

CHAINED MESSENGER

unchained Message

ACTS 21-28



STUDY 1

ACTS 21

GUIDANCE and the VOICE of GOD

If only we could know what the future holds! The reason horoscopes, palmistry and tarot cards are so popular is simply that people long to know what's around the corner. Many Christians have this same fascination, looking for words of "prophecy" or "feelings from the Holy Spirit" to guide them in decision making.

ICE-BREAKER

Think about it for a minute... what would life be like if horoscopes really worked? Or reading tea-leaves? Tell your group the five things you'd ask if you met someone who really could foretell the future...

What benefit do you think it would be to have a "word of prophecy" telling you what was going to happen in advance?

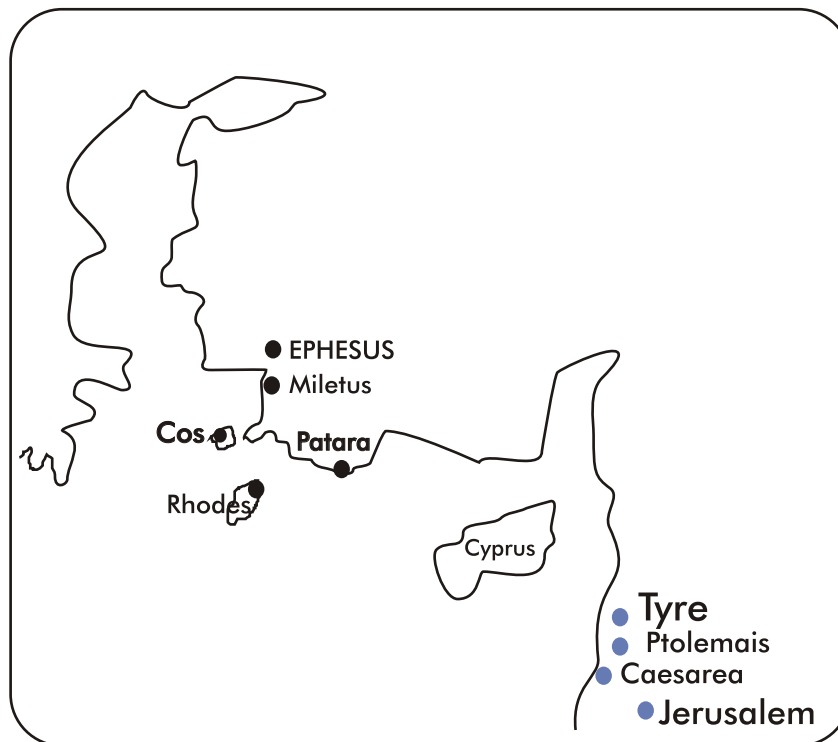
Back to Jerusalem

When we left Paul and his friends, they were saying goodbye to the elders of the church of Ephesus. Paul tells them of his travel plans, reminds them of the gospel he had preached to them, and calls on them to be on guard against false teachers.

1. According to Acts 20:22-23, where is Paul planning to go next, and what does the Holy Spirit tell him that the future holds?

If the Holy Spirit warned YOU of danger ahead, how would you react?
What two options are there when you receive a warning?

2. Read Acts 21 v 1-3, and chart Paul's sea-journey on the map.



Paul and his friends land at Tyre, and stay with the Christians there for seven days. Then they visit Ptolemais, and finally Caesarea. Read Acts 21 v 4-14, and follow this part of the journey on the map too.

PAUL AND GOD'S GUIDANCE

3. Paul had no shortage of advice on what the future held! It seems that where-ever he goes, there are messages waiting for him! Make a note of the things he is told:

21v4

21v10-11

4. When they hear these repeated prophecies, what advice do Paul's friends and fellow travellers give him? (v12)

5. How does Paul respond to the begging of his friends? (v13)

This is a fascinating situation! The Holy Spirit keeps telling Paul that hardship, bondage and affliction are waiting for him in Jerusalem - and his friends keep begging him not to go there! After all, if you know that hardship lies ahead, surely you'll avoid it? Here's a man with a very clear picture of the future, and what we'd call very clear guidance from the Holy Spirit. And yet something BIGGER than a direct word of prophecy is driving him onwards.

6. What do you think is motivating Paul to keep on moving towards Jerusalem? (Look back at 20:22-24, and at 21:13.)

Paul is guided by a PRINCIPLE that over-rides everything else. Even knowing what the future holds doesn't sway him from DOING WHAT HE KNOWS TO BE RIGHT. His commissioning to PREACH THE GOSPEL OF GRACE drives him on - no matter what the consequences.

What forms of "guidance" (or "discerning the Lord's will") do Christians tend to use in making life-decisions?

Which of these - if any - do you use in your own life?

How often do you allow principles from God's word to over-rule "feelings"?
Should you do this? Why or why not?

For most of us, receiving a direct word of prophecy saying "If you go there you'll be hurt" would be more than enough to turn us around! But to take that approach may well mean NOT doing God's will! Christians often look for a "feeling of peace" as a way of knowing which path to take in a difficult decision - but Paul certainly has no "feeling of peace". (Look back at 20:22!)

7. What conclusion do Paul's friends come to in 21:14?

Amazing as it might seem, Paul is actually doing God's will by GOING AGAINST his feelings of fear and unease, by GOING AGAINST the direct, Spirit-inspired predictions of danger, by GOING AGAINST the advice of his Christian friends - and simply PRESSING ON in the ministry he received from Jesus. DEATH AND DANGER are no obstacle.

Write out Paul's words in 21:13:

Can you say the same?

ANOTHER JOURNEY TO JERUSALEM

As Luke (the writer of Acts) is recording these things, there's no doubt he's thinking back to his earlier book - Luke's Gospel - where he told the story of someone else who set out for Jerusalem, refusing to turn back, although He knew exactly what lay ahead. **Turn back to Luke 9, and read verse 21 to 26.**

What does Jesus see as HIS FUTURE?

What does he see as the FUTURE for those who follow him?

In what ways is Paul putting the words of Jesus into practice?

In what ways can you use these words of Jesus in guiding your own decision making?

