△ This is what the Holy
Spirit says: 'In this way the Jews at ⟲ Jerusalem will
⟲ bind the man who owns this belt and ⚠ deliver him
into the hands of the Gentiles.'"

12 When we had heard this, we as well as the local
residents began begging him not to go up to
⟲ Jerusalem.

13 Then Paul answered, "What are you doing, weeping
and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be
bound, but even to die at Jerusalem △ for the name of
the Lord Jesus."

14 And since he would not be persuaded, we fell silent,
remarking, "△ The will of the Lord be done!"

15 After these days we got ready and started on our way up to Jerusalem.

16 Some of the disciples from Caesarea also came with us, taking us to Mnason of Cyprus, a disciple of long standing with whom we were to lodge.

17 After we arrived in Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly.

18 And the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present.

19 After he had greeted them, he began to relate one by one the things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry.

20 And when they heard it they began glorifying God; and they said to him, "You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed, and they are all zealous for the Law;

21 and they have been told about you, that you are teaching all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs.

22 "What, then, is to be done? They will certainly hear that you have come.

23 "Therefore do this that we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow;

24 take them and purify yourself along with them, and pay their expenses so that they may shave their heads; and all will know that there is nothing to the things which they have been told about you, but that you yourself also walk orderly, keeping the Law.

25 "But concerning the Gentiles who have believed, we wrote, having decided that they should abstain from meat sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from fornication."

26 Then Paul took the men, and the next day, purifying himself along with them, went into the temple giving notice of the completion of the days of purification, until the sacrifice was offered for each one of them.

27 When the seven days were almost over, the Jews from Asia, upon seeing him in the temple, began to stir up all the crowd and laid hands on him,

28 crying out, "Men of Israel, come to our aid! This is the man who preaches to all men everywhere against our people and the Law and this place; and besides he has even brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place."

29 For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with him, and they supposed that Paul had brought him into the temple.

30 Then all the city was provoked, and the people rushed together, and taking hold of Paul they dragged him out of the temple, and immediately the doors were shut.

31 While they were seeking to kill him, a report came up to the commander of the Roman cohort that all Jerusalem was in confusion.

32 At once he took along some soldiers and centurions and ran down to them; and when they saw the commander and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul.

33 Then the commander came up and took hold of him, and ordered him to be bound with two chains; and he began asking who he was and what he had done.

34 But among the crowd some were shouting one thing and some another, and when he could not find out the facts because of the uproar, he ordered him to be brought into the barracks.

35 When he got to the stairs, he was carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the mob;

36 for the multitude of the people kept following them, shouting, "Away with him!"

37 As Paul was about to be brought into the barracks, he said to the commander, "May I say something to you?" And he said, "Do you know Greek?

38 "Then you are not the Egyptian who some time ago stirred up a revolt and led the four thousand men of the Assassins out into the wilderness?"

39 But Paul said, "I am a Jew of Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no insignificant city; and I beg you, allow me to speak to the people."

40 When he had given him permission, Paul, standing on the stairs, motioned to the people with his hand; and when there was a great hush, he spoke to them in the Hebrew dialect, saying,

Marked in the text

- **v4** “through the Spirit not to set foot in Jerusalem” — Sin / warning
- **v5** “After kneeling down on the beach and praying” — Command / instruction
- **v9** “four virgin daughters who were prophetesses” — Promise / blessing
- **v11** “This is what the Holy Spirit says” — God — His character & actions
- **v11** “deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles” — Sin / warning
- **v13** “I am ready not only to be bound, but even to die at Jerusalem” — Command / instruction
- **v13** “for the name of the Lord Jesus” — God — His character & actions
- **v14** “The will of the Lord be done” — God — His character & actions
- **v16** “a disciple of long standing” — Promise / blessing
- **v19** “the things which God had done among the Gentiles” — God — His character & actions
- **v20** “they began glorifying God” — God — His character & actions
- **v20** “they are all zealous for the Law” — Time / place / contrast
- **v21** “to forsake Moses” — Sin / warning
- **v24** “purify yourself along with them” — Command / instruction
- **v28** “has defiled this holy place” — Sin / warning
- **v29** “they supposed that Paul had brought him into the temple” — Sin / warning
- **v31** “While they were seeking to kill him” — Sin / warning
- **v33** “ordered him to be bound with two chains” — Time / place / contrast
- **v36** “Away with him” — Sin / warning
- **v39** “a Jew of Tarsus” — Time / place / contrast
- **v40** “standing on the stairs” — Time / place / contrast
- **v40** “he spoke to them in the Hebrew dialect” — Time / place / contrast
- **v4** “Jerusalem” — Key repeated word (every occurrence)
- **v11** “bind” — Key repeated word (every occurrence)
- **v13** “bound” — Key repeated word (every occurrence)
- **v26** “temple” — Key repeated word (every occurrence)

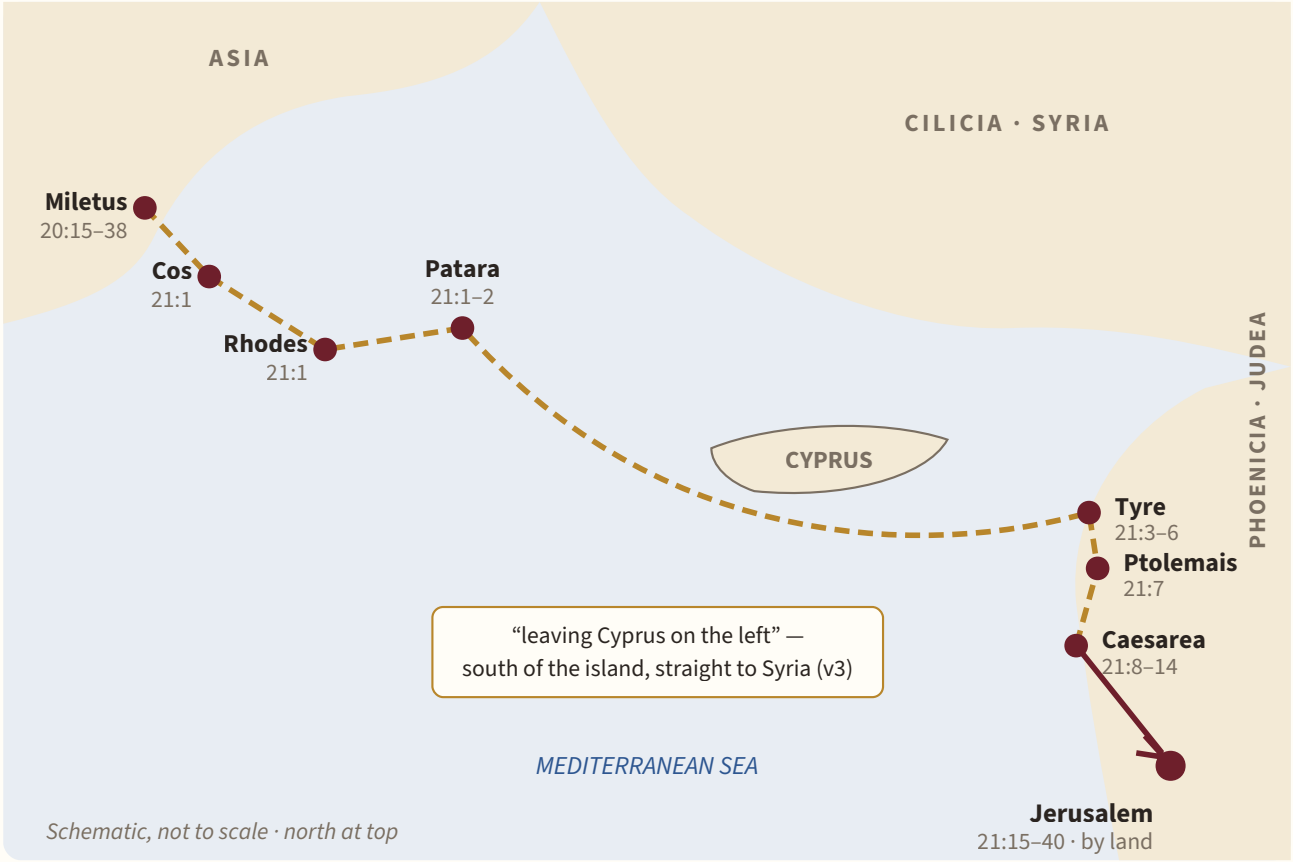
01 Observation

WHAT DOES THE TEXT SAY?

KEY VERSE · ACTS 21:11

"And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands, and said, "⚠ This is what the Holy Spirit says: 'In this way the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and ⚠ deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'""

FIGURE · FROM MILETUS TO JERUSALEM



Follow the dotted line: island-hopping down the coast of Asia, a straight run past Cyprus to Tyre, short hops to Caesarea, then the road up to Jerusalem.

Setting. Paul, Luke ("we") and their companions sail from Miletus down the coast — Cos, Rhodes, Patara — then straight past Cyprus to Tyre, where the ship unloads (vv1–3). After seven days at Tyre and a day at Ptolemais, they come to Caesarea and stay with Philip the evangelist (vv4–14), then go up to Jerusalem (vv15–17). There Paul meets James and the elders (vv18–26), and near the end of a seven-day purification he is seized in the temple and arrested by the Roman commander (vv27–40).

Structure:

- vv1–6 — **the warning at Tyre:** the voyage (vv1–3); disciples at Tyre keep telling Paul "through the Spirit" not to set foot in Jerusalem (v4); whole families escort them; kneeling and praying on the beach (vv5–6).
- vv7–16 — **Agabus and the belt:** Ptolemais (v7); Philip the evangelist and his four prophesying daughters (vv8–9); Agabus binds himself with Paul's belt — "This is what the Holy Spirit says" (vv10–11); everyone begs Paul not to go (v12); "I am ready not only to be bound, but even to die" (v13); "The will of the Lord be done!" (v14); up to Jerusalem, lodging with Mnason (vv15–16).
- vv17–26 — **James and the vow:** a glad welcome; Paul reports what God has done among the Gentiles (vv17–19); thousands of Jewish believers "zealous for the Law" have heard Paul teaches Jews to forsake Moses (vv20–21); the elders' plan — join four men under a vow and pay their expenses (vv22–24); the Gentile decree restated (v25); Paul purifies himself and enters the temple (v26).
- vv27–40 — **the riot and the stairs:** Jews from Asia stir up the crowd — "against our people and the Law and this place" (vv27–28); the Trophimus rumor (v29); Paul dragged out, the doors shut (v30); the commander runs down; the beating stops; two chains (vv31–33); confusion, the barracks, the stairs, "Away with him!" (vv34–36); "Do you know Greek?" — not the Egyptian; "a Jew of Tarsus" (vv37–39); a great hush, and Paul speaks in the Hebrew dialect (v40).

Repeated words, with counts:

- "Paul / Paul's" ×12 — vv4, 11 (×2), 13, 18, 26, 29, 30, 32, 37, 39, 40.
- "day / days" ×11 — vv1, 4, 5, 7, 8, 10, 15, 18, 26 (×2), 27.
- "came / come / arrived" ×10 — vv3, 7, 8, 10, 16, 17, 22, 28, 31, 33.
- "crowd / multitude / people / mob" ×9 — vv27, 28, 30, 34, 35, 36 (×2), 39, 40.
- "Jerusalem" ×7 — vv4, 11, 12, 13, 15, 17, 31.
- "ship / sail / sailing" ×6 — vv1, 2 (×2), 3 (×2), 6.
- "temple" ×5 — vv26, 27, 28, 29, 30.
- "bind / bound" ×4 — vv11 (×2), 13, 33 (plus "two chains," v33).
- "Jews" ×4 — vv11, 20, 21, 27; "Gentiles" ×4 — vv11, 19, 21, 25.
- "commander" ×4 — vv31, 32, 33, 37.
- "Law" ×3 — vv20, 24, 28 (and "Moses," v21).
- "seven" ×3 — vv4, 8, 27; "purify / purifying / purification" ×3 — vv24, 26 (×2).
- "disciple(s)" ×3 — vv4, 16 (×2); "brethren / brother" ×3 — vv7, 17, 20.
- "Spirit" ×2 — vv4, 11; "Away with him" — v36 (and again 22:22).

Contrasts: Friends who say "don't go" ⟷ Paul who says "I am ready" (vv12–13). Tears ⟷ "The will of the Lord be done!" (vv13–14). Glorifying God for the Gentiles ⟷ worry over the Jews (vv19–21). Rumor ⟷ fact: "they supposed" (v29). A holy place defiled ⟷ a man beaten inside it (vv28–32). The mob that wants him dead ⟷ the pagan soldiers who carry him to safety (vv31–35). "The Egyptian" ⟷ "a Jew of Tarsus" (vv38–39). An uproar ⟷ a great hush (vv34, 40).

Shape of the chapter: it moves like a funnel — open sea, coastal towns, the city, the temple, the stairs. Each stop narrows the road and raises the warnings, until the prophecy of verse 11 comes true almost word for word in verse 33.

Chapter theme (my words): Paul goes to Jerusalem knowing chains are waiting, because the will of the Lord is worth more than his own safety. He bends over backward to keep peace with his Jewish brothers, gets slandered and beaten anyway, and God rescues him with Roman soldiers so he can testify to the very crowd that wanted him dead.

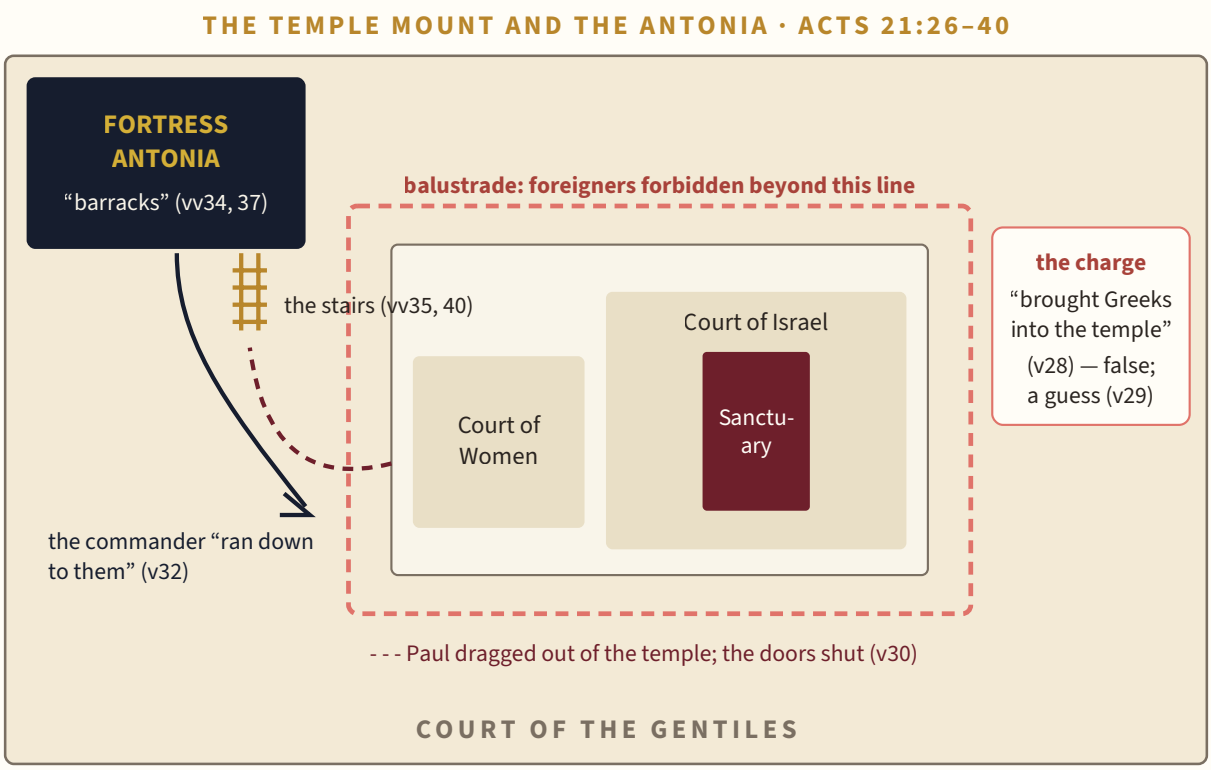
02 Interpretation

WHAT DOES THE TEXT MEAN?

KEY VERSE · ACTS 21:20

"And when they heard it △they began glorifying God; and they said to him, "You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed, and ◷they are all zealous for the Law;"

FIGURE · THE TEMPLE COURTS AND THE ANTONIA



Schematic of the Herodian temple courts, not to scale

The mob's charge was that Paul took a Gentile past the red line; see how close the Roman fortress stood, and the stairs from which Paul spoke.

Did Paul disobey the Spirit? Verse 4 says the disciples told him "through the Spirit" not to go; 20:22 says he went "bound by the Spirit." Guzik: the "do not go" was "a human interpretation of the Holy Spirit's prophecy of the danger that awaited Paul" — otherwise Paul would be going against the Spirit's direction. Agabus, in v11, says only what will happen, not "don't go." I land with Guzik: the Spirit revealed suffering; love drew the conclusion.

Why the belt? Agabus acts the message out like the old prophets (Jer 13; Ezek 4). Henry: "that which we see usually makes a greater impression upon us than that which we only hear of." And it came true: the Jews seized Paul and he ended up "in the hands of the Gentiles" — bound with two chains (v33).

What does "The will of the Lord be done" mean here? Not giving up, but giving over. Sproul separates God's hidden, "decretive" will — "that will of God by which God sovereignly brings to pass whatsoever He wills" — from His revealed will in Scripture: "All I can do is read God's Word." The friends could not see the plan, so they bowed to it. Henry: "it becomes us to say, The will of the Lord be done." It is Gethsemane's prayer on the lips of the church (Luke 22:42).

Was Paul wrong to take the vow? Here the teachers differ, and I want to be fair. Many commentators call it "a terrible compromise on Paul's part" (as Guzik reports). Henry records the view that it had "more in it of fleshly wisdom than of the grace of God," though he leans toward Paul's liberty. Guzik defends Paul from 1 Corinthians 9:20 — to the Jews he became as a Jew — and stresses the offering "was not in any way for the purpose of atonement or forgiveness." I agree with Guzik: Paul never taught that the Law saves, and he never told Jewish believers to throw away their customs. He laid down a freedom for love, not the gospel.

What did the rumor get wrong? It said Paul taught Jews *apostasia* from Moses (v21). Paul circumcised Timothy (16:3) and had kept a vow himself (18:18). What he refused was to put the Law on Gentiles (v25; 15:28–29) or to make it a condition of salvation for anyone. Clarke (via Guzik): such customs "were only dangerous when they depended on them for salvation."

Why did the crowd explode? Jews from Asia who knew Paul from Ephesus assumed he had brought Trophimus past the barrier into the inner courts — a capital offense (vv28–29). Henry: "Innocency is no fence against calumny and false accusation." "Away with him!" (v36) is the same cry raised against Jesus (Luke 23:18); Bruce, through Guzik, notes it was shouted "not far from that spot."

Why do the Romans matter? The commander thought he had caught a famous revolutionary, "the Egyptian," and the dagger-men (*sikarioi*). Instead he found an educated "Jew of Tarsus" who asked permission to speak (vv37–39). God used a pagan army to keep His witness alive — and the promise of 23:11 shows where it was leading: Rome. I believe God keeps His promises to Israel and His plan for the nations; this chapter shows both, side by side, in one city.

Word study (Greek):

- **Spirit — *pneuma* (G4151):** "through the Spirit" (v4); the same Spirit who bound Paul to go (20:22).
- **set foot — *epibainō* (G1910):** to step on, go aboard; vv2, 4; 25:1.
- **belt — *zōnē* (G2223):** a sash or girdle; Agabus' object lesson (v11).
- **ready — *hetoimōs* (G2093):** "I hold readily" — ready to be bound and to die (v13).
- **will — *thelēma* (G2307):** "The will of the Lord be done!" (v14).
- **zealous — *zēlōtēs* (G2207):** zealots for the Law (v20); Paul himself, 22:3.
- **forsake — *apostasia* (G646):** apostasy; only here and 2 Thess 2:3.
- **purify — *hagnizō* (G48):** ceremonial cleansing; vv24, 26; 24:18.
- **defiled — *koinoō* (G2840):** to make common (v28); compare 10:15.
- **barracks — *parembolē* (G3925):** the Roman camp in the Antonia (vv34, 37).
- **away with — *airō* (G142):** *aire*, only Luke 23:18; Acts 21:36; 22:22.

- **Assassins — *sikarios* (G4607):** dagger-men; only v38.
- **Hebrew — *Hebraïs* (G1446):** the Hebrew (Aramaic) dialect; 21:40; 22:2; 26:14.

Key insights to carry (from the Deep Dive):

1. **A true warning, a wrong conclusion** — the Spirit revealed suffering; friends said "don't go" (Guzik).
2. **Warnings prepare; they don't always stop** (Guzik).
3. **Prayer on a beach** — the church's goodbye was a prayer meeting (Henry).
4. **Ready to suffer is more than ready to serve** (Spurgeon).
5. **"The will of the Lord be done"** — Gethsemane on the church's lips; hidden will and revealed will (Sproul).
6. **An old disciple** — Mnason's open home (Henry).
7. **Apostasy from Moses?** — a false rumor (*apostasia*).
8. **Doing right does not guarantee safety** — "Paul might do well, and yet suffer for it" (Henry).
9. **The cry of the Passion** — *aire*, against Jesus and against Paul.
10. **God used Rome to rescue His man** (23:11).

Cross-references: Num 6:1–21; Jer 13:1–11; Ezek 4; Joel 2:28; Luke 9:51; 22:42; 23:18; John 19:15; Acts 6:13–14; 9:15–16; 11:28; 15:28–29; 16:3; 18:18; 20:22–24; 23:11; 24:17–18; Rom 15:25–26; 1 Cor 9:20; 10:32–33; Phil 1:20–21; 2 Thess 2:3; 2 Tim 4:6–7.

03 Application

HOW DOES IT CHANGE ME?

KEY VERSE · ACTS 21:14

"And since he would not be persuaded, we fell silent, remarking, "△ The will of the Lord be done!""

Example to follow — Paul's "I am ready." Paul did not go looking for chains, but he would not run from them either. Some of the men I sit with have done hard time for their own sins; Paul is ready to be bound for the name of Jesus. I want that kind of readiness — to be laughed at, misunderstood, inconvenienced, even hurt — if that is where faithfulness leads. Spurgeon: "ready for whatever the will of God may appoint for you."

Sin to confess — taking my fear for God's voice. The disciples at Tyre heard something true and decided it meant "stay safe." I have done that. I have taken a real warning, or a real fear, and dressed it up as God telling me not to do the hard thing He already told me to do. I confess that, and ask Him to separate my fears from His word.

Command to obey — lay down a freedom for love. James asked Paul to do something he did not have to do, so that Jewish brothers would not stumble. Paul did it. There are things I am free to do that cost my brothers something — at the table, in the dayroom, in what I post. I will give one up this week, not to earn anything, but for their sake.

Promise to trust — the will of the Lord will be done. The friends stopped arguing and said, "The will of the Lord be done!" That is not giving up; it is resting in a God whose plan is bigger than mine. Paul did right and got arrested anyway, and God was still on the throne — He used Roman soldiers to save him (v32) and later told him, "Take courage" (23:11).

Questions for the table (from the Deep Dive):

1. The believers at Tyre heard a true warning and drew the wrong conclusion. When have I taken something true about God and drawn a conclusion He never said? (21:4; 20:22–23) *A human interpretation of the Holy Spirit's prophecy (Guzik).*
2. Paul's friends loved him and begged him to play it safe. Who in my life loves me enough to cry over me — and how do I tell love from God's leading? (21:12–14) *What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart?*
3. "I am ready … even to die … for the name of the Lord Jesus." What am I ready for this week, and what am I not ready for yet? (21:13; 2 Tim 4:6) *Ready to suffer is more than ready to serve (Spurgeon).*
4. The elders asked Paul to give up something he was free to keep, for the sake of Jewish brothers. Where might I lay down a freedom to keep the peace without giving up the gospel? (21:20–26; 1 Cor 10:32–33) *Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks.*
5. Paul did the right thing and got arrested anyway. How do I keep trusting God when obedience makes things worse before it makes them better? (21:26–33) *Paul might do well, and yet suffer for it (Henry).*
6. Bloody, chained and slandered, Paul asked to speak to the crowd that had just beaten him. Who is the "crowd" in my life I would rather walk away from than talk to? (21:37–40; 22:1) *Paul, standing on the stairs, motioned to the people.*

Worship. The Lord Jesus walked this road first — He set His face to go to Jerusalem, heard the crowd shout "Away with Him," and prayed, "not My will, but Yours be done." He is the Lord whose name is worth chains, the God who speaks by His Spirit, and the King who rules even Roman cohorts for the good of His servants.

Prayer. Lord Jesus, make me ready — not reckless, but ready — to be bound, misunderstood or hurt for Your name. Teach me to tell my fears from Your voice. Give me friends who weep and pray for me, and give me the grace to say with them, "The will of the Lord be done." When I do right and it goes wrong, hold me steady; and when I stand bruised in front of the crowd, give me a word for them. Amen.

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