

1 June 2025

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

“Paul, prisoner of Christ”

After the series of the last three meditations, in which we addressed the crisis of the Church's mission in the light of the witness of the apostles, we will now turn to the last chapters of the Acts of the Apostles. We will do so with a slightly different outline than in the last few weeks, since the last chapters speak for themselves. I can only strongly recommend to everyone to take the time to read them in their entirety. They are very rich in the sense that they narrate the following missionary journeys of St. Paul and all that happened in them. However, in the following meditations I will limit myself to summarising the events, emphasising one or the other key point.

After leaving Athens, Paul spent a very fruitful time in Corinth (Acts 18). There he was comforted by the Lord through a vision, who told him not to be afraid and that no one could harm him (vv. 9-10). Paul stayed one year and six months in Corinth (v. 11).

When Paul continued his missionary journey, he arrived in Ephesus and stayed there for two years (Acts 19:10). Because of the persistent opposition of the Jews, he no longer preached in the synagogues, but another place was made available to him (v. 9). Many people who had practised magic turned to the Lord and burnt their books in front of everyone (v. 19).

Then Paul had to face the revolt of the goldsmiths initiated by a certain Demetrius, who carved temples of the goddess Artemis out of silver. Seeing that many people were leaving idolatry and converting because of Paul's preaching, they feared that their business would be ruined and wanted to get rid of him and his companions (vv. 24-28). However, in this case, the local authorities protected the apostles (vv. 35-40).

So Paul continued his journey and returned to Macedonia, staying several months in Greece (Acts 20:1-3). The night before leaving Troas, it happened that a young man fell asleep during a long evening discourse of the Apostle and fell out of the third floor window, and Paul brought him back to life (vv. 9-12).

Their journey took them from Troas to Miletus. There, Paul delivered a moving farewell discourse, part of which we will hear below, for it clearly expresses the reason why he knew he had to go to Jerusalem.

Addressing the priests, he said:

"You yourselves know that I was testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance to God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, bound in the Spirit, not knowing what shall befall me there; except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me. But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may accomplish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:21-24).

Here we get a glimpse into the soul of the Apostle to the Gentiles. He is in chains for the Lord's sake. In one of his epistles he testifies that he is bound to a duty that is incumbent upon him (1 Cor 9:16). It is a duty of love: to bear witness to the Gospel of the grace of God. Everything else is subordinate to this goal.

Paul knows that he will not see the Ephesian presbyters again and warns them of the dangers that lie ahead:

"I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears." (Acts 20:29-31)

There the disciples tried to dissuade him from going up to Jerusalem, because a prophet had announced that he would be bound there and handed over to the Gentiles (Acts 21:10-14). But Paul refused to be persuaded, for, like his Lord, he wanted to do God's will, even if it meant danger and death.

And when he arrived in Jerusalem, he was welcomed by the disciples and the priests (vv. 17-18). But the hostile Jews were not slow to hear of his arrival. When they saw him, they wanted to kill him (vv. 27-31). However, the Roman authorities barely managed to prevent this and arrested Paul (v. 32). But, before they took him away, they allowed him to speak to the angry crowd (vv. 39-40).

Paul told the story of his conversion and testified that he had been sent by the Lord to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. When he mentioned this, the people began to shout, *“Away with such a fellow from the earth! For he ought not to live!”* (Acts 22:22).

The next day, the tribune summoned the High Priest and the whole Sanhedrin to find out for sure what Paul was accused of. But Paul defended himself and spoke of the resurrection of the dead, knowing full well that this was a subject of debate between the Pharisees and Sadducees, and indeed there was an immediate altercation between the two sides (Acts 23:6-7). Since the altercation was escalating, the court, fearing that Paul would be torn to pieces by them, ordered him to be taken to the barracks (v. 10)

In the meantime more than forty Jews conspired and vowed to kill Paul (vv. 12-13). However, the tribune learned of the conspiracy and took Paul under heavy guard to Caesarea to the procurator Felix (vv. 23-24).

Meditation on the day's reading: <https://en.elijamission.net/you-will-be-my-witnesses/>