

## ACTS: ALIGNING WITH GOD'S SOVEREIGN WORK OF DISCIPLING

### LIII. The Test Of Fellowship For Ministry Credibility

(Acts 21:1-20a)

#### I. Introduction

- A. The book of Acts explains "the orderly and sovereignly directed progress of the kingdom message from Jews to Gentiles, and from Jerusalem to Rome," Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 351. We can thus learn much about aligning our ministry efforts with God's sovereign work from studying the book of Acts.
- B. Acts 21:1-20a records Paul's journey to Jerusalem where all the churches along the way knew that he would suffer persecution, but which journey provided evidence of Paul's credibility in terms of true spiritual fellowship he enjoyed with godly believers. We view the passage for our insight and edification (as follows):

#### II. The Test Of Fellowship For Ministry Credibility, Acts 21:1-20a.

- A. When believers are in true spiritual fellowship with the Lord, they also enjoy true spiritual fellowship with one another as testified by the Apostle John in 1 John 1:3-7.
- B. Accordingly, in contrasting the responses to Paul's ministry in Gentile lands versus that of the Jews in Jerusalem, Luke recorded in Acts 21:1-20a on the true spiritual fellowship Paul had with believers of like faith before he faced the bitter hatred of Jews in Jerusalem in Acts 21:27-23:16. In so doing, Luke supplied evidence of Paul's spiritual credibility, so we view the passage for our insight and edification, Acts 21:1-20a:
  1. Paul enjoyed true spiritual fellowship with the elders of the Church at Ephesus, Acts 20:17, 36-38; 21:1a:
    - a. When he had called for the elders of the Church at Ephesus to meet him at the seaport of Miletus, they had sorrowed greatly upon hearing Paul predict that they would see his face no more, Acts 20:17, 36-38.
    - b. Acts 21:1a then reports that Paul and his traveling companions literally "were torn away from" (*apospao* in the passive voice, *apospasthentos*, U. B. S. Grk. N. T., 1966, p. 500; Arndt & Gingrich, A Grk.-Eng. Lex. of the N. T., 1967, p. 97) the elders of the Church at Ephesus, that their parting was emotionally wrenching due to the intensity of the true spiritual fellowship Paul enjoyed with these men!
  2. Paul enjoyed true fellowship with believers at Tyre whom he had not previously met, Acts 21:1b-6:
    - a. In stopping at Tyre where the ship needed to stay in port some days to unload its cargo, Paul and his companions found believers there and stayed with them for seven days, Acts 21:1b-4a.
    - b. These believers were led of the Holy Spirit to predict that Paul would face trouble in Jerusalem, so they urged him not to go there, Acts 21:4b. When Paul and his companions left them, these believers at Tyre with their wives and children accompanied Paul's team to the ship and knelt down at the shore and prayed with Paul's companions before they boarded the ship, Acts 21:5-6.
  3. Paul enjoyed true spiritual fellowship with believers at Ptolemais, Acts 21:7: When Paul's team arrive at Ptolemais, they greeted the believers there, and stayed with them for a day, being accepted by them.
  4. Paul enjoyed true spiritual fellowship with believers at Caesarea, Acts 21:8-16a:
    - a. Their next port stop was Caesarea where Paul and his companions visited Philip the evangelist, one of the original seven deacons of Acts 6:1-7. They stayed with him, being accepted in his fellowship, Acts 21:8.
    - b. Philip had four virgin daughters who had the gift of prophecy, and while Paul's team stayed there for many days, a believer and prophet named Agabus came down from Judaea and dramatically predicted that Paul would be bound by the Hebrews at Jerusalem and be delivered over to the Gentiles, Acts 21:9-11.
    - c. When Paul's companions and Philip's family heard this, they all pleaded with Paul not to go to Jerusalem, and Paul asked why they were weeping and breaking his heart, Acts 21:12-13a. He said that he was ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus, so the rest ceased their emotional pleading with him, saying, "Let the will of the Lord be done," Acts 21:13b-14 ESV.
    - d. When Paul and his companions left Caesarea for Jerusalem, some caring disciples of Caesarea escorted them for a day's journey to meet with and to stay with an elderly believer named Mnason, Acts 21:15-16a.
  5. Paul enjoyed true spiritual fellowship with the elderly disciple Mnason of Cyprus, Acts 21:16b.
  6. Paul finally enjoyed true spiritual fellowship with the believers in Jerusalem: they gladly received him and glorified the Lord in hearing him report on God's work in his ministry with the Gentiles, Acts 21:17-20a.

**Lesson:** *Paul enjoyed true fellowship with various believers in various locations, validating his spiritual credibility.*

**Application:** *(1) May we evaluate one's spiritual credibility by the test of true spiritual fellowship. (2) As in Paul's case, truly spiritual believers will be unloved by the unrighteous, but they will enjoy rich fellowship with the godly.*