

A Study in Acts

Chapter Twenty-One – Third Journey of Paul Completed, Paul’s Arrest in Jerusalem.

ACTS 21:15-40:

We finished our previous lesson with the final leg of the end of the third journey of Paul. We will begin this lesson with his long-awaited arrival in Jerusalem. In **Romans 15: 22-31**, Paul shares his plans to go to Rome and then Spain, after he delivers the collected relief to the brethren and serve the brethren there; however, we know going back to the second journey that Paul has desired to go to Jerusalem for some time (see: **Chap. 18:21**). Paul will finally be able to preach in Jerusalem, but not how he planned, it will come as a series of defenses. In this section, we see why the defense was necessary.

Text #1

Acts 21:15-17 “And after those days we packed and went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁶ Also some of the disciples from Caesarea went with us and brought with them a certain Mnason of Cyprus, an early disciple, with whom we were to lodge.

¹⁷ And when we had come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly.”

As Paul spent time in Caesarea and the brethren attempted to persuade him not to go to Jerusalem, being warned of the danger that awaited him (which he had been aware of for some time), he is finally going to come to Jerusalem.

An Early Disciple – the reference here is that Mnason (Nason – the M is silent) was one of the earliest converts going all the way back to the beginning of the Gospel being preached in Jerusalem. We know nothing else about this man other than the mention here, which suggests that he was known to Theophilus.

Text #2

Acts 21:18-21 “On the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present. ¹⁹ When he had greeted them, he told in detail those things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. ²⁰ And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord. And they said to him, “You see, brother, how many myriads of Jews there are who have believed, and they are all zealous for the law; ²¹ but they have been informed about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs.”

Paul now meeting with the brethren in Jerusalem for the first time since coming here in **Chapter 15**, shares, as he always does, what God has done in Paul’s work of preaching the Gospel among the Gentiles. Yet even as the brethren glorify God for the success of the Gospel, there is a problem. Many, many Jews (Myriads – a single myriad is ten thousand) have continued to obey the Gospel, but are slowly transforming from Judaism to faith in Christ. However, they have heard rumors. What rumors, here is the list:

1. Forsake Moses – **Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:11; Galatians 3:24.**
2. Not to circumcise – **Galatians 5:1-6.**
3. Not to follow customs – **Galatians 4:21-31.**

Text #3

Acts 21:22-25 *“What then? The assembly must certainly meet, for they will hear that you have come. ²³ Therefore do what we tell you: We have four men who have taken a vow. ²⁴ Take them and be purified with them, and pay their expenses so that they may shave their heads, and that all may know that those things of which they were informed concerning you are nothing, but that you yourself also walk orderly and keep the law. ²⁵ But concerning the Gentiles who believe, we have written and decided that they should observe no such thing, except that they should keep themselves from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality.”*

A Vow – This is similar to **Chap. 18:18**, and we have discussed there the nature of vows (**Numbers 6:1-21; Numbers 30:2; Deuteronomy 23:21; Judges 11:29-40**). The Lord Himself set the record straight concerning oaths or vows in His sermon on the mount (**Matthew 6:33-37**). Simply said, nothing should be said, unless there is no doubt it shall be done.

The Question – To what extent do we go to bring the weak along?

1 Corinthians 9:19-23 *“For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; ²⁰ and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law; ²¹ to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law; ²² to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. ²³ Now this I do for the gospel’s sake, that I may be partaker of it with you.”*

1 Corinthians 10:23-33 *“All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify. ²⁴ Let no one seek his own, but each one the other’s well-being. ²⁵ Eat whatever is sold in the meat market, asking no questions for conscience’ sake; ²⁶ for “the earth is the Lord’s, and all its fullness.” ²⁷ If any of those who do not believe invites you to dinner, and you desire to go, eat whatever is set before you, asking no question for conscience’ sake. ²⁸ But if anyone says to you, “This was offered to idols,” do not eat it for the sake of the one who told you, and for conscience’ sake; for “the earth is the Lord’s, and all its fullness.” ²⁹ “Conscience,” I say, not your own, but that of the other. For why is my liberty judged by another man’s conscience? ³⁰ But if I partake with thanks, why am I evil spoken of for the food over which I give thanks? ³¹ Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. ³² Give no offense, either to the Jews or to the Greeks or to the church of God, ³³ just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.”*

Romans 15:1-2 “*We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves. ² Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification.*”

Galatians 6:6 “*Let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches.*”

Text #4

Acts 21:26 “*Then Paul took the men, and the next day, having been purified with them, entered the temple to announce the expiration of the days of purification, at which time an offering should be made for each one of them.*”

Announce the Expiration of the Days of Purification – This was for the purpose of announcing to the priests that their purification was almost complete. This would then allow the priests to prepare their offerings for sacrifice. This act would bring Paul into the temple complex where all the trouble is about to begin.

Text #5

Acts 21:27-30 “*Now when the seven days were almost ended, 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 teaches all *men* everywhere against the people, the law, and this place; and furthermore he also 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, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.)*

³⁰ And all the city was disturbed; and the people ran together, seized Paul, and dragged him out of the temple; and immediately the doors were shut.”

Jews from Asia – These would be specifically from Ephesus, who knew that Paul housed with, and traveled with Gentiles. Keep in mind, just as false accusation was brought against the Lord, it is also to transpire here. Their accusation is an assumption wrapped in hatred for Paul.

Trophimus – They had seen Trophimus with Paul in Jerusalem and recognizing one of their own, will use him as the basis for their accusation. Trophimus is named among those who will travel with Paul back to Jerusalem to witness on behalf of the brethren they represented that the offering for the brethren in Jerusalem was delivered properly (**Chap. 20:4**). He will be mentioned again in **2 Timothy 4:20**.

Text #6

Acts 21:31-36 “*Now as they were seeking to kill him, news came to the commander of the garrison that all Jerusalem was in an uproar. ³² He immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down to them. And when they saw the commander and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul. ³³ Then the commander came near and took him, and commanded *him* to be bound with two chains; and he asked who he was and what he had done. ³⁴ And some among the multitude cried one thing and some another.*

So when he could not ascertain the truth because of the tumult, he commanded him to be taken into the barracks. ³⁵ When he reached the stairs, he had to be carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the mob. ³⁶ For the multitude of the people followed after, crying out, “Away with him!””

Commander – Greek, ‘*Chiliarch*’, a commander of one thousand (or ‘*Cohort*’). This would be the commander of the Jerusalem garrison, located in the fortress Antonia. We will learn his name in **Chapter 23:26** – Claudius Lysias.

Tumult – This word means, a disorderly commotion or disturbance. It comes from the same root word as, ‘*confusion*’.

Away with Him – This would be the same cry that would be made against the Lord. See **Luke 23:18; John 19:15**.

Text #7

Acts 21:37-40 “Then as Paul was about to be led into the barracks, he said to the commander, “May I speak to you?”

He replied, “Can you speak Greek? ³⁸ Are you not the Egyptian who some time ago stirred up a rebellion and led the four thousand assassins out into the wilderness?”

³⁹ But Paul said, “I am a Jew from Tarsus, in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city; and I implore you, permit me to speak to the people.”

⁴⁰ So when he had given him permission, Paul stood on the stairs and motioned with his hand to the people. And when there was a great silence, he spoke to *them* in the Hebrew language, saying,”

The Egyptian – The question of the commander shows that his response with his men was to the riot and not to the cause of the riot. He assumed to know Paul as a local wanted criminal. Paul’s answer to his question is going to present him with the opportunity to learn why this commotion has begun and possibly give him the information he needs if he is going to charge Paul with a crime. Notice in Paul’s response, that Paul is going to leave out a crucial bit of information; his Roman citizenship (this won’t come out until **Chapter 22:25**).

Hebrew Language – Paul’s address to the Jews in Jerusalem is going to grab their attention. He is going to speak to them in their religious language. Aramaic was the everyday language of the Jews; Hebrew was only taught to the students of the law, and priests by the rabbis and priests. Many in the audience would recognize the Hebrew language, but would require those educated in it to interpret Paul’s message.