

Jacob's Well

Lesson Title: The Life of Paul—Disagreement in Discerning God's Will



Key Concept: Paul was highly influential in the early church, and examples from his life still guide us individually and as a church body. When Paul and his fellow disciples disagreed over the will of God, they ultimately released the outcome into the hands of God.



Scriptures:

These believers prophesied through the Holy Spirit that Paul should not go on to Jerusalem.

(Acts 21:4 *New Living Translation*)

When it was clear that we couldn't persuade him, we gave up and said, "The Lord's will be done."

(Acts 21:14 *New Living Translation*)

Context Scriptures: Acts 19:21–22; 20:16–38; 21:1–33; 27:21–26



Lesson Thoughts:

How many of us have ever had a disagreement? Most of our day-to-day conflicts are trivial, like where to go for dinner, which sports team will win the big game, or whose turn it is to take out the trash. Sometimes, however, as Paul experienced, we can have conflict over the most important issue of all: the will of God.

After Paul had ministered in Ephesus, he was determined to go to Jerusalem. In Acts 20:22, Paul informed his fellow believers that he was "bound by the Spirit to go to Jerusalem." While we can't be certain from the original Greek whether "the Spirit" refers to Paul's inner spirit or to the Holy Spirit, Paul had clearly made up his mind. He held firm to his determination, even as "the Holy Spirit [told him] . . . that jail and suffering" awaited him.

Jacob's Well

Paul's brethren in Tyre, however, strongly disagreed with him. In Acts 21:4, the disciples "prophesied through the Holy Spirit that Paul should not go on to Jerusalem." These warnings were punctuated by the visit of Agabus, a Judean prophet who theatrically demonstrated how Paul would be bound and turned over to the Gentiles. At this, Paul's fellow laborers "begged [him] not to go on to Jerusalem." But Paul did not waver, saying, "I am ready not only to be jailed at Jerusalem but even to die for the sake of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 21:10–13).

At this point, Paul and the church at Tyre could have had a shouting contest, continued to argue, and parted ways bitterly. This would not have been productive, however, as they had already talked over all the information at hand, and still disagreed. And so, "When it was clear that [they] couldn't persuade him, [they] gave up and said, 'The Lord's will be done'" (Acts 21:14).

As Christians, we are to work together as the body of Christ to do God's will. Even so, there are times when Spirit-filled believers feel different direction from the Lord. It is in these situations where we, just like Paul and his fellow disciples, may find ourselves in disagreement. Once we have exhausted prayer, study, and discussion, there is nothing more to do than to pray that God's will be done, and trust that the ruler of the world will, indeed, have his will be done.

**Discussion Questions:**

- 1) Eventually the disciples in Tyre "gave up" and prayed that the Lord's will be done, but what else did they do first? What can we do today to seek God's will before agreeing to disagree?
- 2) How do we discern which conflicts we should let go, saying, "God's will be done" and which ones we should keep on fighting for?
- 3) Paul was a great man of God, spreading the gospel to the Gentiles and writing a quarter of the New Testament. Did this give him more authority to determine the will of God than the disciples at Tyre? Why or why not?
- 4) Let's say that Paul was following his own spirit's desires rather than God's. How would this change how we view Paul as a spiritual leader?

Next Lesson: Missionary Work after Imprisonment

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- 1) In Acts 27, Paul is comforted amid a raging storm by an angel who informs him, "Don't be afraid, Paul, for you will surely stand trial before Caesar!" We know from this verse that God used Paul and his decision for his kingdom's purpose. Reflect on Psalm 37:23–24: "the steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord . . . though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down." Even as we may not be sure about the will of God, as long as we are earnestly seeking him and what he would have us to do, God will guide us and protect us!
- 2) Read the rest of the Book of Acts after Paul's disagreement and see what came about from his actions. A small choice can have massive impact on our lives and the lives of those around us. Remember that a disagreement in the body is no small matter to be waved off as personal preference.

Jacob's Well

Notes and Reflections, cont.