



## WEEKLY STUDY

### ***Firm Foundation for the Future - Week Five***

This week, take stock of the places and people that God has used to form you and your faith.

Please note our prayer focus for the week in the box below. Join us in seeing what God will do as we unite in prayer.

Peace of Christ,  
Pastor Mark Youngman

If you are studying with your Providence Small Group or Discipleship Group, you can share from your own daily reflections and consider the Group Discussion questions below. If you would like to get connected visit [prov.church/smallgroups](http://prov.church/smallgroups).

Prayer Focus:

- Pray for the ongoing conflict with Iran. Pray for a way forward that leads to peace and freedom for the Iranian people.
- Pray for all of those who live in fear of persecution for their faith.

## DAILY STUDY

### **MONDAY: ACTS 21.1-6 (NIV)**

*After we had torn ourselves away from them, we put out to sea and sailed straight to Kos. The next day we went to Rhodes and from there to Patara. <sup>2</sup>We found a ship crossing over to Phoenicia, went on board and set sail. <sup>3</sup>After sighting Cyprus and passing to the south of it, we sailed on to Syria. We landed at Tyre, where our ship was to unload its cargo. <sup>4</sup>We sought out the disciples there and stayed with them seven days. Through the Spirit they urged Paul not to go on to Jerusalem. <sup>5</sup>When it was time to leave, we left and continued on our way.*

All of them, including wives and children, accompanied us out of the city, and there on the beach we knelt to pray. <sup>6</sup> After saying goodbye to each other, we went aboard the ship, and they returned home.

- It took one week to unload a large ship at port. This gave Paul an opportunity to meet the disciples in Tyre. You would think that Paul had a deep relationship with these folks, but this appears to be their first meeting. The disciples in Tyre really wanted Paul to avoid Jerusalem. It's not quite clear if their Spirit-led urging for Paul to change his plans meant that he was traveling against the will of God. It seems more likely that "through the Spirit" they knew what persecution could be awaiting Paul in Jerusalem. Either way, it can be difficult to discern the next right move, especially when you are surrounded by people who love you. Have you ever found it difficult to leave a group of people who love you?
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- **Prayer Prompt: "You do not want to leave too, do you?" Jesus asked the Twelve. <sup>68</sup> Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. (John 6.67-68)**
- *God, I am grateful for the people in my life who demonstrate your love for me. I thank you for the invitation to stay, and for the guidance that leads me to the places you would have me go. Amen.*

## **TUESDAY: ACTS 21.7-14 (NIV)**

<sup>7</sup> We continued our voyage from Tyre and landed at Ptolemais, where we greeted the brothers and sisters and stayed with them for a day. <sup>8</sup> Leaving the next day, we reached Caesarea and stayed at the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the Seven. <sup>9</sup> He had four unmarried daughters who prophesied.

<sup>10</sup> After we had been there a number of days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. <sup>11</sup> Coming over to us, he took Paul's belt, tied his own hands and feet with it and said, "The Holy Spirit says, 'In this way the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles.'"

<sup>12</sup> When we heard this, we and the people there pleaded with Paul not to go up to Jerusalem. <sup>13</sup> Then Paul answered, "Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." <sup>14</sup> When he would not be dissuaded, we gave up and said, "The Lord's will be done."

- We don't know what Philip's daughters prophesied about but it's notable that these women had the gift. The prophet Agabus gave a dramatic presentation of what awaited Paul in Jerusalem. He would be bound and handed over to the Gentiles. We know that a key motivation for Paul's return to Jerusalem was to bring the offering from the Gentile churches. It was a sign of the unity between Gentile and Jew in this young Christian movement. Has your sense of mission and purpose ever put you in danger? Describe.

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- **Prayer Prompt: I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3.14)**
  - *Lord God, give me the courage to face the future unafraid. For all of the frightening things this world holds, I am more compelled by the prize of eternal life in Jesus. Amen.*

### **WEDNESDAY: ACTS 21.15-20 (NIV)**

*After this, we started on our way up to Jerusalem.<sup>16</sup> Some of the disciples from Caesarea accompanied us and brought us to the home of Mnason, where we were to stay. He was a man from Cyprus and one of the early disciples.*

*<sup>17</sup> When we arrived at Jerusalem, the brothers and sisters received us warmly.<sup>18</sup> The next day Paul and the rest of us went to see James, and all the elders were present.<sup>19</sup> Paul greeted them and reported in detail what God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry.*

*<sup>20</sup> When they heard this, they praised God.*

- It was clear to many (especially to Paul) that their arrival in Jerusalem was tense. But the initial greeting was overwhelmingly positive. The inclusion of Gentiles into the story of salvation was intriguing but controversial (as we will see), so Paul shared details of what God had been doing through his travels. He began the encounter by invoking praise. It's always better for believers to have a starting place of worship. Have you found testimony which leads to worship to be a helpful way of entering into difficult conversations? How is God praised during tough times?
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- **Prayer Prompt: I will extol the LORD at all times; his praise will always be on my lips. (Psalm 34.1)**
- *God, I will praise you at all times. May praise always be on my lips. Set the stage of my heart to be fixed on you no matter what I am walking through. Amen.*

### **THURSDAY: ACTS 21.20-26 (NIV)**

*Then they said to Paul: "You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews have believed, and all of them are zealous for the law."<sup>21</sup> They have been informed that you teach all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to turn*

away from Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or live according to our customs.<sup>22</sup> What shall we do? They will certainly hear that you have come,<sup>23</sup> so do what we tell you. There are four men with us who have made a vow.<sup>24</sup> Take these men, join in their purification rites and pay their expenses, so that they can have their heads shaved. Then everyone will know there is no truth in these reports about you, but that you yourself are living in obedience to the law.<sup>25</sup> As for the Gentile believers, we have written to them our decision that they should abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality.”

<sup>26</sup> The next day Paul took the men and purified himself along with them. Then he went to the temple to give notice of the date when the days of purification would end and the offering would be made for each of them.

- You can see how quickly they turned from praise to prosecution. There had been a false rumor that Paul was teaching the Jewish followers of Jesus to abandon the practice of circumcision. In fact, he had only taught this to the Gentile believers who were not under the Mosaic law. Paul was given an opportunity (or a test?) to set the record straight by supporting the obedience to the law by four men. Paul went along with it, not because he believed the sacrifices were necessary, but because he was focused on the higher calling of the Gospel that was meant for Jews and non-Jews alike. Are there times when you find yourself going along with an unnecessary ritual (religious or cultural) in order to achieve a higher purpose?
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- **Prayer Prompt: I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. (Philippians 3.8)**
- *God who is over everything, guide me through this world of mixed motives and distractions. I am willing to lose it all for the sake of your Kingdom. Amen.*

## **FRIDAY: ACTS 21.33-36 (NIV)**

The commander came up and arrested him and ordered him to be bound with two chains. Then he asked who he was and what he had done.<sup>34</sup> Some in the crowd shouted one thing and some another, and since the commander could not get at the truth because of the uproar, he ordered that Paul be taken into the barracks.<sup>35</sup> When Paul reached the steps, the violence of the mob was so great he had to be carried by the soldiers.<sup>36</sup> The crowd that followed kept shouting, “Get rid of him!”

- Read the full account of Paul’s arrest (Acts 21.27-36). A whole city was in an uproar over Paul’s message. This wasn’t the first time that Paul caused an entire city to be up in arms. He was accustomed to it! The same accusation about his dilution of the law was at the center of his arrest. We can see how quickly the mob-mentality took over and violence was beginning to reign over the situation. The prophecy had come true. Note how Luke states that the commander could not get at the truth because of the uproar. Do you find that to be true in our world today? It can be hard to see what is true because there is so much vitriol and chaos. Where do you go to find the truth in the midst of the uproar?

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- **Prayer Prompt: Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him and he will do this:**

**<sup>6</sup> He will make your righteous reward shine like the dawn, your vindication like the noonday sun. (Psalm 37.5-6)**

- *God, I long to clearly see your truth. I know that you are working all things for the good of those who love you. Help me to see through the chaos and to remain fixed upon you. Amen.*

### **SATURDAY: ACTS 21.37-22.1 (NIV)**

*As the soldiers were about to take Paul into the barracks, he asked the commander, “May I say something to you?”*

*“Do you speak Greek?” he replied. <sup>38</sup> “Aren’t you the Egyptian who started a revolt and led four thousand terrorists out into the wilderness some time ago?”*

*<sup>39</sup> Paul answered, “I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no ordinary city. Please let me speak to the people.”*

*<sup>40</sup> After receiving the commander’s permission, Paul stood on the steps and motioned to the crowd. When they were all silent, he said to them in Aramaic: “Brothers and fathers, listen now to my defense.”*

- Notice the role of language here. The commander had mis-identified Paul as an Egyptian who did not speak Greek (another man who had caused an uproar among the Israelites). Paul cleared up the fact that he was a Jew. Then he began to address the people in their native tongue. Sometimes it can feel like we are speaking a different language than our audience. We may have to pause and intentionally speak in a way that will earn attention. Are you willing to adjust the way you talk if it means those around you might hear the good news?
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- **Prayer Prompt: in the church I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue. (1 Corinthians 14.19)**
- *God, Give me the words to proclaim your great works among the people. Amen.*

## GROUP DISCUSSION

The latter chapters of the book of Acts lay out the travels of Paul and apostles. We have mentioned that it can read like a travelog. At times it can be hard to trace exactly where Paul went and who he encountered. Consider how your own life could read like a travelog. Even if you haven't strayed far in your life, you have probably changed scenery on many occasions. Take a few moments to map out significant stops along your journey. Then note key people in each of those places. How has God worked through each of those places and people?

Places I have been

People I have encountered there