

Women's Bible Study

A TWO-YEAR JOURNEY THROUGH
THE STORY OF GOD

Week 8 | Unleashed while Bound | Acts 21:15-23:35

We saw last week how Paul's dogged persistence in Ephesus caused the gospel message to spread widely and grow in influence (Acts 19:20). We also saw that Paul was compelled by the Holy Spirit to go to Jerusalem, even though he would face hardships and imprisonment in his future. Paul was willing to be imprisoned, or even to die, in the service of the message of Jesus.

1. BOUND MESSENGER: Accusations and Arrest. Read Acts 21:15-40

- a) Upon arrival in Jerusalem, Paul met with the leaders of the Jerusalem church. When the church leaders heard Paul's report of God's work among the Gentiles, they celebrated the expansion of the Kingdom, but they had a volatile situation at hand that caused them great concern. What was this dangerous situation? (21:20b-21).

For deeper thought: In what way were these zealous Jewish believers mischaracterizing Paul's gospel message? (Hint: Review the decision of the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15:7-20).

Personal Reflection: Allowing ourselves to get caught up in the passion of moral outrage when we hear an ugly accusation is easy to do. Thousands agreed in their outrage; thousands were wrong. The book of Proverbs cautions us to be careful about reacting in haste: "The first to present his case seems right, till another comes forward and questions him." (Proverbs 18:17) Make a personal commitment not to be a "first responder" to malicious gossip.

- b) Later, while Paul was at the temple, a riot erupted in Jerusalem. What false accusations incited the riot? (21:28-29)

What did the Jews do to Paul? (21:30-31)

How was Paul delivered from the murderous Jewish mob? (21:31-36)

- c) Personal Reflection: Paul was delivered from certain death, and he used that deliverance to proclaim the gospel (21:37-40). We have been delivered from certain death to the confidence of eternal life. How does this motivate you to share the gospel in your network of friends and family?

Paul did not allow his physical chains to hinder his determination to further God's mission and message. What "chains" do you need to ignore/push through to move forward with God's mission and message at your point in your life journey?

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2. UNLEASHED MESSAGE: City-wide Sermon. Read Acts 22:1-22

- a) How did Paul show his personal connection with this hostile crowd of Jews? (22:1-5) List several aspects of connection that you find in this paragraph. (22:1-5)
- b) Paul recounted his conversion experience of being dramatically confronted by Jesus on the road to Damascus. At that time, what charge did Jesus give to Paul through His messenger Ananias? (22:14-15).

What additional direction from God was given to Paul later, as he was praying in the temple? (22:17-21)

- c) When Paul declared that God had spoken to him in the temple and had told him to go and offer blessing to the Gentiles, the Jewish crowd erupted in furious protest. (22:21-23) From what you know about Old Testament history, why do you think this caused such anger?
- d) Personal Reflection: Paul told a compelling story of his personal journey into a relationship with Jesus. He described his life before he understood who Jesus was. He told how He encountered Jesus. He explained aspects of his life after that encounter that were of particular interest to his listeners. Your story is likely not as dramatic as Paul's, but what is your story? Have you entered into a relationship with Jesus at this point? How would you describe your journey?

3. BOUND BY MAN; UNLEASHED BY GOD: Interrogations and Assurance. Read Acts 22:23-23:11

- a) What characteristic of Paul's life prevented his being flogged and imprisoned? (22:24-25)

How is this an example of God's grace ("unearned gift") in Paul's life?

- b) Describe how Paul was treated the following day before the Sanhedrin, the ruling council of the Jews. (23:1-5)

How did the proceeding disintegrate? (23:9-10)

- c) Paul had been warned that his trip to Jerusalem would result in hardship and prison. As the meeting of the Sanhedrin collapsed in chaos, Paul was taken into the army barracks. It was a dark time for Paul. How did the Lord encourage Paul? (23:11).

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How did the Lord's words specifically commend Paul for the present and offer strength for the future?

- d) Personal Reflection: Notice the terminology in verse 11: "The Lord stood near Paul"; "The Lord stood by his side." We have all experienced dark times in our lives, and we will all experience dark times in the future. Never forget: If you are a child of God, the Lord is indeed standing at your side. Is there a situation in your life where this assurance may bring you courage and comfort?

Hearing from God directly like that must have deeply encouraged Paul! We can easily think, "Well, I wish Jesus would show up and reveal His plans for me like that. Knowing would make things so much better!" Actually, He has. We have God's complete revelation to us in the Bible—His Word to us. We have His promises, His mission, His message, His instructions and design, and His gospel in our hands. Read 2 Timothy 3:16-17 to learn the power of God's Word to us. How does that impact your thinking and your plans?

4. UNLEASHED TO ROME: First Leg of a Long Journey. Read Acts 23:12-35

- a) When a large group of determined Jews devised a foolproof plot to kill Paul, whom did God use to thwart their plans? (23:16-22)

For deeper thought: Can you recall another time when God provided deliverance for His people by using a person of marginal standing or of low regard?

- b) Personal Reflection: The Roman commander sent a large protective detail with Paul and transported Paul from Jerusalem to Caesarea, where Paul was then imprisoned in Herod's palace. Caesarea is not Rome. Under guard in Herod's palace is not unleashed to the ends of the earth. What hope must have Paul clung to as he lingered in Caesarea?
When you are stuck, what do you do?

Paul had been assured by God that his eventual destination was Rome. Where is our eventual destination? (Rev. 21:1-4) How does that give you comfort as you face the troubles of this life?

FINAL THOUGHT: His trip to and imprisonment in Jerusalem actually launches Paul on a wild ride to Rome, the capital of the Empire that influenced the whole world. Who could have imagined that Paul's journey to Jerusalem would land him in Rome? Jesus' words in Acts 1:8 regarding the explosion of the good news of His Kingdom are being fulfilled.

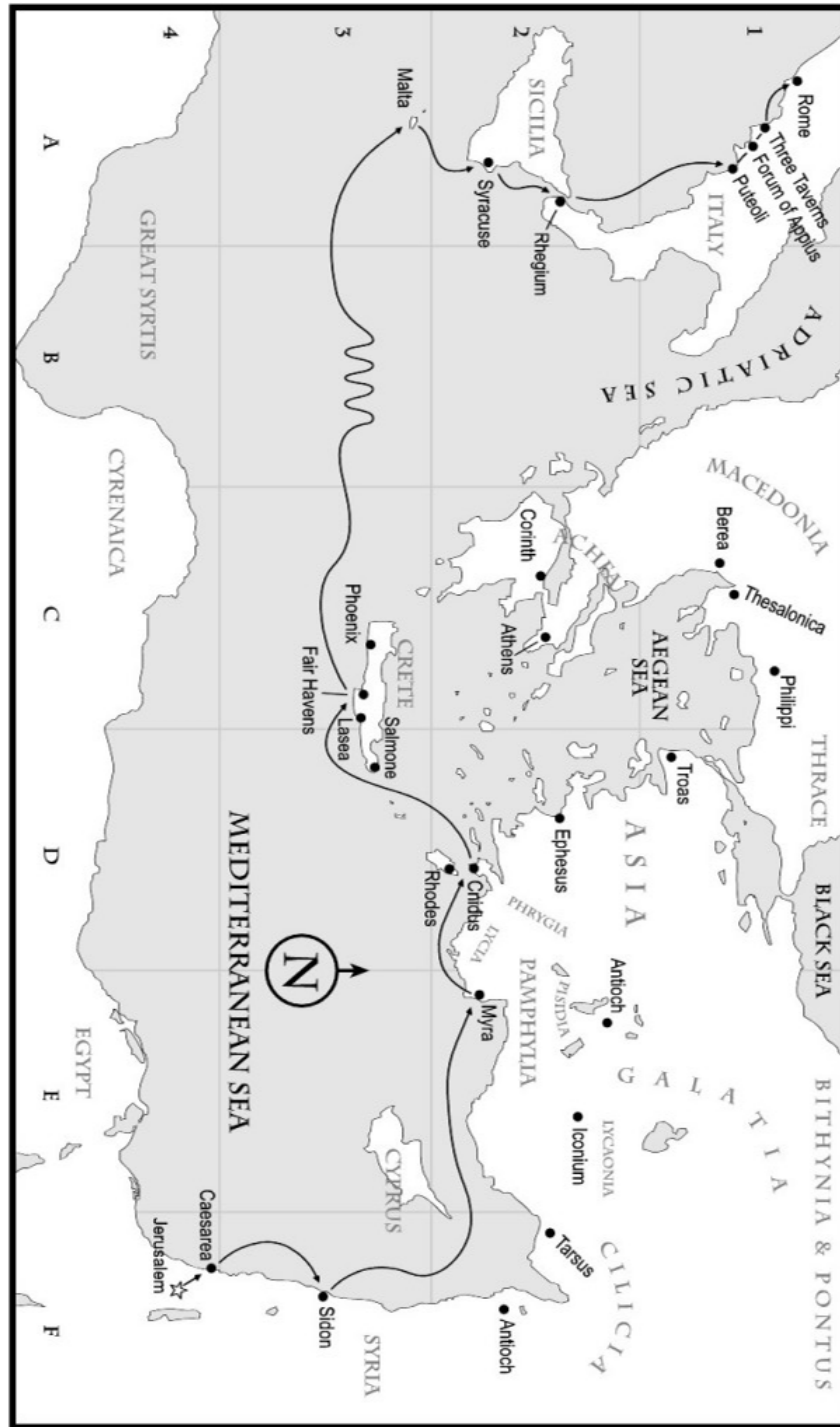
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