

~ Lesson 77 ACTS ~

Bound in Jerusalem**Acts 21:26-33**

We left off last week in our study of the book of Acts in chapter 21 as Paul and his company had come to Jerusalem, being bound in the Spirit to Jerusalem. *Acts 20:22-24-²² ... not knowing the things that will happen to me there, ²³ except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me. ²⁴ But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.* So Paul enters Jerusalem, but not as “the Great Apostle Paul,” but rather a humble servant willing to lay down his life for the Gospel.

Picking up where we left off last week, when Paul had come to Jerusalem, we saw Paul humble himself to the weaker Christian, knowing his freedom in Christ, but yet he is brought to James and the elders of the Jerusalem church who are still in bondage under the Law. So when Paul comes to James Luke says in verse 19... **he told in detail those things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry.**

Paul began recounting one by one each of the things God had done over the last eight years through his ministry, namely his 2nd and 3rd missionary journeys, Acts 15:40-21:14. The things that were accomplished over these eight years were truly amazing. The Gospel had gone forth to the world... from Antioch to Rome, but as we read last week, the response from James after Paul details the wondrous works of God is shocking. James pridefully brings the focus back to him and his church in Jerusalem, **Acts 21:20-25.**

James was zealous for the Law and his priorities were that of the Jews. He has no interest in what God is doing among the Gentiles. So James tells Paul to take a vow to show everyone in Jerusalem that he still keeps the Law. This word “keep” in verse 24 is φυλάσσω, to guard. They were elected for the service to guard the Law and usher in the Messiah, Jesus Christ, Rom 3:2; 9:4-5. And James is boasting in this elect service as the “chosen of God.” But he doesn’t realize that now because Jesus fulfilled the Law, there is nothing to guard. It’s complete, fulfilled, paid in full, Tetelestai! But notice what he says in verse 25... James reminds Paul of this edict of the Jerusalem Council meeting, that the Gentiles don’t have to keep or guard the Law, but instead that they just guard themselves. And he gives them four rules to abide by, Acts 15:28; 21:25.

But James missed the whole point of that council meeting that we are free from the Law and saved only by grace through faith. And there was a crucial point in this meeting that could have freed James and the Jerusalem church if he would have grasp hold of this Truth. And it is in Acts 15:11 when Peter stands up and gives his account with Cornelius, **Acts 15:10-11.** This is a truly freeing statement that Peter makes. Not that Gentiles can be saved as the Jews, but that Jews can be saved in the same manner as the Gentiles, by grace through faith apart from the works of the Law. I believe if James could have grasped a hold of that Truth, it would have drastically changed the course of the Jerusalem church. But because this Truth was ignored, here in 58ad, 26 years after the cross, and 8 years after the Council meeting, we see the church in Jerusalem is still deeply influenced and under the bondage of the Law. They believe Jesus is their Messiah, but they are caught in this transition between Law and Faith. And within this church is a group of men who are still zealous for the Law, and they are attacking the Truths of Paul’s message that we are saved by grace through faith apart from the Law of Moses.

So now Paul enters Jerusalem and the pressure from these Judaizers begin attacking the Apostle Paul and James is trying to play politics to smooth things over. There is a reason why James has lasted so long in Jerusalem. When Paul comes to Jerusalem, he can’t be there more than a few days and people want to kill him. James has been there 26 years. So notice what James says to Paul...

21:21-22) ²¹ but they (these Jews zealous for the Law) **have been informed about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their**

children nor to walk according to the customs. ²² What then? The assembly must certainly meet, for they will hear that you have come.

The Judaizers hated the Apostle Paul and they set out to kill him and destroy his message. They followed him to all the churches he would establish and in doing so they would make Paul out to be the enemy, Galatians 4:16. This is why Paul wrote the book of Galatians, because the Christians in Galatia were being deceived to follow the Law for Salvation, Galatians 3:1. And I think it is possible that the Judaizers read that letter and they are mad about it.

The Judaizers were accusing Paul of teaching the Jews to forsake or apostasize, ἀποστασία, Moses. But Paul never taught that we should apostasize the Law, but rather that the Law was fulfilled in Christ Jesus, Romans 8:4; 10:4. One of the clearest examples of how Paul taught concerning the Law is in the book of Galatians, **Galatians 5:1-13**; Romans 4:27-31; 3:19-20; 7:7; 8:3-4; Acts 13:39; Heb 7:18; 8:7, 13; 10:1-9; Gal 3:21. Paul was constantly warning of the dangers of falling back under the bondage of the Law, Rom 8:3; Gal 4:11. So now after the cross, there is no need for a Jew to circumcise their children any more or to walk according to the customs of Moses because the Law has been fulfilled in Christ. And because we have been crucified with Christ, the Law is no longer our master. We have died to the bondage of the Law, Romans 7:4-6. Sin no longer has mastery over us and we have been set free, Romans 6:7-23. This is the Gospel message that Paul preached everywhere he went, so James says, **The assembly must certainly meet, for they will hear that you have come**. If James had listened to Peter and Paul at the Jerusalem Council meeting eight years earlier, they wouldn't have to meet again and the Judaizers wouldn't have this kind of control. But now there is massive pressure in Jerusalem, so James gets very forceful and tells Paul what to do...

21:23-24) ²³ Therefore do what we tell you: We have four men who have taken a vow. ²⁴ Take them and be purified with them, and pay their expenses so that they may shave their heads, and that all may know that those things of which they were informed concerning you are nothing, but that you yourself also walk orderly and keep the law.

Notice how forceful and overbearing James is. He's trying to control the situation just as he did with the Jerusalem Council meeting. The vow James is demanding Paul to participate in is the Nazarite vow. A vow of sanctification in thanksgiving for something good God had done in their life. This vow is described in Numbers 6 and in fact, we saw Paul take this same vow in Corinth when he had his hair cut off in Cenchrea, Acts 18:18. This was not a vow or some sacrifice to attain Salvation, such as a sin sacrifice. If it were, I am convinced that Paul would not have participated in it. But being a vow of sanctification Paul is willing to go along with this for the weaker Christian... being all things to all men.

There were four Christian Jewish men from the Jerusalem church who had taken this vow, and James, playing the political game, tells Paul that if he pays for their expenses, it will show everyone that he keeps the Law. And James knows he has the means to do this because Paul is carrying the collection for the saints from the Gentile churches. Remember Luke never mentioned Paul giving the collection to James, but here is an indication that Paul had the money, and James tells Paul to use that Gentile money to support the Law.

So it is at this moment that Paul has a decision to make. Is he going to use his liberty and puff himself up against James or will he humble himself and become all things to all men so that he might save some? Paul wasn't a push over. He was a tough guy, and he knew his liberty in Christ. But he wasn't going to use his liberty to lord over people. Rather he would become a servant, **1 Cor 9:19-23**. He wasn't doing this to earn salvation, and he never compromised, but he did this as an avenue to preach the Gospel. Paul says all things are lawful for me, but don't use this liberty to puff yourself up, but rather use this liberty to edify one another, 1 Cor 10:23-24; 8:9.

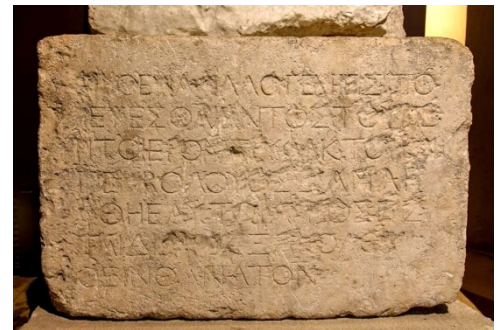
Paul had every right to stand up against James, but he would have run up against a brick wall, and no one would have been edified. So Paul chooses to humble himself to a weaker Christian so that the Gospel might be preached. This isn't compromise... it's love. Peter says, *Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble."* The end goal is not to puff yourself up among Christians, but rather to edify one another and to help them grow up in the faith. Paul was not only humbling himself so that he could preach the Gospel, but he was risking his own life, laying his life down so that others might be edified. So Paul humbly does what James is telling him...

21:26) Then Paul took the men, and the next day, having been purified with them, entered the temple to announce the expiration of the days of purification, at which time an offering should be made for each one of them.

Paul is not doing this for himself, but he is humbling himself and becoming a Jew for the sake of the weaker Christians around him so that he might save some. An amazing act of humility. During this time that Paul is helping the four men with their vow, he is going in and out of the temple. And he does this for seven days according to the Nazarite vow in Numbers 6...

21:27-28) ²⁷ Now when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews from Asia, seeing him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd and laid hands on him, ²⁸ crying out, "Men of Israel, help! This is the man who teaches all men everywhere against the people, the law, and this place; and furthermore he also brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place."

Paul was going in and out of what is called "the court of women" inside the temple gates. Outside the temple was the court of the Gentiles, and at the entrances into the inner court was an inscription written in Greek strictly forbidding Gentiles not to pass through these gates under the penalty of death. Josephus records this in his book "*Antiquities of the Jews*," book 15.11.5. And in 1871 there was an ancient plaque discovered with this same warning that says, "No one other-born is to enter within the balustrade and enclosed court around the temple. Whoever is caught will himself be responsible for his consequent death." Μηθένα ἀλλογενῆ εἰσπορεύεσθαι ἐντὸς τοῦ περι τὸ ἱερόν τρυφάκτου καὶ περιβόλου. Ὅς δ' ἂν ληφθῆ, ἑαυτῶι αἴτιος ἔσται διὰ τὸ ἐξακολουθεῖν θάνατον. This may have been the wall of separation that Paul referred to in Ephesians when he said Jesus has "*broken down the middle wall of separation*," Eph 2:14. It is interesting that Paul writes this in his letter to the Ephesians because it was Jews from Asia that began stirring up the crowd.



Warning inscription outside the temple court discovered in 1871

This is a good indication that Paul was here in Jerusalem for the Day of Pentecost because Hellenistic Jews from Asia had traveled to Jerusalem for the Feast, 2 Chron 8:13. These Jews from Asia are probably the "beasts of Ephesus" that Paul speaks about in 1 Cor 15:32; 16:9, and now they are stirring up the other Jews in the temple saying that Paul was teaching heresy... **This is the man who teaches all men everywhere against the people, the law, and this place.** Again, Paul wasn't teaching apostasy from Moses, but rather that all these things were fulfilled in Christ: the service of the Jewish people to usher in the Messiah was fulfilled. There is now salvation to Jew and the Gentile, to whosoever believes, Romans 3:2; 9:4-5; 10:4; Jesus fulfilled the Law which served as a tutor to bring us to Christ, Gal 3:23-25; and this place, the temple, a type of the fulfillment of the temple of His body that would bring the final sacrifice for sin, John 2:19-22; Eph 2:19-22; Zech 6:13; Hag 2:9. And in addition to all this, they thought Paul had brought uncircumcised Gentiles into this inner court...

21:29) (For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.)

Almost all of Paul's company were uncircumcised Gentiles who believed in Jesus, and these Jews from Asia probably knew Trophimus personally because he was an Ephesian. This creates an uproar among all the Jews in the Temple...

21:30) And all the city was disturbed; and the people ran together, seized Paul, and dragged him out of the temple; and immediately the doors were shut.

By their own law, bringing a Greek into this part of the temple was punishable by death, but they couldn't kill someone in the inner courts of the temple, so they drag Paul outside to kill him. (It's important to be respectful of the laws when you are about to murder someone)... such hypocrisy. It's just like when the Jews wouldn't enter Pilate's Praetorium on the Passover because they didn't want to defile themselves as they murder Jesus, John 18:28.

21:31-33) ³¹ Now as they were seeking to kill him, news came to the commander of the garrison that all Jerusalem was in an uproar. ³² He immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down to them. And when they saw the commander and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul. ³³ Then the commander came near and took him and commanded him to be bound with two chains; and he asked who he was and what he had done.

The mob of Jews drug Paul out of the Court of Women and into the Court of the Gentiles. To the northwest of the Temple was the castle Antonia that was built by Herod the Great to keep watch over the Temple courts and allowed the Roman army to react quickly to disturbances in the Temple. The commander's name is Claudius Lysias which Luke records his personal letter to Felix about the disturbance, **Acts 23:23-30**. Claudius Lysias was a χιλιάρχος, literally meaning leader of 1,000, which tells us that the Roman army that came to Paul's rescue was more than just a few men. There were hundreds of soldiers that came as a result of the disturbance. Notice verse 32... **He immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down to them.** Centurions were leaders of 100 and there were multiple centurions. Remember Luke said that "all the city was disturbed." This took a large army to uphold the peace and the Roman army was on high alert being the Day of Pentecost. When the mob saw the commander of 1,000 and the hundreds of Romans soldiers, they stopped beating Paul.

Paul knew persecution awaited him in Jerusalem. Persecution as a result of preaching the Gospel. Persecution because he humbled himself and became all things to all men so that he might save some. An amazing act of humility and dedication to the Gospel. From this point, Paul will be in prison for the next four years, but during this time he will get the chance to preach the Gospel to not only Jews, but kings and governors and even the emperor himself just as Jesus described to Ananias in Damascus, **Acts 9:15-16**.