

Week of June 3-June 9

DUELING PROPHECIES?

Scripture Reading: Read Acts chapter 21

Every now and then as we read Scripture, we run across a passage that makes us stop and question what we've just read. Perhaps we run into something that confuses us or something we don't understand. Sometimes, we find something that may appear to be a contradiction that is hard to resolve. We know God's Word is inspired by the Holy Spirit but we struggle to make sense of it.

For some folks, they may have found such a verse or two in today's chapter reading. "*Through the Spirit they urged Paul not to go on to Jerusalem.*" Luke seems to infer quite clearly that the Holy Spirit inspired the disciples in Tyre to urge Paul not to go to Jerusalem. Yet, look at Paul's response. *But when our time was up, we left and continued on our way.*" Huh? The Spirit said no but Paul said go. What's up with that? But wait, there's more! Take a look a few verses later in the chapter. "*When we heard this (i.e. the prophecy of Agabus regarding Paul's arrest), we and the people there pleaded with Paul not to go up to Jerusalem.* Again, the Spirit seems to imply that it was not in Paul's best interest to go to Jerusalem. Yet, how does Paul respond? "*I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.*" *When he would not be dissuaded, we gave up and said, 'The Lord's will be done.'*"

OK, so what is going on here? Twice the Spirit seems to say no but Paul pushes forward. Is he just being stubborn? Does he doubt the prophetic word of warning? Why is he pushing forward? According to Paul it's because he feels compelled by the Spirit to go to Jerusalem (Acts 20:22). That's why he kept pressing forward in spite of the attempts to keep him safe. But, if this is the case, then don't we have dueling prophecies from the Spirit? At least, that's what it looks like on the surface. The Spirit says go and no!

So, how do we resolve the apparent contradiction? There are a couple of possibilities. Paul was to go to Jerusalem but he was off with his timing. The Spirit was seeking to stop him but he didn't listen and ended up being arrested prematurely. Another possibility is that the prophets saw prophetically what Paul told the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:23 regarding prison and trials and that, based on what they saw, they interpreted it to mean that he shouldn't go. In other words, they accurately saw the future by the Holy Spirit but then, out of love for Paul, provided their own counsel on what he should do. Unfortunately, Luke never reveals to us the actual cause of the differing views. He just leaves us with the facts as they are. Nonetheless, either option is possible (and there may even be others). I know I have seen both of these possibilities play out again and again in prophetic ministry in our day and age. People miss God's timing or they get part of the picture and fill in the rest on their own. It's not the Spirit who contradicts himself. It's usually our filter that causes the problem. So, how do deal with it? We stay open to the Spirit, faithful to the Scripture, willing to be corrected and, when all is said and done, to respond as the believers did with Paul, "*The Lord's will be done.*"

Action Step & Prayer Focus: Have you found yourself facing what appear to be dueling prophecies? Step back and prayerfully follow the counsel above so that God's will is done.

Take-a-way: *When you think the Spirit says no AND go, take it slow until you know.*