

Paul going to Jerusalem.

JANUARY 25.

ACTS XXI. 1-14

Golden Text, Acts 21: 14.

PAUL and his companions sailed from Miletus immediately after the interview recorded in last lesson. With a fair wind they would make the run from Miletus to Coos in six hours. *Vs. 1, 2.* *Coos*—an island famous as the seat of a medical school and the resort of many strangers. *Rhodes*—a larger island, 13 miles from the mainland. The city of Rhodes most beautifully situated, surrounded with perfumed gardens and vine-clad hills; renowned for its shipbuilding. It was the point from which the Greeks reckoned their parallels of latitude and longitude; noted for its temple of the sun and the *Colossus*—accounted the greatest of the seven wonders of the world—a statue of brass, 105 feet high. *Patara*—on the mainland, near the mouth of the river Xanthus 50 miles east of Rhodes, then a considerable sea-port, but now a desolate ruin and its fine harbour a malarial swamp. The ship ended her voyage here, but another was found ready to sail. *Phoenicia*—that narrow strip of country bordering on the Mediterranean north of Palestine, in which were the famous cities of Tyre and Sidon, now also a land of ruins, *Ezek. ch. 26.* *V. 3.* From Patara to Tyre is 340 miles. With a fair wind, about 48 hours sail. A straight course took them south of Cyprus, see map. *V. 4.* While the crew were unloading the grain or wine and taking in fresh cargo, Paul took the opportunity of seeking out the disciples, for doubtless a church had been founded at Tyre at the time of the dispersion consequent on the death of Stephen, *ch. 11: 19.* The Tyrian Christians urged Paul not to go Jerusalem, fearing that his life would be endangered; but he was bound to go. *Vs. 5, 6.* Here is another affecting farewell scene. Fancy them watching the departure of the vessel: waving their adieus until she was out of sight, and then sadly going home saying to each other “we shall never see the dear man’s face any more!” *V. 7.* *Ptolemais*—the modern Acre, 40 miles south of Tyre. *Vs. 8-11.* One day’s travel, by land, brought them to Cesarea the official residence of Festus and Felix. Here Herod died, *ch. 12: 19-23.* *Cornelius* lived here, *ch. 10: 1.* Paul was a prisoner here two years, *ch. 24: 27.* *Philep*—one of the seven, *ch. 6: 5; 8: 26-40.* *Evangelist*—most nearly answers to our word “missionary”—one who preaches the Gospel from place to place, as Timothy, *2 Tim. 4: 6.* *V. 9.* see *Joel. 2: 28.* *Vs. 10, 11.* *Agabus*, see *ch. 11: 28.* *V. 12.* *We*—Luke, the writer of the Acts, was clearly one of the party: for the others, see *ch. 20: 4.* *Vs. 13, 14.* Seeing that Paul’s purpose did not falter, they ceased entreaties, leaving on record a sentiment borrowed from the Lord’s prayer—a motto for Christians in all the ages and in all circumstances,—“THE WILL OF THE LORD BE DONE.”

Paul at Jerusalem.

FEBRUARY 1.

ACTS XXI. 15-26.

Golden Text, Acts 21: 20.

THIS was Paul’s fifth visit to Jerusalem since his conversion, and the termination of his third and last missionary journey; for though he accomplished his purpose of seeing Rome, *ch. 19: 21*, he went there a prisoner. It may be well at this time to trace on the map the different routes he took and the principal places visited in these memorable journeys. *V. 15.* *Our carriages*—baggage, as in *1 Sam. 17: 22.* The road from Cesarea passes through the plain of Sharon, one of the most beautiful parts of Palestine, where the rose and the lily of the valley would then be in full bloom. *V. 16.* Besides his fellow-travellers from Tyre, some of the Christians of Cesarea had joined the party. *Mnason*—a native of Cyprus, not an old man, perhaps, but an early convert. *V. 17.* Not without grave doubts as to the reception he should meet with from the unbelieving Jews at Jerusalem. Paul was cheered by the kindly reception of the brethren whom he met on his arrival, *Rom. 15: 31.* *V. 18.* Next day a formal reception was given him at a meeting of Presbytery summoned by James, “the Lord’s brother,” *Gal. 1: 19*, who presided over the Church of Jerusalem, when all the members were present to hear Paul’s report and to receive the contributions of the distant churches. *V. 19.* The returned missionaries were received with the brotherly kiss of peace, *1 Thess. 5: 26*, when Paul gave an account of all that he had done and endured these four years, *Rom. 15: 18-20*, and about the churches he founded in Macedonia and Achaia, at Ephesus and elsewhere. *Vs. 20, 21.* It was a telling speech, and the first impulse of the meeting was to join in thanksgiving to God. But it soon appeared that beneath seeming unanimity there lurked elements of discord. There were, thus early, some restless agitators in the Church—men of a sectarian spirit: and also others very weak in the faith. Some of the Judaizing zealots had circulated the report that Paul had been teaching the Jews to forsake Moses—to abandon the law and customs of their fathers. *Vs. 22-24.* To set the public mind at rest, they advised Paul to join publicly in the observance of a Mosaic ceremony. Here were four Jewish Christians under a vow; go with them, said they, to the Temple, go through the prescribed form of ceremonial purification with them; *Be at charges with them*, i.e., pay the necessary expenses, and in this way shew yourself as loyal to the law as any of us. *V. 25.* *Touching the Gentiles*—The Presbytery had already declared its mind on this subject, *ch. 15: 19, 20.* *V. 26.* Whatever the motive, the suggestion was in itself not an unwise one, and as Paul’s object was to conciliate the Church, as far as he could do so consistently, he falls in with the proposal. This was in line with his teaching, *Rom. ch. 14.* *1 Cor. 9: 20-23; 7: 17-19.*