

A SURVEY OF THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

13. PAUL ARRIVES BACK IN JERUSALEM Acts 21:18 – Acts 23 -35

Adult Sunday School
Gethsemane Baptist Church
H. David Nichols

PAUL ARRIVES BACK IN JERUSALEM

Acts 21:18 – Acts 23 -35

As Paul went from town to town preaching the Gospel, he was aware that he was speaking to at least two groups of people. He spoke to the gentile people and many believed the Gospel and were saved. He also preached to the Jews in the Synagogues. There he had much the same response. Some believed and some rejected the message. When the gentiles were converted, he told them that it was important for them to live a life that was separated from the world and the sinful lives they had been saved out of. They were to *“abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood.”* (Acts 15:20; 22:25) The Jewish converts still retained their connection to the Temple and the Law. They felt that the gentile believers should also be circumcised and follow the Laws of the Old Testament. The church reached the conclusion of 15:20 in the Council of Jerusalem in chapter 15. Paul never, however insisted that the gentile believers follow the Old Testament commandments. He allowed the gentiles to simply live a separated life.

As Paul returned to Jerusalem, believers all along the way told him that he should not return to Jerusalem at this time. The Prophet Agabus *“took Paul's girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.”* (21:11) Paul knew that there would be trouble but he felt that the Spirit of God was leading him to return.

In Acts 21:17 it says that when Paul returned, he was received gladly. The Church rejoiced at the news he brought from the churches in Asia. Soon however, he discovered that there was a problem. There was a rumor that he was teaching Jews to turn away from the Law of Moses. *“Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law: And they are informed of thee, that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs. What is it therefore?”* “This was clearly untrue (remember the case of Timothy, [Acts] 16:1-3) for Paul never derided his Jewish heritage nor demanded that Jewish Christians repudiate their Scriptures. (He did, of course, resist any

attempt to force gentiles to comply with the Mosaic Law). James and the others feared that the presence of Paul in Jerusalem along with a vast throng of Jews attending the feast from all over the world would precipitate a problem.” (KENT P. 162) In an attempt to persuade the Jews that this was not the case Paul takes pains to show everyone that he still had respect for the Mosaic Law. (Acts 23:23-26) The Jews still were not satisfied. They accused him polluting the Temple by bringing in a gentile (Trophimus). They tried to kill him. The Roman soldiers had to intervene to stop the riot and save Paul’s life.

His arrest gave Paul the opportunity to address the angry Jews to give his defense. He began with an explanation that he was a Jew who had been so zealous for the Law that he had persecuted the Christians. *“I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day. And I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women.”* (22:4) He then gives them his testimony of how he met the Lord Jesus on the road to Damascus. He told them of how God had chosen

him to preach to the gentiles. At this point the Jews became angry and rioted and the chief captain of the Romans took Paul into protective custody. To placate the Jews, he sought to have Paul beaten until he discovered that Paul was a Roman citizen.

Paul has an opportunity to testify before the Sanhedrin, the ruling body of the Jews. It was made up of Pharisees and Sadducees. Paul takes advantage of their differences as his defense. Because of their differences there was almost another riot. It was only stopped when the chief captain removed Paul from the turmoil.

In the heart of all of this confusion The Lord came to Paul with these words of comfort. *“Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.”* (Acts 23:11)

As was discussed in the last lesson, with so many people warning him not to go, there has been much discussion as to whether Paul was wrong to go to Jerusalem. In light of the Lord’s words of comfort to Paul it seems that it was God’s plan all along. By going, Paul had many opportunities to preach the Gospel. Paul testified to the entire city of the truth of the Lord Jesus. He stood before the wise men of the Sanhedrin to

testify of the reality of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Now, we learn that the Lord's plan for Paul is, *"Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome."* (Vs. 11) Often God will ask His servants to do things that seem counterintuitive. They may not seem reasonable but The Lord has His own plan. His care for his children is evident in this story. There were forty men who took a vow that they would not eat until they killed Paul. Through a series of events God placed Paul in the center of *"two hundred soldiers to go to Caesarea, and horsemen threescore and ten, and spearmen two hundred, at the third hour of the night; And provide them beasts, that they may set Paul on, and bring him safe unto Felix the governor."* (Acts 23:23-24) Though Paul was the most hated man in Jerusalem he was in the perfect will of God. That is always the safest place on earth for the child of God. This proved to be the spring board for Paul's ministry in Rome.

TO AIR OUR LEARNING:

1. Why did Paul not instruct his gentile converts to observe all the Law of Moses?

2. The Jews accused Paul of polluting the Temple with Gentiles. What did Paul do to try to counteract this untruth?

3. Was Paul wrong to go to Jerusalem? Why or why not?

Notes:
