

Woodland Baptist Church
May 22, 2013 - Wednesday Night in the Word
Acts 21:27-36 Chaos in the Temple

1) OPENING REMARKS

- a) Following his three epic journeys Luke describes the five trials Paul had to endure.¹
- 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)
- b) 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.²
 - 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*.³
- c) 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.'

¹Stott - Commentary on Acts

²ibid.

³ibid.

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].⁴

2) **READ ACTS 21:27-36**

3) **Verses 27-29** Paul is attacked by Jews in the Temple

a) **27 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, 28 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." 29 For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city, and they supposed that Paul had brought him into the temple.**

i) **27 When the seven days were almost completed**

(1) The purification process required a cleansing on the third and on the seventh days (Num 19:2).⁵

ii) **the Jews from Asia, seeing him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd and laid hands on him,**

(1) Not surprisingly the opposition to Paul came from Asian Jews, probably some from Ephesus. Paul had spent three years in Ephesus and part of the time in their synagogue (19:8)⁶...it may have been some of these same Asian Jews who had spread the rumors about Paul throughout Jerusalem (cf. v. 21).

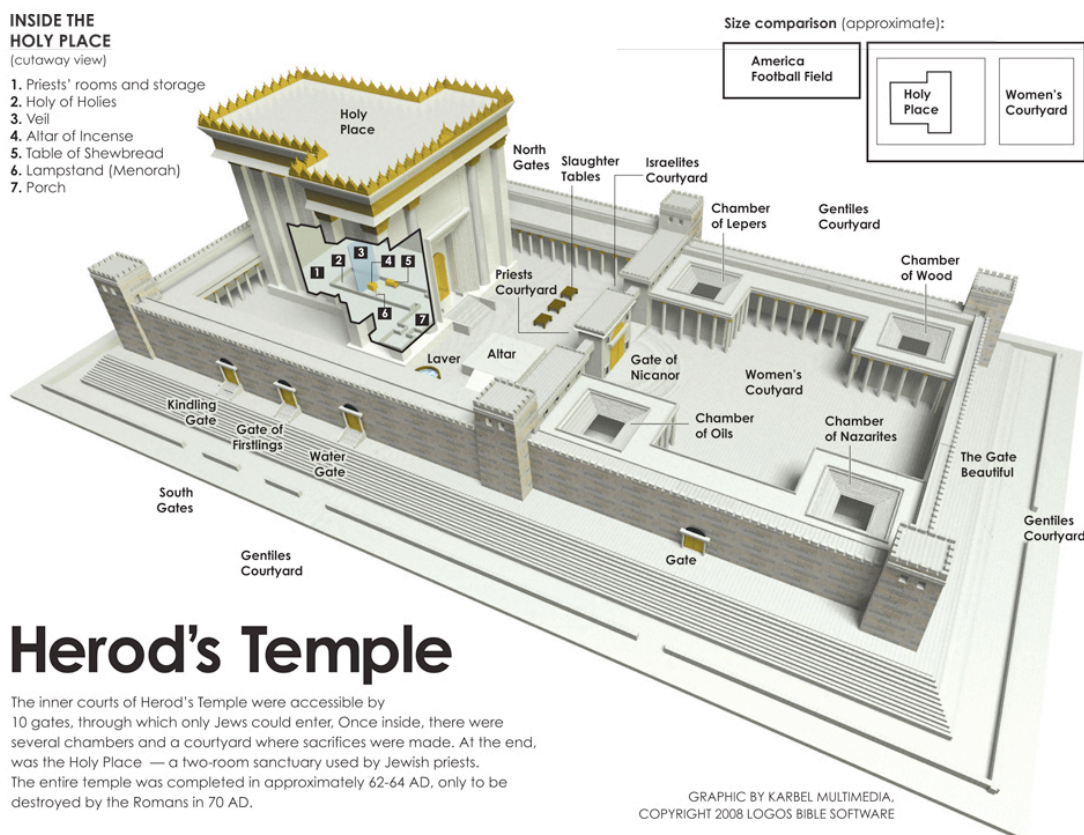
(2) As in Ephesus (19:23–31), Paul's opponents are successful in creating a riot and his life is seriously at risk (vv. 30–31). Mention of 'the whole city' being aroused and in uproar against him suggests 'rejection of Paul by Israel itself'. Only the intervention of the commander of the Roman troops in Jerusalem saves him from death (vv. 31–32).⁷

⁴Stott - commentary on Acts

⁵Polholl

⁶ibid.

⁷Peterson



iii) 28 crying out, “Men of Israel, help! This is the man who is teaching everyone everywhere against the people and the law and this place.

- (1) The uproar in Jerusalem is thus directly linked to Paul’s recent success in advancing the gospel in Asia.⁸
- (2) The accusations they began to make against Paul were very serious. Two were the same charges leveled against Stephen (cf. 6:13):
 - (a) He speaks against “our law and this place”; i.e., against Torah and temple.
 - (b) The third charge was less specific but perhaps the most valid—that Paul taught “against our people.” In a sense Paul did. His leveling gospel of oneness of all in Jesus Christ, Greek as well as Jew, could ultimately do nothing other than reduce the significance of the Jews as God’s chosen people.⁹
- (3) They accused Paul of having violated the temple by taking a Gentile beyond the court of the Gentiles into the sacred precincts that were open

⁸Peterson

⁹Polhill

to Jews only....there was a stone barrier that separated the court of the Gentiles from the first courtyard of the temple proper, the court of the women.¹⁰

(4) This barrier with its warning stones¹¹ is likely the “wall” between Jew and Greek to which Paul alluded in Eph 2:14. Paul certainly was familiar with it. He had experienced it firsthand.

(a) Two of these notices (both in Greek) have been discovered - one in 1871 and one in 1935 - the text of which runs: “No foreigner may enter within the barricade which surrounds the temple and enclosure. Any one who is caught trespassing will bear personal responsibility for his ensuing death.”¹²

b) 29 For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city, and they supposed that Paul had brought him into the temple.

i) On an occasion when he was trying to establish his Jewishness, it was the last thing he would have done! It was an instance of sheer irony. In the temple for his own purification, Paul was accused of having defiled it.¹³

(1) The possibility that Trophimus might have wandered of his own freewill into the forbidden area is about as likely as that somebody should wander into private rooms in the Kremlin for the purpose of sightseeing.¹⁴

ii) This was a capital offense: Gentiles might visit the outer court of the temple (which for this reason was sometimes called the Court of Gentiles), but they were forbidden to penetrate any of the inner courts on pain of death. The Roman authorities were so conciliatory of Jewish religious scruples in the

¹⁰Ibid

¹¹According to Josephus, there were warning stones set at regular intervals along this barrier, some in Greek and some in Latin, forbidding non-Jews access beyond this point. Two of these have been excavated, both with a Greek text and both with a message to the effect that any foreigner proceeding beyond the barrier did so on pain of death.

¹²Bruce, 409

¹³Polhill

¹⁴Marshall, The Acts

regard that they authorized the death sentence for this trespass even when the offenders were Roman citizens.¹⁵

(1) In the Mishnah, there is a text that speaks of ten ascending degrees of holiness within Israel's land: 1) a walled city, 2) within the walls of Jerusalem, 3) the temple mount, 4) the rampart, 5) the court of women, 6) the court of Israelites, 7) the court of the priests, 8) the area between the porch and the altar, 9) the sanctuary, and 10) the Holy of Holies.

(a) The issue with Trophimus and Paul involve #6.¹⁶

c) 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) The crowd, who mere moments ago had been engaged in worship, prayer, study or the transaction of other sacred business, now became an incensed mob.¹⁷

(2) The combination of these two accusations - the one a half-truth and the other an untruth - was enough to bring people 'running from all directions.'¹⁸

ii) Some interpreters see a certain symbolism in the shutting of the gates. This is the last scene at the temple in Acts. The gates were closed. Is this symbolic that with this final refusal of God's messenger the temple was forever closed to God's purposes?¹⁹

iii) Although Luke has not previously alerted us to these concerns about Paul, he shows by means of vv. 21 and 28 that there was a long-standing problem, which had finally been brought to full and open expression. In effect, 'when Paul reaches Jerusalem, he becomes the lightning rod through which the pent-up energy surrounding this issue is discharged.' Paul's attitude towards Judaism dominates the next chapters as he seeks to persuade various people that he is a loyal Jew and that his mission is not anti-Jewish.²⁰

¹⁵Bruce, 409

¹⁶Bock

¹⁷Ger

¹⁸Stott

¹⁹Polhill

²⁰Peterson

- (1) The exclusion of God's message and messenger from the house once called by his name sealed its doom: it was now ripe for the destruction which Jesus had predicted for it many years before (Luke 21:6).
- (2) The priests now closed these doors to prevent the defiling of the inner courts by the tumult and bloodshed.²¹

4) Verses 30 The ROMANS to the RESCUE

- a) **31 And as they were seeking to kill him, word came to the tribune of the cohort that all Jerusalem was in confusion. 32 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. 33 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. 34 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. 35 And when he came to the steps, he was actually carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the crowd, 36 for the mob of the people followed, crying out, "Away with him!"**

- (1) This is the sixth time in Acts that Paul's ministry had precipitated a public disturbance (cf. 14:19; 16:19-22; 17:5-8; 13; 19:25-34).²²

- ii) **31 And as they were seeking to kill him, word came to the tribune of the cohort that all Jerusalem was in confusion.**

- (1) This tribune, whose name is later disclosed as Claudius Lysias (23:26), would play a major role in the following two chapters. As a tribune he was a high-ranking Roman military officer in charge of a cohort, which consisted of 1,000 soldiers (760 infantry and 240 cavalry).²³
- (2) Not accidentally the barracks were located in Antonia adjacent to the temple. Stairs led from Antonia directly into the court of the Gentiles. The Romans were well aware that should any unrest arise in the city, it would most likely begin in the temple area.²⁴

²¹Jeremias

²²Constable

²³Ibid

²⁴Ibid

iii) **32 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. 33 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.**

- (1) In terms of Luke's narrative, this is the end of Paul's freedom to move about and preach the gospel, though the remaining chapters show him taking every opportunity to testify to Christ while imprisoned.
- (a) He is rescued from danger, but there is no miraculous release from captivity (cf. 5:17–21; 12:1–17; 16:25–30). Only when he reaches Rome is a measure of freedom restored, so that he is able to preach and teach more openly, while under house arrest (28:16–31).
- (b) **The commander of the Roman cohort** in Jerusalem becomes a key player in events from this point until Paul is safely delivered into the hands of the provincial governor in Caesarea (23:31–35).
- (i) He first suspects that Paul is a returning terrorist, who recently caused havoc in Jerusalem (21:37–38). Hearing Paul's brief self-description and request to speak to the people, he gives Paul the opportunity to defend himself before the crowd (vv. 39–40).
- (ii) In the next two chapters, the commander becomes progressively aware of Paul's true character and the real reasons for the conflict.²⁵
- (2) The significance of the "two" chains is not altogether clear. Paul may have been handcuffed on both arms and chained to a soldier on each side, or he could have been bound hand and foot, as Agabus had predicted he would be (cf. 21:11).²⁶

iv) **34 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. 35 And when he came to the steps, he was actually carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the crowd, 36 for the mob of the people followed, crying out, "Away with him!"**

²⁵Peterson

²⁶Polhill

- (1) The mood was much like the choice to free Barabbas and execute Jesus. The bulk of Jerusalem has reacted now against Jesus, Peter, John, Stephen and Paul.²⁷
 - (2) As they hastened up the steps, the crowd milled below, shouting, “Away with him!”—the same words the mob had screamed against Jesus (cf. Luke 23:18; John 19:15).²⁸
 - (3) The anger of the Jews was evident in their desire to tear Paul apart immediately. Their cry recalls their words about Jesus some 27 years earlier (Luke 23:18; John 19:15; cf. Acts 22:22). Probably the Antonia Fortress was where the soldiers took Jesus for trial before Pilate. It was also the prison from which the angel had freed Peter (12:5).²⁹
- b) It is noteworthy that the same verb, *epilambanomai* is used both of the mob ‘seizing’ Paul and of the commander ‘arresting’ him, although they had opposite objectives. The crowd were bent on lynching him, the military tribune on taking him into protective custody. It is a striking example of Luke’s aim to contrast Jewish hostility with Roman justice.³⁰

5) CLOSE

- a) Paul is doing everything he can to clear the air regarding who he was and what he truly believed about Judaism and continues to be misunderstood by most of the people.
- b) It is very ironic that Rome is actually more friendly to Paul than his own people; many times when rejected by those that profess to be God’s people we are very surprised to find out who God uses to help us and care for us.
- c) Many times our efforts will be judged wrongly and we must not seek vengeance, but we can seek justice.

²⁷Bock

²⁸Ibid

²⁹Constable

³⁰Stott