

Acts 21 -- Review

Paul said final “Good-byes” to the Ephesian elders and departed Miletus with intentions on going to Jerusalem. Eventually he arrived in Tyre where he resided with the Christian brethren for a week. They prophesied that Paul should avoid traveling to Jerusalem.

Paul eventually reached Caesarea and resided with Philip the Evangelist. During Paul’s stay, the prophet Agabus visited and prophesied, demonstrating with Paul’s belt, that he would be imprisoned by Jewish leaders in Jerusalem and delivered to Roman authorities.

The Christians in Caesarea were heart-broken that they could not persuade Paul from traveling to Jerusalem (Feast of Pentecost) - - Paul declared that not only was he ready to be imprisoned, but he was ready to suffer death for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul arrived in Jerusalem and was joyfully welcomed by the Christians there. Paul met with James (Jesus’ brother) and the elders of the Jerusalem church. He provided a “praise report” of the awesome things God did among the Gentiles via his ministry. Nevertheless, they articulated concern about the rumors that Paul was teaching Jews to abandon the Law of Moses and the Jewish ritual of circumcision. As a solution, they suggested that Paul participate in a Nazarite Vow of Consecration with four other Jews. ****Circumcision: A “token of the covenant between God & Abraham” (Gen. 17:10-14). It was enacted by Moses in the Law (Lev. 12:3). Jews took great pride in this rite and looked contemptuously at those (Gentiles) who did not observe it. (1 Sam. 17:26,36)**

Paul agreed, however, before he could complete the Vow, a group of Jews falsely accused him of defecting from the Law and defiling the Temple by bringing a Gentile in the inner Temple courtyard. A riot was incited and Jerusalem in its entirety was in an uproar. Paul was dragged out of the Temple and the violent mob tried to kill him. The Roman commander was informed of the uproar and he and his officers rescued Paul from the blood-thirsty mob. Paul requested and is allowed to address the hostile mob.

Acts -- Chapter 22

Verses 1-2: Paul is provided with an opportunity to defend himself before the Jewish crowd (mob) which just viciously tried to kill him based upon the false accusations of: (a) Teaching Jews to reject the Law of Moses (Jewish practices/rituals) and abandon the practice of circumcision (b) Bringing a Gentile (Trochimus) into the Inner Court of the Temple (An offense worthy of the death penalty). As he stood before the crowd, he requested their attention and they began to silence. And when Paul addressed the mob in their Hebrew tongue (Aramaic -- Hebrew dialect), the silence became deafening. He began his defense with humility by addressing the Jewish mob as “brothers and esteemed fathers” for Paul was also a Jew and considered Abraham his “father.”

****Note A:** Paul considered himself a “Jew of Jews” (Phil. 3:5-6 NLT), “I was circumcised when I was eight days old, having been born into a pure-blooded Jewish family that is a branch of the tribe of Benjamin. So I am a real Jew if there ever was one! What’s more, I was a member of the Pharisees, who demanded the strictest obedience to the Jewish law. And zealous? Yes, in fact, I harshly persecuted the church. And I obeyed the Jewish law so carefully that I was never accused of any fault.”

****Note:** Paul’s Testimony of his Conversion to the mob is a synopsis of Acts 9:1-19

****Note B: The Lord filled Paul with great wisdom and ability - - Paul was very keen (discerning) in recognizing opportunities to glorify the Lord Jesus through witnessing. Paul used this opportunity to “defend” himself to be a witness for the Lord Jesus Christ and attempt to open the eyes and hearts of his Jewish brethren to God’s Lamb, The Messiah Jesus Christ!**

****Note C: Moments prior his address to his Jewish brethren (the mob), he had spoken to the commander in Greek, now he is addressing the Jewish crowd in Hebrew! Paul was multi-lingual and he was also very educated - - Paul was a Professor of Jewish law. Paul himself said (Phil. 3:4) that he could “have confidence in the flesh...” or he could relish in all of his abilities and accomplishments, nevertheless, Paul also said (Phil. 3:7-8 NLT), “I once thought all these things were so very important, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done. Yes, everything is worthless when compared to the priceless gain of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. I have discarded everything else, counting it all garbage (dung), so that I may have Christ.” Paul also stated (1 Cor. 13) that none of those things would be of any value if he did not have love for others!**

Verses 3-5: Paul is laying the foundation for his Jewish brethren to realize that he “one of them” (Jew) and he also, as they are, is zealous in serving / honoring God. He attests that he IS a Jew and was born in Tarsus of Cilicia (si-lish-a). Tarsus was the capital of Cilicia, a Roman province. Paul, a Professor of Judaism, was instructed / trained in Jerusalem (at the feet of) by the most eminent (famous and respected within a sphere or profession) Doctor of Jewish Law, Gamaliel (ga-mA’ li-el -- meaning “reward of God”).

(Note: Gamaliel’s learning was so eminent and his character so revered that he was one of only seven among Jewish doctors who was honored with the special title of “Rabban.” Gamaliel was called the “Beauty of the Law.” It was also this same Gamaliel who in Acts 5 “flushed” the “blood-thirstiness” from the mouths of the Sanhedrin towards the apostles, by persuading them to leave the apostles alone (5:38) and wait to see if their purpose was Divine or not. The Sanhedrin thirsted to kill the apostles (5:33), but Gamaliel confirmed to them (5:39 KJV), “But if it (their purpose) be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.”)**

In other words, Paul was declaring that he was instructed by the “crème de la crème” or the best of the best, and knew Jewish law so well (Professor) that he could teach others and knew the Law better than they did. This statement actually elevated him as a Jew above all those in the mob - - for it was probably very few in the mob who could say they were “brought up at the feet of Gamaliel!” He declares that he was loyal to Judaism and instructed meticulously (careful & precise without waver or error) according to the Law, and was zealous (great energy & intensity regarding a pursuit, cause, or objective) towards God, Judaism, and the Law...just as they (his Jewish brethren) are. He further illuminates to them that he was so zealous towards God, Judaism, and the Law that he persecuted Christians (the Way), as a vicious animal (8:3), and had men / women arrested and sentenced to death. He also highlighted that the high priest and the Sanhedrin could validate and testify (bear witness) towards his vocation or purpose - - for they gave Paul letters (authority) to present to the Jews in Damascus authorizing him to arrest Christians in Damascus, and bring them to Jerusalem for judgment.

Verses 6-8: Here in verse 6 Paul begins to give, before this entire hostile Jewish mob, his Testimony of his Personal and Divine meeting with the Lord Jesus Christ...He was approaching Damascus to “go get some more Christians” (**Note: The distance between Jerusalem and Damascus was a little over 200 miles) when suddenly, at noon, a great (brilliant, glorious, intense) heavenly light besieged and overwhelmed him to the point that he buckled to the ground. He heard a Voice saying, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” (Saul, Saul why are you fighting Me, why are you obstructing the Gospel?) Paul responded, “Who are you Lord?” And the Lord Jesus Christ responded, “I am Jesus of Nazareth, the One you are persecuting.”

****Note:** Paul is laying the foundation and attempting to make panoramic to the Jews that God Himself has “replaced” Moses and the Law (Judaism) with Jesus the Messiah and the Gospel of Grace (Christianity)!

Verse 9: Paul continued that the men who traveled with him saw the great light, however, they were unable to hear the Voice that was speaking to Paul and to whom Paul was responding to. (**Note: Understand that we can be surrounded by people, yet God can communicate a Message specifically to us that others are unable to hear or interpret!)

Verse 10: Paul’s response of “What shall I do, Lord?” was one of reverence, humility, and surrender to God and His Will - - he renounced (abandoned) his philosophy, his conviction, his justifications, his will, and his way and said “YES” to the Lord Jesus, YES to Christianity, and YES to Salvation through the Grace (not the Law or rituals) of Jesus Christ. Paul, in his zeal, is laboring to position his Jewish brethren to visualize themselves in his position and also to model to them “surrender” to God’s Will. The Lord Jesus instructs Paul to first go to Damascus, and then wait for further instructions.

Verse 11: Paul was literally physically blinded by the Glory of Jesus Christ and he had to be led to Damascus by those who traveled with him (those who did not hear the Voice). Paul was not only made cognizant of his physical blindness, but he began to “absorb” the fact that he had been gravely “spiritual blind” also. He began to realize that the God of Judaism is also the God of Christianity. Paul was placed in a position where he was deeply humbled by God and he could no longer depend upon his abilities and skills - - he now HAD to trust God. In complete surrender to the Lord, we do not place our trust and confidence in ourselves and abilities, we place our ultimate trust and confidence in the Lord - - whether we “see” the Purpose or not.

Verses 12-13: In continuing with his testimony, Paul mentions a devout or godly Jew named Ananias who lived Damascus. **Note: This is not the same Ananias married to Sapphira - - they both were struck dead instantly for lying to the Holy Spirit over some money (Acts 5:1-11). Ananias was dedicated, loyal to Jewish law and he was highly regarded (upstanding character) by all Jews in Damascus. (**Note: The mentioning of men in his Testimony such as Gamaliel and Ananias was intended to add credibility to Paul’s unique Testimony before his Jewish brethren). By the Direction of God, Ananias commanded Paul to “receive his sight!” Paul was Transformed by the Spirit of God in that he received his sight naturally AND spiritually!

Verses 14-16: Paul is declaring before his Jewish brethren and is desperately laboring to enlighten them to the fact that ALL he experienced was by the Hand of God - - The God of their fathers Abraham, Isaac, & Jacob (Israel)! He testifies that God used Ananias in a powerful way to reveal to him that The God of their fathers chose (anointed) him to:
(a) Perform His Will (b) See Jesus Christ, the Just One, for himself (1 Cor. 9:1 & 15:8)
(c) Hear the Voice of the Just One (d) Be a witness for the Just One by testifying to ALL men (Jews & Gentiles) what he saw and heard - - This was truly a Divine Anointing!
Paul further testifies of his Conversion to God's Gospel of Grace through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, by repentance and baptism - - Paul "called on the name of the Lord" and received Salvation!

****Note: Romans 10:9-13 (NLT), "For if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by confessing with your mouth that you are saved. As the Scriptures tell us, 'Anyone who believes in Him will not be disappointed' (put to shame). Jew and Gentile are the same in this respect. They all have the same Lord, who generously gives his riches to all who ask for them. For, 'anyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'"**

Verses 17-21: Paul now begins to highlight the "entranced state" he entered into in the Temple, and the conversation he had with the Lord. When he returned to Jerusalem (from Damascus) he was in the Temple praying and had a vision of the Lord Jesus instructing him to immediately, quickly depart from Jerusalem because the Jews would reject his Testimony concerning the Lord Jesus. In this vision, Paul responded to the Lord in a manner which questioned the Lord's Instructions and attempted to validate staying in Jerusalem, "Lord, they know that in every synagogue I beat and imprisoned Christians - - they know I was an accomplice in the murder of Stephen, for I even held their coats while they stoned him!" Apparently, Paul found it unbelievable that being the "zealous Jew" that he was, his own people (the Jews) would reject him and his powerful Testimony. The Lord Reiterates the Command to Paul of leaving Jerusalem and offering the Gospel and Salvation of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles.

Verses 22-23: The "mob" of Jewish brethren had been "listening" to Paul's Testimony until Paul said the word "Gentiles" - - Oh no, not that word! They became outraged and incensed upon the mere thought that Gentiles could have the same relationship or status with God that Jews have without following the Law of Moses!!! The mention of Gentiles being offered the Gospel aroused insane jealousy and hatred within the Jewish mob - - they were so violently incensed and blood-thirsty that they snatched off their coats, threw handfuls of dust in the air, and cried out for Paul to be killed!

Verse 24: The commander witnessed the madness and concluded that Paul must have been guilty of some very serious crime. Since he probably did not understand Paul's Testimony, since it was spoken in Hebrew, he purposed to extract a confession from Paul of his crime by scourging him. The commander was perplexed at the fury and hostility of the crowd. He brought Paul into the castle to be scourged! ****Note: The scourge was a leather whip, studded with pieces of metal or bone, fastened to a wooden handle. Paul had been whipped before (2 Cor. 11:24,25)...but scourging was far WORSE!!!**
****Note: Jesus our Lord was scourged (Matt. 27:26; Mark 15:15; Luke 23:16,22; John 19:1)**

Verses 25-26: The commander had Paul bound (chained) and prepared to be scourged by his officer (centurion), when Paul challenged the officer with the “legality” of scourging a Roman citizen (such as Paul) without even being tried and found guilty of a crime.

****Note:** The Roman law was that no Roman citizen could be chained, scourged, or killed without a proper trial. Failure to obey this law resulted in severe punishment for the one who commanded the illegal punishment. Paul was chained and about to be scourged without ANY formal charges being made. The law was broken when the commander had Paul “bound with thongs.”

The officer urgently informed the commander that Paul was a Roman citizen, and an immediate re-examination his intentions towards Paul were necessary!

Verses 27-28: The commander instantly came to Paul and inquired if Paul was a Roman citizen...Paul affirmed to the commander that he was. The commander disclosed to Paul that he was a Roman citizen also and that he “purchased” his citizenship at a very high price. Paul revealed to the commander that he was born a Roman citizen (Tarsus of Cilicia, a Roman province), Paul’s Roman citizenship was free!

****Note:** At this time in history, the three ways to obtain Roman citizenship were by

(a) Imperial (Emperor) decree as a reward for outstanding services rendered

(b) Birth

(c) Purchase (with a large sum of money)

Verses 29-30: Those who were preparing to scourge Paul abandoned their plans and left immediately when it was discovered that Paul was a Roman citizen. The commander also was fearful for his life because he had committed major injustices towards Paul - - Paul’s rights as a Roman citizen had been severely violated. The commander was still curious regarding the reason why the Jews wanted Paul dead so badly, nonetheless, the following day he freed Paul from the chains of his imprisonment and arranged for Paul to appear before the chief priests and the Jewish high council (the Sanhedrin).

The Sanhedrin

The council was formed of high priests (i.e., the acting high priest, those who had been high priests, and members of the privileged families from which the high priests were taken), elders (i.e., tribal and family heads of the people and priesthood), and scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees. The number of members was seventy, with a president, vice president, and servants of the court. Usually the high priest officiated as the president -- Caiaphas during the time of Christ (Matt. 26:3,57) and Ananias during the time of Paul (Acts 23:2; 24:1). It is believed that membership was for life.

PAUL'S MISSIONARY JOURNEYS

The First Missionary Journey: (2 years, 1400 miles)

- a) From Antioch in Syria to Seleucia; Sailed then to Salamis in Cyprus (13:2-4)
- b) From Salamis to Paphos in Cyprus (13:5-6)
- c) From Paphos to Perga in Pamphylia (13:13)
- d) From Perga to Antioch in Pisidia (13:14)
- e) From Antioch in Pisidia to Iconium (13:50,51)
- f) From Iconium to Lystra (14:5,6)
- g) From Lystra to Derbe (14:20)
- h) From Derbe through Lystra, Iconium, Antioch (Pisidia) to Perga (Pamphylia) (14:21-23)
- i) From Perga to Attalia (14:25)
- j) From Attalia to Antioch in Syria (14:26-28)

The Second Missionary Journey: (3 years, 2700 miles)

- a) Traveled throughout Syria & Cilicia and then to Derbe & Lystra (15:40 -- 16:1)
- b) From Lystra to Troas (16:6-8)
- c) From Troas to Samothrace to Neapolis to Philippi (16:11-12)
- d) From Philippi to Thessalonica (16:40 -- 17:1)
- e) From Thessalonica to Berea (17:10)
- f) From Berea to Athens (17:14-15)
- g) From Athens to Corinth (18:1)
- h) From Corinth to Ephesus (18:18-19)
- i) From Ephesus to Jerusalem (18:21-22)
- j) From Jerusalem to Antioch in Syria (18:22)

The Third Missionary Journey: (4 years, 2800 miles)

- a) From Antioch in Syria to Galatia (18:22-23)
- b) From Galatia through Phrygia to Ephesus (19:1)
- c) From Ephesus through Macedonia to Corinth (20:1-2)
- d) From Corinth through Macedonia to Troas (20:3-6)
- e) From Troas to Assos to Mitylene to Chios (Kios) to Samos to Miletus (20:13-15)
- f) From Miletus through Coos, Rhodes & Patara to Tyre (21:1-3)
- g) From Tyre through Caesarea to Jerusalem (21:7-15)

Paul's Voyage To Rome (4th Journey): (Approx. 1500 miles)

- a) From Jerusalem to Caesarea (23:31-33)
- b) From Caesarea to Sidon (27:3)
- c) From Sidon, along the coast of Cilicia & Pamphylia to Myra (27:5)
- d) From Myra to Cnidus, past Salmone to Fair Havens (27:5-8)
- e) From Fair Havens past Claudia to Melita (27:13-28) **Shipwrecked at Melita
- f) From Melita to Syracuse (28:11-12)
- g) From Syracuse to Rhegium & Puteoli (28:13)
- h) From Puteoli through Appii Forum & Three Taverns to Rome (28:15-16)

The Astounding Evangelical Perseverance of the Apostle Paul: 2 Corinthians 11:22-28

False prophets infiltrated the Corinthian church bringing serious accusations against Paul with the intent to “seed” dissention and cause the congregation abandon the instruction & direction of Paul. Paul defends himself to the Corinthian church against these false prophets or “wolves” who hungered to invalidate his ministry...

They say they are Hebrews, do they? So am I. And they say they are Israelites? So am I. And they are descendants of Abraham? So am I. They say they serve Christ? I know I sound like a madman, but I have served Him far more! I have worked harder, been put in jail more often, been whipped times without number (beaten more times I can count), and faced death again and again. **Five different times the Jews gave me thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. Once I spent a whole night and a day adrift at sea. I have traveled many weary miles. I have faced danger from flooded rivers and from robbers. I have faced danger from my own people the Jews, as well as from the Gentiles. I have faced dangers in the cities, in the deserts, and on stormy seas. And I have faced danger from men who claim to be Christians but are not. I have lived with weariness and pain and sleepless nights. Often I have been hungry and thirsty and have gone without food. Often I have shivered with cold, without enough clothing to keep me warm. Then, besides all this, I have the daily burden of how the churches are getting along. (New Living Translation) **The Law forbade Jews to inflict more than forty (40) lashes at once (Deut. 25:3). To ensure the Law was not broken, thirty-nine (39) lashes would be inflicted.

Comment: What immeasurable pain, suffering, and trials Paul endured because of his zeal for God and his passion for rescuing men from darkness and bringing them to the Light! His “appreciation” on numerous occasions came in the form of men plotting, hungering, and thirsting to take his life.

Lessons in Life From the Anointed Evangelist, the Apostle Paul: Acts 28: 1-6

Once we were safe on the shore, we learned that we were on the island of Malta. The people of the island were very kind to us. It was cold and rainy, so they built a fire on the shore to welcome us. As Paul gathered an armful of sticks and was laying them on the fire, a poisonous snake, driven out by the heat, bit him on the hand. The people of the island saw it hanging from his hand and said to each other, “A murderer, no doubt! Though he escaped the sea, justice will not permit him to live.” But Paul shook off the snake into the fire and was unharmed. The people waited for him to swell up or suddenly drop dead. But when they had waited a long time and saw that he wasn’t harmed, they changed their minds and decided he was a god. (New Living Translation)

Comment: Paul was just working to build a fire for warmth when a viper, without warning, appeared and struck him. This was the only recorded experience where Paul literally dealt with a viper - - however, metaphorically, Paul had other “vipers” he had dealt with: false prophets, being stoned, robbers, shipwrecks, church challenges, facing death, beatings, etc. Life brought “the unexpected” to Paul in being struck by the viper, yet Paul was not deterred and his trust in God was unmovable - - he “shook the viper in the fire” and continued on in God’s Purpose. Paul models to us that when “life” unexpectedly strikes like a viper and attempts to deter or even destroy us, shake the viper in the fire! Continue in your Purpose in the Lord and seek His Will!