

ACTS 21:22-30a

Introduction:

1. Paul is in Jerusalem. He has taken the Gentile churches' financial collections to those of the Messianic Church. Their leaders are worried about Paul's ministry in having the Jews saved and then ditching the **law**. They knew their own kingdom believers were having **debates** about Paul's dealings with the Jews that he met in the synagogues. We see this in vs. 20-21, and they proudly tell Paul how many of them practiced the law **still**.
2. Then they were worried for Paul in how the Jews (unbelievers, who hated Paul) in the temple would **react** upon seeing him in the temple. Over a period of time, false information about Paul had filtered into Jerusalem among new believers and non-believing Jews. A great animosity had developed against Paul, and the temple was the center of their religion and customs.

A.

The Leaders' Solution

Acts 21:20-26 - And when they heard *it*, they glorified the Lord, and said unto him, Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law: Acts 21:21 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. Acts 21:22 What is it therefore? the multitude must needs come together: for they will hear that thou art come. Acts 21:23 Do therefore this that we say to thee: We have four men which have a vow on them; Acts 21:24 Them take, and purify thyself with them, and be at charges with them, that they may shave *their* heads: and all may know that those things, whereof they were informed concerning thee, are nothing; but *that* thou thyself also walkest orderly, and keepest the law. Acts 21:25 As touching the Gentiles which believe, we have written *and* concluded that they observe no such thing, save only that they keep themselves from *things* offered to idols, and from blood, and from strangled, and from fornication. Acts 21:26 Then Paul took the men, and the next day purifying himself with them entered into the temple, to signify the accomplishment of the days of purification, until that an offering should be offered for every one of them.

1. Remember, Paul did not feel/believe that it was wrong for him to practice certain Jewish customs - just so they didn't conflict with salvation's grace nor be a **test** of fellowship.

**Paul had tried so hard to maintain his Jewishness so he might have an opportunity to witness to his kinsmen (Rom. 9:1-3, 10:1).

Examples:
Acts 16:3 - Him would Paul have to go forth with him; and took and circumcised him because of the Jews which were in those quarters: for they knew all that his father was a Greek.

Acts 18:18 - And Paul *after this* tarried *there* yet a good while, and then took his leave of the brethren, and sailed thence into Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila; having shorn his head in Cenchrea: for he had a vow.

I Corinthians 9:20 - And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law;

*They never would have listened if he hadn't.
2. The Jerusalem leaders thought that if Paul would himself demonstrate publicly his respect for the Jewish law, that would **stop** the rumors. So they asked Paul to take a vow (Nazarite?) with four others, pay their expenses (their preparation), and be with them in the temple for the time for purification.

- a. Paul (unto the Jews, I became a Jew) agreed to do this. If this had involved any contradiction to salvation, Paul would **never** have agreed to it. That would violate grace! In Paul's life (as in ours), he had the **freedom** to accept or reject such customs.
 - b. Paul reported to the priest the next day and participated in the purification ceremony. Paul and the four men were to wait 7 days and then offer the prescribed sacrifice. But Paul never made it to that. Instead of helping to make peace, it created quite a **stir** (as we will see)!
3. Before going further, we should recognize that Paul would win Jews to Christ. He then would share with them that they did not have to, or were not **required** to, follow the law anymore.

Acts 13:38-39 - Be it known unto you therefore, men *and* brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: Acts 13:39 And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.

Galatians 3:24-25 - Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster *to bring us* unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. Gal. 3:25 But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.

Galatians 4:9-11 - But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage? Gal. 4:10 Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years. Gal. 4:11 I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain.

Galatians 5:1-2 - Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. Gal. 5:2 Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing.

Romans 7:6 - But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not *in* the oldness of the letter.

****They were now free (not under law), yet they had the liberty to participate in a Jewish custom if they wished to.**

4. I do not, for a **second**, believe Paul sinned in this ceremony.
 - a. There are some who say Paul sinned greatly here! Two were Donald Grey Barnhouse and Herbert Henry Ehrenstein. They said:

- (1) "I believe Paul taking this vow was really the beginning of the **end** for Paul." (even Paul's going to Jerusalem)

Answer: Was Paul's commission only to the Gentiles? Who are the heathen? If Paul only went to the Gentiles, then he would **often** be out of the will of God (but he wasn't).

Acts 17:1-2 - Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews: Acts 17:2 And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures,

Acts 13:46 - Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles.

Acts 9:15 - But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel:

- (2) Barnhouse: "Paul being in Jerusalem was not of the Holy Spirit, but I believe it was self-will. Paul made up his own mind to go to Jerusalem, but God wanted him to move on to Rome to only Gentile territories."

"How many of the Lord's people have lean souls (Ps. 106:15)? Paul was one of these at this time or point in his life. How sad to go off on a tangent of his own stubbornness. Here in Acts 21, we find the Holy Spirit twice warning Paul about going to Jerusalem (vs. 4, 11). Paul could have had God's best-first best, but he willfully settled for God's second best. By this time Paul was an opinionated, stubborn man and was determined to have his own way. Paul was actually showing little devotion to Christ in being willing to die for Him, which was easy. He rebelled against living for Christ, which was hard.

"Paul seems to have lost his spiritual discernment. He not only refused to rebuke James and these law-keeping Christians (?), he joins them in their heresy. This is one of the saddest sections in the Bible."

"Seeing Paul going through the legalistic practices of Judaism once again, they rightly assume he (Paul) was a phony, a turncoat."

"The way Paul talked, egotistically, is the way people talk who are out of the will of God."

- b. Answer: Can you imagine saying these things?

- (1) Again, as far as his going to Jerusalem, Paul had a purpose in going there.

Acts 19:21 - After these things were ended, Paul purposed in the spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, After I have been there, I must also see Rome.

Romans 15:25-27, 31 - But now I go unto Jerusalem to minister unto the saints. Rom. 15:26 For it hath pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem. Rom. 15:27 It hath pleased them verily; and their debtors they are. For if the Gentiles have been made partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister unto them in carnal things. Rom. 15:31 That I may be delivered from them that do not believe in Judaea; and that my service which I have for Jerusalem may be accepted of the saints;

I Corinthians 16:3 - And when I come, whomsoever ye shall approve by *your* letters, them will I send to bring your liberality unto Jerusalem.

**Paul's going to Jerusalem was not a spur-of-the-moment decision, but a long and well-thought-out plan that covered several years.

- (2) Again, his going to Jerusalem was also led by Paul's sensitivity to the Spirit's leading, that shows the probability for his right action in going there. He considered the Holy Spirit's warning to him as a divine forewarning, so he would be prepared spiritually for what would happen in Jerusalem.

Note: Acts 23:11 - [And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.]

- (3) I believe it was necessary for Paul to go there in order to fulfill his ministry. He expressed this fact.

Acts 20:24 - But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.

- (a) *Acts 9:15 - But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel:

It was necessary for Paul to fulfill his commission before the city (Jerusalem) was judged by God and destroyed (A.D. 70).

- (b) How could Paul go before kings and rulers? How could he set up meetings with the high priest or testify to the Sanhedrin to share the gospel with them? This was humanly impossible, but God had a way of doing it. God had the rulers set up the meeting

having Paul arrested. Paul's arrest also enabled him to testify before other rulers and kings, such as: Felix, Festus, King Agrippa, and finally before Caesar himself.

**The remainder of Acts demonstrates how God made all of it happen.

- (4) About Paul participating with this purification ceremony in the temple, in light of knowledge of Paul's sensitive conscience, his uncompromising stand for truth, and his placing of the will of God above everything else, I find it impossible to believe that Paul could fall and make such a mistake now.

**Other reasons why Paul did not make a mistake doing this ceremony:

- (a) Paul had taken a Nazarite vow (Num. 6) himself on his second missionary journey (Acts 18:18). Why then would it be wrong for him to participate in this ceremony?
- (b) As noted, Paul's doing this did not compromise any biblical truth. Instead, it was simply a matter of Christian liberty.
- (c) If Paul made such a serious mistake or error, would the Holy Spirit not have made that clear in the text?
- (d) The negative results do not prove he made such a mistake. That would imply Paul's arrest ignored the facts. The fact is, his arrest was prophesied before he arrived at Jerusalem.

Acts 21:4 - And finding disciples, we tarried there seven days: who said to Paul through the Spirit, that he should not go up to Jerusalem.

Acts 20:22 - And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there:

Acts 23:1 - And Paul, earnestly beholding the council, said, Men *and* brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.

- (e) Paul did not go back into Judaism while among the Jews. But recognizing their prejudices, he restrained himself and used his liberty so he would not offend them.

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B. Acts 21:27-30 - And when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews which were of Asia, when they saw him in the temple, stirred up all the people, and laid hands on him, Acts 21:28 Crying out, Men of Israel, help: This is the man, that teacheth all *men* every where against the people, and the law, and this place: and further brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place. Acts 21:29 (For they had seen before with him in the city Trophimus an Ephesian, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.) Acts 21:30 And all the city was moved, and the people ran together: and they took Paul, and drew him out of the temple: and forthwith the doors were shut.

1. The thousands of pilgrims who travelled to Jerusalem on its main feast days were usually those **most** zealous of the law and the traditions of the fathers. It now had been around **25** years since Paul had been in the public eye of Israel. The Jews at Jerusalem had not recognized him as yet. But the Jews that had been in Asia did recognize Paul from Ephesus, where Paul had a Greek-Gentile with him.
2. These Jews, to attack Paul, began to cry **out** to those in the temple that Paul was the man who had told others to be against the law and the temple. They cried out that Paul was polluting the temple by bringing in Greeks. Though **untrue**, just saying this was bound to stir up indignation from the Jews present. It had an immediate effect.
3. To show their **dis**dain for any Gentile being in the temple, this inner portion of the temple was held **sac**red for the Jews alone. Note:

****In excavations, in 1871, they found a slab of stone with an inscription on it which shows the Jews **real** feelings about Gentiles in this place in the temple.**

"NO MAN OF ALIEN RACE IS TO ENTER WITHIN
THE BALUSTRADE AND FENCE THAT GOES
ROUND THE TEMPLE. IF ANY ONE IS TAKEN
IN THE ACT, LET HIM KNOW THAT HE HAD
HIMSELF TO BLAME FOR THE PENALTY
OF DEATH THAT FOLLOWS."

4. These Jews grab Paul and yell for help from other Jewish worshippers. They are making him seem to be **anti**-Semitic (Rom. 9:1-3; 10:1)! They are accusing Paul of opposing the law and their temple, which was **blas**phemy to them.

Stephen? Acts 6:13 - [And set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak **blasphemous words** against this holy place, and the law:]