

The Church of the Servant King

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Survey of the Bible Series – The Book of Acts

(SB_Acts 21B_Paul's Arrest and Defense in Jerusalem)

Introduction

In our previous session, we studied Paul's travel to Jerusalem as documented by Luke in the first half of chapter 21. That study led us to Paul's arrival in Jerusalem and his address before the church leadership in Jerusalem (21:15-26). At the conclusion of Paul's explanation of all that had transpired among the Gentiles during the eight years or so between the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) and his current visit, the Jewish Christian leadership in Jerusalem responded with encouraging words as well as concerns regarding the reactions that they anticipated from the Jewish believers and unbelievers in Jerusalem.

Based upon the response to Paul by the leaders of the Jerusalem church, several things are made clear and should be highlighted in the way of review:

- Jewish believers in Jerusalem continued to practice and observe rituals and behavioral patterns associated with the Mosaic Law which had become tradition within Jewish culture over its then 1500 to 2000 year history.
- The Jewish leadership of the Jerusalem church affirmed the decisions of the earlier Jerusalem Council – Gentiles were under no obligation to observe elements of the Mosaic Law (e.g. circumcision) in order to be saved.
- The decisions of the Jerusalem Council were directed towards what was required of Gentiles for salvation and the Council did not address the issue of Jewish believers continuing to observe practices and rituals associated with the Mosaic Law.
- By virtue of the Council's silence, Jewish believers continued to practice circumcision, meet on the Sabbath and even offer sacrifices (21:26).
- Some have concluded from these observations that God had sanctioned two parallel programs (one for Jews and one for Gentiles) during this Transition period.
- However, it is my belief that we are simply observing the effects of progressive revelation slowly effecting changes in culture and tradition as new understanding begins to unfold. (Remember, Paul has yet to write the prison epistles of Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians and his letters to Timothy and Titus which disclose much new doctrine that is even more unique to the present age).
- The effect of progressive revelation is not only observed in the unfolding of Pauline theology, but is highlighted in the book of Hebrews (circa A.D. 64) which argues for the cessation of the observance of Jewish rituals and practices associated with the Mosaic Law.

The elders of the Jerusalem church were concerned about the reaction that Paul faced within Jerusalem since there had been rumors that distorted what he had been teaching. Some had been led to believe that Paul was teaching the Jews who were among the Gentiles to forsake the Law and abandon the "customs" of the Jews (21:21). Of course, this was a smoke screen that the Jewish unbelievers used to distort and to obscure any attempt to arrive at an objective and accurate understanding of Paul's teaching.

Principle: People in reversionism will inevitably manifest subjective thinking in those areas where they have rejected truth.

Principle: Subjective thinking is the product of self-justification and rationalization.

Principle: Self-justification and rationalization is motivated by a sin-nature driven desire to protect one's self-interest.

Application: Be discerning of reversionistic people (believers and unbelievers) and be wise to discern their areas of subjectivity.¹ Their modus-operandi (method of operation) is to distort the truth in an effort to protect their selfish modus-vivendi (their method of living). In the case of the Jewish unbelievers, the leadership was interested in retaining their power and status and the hoi polios were interested in retaining their social and/or financial status.

In an attempt to placate his opposition and go the extra mile to demonstrate that he was not an enemy of the Jews, Paul offered to pay for the expenses of four Jewish men who had taken a vow – presumably the Nazarite vow. At the conclusion of the vow, some expensive sacrifices had been required of or pledged by these men (cf. Num 6:13-17) and they were evidently too poor to complete their vow and pay for the sacrifices. Was Paul wrong to have entered into this arrangement? *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* has some interesting comments to note with which I agree.

Was Paul wrong in entering into this arrangement, which was a specific part of the Law? For several reasons it may be said he was not: (1) Paul himself had previously taken a Nazirite vow (Acts 18:18). (2) Later he unashamedly referred to this incident before Felix (24:17-18). (3) This action on Paul's part only confirmed one of the principles of his ministry which was to become like a Jew to win the Jews, and to become like one under the Law to win those under it (1 Cor. 9:20). (4) One of Paul's goals for the Jerusalem trip, along with relief of the poor, was the unifying of Jews and Gentiles. (5) Paul was not denying the finished work of Christ by offering animal sacrifices. The epistles Paul had already written by this time (Gal., 1 and 2 Thes., 1 and 2 Cor., Rom.) make it clear that such a denial was incomprehensible. He must have looked on these sacrifices as memorials. After all, this will be the significance of millennial sacrifices (Ezek. 43:18-46:24; Mal. 1:11; 3:3-4). (6) Paul later asserted he did not violate his own conscience (Acts 23:1).²

This [Paul's participation in Judaistic purification rituals] did not conflict with Paul's teaching that Jews and Gentiles cannot be brought under the Law to be saved. This was a matter of Jewish custom, not of salvation or of sanctification.³ [Bracketed comments and underlining are mine for clarification and emphasis]

Paul is Seized in the Temple (21:27-40)

27 And when the seven days were almost over, the Jews from Asia, upon seeing him in the temple, *began* to stir up all the multitude and laid hands on him, 28 crying out, "Men of Israel, come to our aid! This is the man who preaches to all men everywhere against our people, and the Law, and this place; and besides he has even brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place." 29 For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with him, and they supposed that Paul had brought him into the temple. 30 And all the city was

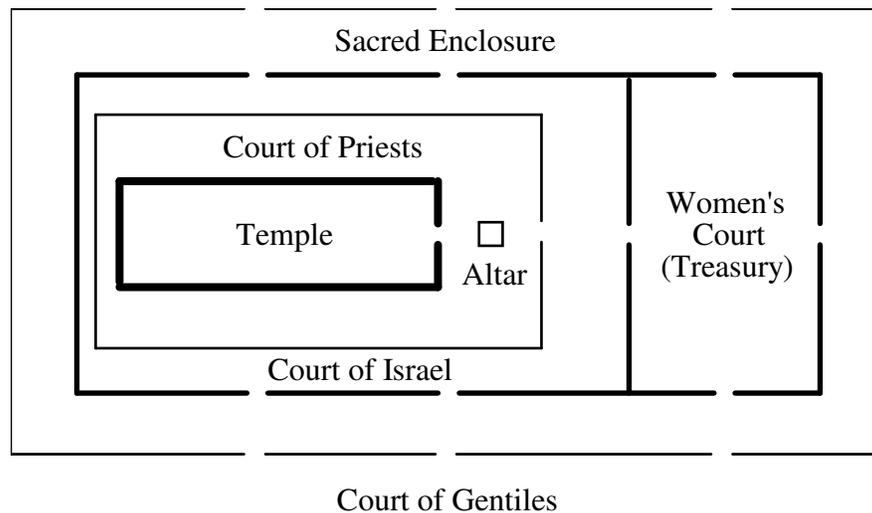
¹ For a definition and development of the Biblical concept of reversionism, see the notes that are the subject of a lesson series on the subject.

² John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary – New Testament*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Scripture Press Publications, Inc., 1983, 1985), 416.

³ Ibid.

aroused, and the people rushed together; and taking hold of Paul, they dragged him out of the temple; and immediately the doors were shut. 31 And while they were seeking to kill him, a report came up to the commander of the *Roman* cohort that all Jerusalem was in confusion. 32 And at once he took along *some* 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 up and took hold of him, and ordered him to be bound with two chains; and he *began* asking who he was and what he had done. 34 But among the crowd some were shouting one thing *and* some another, and when he could not find out the facts on account of the uproar, he ordered him to be brought into the barracks. 35 And when he got to the stairs, it so happened that he was carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the mob; 36 for the multitude of the people kept following behind, crying out, "Away with him!" 37 And as Paul was about to be brought into the barracks, he said to the commander, "May I say something to you?" And he *said*, "Do you know Greek? 38 "Then you are not the Egyptian who some time ago stirred up a revolt and led the four thousand men of the Assassins out into the wilderness?" 39 But Paul said, "I am a Jew of Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no insignificant city; and I beg you, allow me to speak to the people." 40 And when he had given him permission, Paul, standing on the stairs, motioned to the people with his hand; and when there was a great hush, he spoke to them in the Hebrew dialect, saying. ⁴

The Jews permitted Gentiles in the outer court of the temple, the court of the Gentiles. Gentiles were not allowed to go beyond the sacred enclosure into the women's court or into the court of Israel. There was no way they would be allowed into the court of the priests.



Jewish men like Paul who were not priests or Levites could go no farther than the court of Israel. The priests had posted notices in Latin and Greek of the prohibition against Gentiles entering the sacred enclosure, the area that included the courts of the women, Israel, and the priests. The doors that were closed when Paul was dragged out of the Temple were probably the doors that separated the Court of the Gentiles from the inner courts. The doors were closed to protect the inner courts from being defiled by the violence and bloodshed that was to ensue. The

⁴ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from *The New American Standard Bible*, (La Habra, California: The Lockman Foundation) 1977.

Romans allowed the Jews to execute any Gentile, even a Roman citizen, for proceeding beyond this low, stone barrier.⁵

Archaeologists have discovered two of these notices. One reads as follows.

"No man of another nation to enter within the fence and enclosure round the temple. And whoever is caught will have himself to blame that his death ensues."⁶

Unbelieving Jews from Asia had traveled to Jerusalem to participate in the Feast of Pentecost. These unbelieving Jews discovered Paul and incited the whole crowd against Paul using a false accusation that was guaranteed to inflame the passions of all Jews who were "zealous for the Law" (21:20). They accused Paul of taking a Gentile into restricted areas of the Temple which would have been viewed as defiling the Holy Place. This is the sixth time a crowd was incited because of Paul's ministry (14:19; 16:19-22; 17:5-8, 13; 19:25-34). The false charges brought against Paul were similar to those raised against Stephen.

9 But some men from what was called the Synagogue of the Freedmen, *including* both Cyrenians and Alexandrians, and some from Cilicia and Asia, rose up and argued with Stephen. 10 And *yet* they were unable to cope with the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking. 11 Then they secretly induced men to say, "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and *against* God." 12 And they stirred up the people, the elders and the scribes, and they came upon him and dragged him away, and brought him before the Council. 13 And they put forward false witnesses who said, "This man incessantly speaks against this holy place, and the Law; 14 for we have heard him say that this Nazarene, Jesus, will destroy this place and alter the customs which Moses handed down to us." (Acts 6:9-14)

The Jews started to attack Paul in the court of the Gentiles. The commander of the Roman garrison in the nearby Fortress of Antonia named Claudius Lysias (23:26) was alerted by the commotion. The Fortress of Antonia connected with the Temple area on the northwest corner. Herod the Great had built this fortress to house the soldiers of the Tenth Legion. There were approximately 1,000 soldiers in this garrison. When he saw the riot, he summoned the garrison which then rushed to the court of the Gentiles. Levites constituted the Temple police (cf. 4:1), but these Roman troops were responsible to keep peace in the whole city. The Jews stopped beating Paul when they saw the commander and the other soldiers. The Roman authorities were very serious about civil order and dealt quickly and severely with those who caused civil disturbances as well as any Roman officer that allowed it.

The anger of these religious and unbelieving Jews was outwardly manifest in their desire to kill Paul immediately. Their outcries were similar to those that were made against Jesus some 27 years earlier (Luke 23:18; John 19:15; cf. Acts 22:22). It is quite possible that 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).

⁵ Flavius Josephus, *The Works of Flavius Josephus*, translated by William Whiston, *Antiquities of the Jews* and *The Wars of the Jews* (London: T. Nelson and Sons, 1866), 6:2:4 cited by Thomas Constable, "Notes on the Book of Acts."

⁶ C. K. Barrett, *The New Testament Background: Selected Documents*, p. 50. See Adolf Deissmann, *Light From the Ancient East*, p. 81, or Kent, p. 163, for a photograph of this limestone block cited from Thomas Constable, "Notes on the Book of Acts." See also Walvoord and Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary – New Testament*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Scripture Press Publications, Inc., 1983, 1985), 417.

The commander assumed that Paul was a certain Egyptian who had appeared in Jerusalem three years earlier.

This man claimed to be a prophet of God and announced that the wall of Jerusalem would collapse at his command. He further claimed that he would lead his followers from the Mount of Olives into Jerusalem where they would defeat the Romans and throw off their yoke. The Romans, however, attacked this man's followers first and killed many of them, but he had escaped. The Egyptian's followers came from the ranks of the Assassins (lit. dagger-men). These were radicals who mingled with crowds with daggers hidden under their cloaks and stabbed Romans and pro-Roman Jews stealthily in an attempt to gain Jewish independence from Rome.⁷

Claudius Lysias evidently thought this man had returned to the temple area to recruit more followers and the people who now recognized him as an impostor had turned against him.⁸

Paul informed the Roman commander that he was not an Egyptian, but a Jew from the very respected Roman city of Tarsus. Tarsus was an important center of learning in the ancient world along with Athens and Alexandria. It was also the capital of Cilicia and a free city in the Roman empire. As a Jew, Paul had a right to be in the Temple court of Jerusalem. Paul's background and the Roman commander's knowledge of these facts would have given Paul some immediate credibility with the Roman commander and that credibility influenced the Roman commander's decision to allow Paul to address the mob.

Paul's Self-Defense Before the Jewish Mob (21:41 – 22:21)

Paul spoke to the Jews in Hebrew rather than Greek. This would have established a common connection between Paul and his captors and this is why they immediately became silent when he began to address them.

In his opening remarks (v. 3), Paul just wanted to demonstrate that he was as zealous for his Jewish heritage as any of them (cf. Gal 1:14). He admits to having persecuted Christians to the death (vv. 4-5 cf. 9:1-2). He had done so under the authority of the Sanhedrin and he had pursued Christians as far away as Damascus.

13 For you have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism, how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure, and tried to destroy it; 14 and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions. (Gal 1:14)

9:1 Now Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest, 2 and asked for letters from him to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. (Acts 9:1-2)

In verse 3, Paul mentions the fact that he was schooled by Gamaliel – the most respected Jewish Pharisee and teacher of the day. Earlier in the Acts narrative, the wisdom of

⁷ Josephus, *The Wars . . .*, 2:13:3, 5; and *Antiquities of . . .*, 20:8:5, 6, 10. See also Richard A. Horsley, "High Priests and the Politics of Roman Palestine," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 17:1 (June 1986):42-43 cited in Constable, "Notes on the Book of Acts."

⁸ Constable, "Notes on the Book of Acts."

this Gamaliel is displayed in the manner in which he controlled the overly zealous religious leadership of Israel (i.e. the Sanhedrin) when they were plotting to kill the Apostles for testifying of Jesus' resurrection and Messianic status. He wasn't a believer, but he was clearly guided by a conscience (norms and standards) that had been shaped by the divine establishment principles of Scripture, e.g. respect for volition.

33 But when they heard this, they were cut to the quick and were intending to slay them. 34 But a certain Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the Law, respected by all the people, stood up in the Council and gave orders to put the men outside for a short time. 35 And he said to them, "Men of Israel, take care what you propose to do with these men. 36 "For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody; and a group of about four hundred men joined up with him. And he was slain; and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing. 37 "After this man Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census, and drew away *some* people after him, he too perished, and all those who followed him were scattered. 38 "And so in the present case, I say to you, stay away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or action should be of men, it will be overthrown; 39 but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them; or else you may even be found fighting against God." 40 And they took his advice. (Acts 5:33-40a)

In verses 12-15, Paul described Ananias as a devout Jew who carefully observed the law and one who had a good reputation among his fellow Israelites. As a Jew, Ananias communicated to Paul a revelation that he had received from God using Jewish terminology from his frame of reference. Paul was emphasizing the fact that God used a devout and respected Jew to communicate God's purpose for Paul. Ananias had even called Paul his brother. Ananias explained to Paul that it was the God of their fathers who had appeared to Paul (cf. 3:14). This title for God is distinctly Jewish. God wanted Paul to know His will, to see the Righteous One (the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, v. 8), and to receive direct revelation from Him. Ananias also said that God had told him that Paul was to be a witness "to all men" of what Paul had seen and heard. This vindicated Paul's ministry to Gentiles.⁹

Verse 16 has been a problem to some readers of Acts because one might understand it to say that water baptism washes away sins.

16 'And now why do you delay? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name.' (Acts 22:16)

It is important to make accurate observations about this passage as a part of our hermeneutical approach to determining its interpretation. First, it is important to properly observe the Greek syntax so that the proper relationship between words in the verse can be understood. The Greek word that is translated "calling on" is an aorist participle that precedes the action of the main verb ("be baptized"). Accordingly, the phrase is more appropriately translated "Arise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins, having called on His name."

Second, in this verse, it is important to observe what is meant by "wash away your sins." Well prior to Paul's encounter with Ananias, Paul was converted. Paul experienced an appearance by the resurrected Lord Jesus Himself (Gal 1:11-12). Paul admittedly acknowledged Jesus as His Lord at this time when he asked the Lord "What shall I do Lord?" (Acts 22:10) An unbeliever would not manifest a willingness to do whatever Jesus commanded. So, Ananias' command of Paul that he "wash away his sins" in association with water baptism should not be interpreted to mean that the ritual of water baptism washes away one's sins. Rather, water

⁹ Constable, "Notes on the Book of Acts."

baptism was merely an outward cleansing ritual that had been practiced within Judaism throughout its history and was carried over into the Transition era.¹⁰

The writers of Scripture present water baptism elsewhere not as the agent of spiritual cleansing but as the illustration of spiritual cleansing that has already taken place (1 Cor. 6:11; 1 Pet. 3:21). The agent of spiritual cleansing is faith in Christ. Paul referred to faith in this verse as "calling on His name" (cf. Joel 2:32). Paul evidently experienced regeneration on the Damascus road; he believed that Jesus of Nazareth was the divine Messiah predicted in the Old Testament (v. 10; cf. Gal. 1:11-12; Acts 9:17-18). He experienced baptism in water after he called on the Lord for salvation. The Lord washed Paul's sins away when he called on the Lord. Then Paul arose and received baptism. The Greek word *epikalesamenos*, translated "calling on," is an aorist participle meaning "having called on."¹¹

In verse 17, Paul includes some new things that Luke had not mentioned earlier in chapter 9 of his account of Paul's conversion. Evidently, Ananias relayed to Paul the instructions that Jesus had communicated to Ananias.

13 But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he did to Thy saints at Jerusalem; 14 and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call upon Thy name." 15 But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; 16 for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake." (Acts 9:13-16)

When Paul was in Jerusalem, God confirmed this mission to Paul by special revelation as he was praying in the temple following his return from Damascus (9:26-29; Gal. 1:18-19). This took place in the third year after his conversion. Paul specifically mentions the fact that he was praying in the temple when God gave him direction in the hopes that his Jewish audience would have been positively impressed.

In Paul's vision (vv. 18-20), the resurrected Jesus of Nazareth instructed Paul to leave Jerusalem. Luke had not mentioned this instruction earlier in his narrative (9:29-30); rather Luke emphasized the activity of Paul's fellow believers in sending him to Tarsus. Regardless, their insistence was in harmony with the Lord's command. Paul's testimony highlights the fact that the Jerusalem in which he now stood and faced such opposition was God's originally intended place of witness and the temple had been His place of the revelation of His will. The reason Paul needed to leave Jerusalem was that the Jews there would not accept his testimony about Jesus even though Paul had formerly persecuted Jesus' disciples.

The fact that Paul had taken the gospel or truth to Gentiles was not what upset the Jewish crowd in Jerusalem. This mission activity to Gentiles had plenty of precedence in Israel's history. What really upset this Jewish crowd was the fact that Paul was not requiring that Gentiles become Jews first, but he was approaching Gentiles on an equal basis with Jews. It was the same self-righteousness which motivated the extreme opposition that Jesus faced.

28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Gal 3:28)

¹⁰ See similar comments in Walvoord and Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary – New Testament*, 418.

¹¹ Constable, "Notes on the Book of Acts."

This response is important to the argument of the Book of Acts. It indicates the Jews in Jerusalem had irrevocably refused the gospel of Jesus Christ and had sealed their fate. Less than 20 years later in A.D. 70 the city of Jerusalem became rubble and ruin (cf. Matt. 24:1-2; 21:41; 22:7). This, of course, does not mean Israel will not be restored in the future (cf. Rom. 11:26).¹²

Paul's Claim to Roman Citizenship and Presentation to the Sanhedrin (22:22-30)

The Roman commander did not understand Hebrew or Aramaic; therefore, he did not understand what Paul had said that might have provoked the crowd. The fact that this Roman commander allowed Paul to address the Jews is a reflection of the character, professionalism and discipline of this man. We see several examples in Scripture of Roman military officers acting with poise and character around Christians. (Conversely, we also see the cruel and harsh means by which Roman authority could function as well, e.g. the treatment of Jesus for political expediency and Nero's persecution of Christians in the A.D. 60's).

When the crowd was provoked to hysteria against Paul again, the Roman commander was determined to get to the bottom of what was happening. He ordered that Paul be flogged so that Paul would be convinced to tell him the truth. Of course, the Jews must have thought that such actions might result if they protested against Paul enough for they knew the Romans' hatred of civil unrest and the extreme measures that would be taken against anyone who dared to incite such a riot. They had hoped Paul might die.

This flogging is different from Paul's beating with rods at Philippi and on two other occasions (2 Cor. 11:25; Acts 16:22-23). Nor was it the same as the Jewish 39 lashes administered with the long whips, a punishment Paul had received five times (2 Cor. 11:24). The Roman scourge was inflicted with shorter whips embedded with pieces of metal or bones and attached to a strong wooden handle. It could kill a man or leave him permanently crippled. This was the punishment Christ received (Matt. 27:26), leaving Him unable to carry His cross.¹³

This was at least the sixth time that the Sanhedrin had to evaluate the claims of Christ. The first occasion was when it met to consider reports about Jesus (John 11:47-53), and the second was Jesus' trial (Matt. 26:57-68; 27:1-2; Mark 14:53-65; 15:1; Luke 22:66-71). The third meeting was the trial of Peter and John (4:5-22), the fourth was the trial of the Twelve (5:21-40), and the fifth was Stephen's trial (6:12—7:60).¹⁴

¹² Walvoord and Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary – New Testament*, 418-419.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Constable, "Notes on the Book of Acts."