

# Acts Highlights - Part 8

by George Verwer

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*George Verwer explores the challenges and commitments of the Apostle Paul as he journeys to Jerusalem amidst prophecies and opposition.*

**Duration:** 33:20

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:33, Acts 21:18-22

**Topics:** "Book Of Acts"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker reflects on his 65 years of active ministry and acknowledges that he has not faced many difficult tests. He expresses gratitude for the challenging chapters in his life, as they have taught him valuable lessons. The speaker encourages the audience to be willing to die for the Lord Jesus and references missionary history and films that depict the lives of influential missionaries. He also mentions a website called Redeem TV, where people can access free films, including his own. The sermon concludes with a brief mention of Paul's encounter with the High Council and Felix, highlighting the subjects of conscience, righteousness, self-control, judgment, and bribery.

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## Transcript

Brothers and sisters, what a joy to be back with you again, looking together at the book of Acts. And it's amazing that I was led last week, last session, session seven, to mention Ray Lynch. And we read a hymn that Ray Lynch, this great evangelist who was with OM for half a century, who preached in the open air all over the world.

But around the same time that I was sharing, Ray Lynch went to be with the Lord at 93 years of age. He was another close friend of our brother Bhakti Singh. Ray Lynch had the most amazing book of his journeys.

He's one of the few persons in the world that has visited almost every nation. And I've been this morning rereading parts of it actually published in India. But his last command, my first desire.

And it's a message because Ray Lynch was one of those whose life was an example of the book of Acts. His life had some similarities, not the same, but similarities to the life of the apostle Paul that we're spending so much time studying. So that's interesting.

And I don't have many copies in the States, but I've had lots of copies in India and here in the UK, if you want one. I also wanted to give thanks to Tom Hale who used to be a missionary in Nepal. Because in this study of the book of Acts, my main reference has been Tom Hale's commentary on the New Testament, actually in Spanish.

But of course it's available in English. So I don't know where any copies are. I did two other series on Acts in the past years and used other materials, a number of different books, especially John Stott's.

But this time I mainly use this commentary. I know some people, they don't like commentaries, but that's so ridiculous because the commentary is very similar to a sermon. And some of the commentaries are even more similar than others.

So it's an exposition of the verses from someone else's heart, from someone else's mind. We don't have to accept everything that person says, which is also true of what I'm sharing. We have to search the scriptures and see if these things be so.

So those of you who do teaching and preaching, don't be afraid at times to look at commentaries, see what other great Bible students and Bible scholars have said. Now getting back to the book of Acts, we're in chapter 21. And in both these sections, we'll be covering three or four chapters.

In many ways, these have been the more difficult chapters for me to prepare because there's not a lot of highlights. So there are some. And a lot of time is just given to sharing about the journeys and the legal problems and the suffering of the Apostle Paul.

You'll remember that in Acts chapter 20, the Holy Spirit promised that there'd be difficulties and struggles and even imprisonments ahead. So what was predicted by the Holy Spirit in chapter 20 now becomes a reality. And there's some highlights, some interesting things that we surely want to look at.

Paul now begins his journey to Jerusalem. This was a passion on his heart. Among other things, he had to deliver that gift that was given to him by one of the churches.

So he was carrying some money. I hope he was careful. And we pick it up there at verse four in chapter 21.

We went ashore and found local believers and stayed with them for a week. Again, we have that encouragement of showing hospitality to God's people. We've had this in previous chapters.

These disciples prophesied through the Holy Spirit that Paul should not go on to Jerusalem. When we returned to the ship the end of the week, the entire congregation, including wives and children came down to the shore with us. There we knelt and prayed and said farewell.

Then we went abroad and they returned home. And it's interesting that there was this prophecy that Paul should not go to Jerusalem, but he didn't seem to pay any attention to it. Again, there's a message there that often, even within the church, different people have different ideas of what should be done.

And it's not always an easy road, but we have to seek the Lord. Paul had already sought the Lord about this. And so he sensed he had God's guidance and these things would not lead him away from that goal.

The next stop after leaving Tyre and Ptolemy, Caesarea, where we greeted the believers, but stayed only one day. Then we went on to Caesarea and stayed in the home of Philip the Evangelist. It's so interesting

that here now in chapter 21, we get a mention of Philip, who we haven't heard of at all since the very early days when he was appointed and that's what it says here.

One of the seven men who had been chosen to distribute food. He had four unmarried daughters who had the gift of prophecy. I don't know if any of your daughters claim to have the gift of prophecy.

Something we're sometimes amazed about, confused about. Different churches take different viewpoints. But there it is written in the book of Acts.

During our stay of several days, a man named Agabus, who also had the gift of prophecy, arrived from Judea. When he visited us, he took Paul's belt. This is really interesting.

He took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands with it. Then he said, the Holy Spirit declares, so shall the owner of this belt be bound by Jewish leaders in Jerusalem and turned over to the Romans. So this man was also a prophet and he gave this unique visual demonstration of what was on his heart.

When he heard this, we were traveling with him as well as the local believer, begged Paul not to go to Jerusalem. Again, Paul didn't pay much attention, but he said, why all this weeping? And here's a key verse. Here's one of the highlights of chapter 21.

Why all this weeping? You are breaking my heart, for I am ready not only to be jailed in Jerusalem, but also to die for the sake of the Lord Jesus. Wow. All of us, all of us should be able to say, we're willing to die for the Lord Jesus.

And if we look back at missionary history, and it's sad that many don't read the great missionary books anymore. They don't see these great films. I think of this new film of the life of C.T. Studd.

I think of that new film, Hudson Taylor. These are now available through a website completely free of charge. They used to be very expensive.

A website called Redeem, Redeem TV. And I've been introducing people to Redeem, and I've had a lot of people thanking me because dozens and dozens of films are all available to download and watch on your computer. I'm including my own film, George for Real.

By the way, there is a second film. Following on from George for Real, called George Uncut. And I'd be happy to send you the DVD.

I think it's on that Redeem network. By the way, my whole book, Metseology, that many of you have read, is now available on CD, especially for people who are blind. And if you know anyone who's blind, I'd love to send a copy of this set of CDs, the entire book read personally by myself.

Some people listen to these in the car when they don't get so much time to read. I'd be happy to send it. So here again, we have this tremendous courage and commitment in the life of the Apostle Paul, making it clear he's ready to lay down his life.

When it was clear that he couldn't persuade him, he gave up and said, the will of the Lord be done. This is a wonderful expression. When we're struggling, different people have different ideas.

To humble ourselves and say the Lord's will be done. Even when we're praying fervently for someone to be healed, as we have for dear Peter Maiden, who within the next few days, my successor, many of you

know him, chairman of the Keswick Convention, within the next few days, he probably will be with the Lord. So often at the end of our praying and our pouring out our hearts, we need to use those same words from scripture.

Thy will be done. Shortly afterward, we packed our things and we left for Jerusalem. Now I could get bogged down here in chapter 21, and we never get to the other chapters.

So I'm gonna move on, and especially just pick up the story at verse 18. The next day, Paul went in with us to meet with James and the elders of the church in Jerusalem. After greeting and exchange, Paul gave a detailed account of the things God had accomplished among the Gentiles through his ministry.

Again, we see the importance sharing with the leaders of the church what is going on. Some of the Jewish converts were still very nervous about the Apostle Paul. And this is a very interesting chapter in which Paul, excuse me, defends his going with the gospel to the Gentiles.

But people were gossiping against him. And people were saying that Paul himself was breaking the Jewish laws. They sort of were okay with the Gentiles not keeping the Jewish laws, but they felt Paul is a Jew, he must keep the Jewish laws.

And so Paul had a problem and he ended up in the minds of many, quite a few commentators, he ended up making a big mistake, but going back to the law. And you know, Christian leaders make mistakes. It's very dangerous.

If we put people on a pedestal where they can't sin, they can't make mistakes. And I write about that in my new book, Toxic Perfectionism. I may have touched on it in Messiology.

So in order to sort of keep the peace, again, it's a compromise. And it's sort of Paul's pragmatic streak, something I know about in my own life, that he wanted to get on with proclaiming the gospel. He wanted to get the unity of these leaders in Jerusalem.

And so to keep the peace with these critics, Paul took a vow. Pick it up at verse 23. Here's our suggestion.

We have four men here who have taken a vow and are preparing to shave their heads. Go with them to the temple and join them in the purification ceremony. And pay for them to have their head shaved.

Then everyone will know that the rumors are all false and you yourself observe the Jewish laws. As for the Gentile Christians, all we ask of them is what we already told them in a letter. Remember that letter? They should not eat food offered to idols, not consume blood, not eat meat from strangled animals, and they should stay away from immorality.

And so we read, Paul agreed to their request. And the next day he went through the purification ritual with the men and went to the temple. Then publicly announced the date when their vows would end and sacrifices would be offered for each of them.

It does seem that Paul really went into the bondage of the law at that time, but I guess we'll have to leave it to heaven to find out. Of course, immediately he's in difficulty on another issue. The seven days were almost ended when Jews from the province of Asia saw Paul in the temple and roused a mob against him.

Well, we've already been through this, haven't we? We've already had Paul mobbed. We've had Paul in prison. And so here it goes again.

They grabbed him, yelling, men of Israel, help. This is the man who teaches against our people and tells everybody to disobey the Jewish laws. He speaks against the temple.

He even defiles it by bringing Gentiles in. And there's a little explanation of how he was falsely accused of bringing Trithemus into the temple, but I don't think that was actually true. And they assumed Paul had taken him into the temple.

The whole population of the city was rocked by their accusations. And a great riot followed. Paul was dragged out of the temple.

Immediately, the gates were closed behind him. As they were trying to kill him, word reached the commander of the Roman regiment that all Jerusalem was in an uproar. He immediately called out his soldiers and officers and down among the crowd, when the mob saw the commands and troops coming, they stopped beating Paul.

So again, Paul's life is saved. And in the remaining couple of chapters, we just find this whole event of Paul defending himself, Paul preaching, actually sharing his testimony about his conversion as he tries to defend himself. And what really got him off the hook when he was about to be killed and imprisoned is he brought out the fact that he was a Jew.

Verse 39, no, Paul replied, I am a Jew from Tarsus in Cilicia, which is an important city. Please let me talk to these people. The commander agreed.

And then of course, Paul, because of that, had this great opportunity to speak to the crowd, which takes us right into chapter 22. One of the verses that jumps off the page is verse eight. Who are you, sir? I asked.

This is when Paul was being converted. And he replied, I am Jesus of Nazareth, the one you are persecuting. And so it's just a reminder.

And it's one of the reasons he's accepted as one of the 12 apostles, is he had a personal experience with Jesus. All the other apostles knew Jesus physically, but Paul also now had his conversion, had this personal experience with Jesus, which is not the normal thing for everybody ever since then who came to know Jesus in a personal way. But of course, receiving the Lord Jesus by faith is what our experience is in all those who love the Lord Jesus.

Pick it up now in verse 22. The crowd listened until Paul came to that word. And the word was in the previous verse, the word Gentile.

Then with one voice they gathered away with such a fellow, kill him, he isn't fit to live. They yelled, they threw off their coats, they tossed handfuls of dust in the air. I've watched a video series on the book of Acts.

It's absolutely fantastic. I don't know where I put it, but I'm sure I could probably now get it on the internet. And then of course, again, Paul brings out his Roman citizenship.

And so of course he's preserved, he's guarded, and he is taken to someone else, a guy named Ananias, the high priest. So we have to move quickly to chapter 23. Gazing intently at the high council, Paul began, brothers, I have always lived before God in all good conscience.

Instantly Ananias, the high priest, commanded those close to Paul to slap him on the mouth. But Paul said to him, this is very interesting by the way, listen, I really hope you read these chapters on your own because we're only just touching on some of the points. We're always battling this little clock.

God will slap you, whitewash wall. Wow, that's pretty strong language. What kind of judge are you to break the law yourself by ordering me struck like that? And standing near Paul, those standing near Paul said to him, is that the way to talk to God's high priest? Oh, I'm sorry, brothers.

Oh, here we find Paul apologizing. You know, in leadership, there are times when we have to be ready to apologize. And sometimes to non-believers and to leaders in certain aspects of society, in a weak moment, we may say something that's unkind and shows lack of respect.

We have passages in Romans that teach us that we need to respect those that are in authority. So here we find Paul apologizing. I'm sorry, brothers.

I didn't realize he was the high priest. Seems to me also we got a little bit of a respecter of persons problem here, but no time to discuss it. Paul replied, for the scriptures say, do not speak evil of anyone who rules over you.

Just amazing, isn't it? To follow this man's life. And we may wonder why do we have so much about Paul here in the book of Acts? But we need to remember this is preparing us. This is preparing us for those great epistles Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians.

I've been through them over 100 times in audio and reading. And we can't grasp those epistles as well as we should if we don't have this background information about the Apostle Paul. Keep in mind that epistles like the Thessalonians, which I was looking at again this morning, they were written before of the book of Acts.

The Thessalonian epistles probably are the earliest epistles in the whole of the New Testament. And I urge you to study the Pauline epistles and to give extra time because they are so powerful and so relevant even in the day in which we live. I've tried to memorize many parts of the Pauline epistles.

So though this seems a little bit mainly history and it seems almost a bit repetitious, it's laying that foundation for reading and studying the epistles written by the Apostle Paul. I've often preached on chapter 23 and verse 12, especially going way back when I've been given the privilege of speaking to leaders. I've often chosen this passage.

So let's pick it up. I don't have time to preach that message with you today. The next morning, a group of Jews, verse 12, a group of Jews got together and bound themselves with an oath to neither eat nor drink until they had killed Paul.

There were more than 40 of them. Imagine, imagine getting home tonight and there was a letter signed by 40 people that they weren't gonna eat until you were dead. I would dare to say your metabolism might take a little bit of a leap.

And to me, it reminds me of that verse, Satan as a roaring lion, seeketh whom he may devour. And this of course was a conspiracy. And I believe there's a conspiracy against every man and woman of God.

And those of you who are following me in this teaching, I pray this will not just be something in your head, but it will come deep into your spiritual DNA, into your spiritual life. And you will be more diligent about using that armor so powerfully described in Ephesians chapter six to stand against the fiery darts. Again, God in his providence saved Paul because of his nephew, verse 16.

But Paul's nephew heard of this plan, went to the fortress and told Paul. Paul called one of the officers and said, take this young man to the commander. He has something important to tell him.

And again, the commander arranged for Paul to be rescued. And it's just amazing to read through this. And I hope you will do it.

We need to jump ahead quickly to verse 27. Then they commanded and called two of his officers and ordered, get 200 soldiers ready to leave for Caesarea at nine o'clock tonight. Take 200 spearmen and 70 horsemen.

Provide horses for Paul to ride on and get him safely to governor Felix. Then he wrote a letter to the governor. And then we have Paul's experience with the governor Felix defending himself, presenting his situation.

And we have to just read the last verses quickly. When they arrived at Caesarea, they presented Paul and the letter to the governor Felix. He read it and then asked Paul what province he was from.

Cilicia, Paul answered. I will hear your case myself when your accusers arrive. The governor told him.

Then the governor ordered him to be kept in prison at Harrods headquarters. I was dealing with a situation recently in which an outstanding Christian leader just had so much of his time being consumed because of some evil people who were attacking that ministry, taking men to court and trying to do all kinds of terrible things. And this dear brother had to spend a huge amount of time because of the investigation.

And of course, it can be so discouraging when there are other things you want to do. And that's the way lockdown has been for quite a few people. There's all kinds of things they were hoping they would do, places they were gonna visit.

So really these are lockdown chapters. The apostle Paul is not accomplishing much of his regular ministry. He's in prison.

He's being misunderstood. He's being falsely accused. And I'm sure he's a human being.

He must have gone through times of tremendous trial and difficulty. Well, chapter 24 takes us, of course, to the encounter with Felix. And I think it's best to pick it up at verse 14.

But I admit that I follow the way which they call a sect. I worship the God of our ancestors. And I firmly believe the Jewish law and everything written in the book of prophecy.

I have hope in God, just as these men do. And he will raise both the righteous and the ungodly. Because of this, I always try to maintain a clear conscience before God and everyone.

Several years away, I returned to Jerusalem with money to my people to offer sacrifices to God. Paul, again, as he often is, is defending himself and presenting, trying to convince this leader of his innocence. Wish we had more time to look at this.

Dropping down to verse 24, a few days later, Felix came with his wife, Daniela, who was Jewish. Sending for Paul, they listened as he told them about his faith in Christ Jesus. He reasoned with them about righteousness and self-control, judgment to come.

Felix was terrified. Go away for now, he replied. When it is more convenient, I'll call for you again.

He also hoped that Paul would bribe him. Well, that's an interesting subject, the subject of bribery. And here it is, almost 2,000 years ago, brought out here in this passage.

And of course, Paul did not pay any bribe. The level of corruption in the world today is one of the greatest problems and one of the greatest demonstrations of human weakness and human sinfulness. And I'm sure you know that in India, it is especially difficult to function because the bribery system is so inbred.

And we really, we need to really pray and realize sometimes people will fail. Believers will fail. And we must not be too harsh and toxic on them.

If we found out somehow in a situation, they paid some money. A man of God once wrote me when I lived in India that he believed in paying bribes if what the person was going to do because of the bribe was the right thing. Well, I think other men of God would not agree with him on that, but it does show you the complexity of this challenge.

Two years went by. Wow, two more years, two more years stuck in prison. Again, we're reminded that our prayers often are not answered according to our timing.

Paul had a lot of people praying that he would be released. He had a lot of people waiting to see him. And yet it says two years went by.

Then Felix was succeeded by Pontius Festus. And because Felix wanted to gain favor with the Jewish leaders, he left Paul in prison. What a challenge.

What a challenge to some of you, some of us that may have found lockdown difficult. A challenge for those of us who are so wired like I am to try to accomplish as much as possible. I've actually never had, except for one evening, I was, or a couple of days, I was arrested and held by the Soviets, but not in a prison.

They held me and locked me up in a room. But I've never had a time where I could not be engaged in active ministry, and that's for almost 65 years. So I realize that in a number of areas, I've not been tested very much.

And who knows, I may have some difficult testings ahead. I thank the Lord for these, what have been for me in my studying difficult chapters, because there are nuggets of truth. There are basic lessons that we can learn from, and we're going to see it finalized in our final session next week.

God bless you. Again, if there's anyone that's gone through all seven, now eight sessions, that would be amazed to hear from you. Let's pray.

We thank you for these great passages. We thank you for the life of the Apostle Paul. We thank you that in your providence, you chose him to give us a good part of the New Testament.

Romans, and 1st and 2nd Corinthians, and Galatians, and Ephesians, and Colossians, and Philippians, and the Thessalonians, and Philemon. And Lord, help us to be more diligent in getting into these epistles. As through the book of Acts, we've had a greater glimpse of the trials and tribulations.

Yes, and the mistakes that the Apostle Paul made in his pilgrimage to be your servant. And we pray that especially we may know that same reality of the Holy Spirit, even in terms of guidance in our lives, which seems to be so complicated in the world in which we live. So we thank you, Lord, for your holy word.

And we ask that you give us grace to put these great challenges into practice. In Jesus' name, amen.

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