

**Woodland Baptist Church**  
**May 1, 2013 - Wednesday Night in the Word**  
**Acts 21:17-25 Paul Arrives in Jerusalem**

**1) OPENING REMARKS**

a) Do we remember Acts 15?

i) **Acts 15:19-21** - Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God, 20 but should write to them to abstain from the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood. 21 For from ancient generations Moses has had in every city those who proclaim him, for he is read every Sabbath in the synagogues."

b) Following his three epic journeys Luke describes the five trials Paul had to endure.<sup>1</sup>

i) Jewish crowd at the northwest corner of the temple area (22:1)

ii) Supreme Jewish Council in Jerusalem (23:1)

iii) Caesarea before Felix (24:1)

iv) Caesarea before Festus (25:1)

v) Caesarea before King Herod Agrippa (26:1)

c) Why did Luke take so much care in devoting so much time to these trials?

i) One of the major themes which he has been developing concerns the relations between Jews and Gentiles in the Messianic community. He has shown how Paul, called and commissioned to be the Apostle to the Gentiles, has by now on three solemn occasions, in Pisidian Antioch, Corinth and Ephesus, left the synagogue and exchanged Jewish for Gentile Evangelism (13:46, 18:6 & 19:8-9). It is in not an accident that Luke's story begins in Jerusalem and ends in Rome.<sup>2</sup>

ii) In Acts 21-23, Luke depicts the reaction to the gospel of two communities - of the *Jews who were increasingly hostile to it*, and of the *Romans who were consistently friendly to it*.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Stott - Commentary on Acts

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

- d) Remember the similarities between Jesus and Paul:
- i) Were rejected by their own people, arrested without cause and imprisoned.
  - ii) Were unjustly accused and willfully misrepresented by false witnesses.
  - iii) Were slapped in the face in court.
  - iv) Were hapless victims of secret Jewish plots.
  - v) Heard the terrifying noise of a frenzied mob screaming 'away with him.'
  - vi) Were subjected to a series of five trials - Jesus by Annas, the Sanhedrin, King Herod Antipas and twice by Pilate [5]; Paul by the crowd, the Sanhedrin, King Herod Agrippa II and by the two procurators, Felix and Festus[5].<sup>4</sup>

## 2) TRANSITIONS

- a) **17-** Paul and his Gentile delegation arrive in Jerusalem.
- b) **18-19** Paul and his companions go to the Christian church in Jerusalem and meet with James and the other elders. Paul gave them a report as he had done before in Antioch.
- c) **20** - The Jerusalem church praises God for the report and gives their own report, that thousands of Jews have also received the gospel and come into the church.
- d) **21** - The Jerusalem church is concerned that the untrue rumor is being spread that Paul teaches Jews to abandon their traditional customs. Together, they need to find a solution to this breach of unity, as word is out that he was in Jerusalem. They have a suggestion to help the situation.
- e) **22** - Join these four Jewish men in completing their vows and even pay for their sacrifices; this will show everyone that what they have heard is not true.
- f) **25** - the previous policy we agreed on for Gentile inclusion in the church still stands.
- g) **26** - Paul takes the suggestion and fulfills their request.

## 3) READ ACTS 21:17-26

### 4) Verses 17-19 Paul's Initial Arrival was Peaceful and Well-Received

- a) **17** When we arrived at Jerusalem, the brothers and sisters received us warmly.  
**18** The next day Paul and the rest of us went to see James, and all the elders were present. **19** Paul greeted them and reported in detail what God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry.
- i) **Received us warmly** - [asmenos] - to genuinely experience happiness.

---

<sup>4</sup> Stott - commentary on Acts

- (1) **Philippians 2:29-30** - So receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honor such men, 30 for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me.

ii) **James and all the elders** - Who is this James?

- (1) NOT - **James, the son of Zebedee** and brother of John (Matthew 4:21 ; Matthew 10:2 ; Mark 1:19 ; Mark 3:17 ; Luke 5:10 ). As one of the twelve disciples (Acts 1:13 ), he, with Peter and John, formed Jesus' innermost circle of associates. These three were present when Jesus raised Jairus' daughter (Mark 5:37 ; Luke 8:51 ), witnessed the transfiguration (Matthew 17:1 ; Mark 9:2 ; Luke 9:28 ), and were summoned by Christ for support during His agony in Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36-37 ; Mark 14:32-34 ) - first to be killed - Acts 12:2.
- (2) NOT - **James, the son of Alphaeus**, one of the twelve disciples ([Matthew 10:3](#) ; [Mark 3:18](#) ; [Luke 6:15](#) ; [Acts 1:13](#) ). He is not distinguished by name in any occasion reported in the Gospels or Acts. He may be "James the younger," whose mother, Mary, was among the women at Jesus' crucifixion and tomb ([Matthew 27:56](#) ; [Mark 15:40](#) ; [Mark 16:1](#) ; [Luke 24:10](#) ). In [John 19:25](#) , this Mary is called the wife of Cleophas, perhaps to be identified with Alphaeus. See [Cleophas](#) ; [Mary](#) .
- (3) **James, the brother of Jesus**. Bible students debate the precise meaning of "the Lord's brother" ([Galatians 1:19](#) ). Possibilities are the literal brother or stepbrother, a cousin, or intimate friend and associate. The literal meaning is to be preferred. During the Lord's ministry, the brothers of Jesus ([Matthew 13:55](#) ; [Mark 6:3](#) ; [1 Corinthians 9:5](#) ) were not believers ([John 7:3-5](#) ; compare [Matthew 12:46-50](#) ; [Mark 3:31-35](#) ; [Luke 8:19-21](#) ). Paul specifically mentioned a resurrection appearance by Jesus to James ([1 Corinthians 15:7](#) ). After the resurrection and ascension, the brothers are said to have been with the twelve and the other believers in Jerusalem ([Acts 1:14](#) ). Paul, seeking out Peter in Jerusalem after his conversion, reported "other of the apostles saw I none, save **James the Lord's brother**" ([Galatians 1:19](#) ). In time, James assumed the leadership of the Jerusalem church, originally held by Peter. Evidently, such was achieved not through a power struggle but by James' constancy with the church while Peter and other apostles traveled.

(a) **The death of James** reportedly was at the order of the high priest Ananus, and was either by stoning (according to Flavius Josephus, first century historian of the Jews) or by being cast down from the Temple tower (after Hegesippus, early Christian writer, quoted by the third-century Christian historian Eusebius). These accounts of James's death (about A.D. 66), are not confirmed in the New Testament.

(4) **The elders** - other qualified male leaders that had been established in the church since it's birth at Pentecost.

iii) **Paul reported in detail what God had done among the Gentiles** - much like Peter's report to the Jerusalem church about his experience with Cornelius, Acts 11. Paul reports on his journeys since the Jerusalem council, [apprx 10 years?]

(1) Paul told them intimate details about everything that he had encountered on his two missionary journey's since the Jerusalem council.

#### 5) **Verses 20- Paul's Controversial Reputation and How to Change It**

a) **20 When they heard this, they praised God. Then they said to Paul: "You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews have believed, and all of them are zealous for the law. 21 They have been informed that you teach all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to turn away from Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or live according to our customs. 22 What shall we do? They will certainly hear that you have come, 23 so do what we tell you. There are four men with us who have made a vow. 24 Take these men, join in their purification rites and pay their expenses, so that they can have their heads shaved. Then everyone will know there is no truth in these reports about you, but that you yourself are living in obedience to the law. 25 As for the Gentile believers, we have written to them our decision that they should abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality."**

- i) **They praised God** - [doxazo] - to give praise and glorify - something that is exceedingly good and deserving of honor.
- ii) But then they quickly changed the subject to more pressing matters... **You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews have believed, and all of them are zealous for the law. 21 They have been informed that you teach all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to turn away from Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or live according to our customs.**

- (1) *Many thousands of Jews believed* - not only has God reaped a harvest from among the Gentiles, but He has also been at work in Jerusalem as thousands of Jews have believed in Jesus.
  - (2) *all of them are zealous for the law* - they wish to maintain their adherence to Jewish customs and traditions.
  - (3) *They have been informed that you teach all the Jews who live among Gentiles to turn away from Moses, telling them not to circumcize their children or live according to our customs.*
    - (a) To turn away from Moses - [apostasia] - to rebel against - to rise up against in an open defiance of authority
    - (b) Not to circumcise their children - not to remove the skin from the male organ in accordance to the covenant of Abraham.
    - (c) Not to live according to Jewish customs - [ethos] pattern of behavior sanctioned and accepted by the society in which they live.
- b) Was this accusation true of Paul? If we were the Jews what would we think based on what we had heard?
- i) What was discussed in Paul's letter to Galatians?
  - ii) What was discussed and decided at the Jerusalem council?
  - iii) What exactly was Paul teaching about Judaism?
    - (1) **Galatians** - the example of Abraham - his justification was by believing God's promise, not works of law.
    - (2) **Acts 15** - Peter testifies about Cornelius (Acts 10), Barnabas and Paul testify to everything they seen on the missionary journeys and James finally declares partial fulfillment of Amos 9:11-12 - that that Gentiles coming to faith in Christ is a sign of the restoration of Israel.
    - (3) **Not of works** - Paul was teaching that salvation came through believe and faith in Christ as the promised messiah and that was not of works so that no man could boast.
  - iv) This accusation was not true, but as we know, our enemies like to take things that we say and twist them in a way that causes other people to turn against us and do their dirty work for them. This "delusional" thinking is a product of God's judgment and the blinding affects of Satan.

- (1) **2 Thessalonians 2:9-12** - The coming of the lawless one is based on Satan's working, with all kinds of false miracles, signs, and wonders, 10 and with every unrighteous deception among those who are perishing. They perish because they did not accept the love of the truth in order to be saved.  
**11 For this reason God sends them a strong delusion so that they will believe what is false,** 12 so that all will be condemned—**those who did not believe the truth** but enjoyed unrighteousness.
- c) **22 What shall we do? They will certainly hear that you have come, 23 so do what we tell you. There are four men with us who have made a vow. 24 Take these men, join in their purification rites and pay their expenses, so that they can have their heads shaved. Then everyone will know there is no truth in these reports about you, but that you yourself are living in obedience to the law. 25 As for the Gentile believers, we have written to them our decision that they should abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality."**
- i) *22 What shall we do? They will certainly hear that you have come, 23 so do what we tell you.*
- (1) It seems clear that James and elders do not believe what is being said about Paul, but there must be something done to reverse this process of false information about his teachings or there could be a continued rupture massing in the unity of the Gentile/Jewish church, the very thing that Paul was striving to avoid and heal.
- (2) James and the elders have a suggestion they think that will help to heal the rupture between the two.
- d) *There are four men with us who have made a vow. 24 Take these men, join in their purification rites and pay their expenses, so that they can have their heads shaved. Then everyone will know there is no truth in these reports about you, but that you yourself are living in obedience to the law.*
- i) Paul must follow the practice whereby rich men showed their love of the Law by paying the expenses and sharing the vigil of poor men. (They had four under a Nazarite vow who had incurred ritual defilement but were too poor to buy sacrificial birds and animals to purge the defilement and complete the vow.) "Then everyone will know that there is nothing in the stories they were told about you, but that you are a practicing Jew and keep the Law yourself."<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> Pollock - Paul the Apostle

ii) What is a **Nazarite Vow**?

- (1) Member of a class of individuals **especially devoted to God**. The Hebrew term means consecration, devotion, and separation. **Two traditional forms of the Nazirite are found**. One was based on a vow by the individual **for a specific period**; the other was a **lifelong devotion** following the revelatory experience of a parent which announced the impending birth of a child.
- (2) The Nazirite's **outward signs**—the growth of hair, abstention from wine and other alcoholic products, the avoidance of contact with the dead—are illustrative of devotion to God. Violation of these signs resulted in defilement and the need for purification so the vow could be completed. [Numbers 6:1-21](#) regulated the practice and lined the phenomenon to cultic law and locality. [Numbers 6:1-8](#) show how the Nazirite's period was begun. In case of defilement, a method of purification was given ([Numbers 6:9-12](#)). The status was **terminated** ([Numbers 6:13-21](#)) by the burning of shaven hair and the giving of various offerings. Parallels exist between the cultic purity of the high priest and the Nazirite.
- (3) The lifelong Nazirite in biblical tradition included **Samson** ([Judges 13:1](#)), **Samuel** ([1 Samuel 1:1](#)), and **John the Baptist** ([Luke 1:15-17](#)). In the New Testament, Paul took the Nazirite vow for a specific period of time ([Acts 18:18](#); [Acts 21:22-26](#)). [Amos 2:12](#) shows an ethical concern for protecting the status of the Nazirite.<sup>6</sup>

*iii) 24 Take these men, join in their purification rites and pay their expenses, so that they can have their heads shaved. Then everyone will know there is no truth in these reports about you, but that you yourself are living in obedience to the law.*

- (1) Are we hearing right? Are James and the Elders strongly suggesting that Paul submit to the Nazirite vow? What is going on here? Will Paul not seem like a complete hypocrite? No, although it certainly seems that way. We must remember Paul's teaching here:
  - (a) **Timothy - Acts 16:3** -Paul wanted Timothy to go with him, so he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places, since they all knew that his father was a Greek.

---

<sup>6</sup> Holman Bible Dictionary

- (i) Why did Paul have Timothy circumcised? He was half Jewish, so Paul circumcised him to make him a more accepted witness to the Jewish people.
  
- (b) **Titus - Galatians 3:3-5** -But not even Titus who was with me, though he was a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised. 4 This issue arose because of false brothers smuggled in, who came in secretly to spy on the freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, in order to enslave us. 5 But we did not give up and submit to these people for even an hour, so that the truth of the gospel would be preserved for you.
  - (i) Why did Paul completely refuse to have Titus circumcized? He had no part in ethnic Judaism. He had not Jewish blood.
  
- e) The heart of Paul on these issues is found in Romans 14/15 and 1 Corinthians 9.
  - i) **Romans 14 and 15** - The Law of Liberty /Love/ Pleasing others not ourselves/ Glorifying God together
  - ii) **1 Corinthians 9:19-23** - Although I am a free man and not anyone's slave, I have made myself a slave to everyone, in order to win more people. 20 To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win Jews; to those under the law, like one under the law—though I myself am not under the law—to win those under the law. 21 To those who are without that law, like one without the law—not being without God's law but within Christ's law—to win those without the law. 22 To the weak I became weak, in order to win the weak. I have become all things to all people, so that I may by every possible means save some. 23 Now I do all this because of the gospel, so I may become a partner in its benefits.
  
- f) So, if Paul's one-time, harmless participation in this ritual would somehow secure the fears of the Jews that are "zealous for the law," therefore, facilitating unity between the two racially diverse churches...why not do it? It was already recorded from the Jerusalem council where Paul and the others stood on Gentile salvation, the issue was what to do with Jewish custom.
  - i) *Then everyone will know there is no truth in these reports about you, but that you yourself are living in obedience to the law.*
  
  - (1) As we know true obedience to the law only comes through faith in Christ; so Paul would probably look at his participation in this ritual as a

**nostalgic experience** use the time to build fellowship with these poor Jewish men and strengthen their walk as they went to the temple.

**g) 25 As for the Gentile believers, we have written to them our decision that they should abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality."**

i) This was a re-statement of the decisions made during the Jerusalem council years earlier, of which James presided over.

**(1) Acts 15:19-21** - Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God, 20 but should write to them to abstain from the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood. 21 For from ancient generations Moses has had in every city those who proclaim him, for he is read every Sabbath in the synagogues."

## 6) CLOSE

- a) We can only thank God for the generosity of spirit displayed by both James and Paul. they were already agreed doctrinally and ethically. The issue between them concerned culture, ceremony and tradition. The solution they came to was a concession in the area of practice. Paul was ready to obey the law on certain special occasions for the sake of evangelism for example or for the unity of the church.<sup>7</sup>
- b) F.F. Bruce, "A truly emancipated spirit such as Paul's is not in bondage to its own emancipation."
- c) This was a sensitive, mutual Christian forbearance.
- d) Amazing that there is NO mention of the offering the Gentiles brought the Jerusalem church\*\*

---

<sup>7</sup> Stott