

Acts 21-22 Bible Study

1. Do you ever hear people talk about wanting to know God's will? In what contexts?

I suspect we usually hear it in terms of major decisions in our lives (buy house / car etc, move job, ministry opportunities). But just let people say what comes to mind.

2. Read Acts 21:1-14. Since 20:22 Paul has stated his intention to go to Jerusalem. What makes it difficult for him to go? Why?

Christians along the way who want him to avoid Jerusalem. They understand that he will face opposition and persecution there.

3. How is it that Christians can be 'prompted' by the same Spirit but have such different conclusions? What can we learn from this?

Although the Spirit works in us, by ourselves we can make mistakes in how we interpret the Spirit's work in us. We need something more objective to help – for this we need God's clear revelation, and this is given to us in the Bible, the written record of his prophets and apostles. The disciples agree that Paul's conviction / interpretation is God's will (v14), so with us, every prompting from God must be tested by the light of Scripture – if the Bible clearly is against our interpretation – we must change. eg see 1 John 4:1-6 NB "we" = apostles.

4. Read Acts 21:15-26. Why do the leaders of the church in Jerusalem want Paul to do this very "Jewish" thing? Isn't this going back to the Law (eg Num 6:2, 5, 18)?

See 1 Cor 9:19-20, 10:32-33. This ceremony was not a salvation issue – it was a part of the culture that these Jewish Christians had grown up with. Paul would not cause offence to those of different consciences to him over issues like this, so 'to the weak he became weak' etc. If it was to offer sacrifices of atonement (salvation issue) Paul would have surely refused.

5. Read Acts 21:27-36. What is the irony of the accusations against Paul? What does it remind us of opposition to the gospel?

Paul was going to great lengths to respect the customs and 'purity' of the temple. But opposition to the gospel (and it's servants) is not a rational thing, it is moral, from hearts that are set against God. So we ought not be surprised when people's arguments against what we believe don't make clear rational sense.

6. Read Acts 21:37-22:22. What is the point at which the Jews stop listening. What is surprising about what they listened to up to this point? Do you think Paul could have avoided their angry reaction and left peacefully?

The Jews refuse to hear that the people of God now includes Gentiles (without their needing to become Jews). This is the issue that caused Stephen to be martyred. It's perhaps remarkable that they listened to Paul refer to Jesus as alive and as "Lord" (which they would have understood as meaning God). If Paul had said nothing about Gentiles, maybe he would have been allowed to leave – but Paul's (and our) job is to present the whole truth about Jesus (cf 20:27) and not only the parts that we think will be accepted.

7. Read Acts 22:23-29. Why does Paul stand on his rights as a Roman citizen and avoid a flogging, when at other times he accepts mistreatment?

The flogging here was a straightforward injustice with no relation to the gospel – to serve the Lord does not mean to accept every hardship possible! But when hardship is directly for the sake of Jesus (21:13), our suffering and endurance points to him.

8. Paul went to Jerusalem not knowing the specifics of what would happen to him there (20:22). But he went knowing that he had work to do (22:15) and that work needed doing in Jerusalem (and to the ends of the earth, see also Acts 1:8). We might not know the specifics of what God wants for us (eg decisions about home, work, children's education, etc). Does that mean that we can't know God's will for us? Read Rom 12:2. Perhaps read Rom 12:9-21 as a list of examples. Do any of these speak particularly to you in your current situation? Pray about it.

God's will for us is to know him and glorify him forever. In this life that will mean loving service of others and personal godliness. You might encourage people to read and meditate on Eph 4-6 at home for more specific examples.