

**February 1, 2026**

**God's Good News Story: The Church Alive & Growing**

***The Book of Acts Chapter 21, 22***

***Passing the Torch: Paul's Farewell Tour Pt. 2***

***The Misunderstood Missionary***

**PAUL'S THIRD JOURNEY**



Today, we pick up where we left Paul and His Ministry Team left off at the end of Chapter 21 on their Farewell Tour.

In Chapter 20, we saw Paul's heart for the church. In Chapters 21 and 22, we see Paul's heart for his mission and his people, even when they misunderstood him. As Paul completes his "Farewell Tour" and arrives in Jerusalem, he transitions from a traveling preacher to a prisoner for Christ. This section teaches us how to handle opposition, clarify our calling, and remain faithful even when our motives are misunderstood or questioned.

**I. Jerusalem or Bust (Acts 21:1-14)**

Some of you may have heard of the [phrase "California or Bust"] originated during the mid-1800' Gold Rush, embodying pioneers' determination to reach California for riches, meaning they'd go all-in, facing potential ruin ("bust") but determined to succeed, with "bust" deriving from an older sense of "burst" or "break down" from the arduous journey, appearing on wagons and signs. This phrase has been rephrased to refer to any determined journey to fulfill a dream or a specific purpose and plan. The Apostle Paul seems to be the originator of this concept with his passionate commitment to head to Jerusalem. All along his 'Farewell Tour' he is met with warning and tearful pleas to NOT go to Jerusalem. Paul even received repeated warnings through the Holy Spirit about the "chains and afflictions" awaiting him.

Listen to **Acts 21:10-14**... <sup>10</sup> *As we were staying there for some days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea.* <sup>11</sup> *And he came to us and 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 in Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and hand him over to the Gentiles.'"* <sup>12</sup> *When we had heard this, we as well as the local residents began begging him not to go up to Jerusalem.* <sup>13</sup> *Then Paul replied, "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."* <sup>14</sup> *And since he would not be persuaded, we became quiet, remarking, "The will of the Lord be done!"*

- **The Warnings at Tyre and Caesarea:** Disciples at Tyre urge him not to go. Agabus the prophet binds his own hands and feet with Paul's belt, prophesying Paul's arrest (21:10-11).

- **The Courage of Conviction:** Despite the tears and pleas of his friends, Paul's resolve is unshakable. He states, *"I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus"* (21:13).

Passing the torch requires a willingness to face personal cost for the sake of the Great Commission. Paul models for us that when God calls us to a task, nothing, not even fears and dangers should deter us. He was prepared to face whatever lay ahead in order to follow the will and plan of God.

## II. The Misunderstanding of the Mission

(Acts 21:17–36)

Paul arrives in Jerusalem at the conclusion of his "Farewell Tour." Upon arriving in Jerusalem, Paul meets with James and the elders only to discover that his groundbreaking ministry among the Gentiles has created deep suspicion among Jewish believers. Despite his integrity and efforts at reconciliation, Paul becomes the target of a violent misunderstanding that transforms him from a traveling preacher into a prisoner for Christ. He is caught between his mission to the Gentiles and the legalistic expectations of the Jewish believers.

Acts 21:17-24... <sup>17</sup> *After we arrived in Jerusalem, the brothers and sisters received us gladly.* <sup>18</sup> *And the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were*

*present.* <sup>19</sup> *After he had greeted them, he began to relate one by one the things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry.* <sup>20</sup> *And when they heard about them, 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;"* <sup>21</sup> *and they have been told about you, that you are teaching all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to abandon Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs.* <sup>22</sup> *So what is to be done? They will certainly hear that you have come.* <sup>23</sup> *Therefore, do as we tell you: we have four men who have a vow upon themselves;* <sup>24</sup> *take them along and purify yourself together with them, and pay their expenses so that they may shave their heads; and then everyone will know that there is nothing to what they have been told about you, but that you yourself also conform, keeping the Law.*

- **The Attempt at Conciliation:** To prove he hasn't abandoned his Jewish heritage, Paul joins four men in a purification vow (21:23-26). He tries to be *"all things to all men."* (1 Cor. 9:22)
- **Misunderstood Allegiance Sparks a Riot:** In the following verses as Paul tries to appease the Jews and reaffirm his allegiance and respect for basic Jewish religious laws a group of 'rabble rouser Jews' from Asia see Paul in the temple and falsely accuse him of bringing a Gentile (Trophimus) into the inner courts. He had been seen earlier in the day with some Greeks, but they were not with him at this time.

- **The Misunderstood Motive Turns To Prejudicial Violence:** In verses 31-36 we see Paul's heart was to bring unity between Jews and Gentiles, but he is viewed as a traitor to his culture and a defiler of the Temple. The spiritual pride and social prejudice of the Jews drove the mob to kill him. **The Danger of Prejudice:** A riot erupts based on false assumptions rather than facts—the crowd sees what they expect to see, not what is actually true. This warns us against allowing personal bias to blind us to God's work in others. **Faithfulness in the Storm:** Even as the mob cries "Away with him!", Paul remains focused on his calling. His arrest becomes the very platform God uses for testimony before kings and eventually Rome.
- **From Preacher to Prisoner:** This marks a pivotal turning point in Acts. Paul's farewell tour ends exactly as the Holy Spirit warned—with "*chains and afflictions.*"
- **Sovereignty in Chaos - God's Providential Protection:** The Roman commander's timely arrival, intended to kill Paul, becomes God's means of preserving his life. When we are misunderstood or attacked, we remain perfectly understood and protected by God's sovereign hand. Even when we act with integrity and wisdom, our intentions may still be distorted by those blinded by prejudice.

### III. The Testimony of the Missionary: Turning Accusation into Witness (Acts 21:37-22:20)

As Paul is being arrested by the Roman commander, he asks to speak to the mob. He uses his "defense" not to save his life, but to share the Gospel.

Acts 21:37-40...<sup>37</sup> *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?"* <sup>38</sup> *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?"* <sup>39</sup> *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."* <sup>40</sup> *When he had given him permission, Paul, standing on the stairs, motioned to the people with his hand; and when there was a great silence, he spoke to them in the Hebrew dialect....* I'll stop there and summarize the situation for times sake...

Paul, having just been rescued from a violent mob, stands on the steps of the Roman barracks. Instead of defending himself or seeking escape, he seizes the moment to share his testimony with the very people who want him dead. This passage is a masterclass in turning crisis into opportunity and shows how God uses our stories—even in hostile circumstances—for God's glory.

Let's look at Paul's response to the accusations and misunderstandings and see what we can learn:

## 1. Courage to Speak When Attempts to Silence You Come

(Acts 21:37–40)

Paul requests permission to address the crowd, surprising the Roman commander with his composure and education. God can give us a platform to speak for Him in the most unlikely places, if we are willing and ready.

## 2. Build Bridges, Not Barriers (Acts 22:1–3)

Paul addresses the crowd in Aramaic, identifying with his audience as “*brothers and fathers*.” He begins by affirming his Jewish heritage and zeal, showing respect and common ground. Effective witness starts with empathy and connection, not confrontation.

## 3. The Power of Personal Testimony (Acts 22:4–16)

Paul recounts his past as a persecutor of Christians, his dramatic encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus, and his subsequent conversion and baptism. He highlights the role of Ananias—a respected Jew—in his story, further building credibility. Our story of transformation is often the most powerful tool we have for sharing Christ, especially with those who know our past.

## 4. Obedience Over Comfort (Acts 22:17–20)

Paul shares how, even after his conversion, God called him to a difficult and misunderstood mission: to preach to the Gentiles. Despite knowing this would bring opposition, Paul obeys God’s call. God’s calling may lead us into uncomfortable or even hostile situations, but obedience is the measure of faithfulness.

The chapter ends with the crowd erupting in riotous rage when Paul closes out his “testimony” (which to this point was relatively well received) with a bold, biblical statement. We read in...

Acts 22:21–29...<sup>21</sup> *And He said to me, ‘Go! For I will send you far away to the Gentiles.’*<sup>22</sup> *They listened to him up to this statement, and then they raised their voices and said, “Away with such a man from the earth, for he should not be allowed to live!”*<sup>23</sup> *And as they were shouting and throwing off their cloaks and tossing dust into the air,*<sup>24</sup> *the commander ordered that he be brought into the barracks, saying that he was to be interrogated by flogging so that he would find out the reason why they were shouting against him that way.*<sup>25</sup> *But when they stretched him out with straps, Paul said to the centurion who was standing by, “Is it lawful for you to flog a man who is a Roman and uncondemned?”*<sup>26</sup> When the centurion heard this, he *went to the commander and told him, saying, “What are you about to do? For this man is a Roman.”*<sup>27</sup> *The commander came and said to Paul, “Tell me, are you a Roman?” And he said, “Yes.”*<sup>28</sup> *The commander answered, “I acquired this citizenship for a large sum of money.” And Paul said, “But I was actually born a citizen.”*<sup>29</sup> *Therefore, those who were about to interrogate him immediately backed away from him; and the commander also was afraid when he found out that he was a Roman, and because he had put him in chains.*

## IV. The Sovereignty of God in the Storm (Acts 22:21–30)

- Misunderstanding and Mob Mentality Go Together.

This passage marks the moment when Paul's testimony, which had held the crowd's attention, suddenly ignites their fury at the mention of his mission to the Gentiles. The crowd listens until Paul says God sent him to the Gentiles. Their outrage reveals a deep-seated resistance to God's inclusive grace. The Gospel challenges our boundaries and prejudices. True mission means proclaiming God's grace even when it provokes opposition.

- **God's Design for Good Government is Made Evident.**

The Roman official, not understanding the crowd's rage, orders Paul to be flogged for answers, but he strategically invokes his Roman citizenship, turning a moment of vulnerability into one of divine protection. Through it all, God's sovereignty is evident, using both chaos and legal rights to advance the Gospel. God can use our earthly privileges—education, status, citizenship—as tools for His kingdom. We are called to be both wise and innocent in a hostile world.

- **God's Providential Protection.**

Even in the midst of a riot and a legal mess, God provides a way for Paul to stand before the Sanhedrin the next day. The commander, now fearful, arranges for Paul to address the Sanhedrin. What looked like a dead end becomes a new opportunity for witness. When we are misunderstood by the world, we are still perfectly understood and protected by God. God is always at work,

even in chaos. Interruptions and setbacks may be God's way of opening new doors for the Gospel.

### **Closing Challenge:**

When the world rejects your message, questions your motives or misunderstands your purpose remember: you are fully understood and protected by God. Paul was willing to be labeled a traitor by his own people and a troublemaker by the Romans, all so that the "torch" of the Gospel could reach the ends of the earth. Like Paul, we must prioritize the mission over our reputation, trusting that God is the ultimate judge of our hearts and the sovereign protector of our path.

Acts 21& 22 in its totality follows:

Acts 21 New American Standard Bible
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**Paul Sails from Miletus**

**21** Now when we had parted from them and had set sail, we ran a straight course to Cos, and on the next day to Rhodes, and from there to Patara; <sup>2</sup> and having found a ship crossing over to Phoenicia, we went aboard and set sail. <sup>3</sup> When we came in sight of Cyprus, leaving it on the left, we kept sailing to Syria and landed at Tyre; for the ship was to unload its cargo there. <sup>4</sup> After looking up the disciples, we stayed there for seven days; and they kept telling Paul, through the Spirit, not to set foot in Jerusalem. <sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> Then we boarded the ship, and they returned home.

<sup>7</sup> When we had finished the voyage from Tyre, we arrived at Ptolemais, and after greeting the brothers *and sisters*, we stayed with them for a day. <sup>8</sup> On the next day we left and came to Caesarea, and we entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him. <sup>9</sup> Now this man had four virgin daughters who were prophetesses. <sup>10</sup> As we were staying there for some days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. <sup>11</sup> And he came to us and 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 in Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and hand him over to the Gentiles.'" <sup>12</sup> When we had heard this, we as well as the local residents *began* begging him not to go up to Jerusalem. <sup>13</sup> Then Paul replied, "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." <sup>14</sup> And since he would not be persuaded, we became quiet, remarking, "The will of the Lord be done!"

### **Paul in Jerusalem**

<sup>15</sup> After these days we got ready and started on our way up to Jerusalem. <sup>16</sup> *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 stay.

<sup>17</sup> After we arrived in Jerusalem, the brothers *and sisters* received us gladly. <sup>18</sup> And the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present. <sup>19</sup> After he had greeted them, he *began* to relate one by one the things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. <sup>20</sup> And when they heard *about them*, 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; <sup>21</sup> and they have been told about you, that you are teaching all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to abandon Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs. <sup>22</sup> So what is *to be done*? They will certainly hear that you have come. <sup>23</sup> Therefore, do as we tell you: we have four men who have a vow upon themselves; <sup>24</sup> take them along and purify yourself together with them, and pay their expenses so that they may shave their heads; and *then* everyone will know that there is nothing to what they have been told about you, but that you yourself also conform, keeping the Law. <sup>25</sup> But regarding the Gentiles who have believed, we sent a letter, having decided that they should abstain from meat sacrificed to idols and from blood and what is strangled, and from sexual immorality." <sup>26</sup> Then Paul took along the men, and the next day, after purifying himself together with them, he went into the temple giving notice of the completion of the days of purification, until the sacrifice was offered for each one of them.

### **Paul Seized in the Temple**

<sup>27</sup> 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, <sup>28</sup> crying out, "Men of Israel, help! This is the man who instructs everyone 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!" <sup>29</sup> For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with him, and they thought that Paul had brought him into the temple. <sup>30</sup> Then the whole 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. <sup>31</sup> While they were intent on killing him, a report came up to the commander of the *Roman* cohort that all Jerusalem was in confusion. <sup>32</sup> He immediately took along *some* soldiers and centurions and ran down to the crowd; and when they saw the commander and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul. <sup>33</sup> Then the commander came up and took hold of him, and ordered that he be bound with two chains; and he *began* asking who he was and what he had done. <sup>34</sup> 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 that Paul be brought into the barracks. <sup>35</sup> When *Paul* got to the stairs, it came about that he was carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the mob; <sup>36</sup> for the multitude of people kept following *them*, shouting, "Away with him!"

<sup>37</sup> 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?” <sup>38</sup> 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?” <sup>39</sup> 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.” <sup>40</sup> When he had given him permission, Paul, standing on the stairs, motioned to the people with his hand; and when there was a great silence, he spoke to them in the Hebrew dialect, saying,

### **Paul’s Defense before the Jews**

**Acts 22** “Brothers and fathers, hear my defense *which I now offer* to you.”<sup>2</sup> And when they heard that he was addressing them in the Hebrew dialect, they became *even* more quiet; and he \*said,

<sup>3</sup> “I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated under Gamaliel, strictly according to the Law of our fathers, being zealous for God just as you all are today. <sup>4</sup> I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and putting both men and women into prisons, <sup>5</sup> as also the high priest and all the Council of the elders can testify. From them I also received letters to the brothers, and started off for Damascus in order to bring even those who were there to Jerusalem as prisoners to be punished.”<sup>6</sup> “But it happened that as I was on my way, approaching Damascus at about noon, a very bright light suddenly flashed from heaven all around me, <sup>7</sup> and I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’ <sup>8</sup> And I answered, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ And He said to me, ‘I am Jesus the Nazarene, whom you are persecuting.’ <sup>9</sup> And those who were with me saw the light, but did not understand the voice of the One who was speaking to me. <sup>10</sup> And I said, ‘What shall I do, Lord?’ And the Lord said to me, ‘Get up and go on into Damascus, and there you will be told about everything that has been appointed for you to do.’ <sup>11</sup> But since I could not see because of the brightness of that light, I came into Damascus being led by the hand by those who were with me.

<sup>12</sup> “Now a certain Ananias, a man who was devout by the standard of spoken of by all the Jews who lived *there*, <sup>13</sup> came to me, and standing nearby he said to me, ‘Brother Saul, receive your sight!’ And at that very moment I looked up at him. <sup>14</sup> And he said, ‘The God of our fathers has appointed you to know His will and to see the Righteous One and to hear a message from His mouth. <sup>15</sup> For you will be a witness

for Him to all people of what you have seen and heard. <sup>16</sup> Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins by calling on His name.’

<sup>17</sup> “It happened when I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, that I fell into a trance, <sup>18</sup> and I saw Him saying to me, ‘Hurry and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about Me.’ <sup>19</sup> And I said, ‘Lord, they themselves understand that in one synagogue after another I used to imprison and beat those who believed in You. <sup>20</sup> And when the blood of Your witness Stephen was being shed, I also was standing nearby and approving, and watching over the cloaks of those who were killing him.’ <sup>21</sup> And He said to me, ‘Go! For I will send you far away to the Gentiles.’”

<sup>22</sup> They listened to him up to this statement, and *then* they raised their voices and said, “Away with such a man from the earth, for he should not be allowed to live!” <sup>23</sup> And as they were shouting and throwing off their cloaks and tossing dust into the air, <sup>24</sup> the commander ordered that he be brought into the barracks, saying that he was to be interrogated by flogging so that he would find out the reason why they were shouting against him that way. <sup>25</sup> But when they stretched him out with straps, Paul said to the centurion who was standing by, “Is it lawful for you to flog a man who is a Roman and uncondemned?” <sup>26</sup> When the centurion heard *this*, he went to the commander and told *him*, saying, “What are you about to do? For this man is a Roman.” <sup>27</sup> The commander came and said to Paul, “Tell me, are you a Roman?” And he said, “Yes.” <sup>28</sup> The commander answered, “I acquired this citizenship for a large sum of money.” And Paul said, “But I was actually born *a citizen*.” <sup>29</sup> Therefore, those who were about to interrogate him immediately backed away from him; and the commander also was afraid when he found out that he was a Roman, and because he had put him in chains.

<sup>30</sup> Now on the next day, wanting to know for certain why *Paul* had been accused by the Jews, he released him and ordered the chief priests and all the Council to assemble, and he brought Paul down and placed him before them.