

THE LIFE OF THE APOSTLE PAUL

MINISTRY NOTES

- A. The purpose for Paul's trip to Jerusalem was to take the offering from the Asian Christians to the Judean Christians.
- B. It was out of concern for the Judean Christians' physical needs but also a way to demonstrate the unity of the church.
- C. He hoped to take the Gospel to Rome and even to Spain. I believe the Holy Spirit impressed on him that for him to get to Rome, he must go through Jerusalem, Matthew 23:37, *O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it!*

AT JERUSALEM , ACTS 21:17-36

- A. Paul's arrival in Jerusalem (17-26)
 - 1. A greeting by the church in Jerusalem (17-19), *When we had come to Jerusalem, the brothers received us gladly. On the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present. After greeting them, he related one by one the things that God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry.*
 - a. Christians in Jerusalem welcomed Paul and his traveling companions.
 - b. Paul met with James and the church elders.
 - 1) James was the Lord's half-brother and the leader of the church in Jerusalem.
 - 2) Elder leadership had been established as was seen in Antioch earlier, Acts 11:30, *And they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.*
 - 3) He told of God's working in the hearts of Gentiles, establishing churches throughout Asia and Greece.
 - 4) No mention was made by Luke concerning the financial gift. It was probably given at this time but Luke rightly noted Paul's primary emphasis, the spread of the Gospel to non-Jews, note Acts 24:17, *Now after several years I came to bring alms to my nation and to present offerings.*
 - 2. Advice to Paul in response to his ministry presentation (20-26)
 - a. Concern over misunderstanding by some of Paul's teaching (20-21), *And when they heard it, they glorified God. And they said to him, "You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed. They are all zealous for the law, and they have been told about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or walk according to our customs.*
 - 1) James and the elders rejoiced in God's drawing Gentiles to faith in Christ.
 - 2) Then, they told Paul that many Jewish believers committed to the law of Moses are saying that Paul is teaching Jews to forsake their Jewish traditions.
 - a) There were between 25,000 and 50,000 Jewish Christians in Judea when Paul returned to Jerusalem.
 - b) It was a time of Jewish nationalism and anti-Gentile attitudes.
 - c) Many of the new converts had been influenced by the Judaizers, the group that had challenged Paul in Caesarea and the issue was addressed at the Jerusalem Council, note Acts 15:1, *But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."*
 - d) Kenneth Gangel, *Paul's position had argued for tolerance and the right of each group to its own views. He had Timothy circumcised (16:3) and argued for the veiling of women at worship (1 Cor. 11:2-16), but the distortion of his teaching, especially at Jerusalem, had become standard operating procedure.*
 - e) Thomas Constable, *The word on the streets was that Paul was going beyond his actual practice of not requiring Gentile converts to undergo circumcision or to obey the Mosaic Law. They had heard he was telling Jewish converts not to practice circumcision or to observe the customs of Judaism. This was a false report. Paul did not teach that these customs were evil, just unnecessary for justification and sanctification.*

- b. The elders' plan to appease Jewish Christians (22-24), ***What then is to be done? They will certainly hear that you have come. Do therefore what we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow; take these men and purify yourself along with them and pay their expenses, so that they may shave their heads. Thus all will know that there is nothing in what they have been told about you, but that you yourself also live in observance of the law.***
- 1) The elders asked Paul what was to be done which was a rhetorical question since they already had a plan.
 - 2) They wanted Paul to demonstrate to Jewish Christians in Jerusalem that he had not abandoned Jewish customs.
 - 3) The plan involved four men who had taken a Nazirite vow of separation to God.
 - a) At the end of the vow they were to take an offering to the temple, two lambs, one ram, a basket of unleavened cakes and wafers, a grain offering, and a drink offering, note. Numbers 6:13-15.
 - b) They would present their offerings to the priest who would cut off their hair and burn it on the altar, Numbers 6:18.
 - 4) The elders encouraged Paul to go with them to the temple, purify himself for temple worship, and show support for this Jewish custom by paying for their offerings.
 - a) Paul could do this without compromising his convictions since a Nazirite vow was not considered essential for acceptance by God but a voluntary act of worship.
 - b) Judaizers considered circumcision as essential but Paul never objected to circumcision as a Jewish custom but not rite essential for acceptance by God.
 - c) Paul had taken a Nazirite vow earlier in his ministry, Acts 18:18, *After this, Paul stayed many days longer and then took leave of the brothers and set sail for Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila. At Cenchreae he had cut his hair, for he was under a vow.*
 - d) Paul's principle of ministry was that under grace, he could become like a Jew to win Jews, 1 Corinthians 9:20, *To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law.*
- c. Their instructions for Gentile Christians (25), ***But as for the Gentiles who have believed, we have sent a letter with our judgment that they should abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality.***
- 1) James and the elders repeated their instructions from the Jerusalem Council to Gentile believers.
 - a) They mentioned this to emphasize that their decision concerning Gentiles had not changed.
 - b) Thomas Constable, *Their counsel to Paul on this occasion did not contradict their strong commitment to salvation by grace.*
 - 2) The recommendations
 - a) Don't eat food dedicated to idols as noted in 1 Corinthians 8:10-13, *For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will he not be encouraged, if his conscience is weak, to eat food offered to idols? And so by your knowledge this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died. Thus, sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.*
 - b) Don't pursue sexual immorality as noted in Leviticus 18:6-20.
 - c) Don't eat strangled meat/don't drink blood as noted in Genesis 9:1-6 and Leviticus 17:11, *For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life.*
 - 3) The letter was a reminder to Gentile believers of the importance of being set apart to God.
 - a) Any appearance of worshiping idols must be avoided.
 - b) Immorality was an accepted practice in Gentile cultures but it is an abomination to God.
 - c) The importance of blood is tied to the fact that God is the giver of life and that life is in the blood and that spiritual life comes from blood sacrifice.

- d. Paul instituted their plan (26), *Then Paul took the men, and the next day he purified himself along with them and went into the temple, giving notice when the days of purification would be fulfilled and the offering presented for each one of them.*
 - 1) The seven days was the time in which a Nazirite would announce the completion of his vow to the priest and seven days later would present his offerings.
 - 2) Paul underwent the rites of purification because he was paying the expenses of the four men.
 - 3) Thomas Constable, *The Jews considered paying the charges for Nazirites' offerings an act of piety and a symbolic identification with the Jews.*

B. A riot in the Temple and Paul's arrest (27-36)

1. Asian Jews saw Paul in the Temple and made false charges against him (27-29), *When the seven days were almost completed, the Jews from Asia, seeing him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd and laid hands on him, crying out, "Men of Israel, help! This is the man who is teaching everyone everywhere against the people and the law and this place. Moreover, he even brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place." For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city, and they supposed that Paul had brought him into the temple.*

- a. Jews from Asia recognized Paul and made false accusations against him.
 - 1) They declared that Paul was teaching against the traditions of the Judaism, including the law and the sanctity of the temple.
 - 2) Also, they accused Paul of defiling the temple by bringing non-Jews into an area reserved only for Jews. a) They has seen Paul with Trophimus an Ephesian Christian and assumed Paul had brought him into the temple.
 - b) Thomas Constable, *The Jews permitted Gentiles in the outer court of the temple, the court of the Gentiles. They could not go beyond the sacred enclosure into the women's court, or into the court of Israel, much less into the court of the priests.*
 - c) Josephus, *The Romans allowed the Jews to execute any Gentile, even a Roman citizen, for proceeding beyond this low, stone barrier.*
- b. The Asian Jews incited the crowd and grabbed Paul.
 - 1) This crowd had traveled far to celebrate Pentecost, the harvest festival that occurs seven weeks after Passover.
 - 2) This is the sixth time a crowd was infuriated by Paul's ministry (Lystra, 14:19; Philippi, 16:19-22; Thessalonica, 17:5-8, Berea, 13; and Ephesus, 19:25-34).

2. A riot ensued (30-36)

- a. Paul was attacked by an unruly mob (30), *Then all the city was stirred up, and the people ran together. They seized Paul and dragged him out of the temple, and at once the gates were shut.*
 - 1) Rumors of Paul's alleged offense spread throughout the city with many coming to the temple to defend it.
 - 2) Paul was dragged out of one of the inner courts and back into the court of the Gentiles. The doors were then closed by the priests to keep the inner courts from being further defiled.
- b. The Roman commander heard of the disturbance and rescued Paul from the mob (31-32), *And as they were seeking to kill him, word came to the tribune of the cohort that all Jerusalem was in confusion. He at once took soldiers and centurions and ran down to them. And when they saw the tribune and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul.*
 - 1) The mob continued to beat Paul while he was in the court of the Gentiles.
 - 2) The Roman commander of the Fortress of Antonia that was connected to the temple heard of the disturbance.
 - a) Herod the Great had built the fort.
 - b) The tribune was the commander of the 1,000 Roman soldiers stationed in the fort.
 - c) Centurions were commanders of 100 soldiers each so at least 200 soldiers came to the temple.
 - 3) The mob stopped beating Paul when they saw the soldiers appear, W. Barclay, *One thing Rome insisted on—civil order. A riot was an unforgivable sin both for the populace who staged it and the commander who allowed it.*

- c. Paul was arrested by the Roman commander (33-34), *Then the tribune came up and arrested him and ordered him to be bound with two chains. He inquired who he was and what he had done. Some in the crowd were shouting one thing, some another. And as he could not learn the facts because of the uproar, he ordered him to be brought into the barracks.*
- 1) Paul was arrested and bound with two chains which bound him to two soldiers.
 - 2) The tribune asked Paul who he was and what he had done.
 - 3) He took Paul to the barracks since he could not gain the information he requested, K. Gangel, *Of course, in a mob of anarchists, one cannot hope to get any kind of rational response, so the tribune chose to take Paul back to the barracks.*
- d. The crowd tried to take Paul from the Roman soldiers (35-36), *And when he came to the steps, he was actually carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the crowd, for the mob of the people followed, crying out, "Away with him!"*
- 1) The crowd tried to take Paul back so the soldiers carried Paul.
 - 2) The mob followed crying, *away with him.* This meant *kill him*, note Acts 22:22, *Up to this word they listened to him. Then they raised their voices and said, "Away with such a fellow from the earth! For he should not be allowed to live."*
 - 3) Kenneth Gangel, *As they carried Paul up the steps (perhaps the same place Christ had stood twenty-seven years earlier), the crowd screamed Away with him!...Angry mobs at Jerusalem treated Paul exactly the way they had treated his Lord.*

CONCLUSION

- A. Paul sought unity among Jewish and non-Jewish Christians.
- B. Paul obeyed the elders' request without compromising his principles.
- C. Paul trusted God with no regard for his personal safety.