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### Similarities

- The beginning of chapter 1 covers the end of Paul's final missionary journey as Paul travels towards Jerusalem. Commentators have often pointed out similarities between Jesus' final journey to Jerusalem and Paul's final journey. For example, Ben Witherington outlines 4 main parallels[1]:

- ◆ The Final journey in each case involves or is precipitated by a Jewish plot.
- ◆ There is a handing over to or a falling into the hands of the Gentiles in Jerusalem.
- ◆ There is a triple prediction of coming suffering (cf. Luke 9:22,44; 18:31–34 to Acts 20:22,24; 21:4; 21:10–11).
- ◆ There is in the end a resignation to God's will in both cases:

(41) And he was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast, and kneeled down, and prayed, (42) Saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done. --Luke 22:41–42.

and,

And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done. --Acts 21:14

- *Does this help explain why the book ends with the final days of Paul?*
- *What do you make of these similarities? Are these similarities incidental or is Luke trying to emphasize these similarities?*
- *Suppose Luke is emphasizing the similarities on purpose. Why would he do that? What are we, as the reader, suppose to learn from these similarities?*
- *Do the similarities or parallels emphasize or reinforce the idea that Paul's trip to Jerusalem is part of the divine plan? Does it confirm that this is no ordinary journey? Why would this be an important part of Luke's message? Does it help explain why Luke writes both Luke and Acts?*

- *Is there a danger in concentrating too much on these parallels? Are there differences? Are the difference important as well?*

## II. Journey to Jerusalem

### A. *Don't Go*

- Read Acts 21:1–6:

(1) And it came to pass, that after we were gotten from them, and had launched, we came with a straight course unto Coos, and the day following unto Rhodes, and from thence unto Patara: (2) And finding a ship sailing over unto Phenicia, we went aboard, and set forth. (3) Now when we had discovered Cyprus, we left it on the left hand, and sailed into Syria, and landed at Tyre: for there the ship was to unlade her burden. (4) And finding disciples, we tarried there seven days: who said to Paul through the Spirit, that he should not go up to Jerusalem. (5) And when we had accomplished those days, we departed and went our way; and they all brought us on our way, with wives and children, till we were out of the city: and we kneeled down on the shore, and prayed. (6) And when we had taken our leave one of another, we took ship; and they returned home again.

- My guess is that there is a tendency to skip over these verse because they seem like a travelogue. *On the other hand, why would Luke include these description of Paul's travel? Why do we need to know about these travels and what do we learn about Paul?*
- *Is it an important detail that there are Christian congregations that welcome Paul as he journeyed toward Jerusalem?*
- *What part of these verses is the most important? Do you find these verses full of emotion despite their travelogue nature?*
- Are you surprised by verse 4? The locals tell Paul, *through the Spirit*, that he shouldn't go to Jerusalem. Paul goes to Jerusalem. *Shouldn't Paul following the warnings of the Spirit? Does this contradict verses like Acts 19:21?*

(21) After these things were ended, Paul purposed in the spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, After I have been there, I must also see Rome.

- *How are verses 4 and 5 related to each other. Is verse 5 more impactful or meaningful given verse 4?*

### B. *Prophecy*

- Read Acts 21:7–14:

(7) And when we had finished our course from Tyre, we came to Ptolemais, and saluted the brethren, and abode with them one day. (8) And the next day we that were of Paul's company departed, and came unto Caesarea: and we entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven; and abode with him. (9) And the same man had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy. (10) And as we tarried there many days, there came down from Judaea a certain prophet, named Agabus. (11) And when he was come unto us, he took Paul's girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles. (12) And when we heard these things, both we, and they of that place, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem. (13) Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. (14) And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done.

- We are reintroduced to Philip in this verse. We last saw Philip in chapter 8 where he baptized an Ethiopian eunuch. *Why would Luke include this detail? Do you think Luke wants the reader to look back?*
- *What themes are continued in these verses?*
- *What do you make of the prophecies? Is it important that the daughters prophesied? Is it important that a "prophet" comes and also prophecies?*
- *Are you surprised that Agabus is called a prophet and not connected with the Church leadership (at least no such connection is mentioned)?*
- What did Agabus do in verse 11? Does that remind you of the actions of some OT prophets?[2] For example,

(1) Thus saith the LORD, Go and get a potter's earthen bottle, and take of the ancients of the people, and of the ancients of the priests; (2) And go forth unto the valley of the son of Hinnom, which is by the entry of the east gate, and proclaim there the words that I shall tell thee, (3) And say, Hear ye the word of the LORD, O kings of Judah, and inhabitants of Jerusalem; Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, the which whosoever heareth, his ears shall tingle. (4) Because they have forsaken me, and have estranged this place, and have burned incense in it unto other gods, whom neither they nor their fathers have known, nor the kings of Judah, and have filled this place with the blood of innocents; –Jeremiah 19:1–4

and

(10) Then shalt thou break the bottle in the sight of the men that go with thee, (11) And shalt say unto them, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Even so will I break this people and this city, as one breaketh a potter's vessel, that cannot be made whole again: and they shall bury them in Tophet, till there be no place to bury. (12) Thus will I do unto this place, saith the LORD, and to the inhabitants thereof, and even make this city as Tophet: (13) And the houses of Jerusalem, and the houses of the kings of Judah, shall be defiled as the place of Tophet, because of all the houses upon whose roofs they have burned incense unto all the host of heaven, and have poured out drink offerings unto other gods.

- *Do you think this is an important connection? Do you think that Luke wants us to make this connection? Why?*
- *Does the prophecy actually come true? Is Paul bound by the Jews in Jerusalem and handed over to the Gentiles?*
- *Do you think this scene helps us understand verse 4 better? Do you think the underlying events of verse 4 could be a lot like the events of this situation?*
- *What do we learn about Paul?*
- *How do Paul's companions react to the prophecy? Is this an important detail? Is the reaction of his companions and the locals meant to contrast with Paul's reaction in verse 13?*

### **III. Paul Meets James**

- Read Acts 21:17–22:

(17) And when we were come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. (18) And the day following Paul went in with us unto James; and all the elders were present. (19) And when he had saluted them, he declared particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry. (20) And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord, and said unto him, Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law: (21) And they are informed of thee, that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs. (22) What is it therefore? the multitude must needs come together: for they will hear that thou art come.

- Are you surprised that none of the twelve (such as Peter) are mentioned? Is that an important omission?

- *What is going on here? What controversy is brewing?*
- *Wasn't the gentile controversy settled earlier in Acts (see chapter 15)? How is the complaint in this situation different? Do you think the concerns are legitimate? Can you think of any situations in the modern church that are similar?*
- *Is it fair to say that the question of whether Jewish Christians are saved by law has been answered but now the question is whether Jewish Christians should go on keeping the law?[3]*
- Read Acts 21:23:26:

(23) Do therefore this that we say to thee: We have four men which have a vow on them; (24) Them take, and purify thyself with them, and be at charges with them, that they may shave their heads: and all may know that those things, whereof they were informed concerning thee, are nothing; but that thou thyself also walkest orderly, and keepest the law. (25) As touching the Gentiles which believe, we have written and concluded that they observe no such thing, save only that they keep themselves from things offered to idols, and from blood, and from strangled, and from fornication. (26) Then Paul took the men, and the next day purifying himself with them entered into the temple, to signify the accomplishment of the days of purification, until that an offering should be offered for every one of them.

- *What is the proposed solution? Are you surprised that Paul agrees to the proposal?*
- *Do these verse give us insight into the role that culture plays in religious practices?*

## **Endnotes**

1. Witherington, Ben, 1998, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Social Rhetorical Commentary*, Eerdmans, 628.
2. Witherington, Ben, 1998, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Social Rhetorical Commentary*, Eerdmans, 634.
3. Barton, John, and John Muddiman (Editors), 2001, *Oxford Bible Commentary*, Oxford University Press, 1054.