

Paul at Jerusalem - Part I
*The Report to the Church and Paul's Arrest by the
Unbelieving Mob*
(Acts 21:17-40)

Introduction:

1. Paul has returned to Jerusalem as planned (Acts 21:17, see - Acts 20:16)
 - Paul's reasons for returning to Jerusalem:
 - 1) To present the offering that was received from the Gentiles during his Third Missionary Journey
 - 2) To continue to show those in the Jerusalem church that the Gospel was spreading to the "uttermost" parts of the world – the Gentile regions.
 - 3) To emphasize the unity of the Church; which consists of both Jew and Gentile, where all who believe in Christ are one in Him. (Ephesians 2:11-22, 3:6)
 - **While in Jerusalem; Paul finds that not much has really changed in the 8-9 years since they last debated the issue regarding the salvation of the Gentile.**
 - Although the church leadership will welcome Paul and even rejoice with him regarding the effectiveness of the Gospel in the Gentile region – an underlying dissension still remains (among others) regarding Paul's motives and actions.

2. What issues of conflict did Paul face while in Jerusalem?

- He was under continued suspicion by “*unbelieving*” Jews for his willingness to embrace and accept the Gentile without “proselytizing” them into Judaism.
 - 1) The non-believing (one who did not accept or embrace Jesus Christ as Messiah and Lord) Jew continued to scoff, mock and reject that a person could come to God through any other means than the Law.
 - 2) As such, they (the unbelieving Jew) would continue to deny any Gentile as a “genuine follower of God” who did not practice the Law (i.e. circumcision) and submit to teaching of Judaism (*The Law, The Talmud, and teachings of the Rabbi’s, etc.*).
 - 3) He not only faced this problem in Jerusalem, but he also faced it on all of his Missionary Journey’s.
 - 4) It will be these “unbelieving” Jews who will be the primary instigators in Paul’s arrest and subsequent trials.
 - 5) Why was this such a problem? Why such opposition? Why does such opposition continue even into our day?
- He will also face the continued “misunderstanding” from those Jews who seem to believe in Christ (Acts 21:20), yet still have a zealous pursuit of the Law.
 - 1) Paul never promotes the rejection of the Law, nor did he ever teach that a Jew should not practice it.
 - 2) Paul merely taught (as was decided at the Jerusalem Council), that we are no longer bound by it.

3. Paul knew full well that this opposition would lead to his eventual arrest, imprisonment and ultimately his death.

- In spite of the danger – Paul willingly submitted to will of God; knowing that whatever pain he would suffer, it would be worth it all. *It was with this is mind that he would later write:*

1) **“Therefore I ask you not to lose heart at my tribulations on your behalf for they are your glory.**
For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God. Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond what we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus for all generations forever and ever. Amen.
(Ephesians 3:13-21)

2) “Now I want you to know brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel, so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else, and that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear...according to my earnest expectation and hope, that I will not be put to shame in anything, but that with all boldness, Christ will even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ but to die is gain.” **(Phil. 1:12-21)**

- The decision by the “unbelieving” crowd to rise up and oppose Paul was not without its negative consequences:
 - 1) The continued uprising by the Jews against Christianity only fueled the need for Rome to intervene and squelch the potential for civil unrest.
 - 2) The “unbelieving” Jews will be incapable of convicting Paul of any crime and by God’s providence they will not be able to silence him as they did Stephen. **This will also bring about the loss of power that the Sanhedrin once had over the people and the region.**
 - 3) The opportunity (by the Jews) to overthrow the Roman occupation of Judea and Jerusalem will be lost as Rome will step up their control of the region due the continued insurrection of the Jews.
 - 4) Eventually their hatred toward Christianity will be even worse toward Rome. The Jewish Zealots (as they will come to be known) will continue in their rebellion against Roman occupation for another 10-12 years. Their rebellion will eventually be crushed by Titus in 70 AD in which the Temple will be destroyed and the people scattered throughout the world.
 - 5) They should have heeded the words of Jesus and submitted to Him – for eventually they will anyway. (Luke 21:1-6, see also Galatians 6:7)
- In many ways the teachings that were not only taught by the Apostles, but also lived out in the lives of believers; will bring about a change within the ranks of the Roman government and its military – as many more Gentiles (specifically Romans) will embrace the teachings of Paul and believe in Christ through faith. Thus what man meant for harm God will make good. (Romans 8:28)

Paul Meets with the Church Leaders: (Acts 20:17-26)

1. Take notice that _____ is now the primary leader of the Jerusalem church.
 - Initially the church at Jerusalem was ruled/overseen primarily by the _____. (Acts 2:42, 4:35-37, 5:2)
 - Eventually the church grew and the apostles sought out a group of men (seven in all) to assist (minister) in the administration of food and caring for the widows. (Acts 6:26)
 - As the church grew and the apostles began to go to regions beyond Jerusalem, the need for additional leadership for the Jerusalem church became evident and thus the establishment of a ruling body known as “elders” was formed.
 - 1) We see the first evidence of this at the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15.
 - 2) By the time Paul returns after his Third Missionary Journey; the church at Jerusalem was probably quite large, and with the apparent absence of the apostles – the church was now led/governed by the elders. This became a pattern for the New Testament Church and one that Paul himself taught and promoted. (Acts 14:23, 20:17, I Timothy 5:17, Titus 1:5, I Peter 5:1,5)
 - 3) Just an FYI - In “most” of our modern churches today; the Pastor/Pastors function as elders/shepherds and in some cases these can be vocational (paid – “the laborer is worthy of his hire”) or non-vocational (non-paid) – but the function remains virtually the same. *For more information on my position regarding the office of an elder- see my notes on I Timothy and Titus.*

2. Paul gathers all the elders together to report what took place on his journey. (Acts 21:19-20)
- Take note of Paul's _____; as his account reveals what _____ accomplished and not on what he (Paul) accomplished!
 - 1) This was consistent with Paul's teaching (Romans 15:18, I Corinthians 3:5-7, Romans 15:18, II Corinthians 10:17)
 - 2) A man of God (in my opinion) should refuse the praise for the work he accomplishes in ministry and direct all praise to God. This is the pattern that Paul modeled for us and one that is greatly lacking (in my opinion) in the western church!
 - Paul's report produced two responses: (Acts 21:20)
 - 1) Those that heard Paul's report _____ at what was accomplished and they in turn _____ God. This was an affirmation by the elders that salvation is not by human effort but by God's grace.
 - 2) The other response that was given was one of _____; which was in response to a false report being circulated that Paul was teaching Christians to forsake the Mosaic Law. The elders did not appear to agree with the false accusations against Paul – but they solicited his help in correcting the error or misunderstanding.
 - Why is it that when something good is happening that someone is there to attempt to disrupt it?

3. The elders explain their concerns to Paul (Acts 21:20-22)
- They identify a group of Jews who are believers in Jesus, and no doubt embrace Him as Lord and Savior. In addition these believers chose to continue in honoring the ceremonial aspects of the Law.
 - 1) This means they probably observed the required feasts, dietary restrictions, the regulations regarding the Sabbath, and various rituals and vows.
 - 2) There is no Scriptural prohibition against a Jewish Christian continuing to act as a Jew! These customs and rituals had been established by God and in many ways they served as a means for them to show that they loved God and desired to obey Him.
 - 3) We don't find anywhere in the Book of Acts where the apostles prohibited or opposed the continuation of these practices. There was just no need to impose them on Gentile believers. (See Acts 15)
 - These Jewish Christians were apparently being influenced by **unbelieving Jews (known as *Judaizers*)** who were circulating a falsehood that Paul was promoting the abandonment of their Jewish heritage.
 - 1) They claimed that Paul was telling Jews to abandon or forsake the teachings of _____ – a total falsehood.
 - 2) They claimed that Paul encouraged Jews not to _____ their children – another falsehood.
 - 3) They claimed that Paul taught Jews to ignore their _____ and even cease practicing them – another falsehood.

- How do we know these things that the Jewish Christians were being told by the Judaizers about Paul were false?

- It was becoming evident that the elders were concerned (not with Paul's teaching) that these lies needed to be addressed so that their effectiveness in reaching those unbelieving Jews would not be hindered.
 - 1) There is no evidence that the elders accepted the accusations against Paul (see I Timothy 5:19).
 - 2) The fact remains however that these lies needed to be dealt with in order for their continued outreach to be effective.

- 4. The elders devise a plan to address the problem and correct the lies being told about Paul. (Acts 21:23-26)
 - There was no sacrifice of truth or doctrinal purity in this decision;
 - 1) The subsequent efforts and actions by Paul and the others promoted _____ and showed extreme _____.
 - 2) This decision allowed for Paul and the others to "act like Jews" ("to the Jews I became a Jew so that I might win Jews" – I Corinthians 9:19)
 - 3) This decision (much like the decision at the Jerusalem Council) is a good reminder that truth is truth and it need never be compromised. Jesus told His disciples that "they would know the truth and the truth would set them free" (John 8:31-32)

- The details of the vow taken by the four men, as well as the specifics of Paul’s participation in the ceremony is not clear – which perhaps Luke did not consider important enough to record.
 - 1) The four men apparently were already under some sort of vow (probably a Nazirite vow) and a part of that vow must have involved some sort of costly sacrifice. **Paul would pay those costly expenses as an act of good will and thus proving that the allegations against Paul were false. He certainly would not pay for something so costly if he didn’t believe in it.**
 - 2) The fact that Paul willingly went through a “purification ritual” showed Paul’s recognition of the Jewish custom that the Gentile lands were considered unclean. His decision to go through the ritual was in no way a condemnation of the Gentiles, but a mere recognition of the Jewish mindset (“to the Jew I became a Jew”). As people grew in their walk with the Lord; such practices would eventually serve little or no purpose in the church. **For now Paul was keeping a weaker brother from stumbling until they matured in Christ and came to the full understanding of their freedom from the Law. (John 8:31-32, Romans 8:1-4)**
- James restated the decision by the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15); “But concerning the Gentiles who have believed, we wrote, having decided that they should abstain from meat sacrificed to idols and from blood, and from what is strangled, and from fornication”. These are all good practices and actions of right behavior for believers and not in any way to be construed as a means of salvation.

5. Did Paul compromise his convictions?

- We have evidence of Paul taking a vow (Acts 18:18) in the past and no reason to conclude this ceremony was any different. He was a Jew and had every right to act like one.
- Paul promoted Christian liberty and in doing so he (of all people) should practice what he preached. The decision not to make a weaker brother stumble out weighed the liberty he had every right to exercise.
- If Paul was in error on something that was of such doctrinal importance; the Holy Spirit would have clearly directed Luke to correct it!
- With all the knowledge that Paul possessed; such a huge mistake would have been unlikely. Instead he chose the high road of humility without risking the compromise of doctrinal integrity.
- The fact that Paul knew his arrest was imminent anyway would seem to show there would be no need to placate the unbelieving Jews by succumbing to their wishes. They were bent on having Paul silenced and he knew it. Thus his willingness to go through the ritual as a means of showing humility further proved his motives were pure!

6. A couple random thoughts:

- In spite of the attempt to show good faith, Paul will still face an unruly mob that is bent on his arrest and destruction.
- Ironically, the attempt to silence Paul has just the opposite effect (as it did with Stephen). The fact is; more will be accomplished for the spread of the Gospel during these series of trials that Paul faces and his subsequent journey to Rome than perhaps all three journey's combined!

Paul is seized by the temple mob: (Acts 21:27-30)

1. The purification ritual that Paul participated in required him to visit the temple on the _____ and the _____ day. Here is what happens:
 - On Paul's second visit (the conclusion of the ritual) to the temple he faces some opposition. (Acts 21:27)
 - The opposition that Paul faces while visiting the temple is not from the believing crowd but from _____ Jews.
 - A confrontation occurs in which the unbelieving crowd instigates a riot shouting accusations against Paul.
2. Who were the instigators of this riot and what was their beef with Paul?
 - The writer of Acts (Luke); tells us they were "Jews from Asia"
 - 1) More than likely they were on some sort of pilgrimage from Asia and came to Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Pentecost.
 - 2) They probably were from _____ as they seemed to have recognized Trophimus (Acts 21:29) who lived there. They would also have known who Paul was being that he ministered there for three years.
 - Their beef with Paul was; "This is the man who preaches to all men everywhere against our people and the Law and this place" (Acts 21:28a).
 - These were false accusations and ones that Paul continually faced by unbelieving Jews throughout his ministry. Ironically, these charges were also similar to the accusations against Stephen in which he was eventually martyred and for which Paul (prior to his conversion) was probably responsible. (Acts 6:11-14, Acts 8:1)

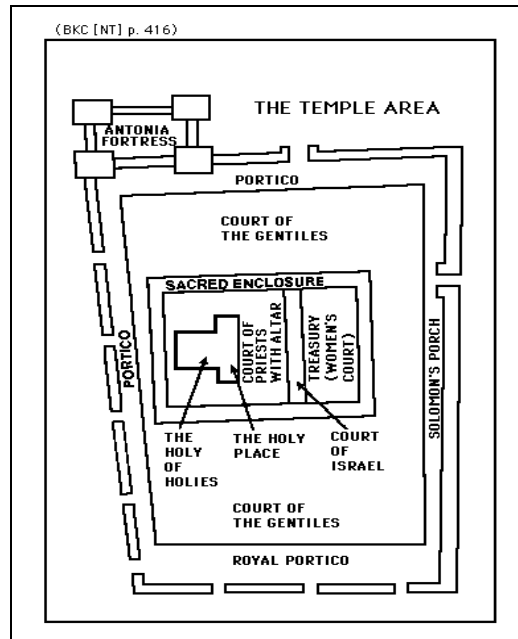
3. Let's examine the charges against Paul: (Acts 21:28-29)

- They claimed he was an _____ of the Jewish people (anti-Semitic) because of what he taught.
 - 1) This was the same claim made by the Judaizers in Acts 15 and those charges were deemed false then and they are still false.
 - 2) Paul was not an enemy of the Jews for not only was he one of them but his actions and writings proved he loved them. (Romans 9:1-5, 10:1)
- They claimed he _____ the Law.
 - 1) This charge had special meaning to it since those in Jerusalem celebrating the Feast of Pentecost (originally a celebration of the Firstfruits of harvest), which for the Jews, had come to be a time to acknowledge the giving of the Law to Moses at Mt. Sinai.
 - 2) This claim too was a falsehood. (Romans 3:21-31, 8, 11)
- The third charge was that Paul spoke out against the _____.
 - 1) The temple was their main focal point of worship and their claim was the equivalent of saying Paul's presence there was blasphemous.
 - 2) Although the temple once served as a holy place; its purposes have been replaced by something even greater. The fact is Jesus Christ removed the barrier between us and God leaving no need for the atoning sacrifices performed in the temple (Ephesians 2:1-22). Paul did not preach against the temple; he taught what was true – he preached a crucified and resurrected Christ that conquered what we could not even through the Law!

- They attempted to substantiate their claims against Paul by declaring that he brought Gentiles into the temple and thus defiled it (Acts 21:27-30). This is how Luke describes it:
 - 1) The accusation that came from these Jews from Asia was embellished or perhaps even fabricated as there was no proof that Paul brought Gentiles into the temple.
 - 2) The assumption is made that since Trophimus (a Greek) was with Paul in the city, that he must have brought him into the temple with him when he went there to complete his cleansing ritual. Luke tells us; “they supposed that Paul had brought him into the temple”.
- The accusation was never proven and based on everything we know about Jewish Laws, Jewish customs, and Paul’s adherence to them; we can easily conclude that the charges were a falsehood.
 - 1) Gentiles could enter what was called the “court of the Gentiles”; but they were not permitted to go any further.
 - 2) Archeologists have found an inscription in 1935 that read; “No Gentile shall enter within the partition and barrier surrounding the temple, and whoever is caught shall be responsible to himself for his subsequent death”.
 - 3) We know of the existence of a division between the Jew and the Gentile from reading Ephesians 2:1-22.
 - 4) Although the separation no longer exists in God’s plan; Paul was well aware that the Jews considered access to the temple by the Gentiles a forbidden act. As such Paul would not have risked his life or the life of Trophimus.
 - 5) The fact that the Jews did not kill Trophimus (had he have actually entered the temple) is good evidence that he never really entered the temple.

4. The actions of an unruly mob (Acts 21:30)

- Here is a sketch of the temple area:



- It appears that they didn't want to defile the temple any further so they probably took Paul into the Court of the Women and closed the doors to the Court of the Gentiles.
 - 1) They seemed to want to beat Paul to death right on the spot as opposed to taking him out of the city (similar to Stephen) and stoning him to death there as would have been their normal custom.
 - 2) Their attempted swift action probably reveals their knowledge that the charges were in fact false, and the shutting of the doors seems to show their desires to conceal this as nothing less than a lynch mob.
- The providential intervention of God will show itself by the arrival of the Roman soldiers who will arrest Paul which will set up a chain of events (providential of course) that will eventually bring Paul to Rome!

Paul's Arrest by the Romans: (Acts 21:31-40)

1. The Roman occupational force of Judea was headquartered in what is referred to as the "Fortress of Antonio".
 - This fortress sat adjacent to the temple (see sketch page 374 – not to scale of course) and in close proximity (about two flights of steps) to the outer court of the temple.
 - This Roman guard was stationed near the temple due to the continual normal uprising by the "Zealots" and during the celebration of the Jewish feasts the size of the guard was usually larger.
 - The Roman guard was especially watchful during these times as civil unrest by the Jews in Jerusalem was somewhat common.
 - The occupational force was 1000 strong (Luke identifies them as a Roman cohort).
 - 1) The leader (identified by Luke in Acts 23:26) of the occupational force is Claudius Lysias.
 - 2) Claudius Lysias would have been the ranking official and the one in charge of maintaining order when the governor (whose residence was in Caesarea) was not in the Jerusalem.
2. After receiving a tip that trouble was brewing (by now they had probably moved Paul into the Court of the Gentiles) the commander (Claudius Lysias) along with a force of probably 200 soldiers broke up the riot.
 - Once this large show of force arrived; the mob stopped beating Paul – probably fearing arrest themselves.
 - The commander had Paul seized (not yet knowing who he was) and took charge of him.

3. Here are a few noteworthy items of Paul's arrest:

- It removes all control and jurisdiction of the Jewish leaders over Paul.
 - 1) The matter of Paul's preaching the gospel was already addressed and ruled acceptable in the eyes of the Romans. (see Acts 18:12-17)
 - 2) As long as the Romans had Paul in their control, the unbelieving Jews could not touch him without facing possible arrest themselves.
- The subsequent chain of events will place Paul in some significant places of influence within the Roman hierarchy. This will more than likely cause various Roman officials (perhaps even as high up as the Emperor) to be exposed to the Gospel during Paul's remaining years.
- The fact that Paul was arrested and placed in chains may well have been the fulfillment of the prophecy by Agabus. (Acts 21:10-11)
- In what ways do you see God controlling these circumstances for the Apostle Paul?
- How about in our world today; do you see God's sovereign control over world events? (Explain)
- How about in your own personal life; do you see God's directing the affairs of your life? (Explain)

4. The commander (Claudius Lysias) will then question Paul (Acts 21:33-40)
- He will take Paul away from the crowd (the noise kept him from interrogating Paul) and had him brought into the barracks.
 - By getting Paul away from the crowd; it also eliminated the risk of an assassin's attempt to kill Paul.
 - The commander appears surprised that Paul can speak Greek and it seems to change some of the assumptions he had made about Paul:
 - 1) Apparently Lysias thought that Paul was either the leader or a member of a band of Egyptian insurrectionists (they were called by the name - Assassin's) who were wanted by the Roman authorities as well as the Jewish collaborators.
 - 2) Upon further questioning of Paul by Lysias proved that Paul was not in any way a part of this group of rebels. Paul told him that he was a Jew from Tarsus (a city known for education and not rebellion) which undoubtedly caused Lysias to conclude that Paul was no threat at all.
 - 3) The fact that Paul was from Tarsus in Cilicia would have explained his knowledge of Greek and eliminated his being an Egyptian as Lysias originally thought.
 - 4) The fact that Paul was a Jew meant he had every right to be in the temple.
 - The interrogation proved that Paul was no threat and Lysias showed this by allowing Paul to speak to the crowd and defend not only his motives but also his actions. (Acts 21:39-40)

Concluding Remarks:

1. This allowance of Paul to speak to the Jews will begin a series of opportunities in which Paul will not only defend his actions, but it will provide a platform to present a compelling argument (an apologia); the Truth that Jesus is the Christ, The Messiah, The Son of God!
2. Before sailing to Rome; Paul will issue five different defenses, sermons or speeches:
 - To the _____ (Acts 22)
 - To the _____ (Acts 23)
 - To _____ (Acts 24)
 - To _____ (Acts 25:1-12)
 - To _____ (Acts 25:13-26:32)
3. Upon arriving in Rome Paul will issue one final defense (recorded by Luke) to the Jews there that will answer the false charges against him.
4. In each of these apologies (defenses), Paul will have the opportunity to not only defend his actions but also to share the Gospel; which in my opinion was the plan of God all along!
5. Stay tuned.....