

The Will of the Lord be Done (Acts 21:1-14)^a

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1. Context

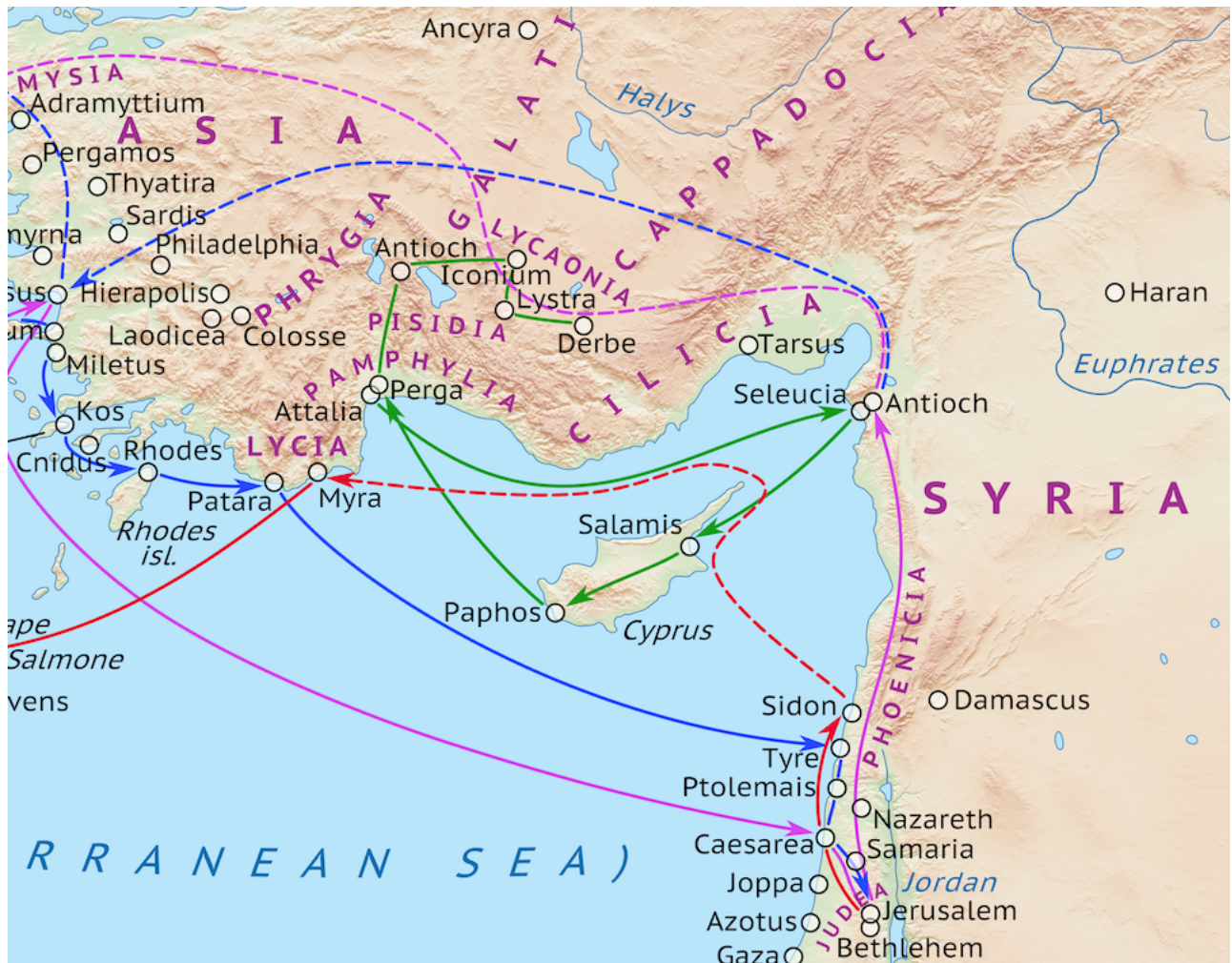
- A. Paul on his third missionary journey
- B. Retracing his route from the second missionary journey
- C. Focus is not evangelism, but *discipleship*: strengthening the newly-established churches from the second missionary journey
- D. Heading back toward Jerusalem by ship
- E. Last time, stopped in Miletus on the coast, warned the Ephesian elders whom he would not see again

2. Passage (Acts 21:1-14)¹

¹ Now it came to pass, that when we had departed from them and set sail, running a straight course we came to Cos, the following [day] to Rhodes, and from there to Patara. ² And finding a ship sailing over to Phoenicia, we went aboard and set sail. ³ When we had sighted Cyprus, we passed it on the left, sailed to Syria, and landed at Tyre; for there the ship was to unload her cargo. ⁴ And finding disciples, we stayed there seven days. They told Paul through the Spirit not to go up to Jerusalem. ⁵ When we had come to the end of those days, we departed and went on our way; and they all accompanied us, with wives and children, till [we were] out of the city. And we knelt down on the shore and prayed. ⁶ When we had taken our leave of one another, we boarded the ship, and they returned home. ⁷ And when we had finished [our] voyage from Tyre, we came to Ptolemais, greeted the brethren, and stayed with them one day. ⁸ On the next [day] we who were Paul's companions departed and came to Caesarea, and entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was [one] of the seven, and stayed with him. ⁹ Now this man had four virgin daughters who prophesied. ¹⁰ And as we stayed many days, a certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. ¹¹ When he had come to us, he took Paul's belt, bound his [own] hands and feet, and said, "Thus says the Holy Spirit, 'So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this belt, and deliver [him] into the hands of the Gentiles.'" ¹² Now when we heard these things, both we and those from that place pleaded with him not to go up to Jerusalem. ¹³ Then Paul answered, "What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die

at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.”¹⁴ So when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, “The will of the Lord be done.” (Acts 21:1-14)

3. Map showing end of Paul’s third missionary Journey^c (blue arrows)²



d

- A. Continued from Miletus, to Cos, Rhodes (southeastern part of Asia), and Patara (in Lycia) — all in what we know today as southern Turkey
- B. Then, crossing the northeastern Mediterranean Sea, passing the island of Cyprus and landing in Tyre in Phoenicia.
- C. Working southward down the coast to Ptolemais and on to Caesarea Maritima
- D. At several stops: the Holy Spirit warns Paul of what lies ahead

4. Passage touches on several issues I would like to highlight:

- A. Q1 - Is NT prophecy different, in regard to accuracy, than OT prophecy?
 - I. Q1B - Are there NT prophets among us today?
- B. Q2 - Did Paul disobey the Holy Spirit?

5. *Philip the evangelist . . . one of the seven* (Acts 21:9)

- A. One of seven deacons appointed to oversee the daily distribution to widows in the early church (Acts 6:5)
- B. An evangelist
 - I. Brought the gospel to Samaria, performing miracles and baptizing (Acts 8:5-13)
 - II. Explained the gospel to the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26-39)
 - III. Preached in the region between Azotus northward to Caesarea Maritima, west of Samaria (Acts 8:40)
- C. Philip had . . . *four virgin daughters who prophesied*. (Acts 21:9)

6. New Testament prophets and prophetesses

- A. Prophesying by women in the NT
 - I. Philip's daughters, here
 - II. Anna, the aged widow who served God with fastings and prayers in the Temple (Luke 2:36)
 - III. Paul gives instructions to women who pray *or prophesy* (1Cor. 11:5)
 - IV. Jezebel, the false prophetess in the church in Thyatira (Rev. 2:20)
- B. Male prophets in the NT
 - I. Prophets that came from Jerusalem to Antioch—including Agabus (Acts 11:27-28)
 - a. Notice that Scripture declares Agabus' earlier prophecy to be accurate

. . . Agabus, stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar. (Acts 11:27)
 - II. At Antioch, we met with with Judas and Silas who are said to be prophets (Acts 15:32)
 - III. The Church is said to be built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets (Eph. 2:20)
 - a. The word order suggests that NT prophets are in view
 - b. Ephesians 3 confirms that these are NT prophets

⁴ *by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), ⁵ which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets* (Eph. 3:4-5)

c. Note: apostles and prophets are associated with the foundation of the Church

d. When did the Church begin: on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2)

i. See presentation 6: [The Birth of the Church \(Acts 2:1-4\)^e](#)

e. How often is a foundation laid?

IV. When Jesus ascended, He gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers (Eph. 4:11)

C. The gift of prophecy (Rom. 12:6; 1Cor. 12:10,28; 13; 14)

7. Q1 - Is NT prophecy different, in regard to accuracy, than OT prophecy?

A. Was Agabus' prediction concerning Paul accurate?

B. Not according to Wayne Grudem

Agabus prophesied that the Jews at Jerusalem would bind Paul and “deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles,” a prediction that was nearly correct but not quite: the Romans, not the Jews, bound Paul (v. 33; also 22:29), and the Jews, rather than delivering him voluntarily, tried to kill him and he had to be rescued by force (21:32). The prediction was not far off, but it had inaccuracies in detail that would have called into question the validity of any Old Testament prophet. On the other hand, this text could be perfectly well explained by supposing that Agabus had had a vision of Paul as a prisoner of the Romans in Jerusalem, surrounded by an angry mob of Jews. His own interpretation of such a “vision” or “revelation” from the Holy Spirit would be that the Jews had bound Paul and handed him over to the Romans, and that is what Agabus would (somewhat erroneously) prophesy. This is exactly the kind of fallible prophecy that would fit the definition of New Testament congregational prophecy proposed above—reporting in one’s own words something that God has spontaneously brought to mind.³

I. “A prediction that was nearly correct, but not quite”

II. “Not far off, but had inaccuracies”

III. Agabus was in error, it was “his own interpretation”

IV. “fallible prophecy”

C. Grudem’s view:

- I. Grudem is arguing for *errant* “congregational prophecy”, but notice that this is even worse: the text declares Agabus *to be* a prophet, not just exercising the NT gift.
- II. Grudem here declares that we should accept as New Testament prophecy truth by the Spirit subsequently marred by human error. His view of the work of the Spirit in prophecy is akin to those with a low view of Scripture who maintain in must be errant because it came through fallen humans.
- III. Reporting, in one’s own (mistaken) words something “that God has spontaneously brought to mind.”
- IV. So how can it be determined where truth ends and error begins? If prophet A can’t declare accurately, who else has the ability to determine what part is true and what part error? Prophet B who has the same admixture problem?

- a. Proponents of faulty “NT prophecy” would have us think this is what Paul meant in his instructions to the Church at Corinth

Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge. (1Cor. 14:29)

- b. Is this saying that prophetic truth must be dissected from “prophetic error” by a majority vote? An errant prophet gives his “best guess,” a kind of “sanctified hunch,” and then other errant prophets figure out where he went right and where he went wrong? What if prophet B and C disagree? How can it be known whether they are similarly in error? What if they disagree about which parts are true and which parts are erroneous?
- c. Or is this about judging the overall NT gift—whether its source was of the Spirit or not? A go/no-go evaluation rather than teaching that NT prophecy is going to be an admixture of truth and error? Similar to evaluating OT prophecy—is what this guy said true or erroneous?
- d. Does the Spirit of Truth give truth in such a way that it can be obscured by passing through an errant channel?
 - i. Jesus said, . . . *when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth . . .* (John 16:13)
 - ii. How well did the Spirit of Truth communicate through inscripturated (written) revelation? 100% accuracy.
 - iii. It is inconsistent to accept errant prophecy by the Spirit while upholding Scriptural inerrancy by the same Spirit — both delivered through the same faulty human vessels?

D. Is this the best explanation? New-testament prophecy is “different,” than in the Old Testament, even “errant”?

- I. Agabus took Paul’s belt, bound his own hands and feet, and said, “Thus says the Holy Spirit, ‘so shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind . . .’”

- a. Does Paul have to be bound *with a belt*? Both *hands and feet*? With Paul's *own belt*?
- b. That's how Agabus enacted the event—if any of these details differ in any way, should we then conclude Agabus to be in error?

II. Is there another, better way of understanding what the Spirit has predicted?

- a. The Spirit is simply indicating that Paul will be captured/restrained *because* of the Jews and wind up delivered into control of the Romans.
 - i. This is akin to saying a king captured a city when it was under his *authority* by his *command* and his *troops*, but the king himself was not necessarily directly involved.
 - ii. *And as they [the Romans] bound him with thongs, Paul said to the centurion who stood by, "Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman, and uncondemned?"* (Acts 22:25)
 - Why was he bound by the Romans, to find out why . . . *they [the Jews] shouted so against him.* (Acts 22:24)
 - iii. *But after two years Porcius Festus succeeded Felix; and Felix, wanting to do the Jews [from Jerusalem] a favor, left Paul bound.* (Acts 24:27)
 - iv. Notice how Paul later describes what happened, *For these reasons the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me.* (Acts 26:21)

E. Gary Gilley, in a review of the book, "The Fallible Prophets of New Calvinism"

There are three convincing arguments against Grudem's views that Agabus gave a partially false prophecy to Paul. (1) Contrary to Grudem, the Apostle Paul was in fact delivered to his captors despite the will of the Jewish mob. (2) Contrary to Grudem, the Apostle Paul was delivered to his captors by legal compulsion. (3) Apparently unknown to Grudem, the Apostle Paul was willingly delivered by the Jews in spite of Roman jurisprudence (p. 92). [Gary E. Gilley, *Review of: 'The Fallible Prophets of New Calvinism' by Michael John Beasley*]⁴

F. What is the motivation behind Grudem's view?

- I. Trying to gain acceptance for the inability of today's self-proclaimed "prophets," or those who claim to have the "gift of prophecy" to make accurate predictions.
- II. Undercutting the requirement that prophecy, which finds its source in the Holy Spirit, "the Spirit of Truth" (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13), necessarily be 100% accurate.
- III. The motivation is essentially the same as the modern-tongues movement when claiming that tongues are not known languages: the inability to produce the same phenomenon today as the early Church in Acts

G. Q1B - Are there prophets among us today?

- I. Objectively—aside from whatever the Scriptures reveal—we would have to answer a resounding, “NO!”
- II. [My Pentecostal background.]
- III. More important than our experience, we have the scriptural indication that the partial revelatory gifts of prophecy, tongues, and knowledge will cease (1Cor. 13)
- IV. It is my belief, when studied carefully, Paul indicates this would take place when the partial is replaced by the complete: at the close of God’s written revelation—the Scriptures as we have them today
 - a. For additional background
 - i. [Ecclesiology^f](#) by Andy Woods, sessions 23 through 35.
 - ii. [Book of 1st Corinthians^g](#), chapter 13, by Steve Lewis
 - iii. Article: [The Meaning of “The Perfect” in 1 Corinthians 13:8-13^h](#) by Andy Woods
 - iv. Article: [Fallible New Testament Prophecy/Prophets? A Critique of Wayne Grudem’s Hypothesisⁱ](#) by David Farnell.

8. Q2 - Did Paul “disobey” the Holy Spirit?

A. What, exactly, did the Holy Spirit say?

- I. Disciples in Tyre, *They told Paul through the Spirit not to go up to Jerusalem.* (Acts 21:4)
 - a. Notice they do not say, “thus says the LORD!”
 - b. As we’ll see shortly, the phrase *through the Spirit* ([διὰ τοῦ πνεύματος](#) [*dia tou pneumatos*]) would seem to indicate that the Holy Spirit revealed to them what would happen to Paul in Jerusalem
 - c. As friends, they naturally sought to dissuade him out of concern for his safety
- II. Via Agabus, *Thus says the Holy Spirit, ‘So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this belt, and deliver [him] into the hands of the Gentiles.’* (Acts 21:11)

B. What did Paul’s companions say after hearing Agabus?

Now when we heard these things, both we and those from that place pleaded with him not to go up to Jerusalem. (Acts 21:12)

- I. The predictions of what awaited Paul were assumed to be warnings from God to avoid the situation, but were they?

- II. Paul's willingness to proceed to Jerusalem, "come what may," set up his "fourth Missionary Journey", under arrest, to Rome.

... "What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." (Acts 21:13)

- a. Paul understood that their desire to protect him was not necessarily in accord with the will of God.

- C. Similar to Peter's attempt to dissuade Jesus from the cross (Mat. 16:21-23)

²¹ From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day. ²² Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!" ²³ But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men." (Mat. 16:21-23)

- D. What had Paul said to the Ephesian elders?

²² "And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, ²³ "except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me. ²⁴ "But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God." (Acts 20:22-24)

- I. How could Paul be "bound in the spirit" unless He understood that it was God's will to walk through whatever would happen in returning to Jerusalem
- II. Capitalization is not in the Greek—those who think Paul is walking in disobedience to the intent of the Holy Spirit interpret "spirit" in Acts 20:22 as Paul's spirit, not the Holy Spirit

- E. The key verse in this passage

So when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, "The will of the Lord be done." (Acts 21:14)

- F. Jesus spoke to Paul after the Romans took him by force after his return to Jerusalem

But the following night the Lord stood by him and said, "Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome." (Acts 23:11)

- I. The uproar by the Jews leading to Paul's subsequent restraint and imprisonment by Rome was how Jesus intended to send Paul on the "fourth Missionary Journey" to Rome

II. Paul's role was to be like that of earlier men sent by God - to deliver an unwelcome message that would not be accepted

a. Ezekiel's commissioning (Ezekiel 2)

¹ *And He said to me, "Son of man, stand on your feet, and I will speak to you."* ² *Then the Spirit entered me when He spoke to me, and set me on my feet; and I heard Him who spoke to me.* ³ *And He said to me: "Son of man, I am sending you to the children of Israel, to a rebellious nation that has rebelled against Me; they and their fathers have transgressed against Me to this very day.* ⁴ *"For [they are] impudent and stubborn children. I am sending you to them, and you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD.'* ⁵ *"As for them, whether they hear or whether they refuse-for they [are] a rebellious house-yet they will know that a prophet has been among them.* ⁶ *"And you, son of man, do not be afraid of them nor be afraid of their words, though briars and thorns [are] with you and you dwell among scorpions; do not be afraid of their words or dismayed by their looks, though they [are] a rebellious house.* ⁷ *"You shall speak My words to them, whether they hear or whether they refuse, for they [are] rebellious. (Ezekiel. 2:1-7)*

b. Isaiah's commissioning (Isaiah 6)

⁸ *Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: "Whom shall I send, And who will go for Us?" Then I said, "Here [am] I! Send me."* ⁹ *And He said, "Go, and tell this people: 'Keep on hearing, but do not understand; Keep on seeing, but do not perceive.'* ¹⁰ *"Make the heart of this people dull, And their ears heavy, And shut their eyes; Lest they see with their eyes, And hear with their ears, And understand with their heart, And return and be healed."* ¹¹ *Then I said, "Lord, how long?" And He answered: "Until the cities are laid waste and without inhabitant, The houses are without a man, The land is utterly desolate (Isaiah 6:8-11)*

III. Paul's witness to parts of the Gentile world, such as Rome, *depended upon* his rejection by the majority of Jews in Jerusalem.

a. His "Fourth Missionary Journey" was underwritten by persecution

b. As the Lord had revealed to Ananias—who was sent to minister to Paul in Damascus

¹⁵ *"... he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel.* ¹⁶ *"For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake." (Acts 9:15-16)*

9. Closing Prayer

Sun May 17 18:26:13 2020



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Endnotes:

1. Unless indicated otherwise, all Scripture references are from the *New King James Version*, copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.
2. Map courtesy of <http://churchmaps.info>, in the public domain.
3. [Ref-1526](#), 1052
4. [Ref-0785](#), Vol. 17 No. 52 (Winter 2013), 272-275, p. 274

Sources:

- Ref-0785** *Journal of Dispensational Theology*, Fort Worth, TX: Tyndale Theological Seminary. [www.tyndale.edu].
- Ref-1526** Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2004).

Links Mentioned Above

- a - See http://www.spiritandtruth.org/teaching/Acts_by_Tony_Garland/73_Acts_21_1-14/index.htm.
- b - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org/id/tg.htm>.
- c - See [./paul_missionary_journeys_end_of_third_modified-from-20200513194415.png](#).
- d - See [./paul_missionary_journeys_end_of_third_modified-from-20200513194415.png](#).
- e - See http://www.spiritandtruth.org/teaching/Acts_by_Tony_Garland/06_Acts_2_1-4/index.htm.
- f - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org/teaching/57.htm>.
- g - See http://www.spiritandtruth.org/teaching/Book_of_1st_Corinthians/22_1Cor_13_1-13/index.htm.
- h - See <http://www.spiritandtruth.org/teaching/documents/articles/index.htm#105>.
- i - See <https://www.tms.edu/m/tmsj2h.pdf>.
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