

# Lesson 27 – Acts 21:1-36

## Destination: Jerusalem

Have you heard the word “fellowship”? You may have heard someone use it when recounting a wonderful time of being with others. The word is commonly used in congregations.

The church bulletin will announce potluck fellowship dinners or youth group meetings in the fellowship hall. So just what does fellowship mean?

Paul and his companions shared fellowship as they sailed from island to island in Acts 21 on their way to Jerusalem. At each landing, they stayed with fellow believers. Together they were actively doing God's will in helping and encouraging each other. Sharing a spiritual oneness in Christ creates a strong and sweet bond of love and purpose. That's fellowship.

### Unity Among Believers

Paul has been visiting the congregations he had established as he traveled sharing Jesus Christ. He cared deeply about the believers in each congregation. He understood the importance of unity in John 17:20-23 where Jesus prayed, “that they may be *one*, just as we are *one*.”

Later Paul wrote to the Philippian church encouraging them to “stand firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel” (Philippians 1:27) “being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit” (2:2). Notice the words, one spirit, one mind, united in spirit. Paul knew the importance of unity if a congregation was to be effective in spreading the gospel. The same is true in congregations today.

In Acts 21:20-26, Paul came to the congregation in Jerusalem and issues arose. Read I Corinthians 9:22. For the sake of unity, Paul was perfectly willing to take part in this Jewish ceremony to comfort the Jewish believers. At the same time, he resisted burdening Gentile believers with additional rules when he was teaching them. Paul did not make his ministry about ‘Paul’ and wasn’t very concerned with getting his way or coming out ahead. His only concern was spreading the good news of Jesus.

[TM note: To understand, we must remember that there are two distinct backgrounds in the early church. The Gentile Christians came out of a culture of idol worship and had turned to Christ. The Jewish Christians came out of the traditions and worship practices of the Old Testament. One of these old traditions was the making of a vow of dedication to the Lord. Numbers 6 explains that this vow included not cutting one's hair for a certain length of time. To show the vow was completed, the person would offer a sacrifice and shave off the hair that had grown during the time of separation.]

### Into the Word: Acts 21:1-36

Verses 1–16 describe the final leg of the journey Paul and his companions took on their way to Jerusalem. They enjoyed the fellowship with believers in each community, even finding old friends to stay with.

Match the person or place with the correct description.

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|----------------------|---|
| <u>E</u> 1. Agabus   | A. Paul and companions visited believers here for seven days            |
| <u>D</u> 2. Caesarea | B. an early disciple from Cyprus with whom they were to lodge           |
| <u>A</u> 3. Tyre     | C. an evangelist from Caesarea  |
| <u>F</u> 4. Paul     | D. last stop before Paul arrived at Jerusalem                           |
| <u>C</u> 5. Philip   | E. used Paul's belt to show how he would be bound and given to Gentiles |
| <u>B</u> 6. Mnason   | F. convinced his friends that it was God's will that he go to Jerusalem |

7. Once in Jerusalem, Paul met James and the other elders of the church there. As he had usually experienced on his travels, Paul was *received gladly* (v.17).

Paul told the church leaders in Jerusalem of the great works God had done among the Gentiles in other regions through the sharing of the Gospel. James and the elders of the church shared the concern of the people with Paul that he had not forced the new Gentile Christians to adopt the Jewish customs. Therefore, some Jewish believers assumed that Paul was trying to destroy all of the Jewish customs.

8. To remove that misconception, what did the leaders advise Paul? vv.23–24 *To take part in a Jewish ceremony to demonstrate that he was not hostile to the Jewish traditions, even though he did not force those traditions upon the Gentiles.*

Paul did as they suggested in an effort to encourage harmony among the believers, but things did not end peacefully.

9. Unbelieving Jews from Asia, the same area where Paul had been spreading the message of Jesus, came to the temple in Jerusalem and saw Paul. What did they claim he had done? v.28 *Preached against the Jewish people and the Law and the temple, and said that he had brought Gentiles into the temple. Both claims were false. Paul had not done these things.*

10. On what basis did Paul's accusers think he had brought a Gentile into the Temple? v.29 *They had seen him around the city with an Ephesian Gentile.*

For the last two chapters, we've seen Paul's friends warning him, "Don't go to Jerusalem!" However, Paul believed it was God's will that he go even though it was dangerous. Paul had been in Jerusalem less than a week when he was grabbed by a mob and dragged out of the temple, much like Stephen had been in Acts 7:57–58. The commander of the Roman cohort, the military in charge of Jerusalem, heard about the uproar. The Romans soldiers rushed down into the mob and stopped them from beating Paul. They chained him up and tried to figure out who he was and what he had done.

11. The crowd was in such a frenzy that the Roman commander could not manage to talk to Paul in all the noise so he ordered that Paul be brought up to the Roman barrack for questioning. The fully armed soldiers had to literally carry Paul up the stairs to keep him from being destroyed by the mob (vv.34–36). Read John 19:15. The crowd kept calling out "Away with him!" just as the mob had cried out to the soldiers when Jesus was on trial. (John 19:15)

### New Ideas:

#### Facing Difficult Times

Christians are sometimes led to believe that if we are living in faith and striving to be obedient to Christ, things will go well for us. But this is not the way the lives of Christians are portrayed in the Scriptures.

In Acts, Paul was headed to Jerusalem, yet he knew troubles awaited him there. His friends begged him to not continue. But Paul would not be persuaded (Acts 21:14).

Paul knew that God was directing him to go to Jerusalem at this time. He didn't know whether he might be imprisoned or even die. All that mattered was that the name of the Lord be glorified.

As Christians we recognize the importance of Jesus' words in John 16:33, "In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world." So Paul and generations of Christians after him have followed the call of God even when it cost them significantly, even when it cost them their lives.

Tertullian, an Early Church leader, knew of the faithfulness of God when he wrote in 197 A.D., "The more you mow us down, the more numerous we grow; the blood of Christians is seed." [TM reference for citation = [Apologeticus, Chapter 50](#)] We too can face difficult times because we know Christ has not abandoned us and that His will cannot be thwarted.

### Memory Verse

To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak;  
I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some.  
1 Corinthians 9:22

### Extra Memory Challenge

Hebrews 10:24-25

*and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds,  
not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some,  
but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.*

### Discussion Questions

*Each teacher should encourage, as much as time permits, discussion and inquiry on the part of students. Not every aspect of the following questions is addressed here, and students may have thoughts related to but not mentioned in this guide. The obligation of the teacher, then, is to understand as deeply as possible the Scriptures that are being discussed, in order to answer as well as possible any questions a student might have.*

1. In Acts 21, Paul's visit to Jerusalem was complicated by several misunderstandings. Sometimes we are the source of confusion when we pass along rumors, misinformation, or jump to conclusions. Using Luther's Small Catechism, read the Eighth Commandment and its meaning. What does it mean to "bear false witness"? What does it mean to "put the most charitable construction on all that [our neighbor] does"?

*Meaning to the Eighth Commandment: "We should fear and love God so that we do not deceitfully lie about, betray, backbite, nor slander our neighbor, but defend him, speak well of him, and put the most charitable construction on all that he does." (see also p.56-57 Luther's Catechism and Explanation). Respectful communication is important. It can help clear up misunderstandings, prevent gossip and anger, and build trust. Note in 1 John 1:9 that it is comforting to know that God offers us His forgiveness when we have contributed to rumors or false information.*

2. Throughout this lesson, we see examples of fellowship among the early believers. Can you think of opportunities for fellowship in your life? Can you think of times when fellow believers have helped or encouraged you?

*Personal examples will vary. Even this class is an opportunity for fellowship. Examples of fellowship outside the church building could include faith-based community events, hosting friends at your home, youth conventions or camps, and activities within schools (Fellowship of Christian Athletes, "See You at the Pole," student-led Bible studies, Baccalaureate services). Teachers could also discuss various Christian groups that meet on college campuses.*

### Daily Devotions

Sunday:	Luke 9:1-11
Monday:	Luke 9:57-62
Tuesday:	Matthew 16:13-20
Wednesday:	Matthew 16:21-28
Thursday:	Luke 10:1-7
Friday:	Luke 10:8-16
Saturday:	John 15:18-27

## THE LUTHERAN CHURCH AND ITS CHURCH YEAR

### \* How is the Church Year Organized?

The Church Year begins on the First Sunday in Advent (around December 1), not January 1 like the secular calendar. It revolves around three major festivals devoted to each Person of the Triune God:

1. Christmas (God the Father) – God acts in sending His Son
2. Easter (God the Son) – Jesus is the primary focus in the crucifixion and resurrection
3. Pentecost (God the Holy Spirit) – the Holy Spirit is at work in the daily life of the believer

Some of these holidays (“holy days”) are preceded by times of preparation and followed by times of celebration for what the Lord has done. Advent prepares us for Christmas; Lent prepares us for Easter.

1. Explain how following the Church Year can help you to “remember” what the Lord means to you.

*Following the church year helps us focus on the role each person of the Trinity plays in accomplishing our salvation. The first part of the church year focuses on what God has done for us, and the second part focuses on the life of the believer.*