

## Women Preachers and Visual Aids – Acts 21: 1 – 15



Acts 21 begins with Luke's eyewitness account of the voyage Paul and his companions made after leaving the Ephesian elders at Miletus. They crossed the Mediterranean to Caesarea, the port city of Judea built by Herod the Great between 22 and 10 BC, about 60 miles northwest of Jerusalem.

In Caesarea, they stayed with Philip, whom we last met in Acts 8, baptizing the Ethiopian official. Philip had been one of the seven men in Jerusalem appointed to supervise the distribution of funds to needy widows in the city. One of Philip's colleagues was Stephen, whose execution had been watched with approval by Paul, known then as Saul. What a lot had changed in the years since then!

Philip now had a leading role in the church in Caesarea, and his children were following in his footsteps. Luke tells us he had four unmarried daughters "who proclaimed God's message" (verse 9). It puzzles me that there has been, and still is, so much controversy around the preaching ministry of women, when we have evidence it was happening in these early days of the church, and accepted, apparently, without question.

During their stopover in Caesarea, a man named Agabus, described as a prophet, arrived from Judaea. The Old Testament prophets, on a number of occasions, used visual aids to reinforce their message, and this New Testament prophet did the same. Taking Paul's belt, he tied up his own hands and feet with it, announcing, "This is what the Holy Spirit says: The owner of this belt will be tied up in this way by the Jews in Jerusalem, and they will hand him over to the Gentiles" (verse 11).

That action stuck in the mind of Luke, who recorded it for us to read. As a preacher, I have got into the habit of using some object, often a stuffed animal toy, to illustrate my children's addresses. In fact, I don't call them "children's addresses", any longer, because I deliver

them whether or not there are children present. Having something to look at can strongly reinforce a spoken message for young and old alike. Now I am doing Zoom services for some of our circuit churches, I am experimenting with ways of using visual aids during the talks I give from my study at home. I also appreciate the pictures Pete Wildman finds to illustrate my words in these weekly meditations. I hope you find them as helpful as I do.

Having received Agabus' warning, Paul's companions tried vainly to persuade him not to go on to Jerusalem. Paul, however, was determined to make his way there, declaring, "I am ready not only to be tied up in Jerusalem but even to die there for the sake of the Lord Jesus" (verse 13).

Writing later to the church in Philippi, Paul was to declare "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Philippians 1: 21, Authorised Version). His readiness to go to Jerusalem, whatever might befall him there, shows that these are no mere empty words. Paul's devotion to his Master, and his conviction that not even death itself could separate him from the love of God in Jesus Christ (Romans 8: 31 – 39), kept him steadfast and sure in his actions too.

**A prayer:**

*When in danger, make me brave;  
Make me know that thou canst save;  
Keep me safe by thy dear side;  
Let me in thy love abide. AMEN*

*(John Page Hopps, 1834 -1911, from the hymn "Father lead me day by day", Hymns and Psalms 790)*

**Image:** aerial view of Caesarea Maritima today. The city has a fascinating history, which you can read about here: [https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Caesarea\\_Maritima](https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Caesarea_Maritima).