

Radiant Church, April 26, 2020
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Acts 21:17-22:21

Acts 21:17-18 *When we had come to Jerusalem, the brothers received us gladly. On the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present.*

Acts 21:19-22 *After greeting them, he related one by one the things that God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. And when they heard it, they glorified God. And they said to him, "You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed. They are all zealous for the law, and they have been told about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or walk according to our customs. What then is to be done? They will certainly hear that you have come.*

First, they celebrate what God has done. This is like one church celebrating what God is doing in another church in town

Paul also (likely, though not mentioned by Luke) presents the offering

But some of the Jerusalem Christians are suspicious of Paul

 Growing Jewish nationalism

 Growing Christian legalism

 "Zealous for the Law" meant saved by grace, kept saved by law

Jerusalem church already gossiping, already accommodating legalists

Acts 21:23-24 *Do therefore what we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow; take these men and purify yourself along with them and pay their expenses, so that they may shave their heads. Thus all will know that there is nothing in what they have been told about you, but that you yourself also live in observance of the law.*

The suggested plan? Undertake a Jewish ritual, that doesn't contradict the gospel

 Seven-day purification (that done by anyone coming from Gentile lands)

 Not unlike a 14-day quarantine today

The purpose was to appease the consciences of certain Jewish Christians - not those of the religious temple leaders. Paul was willing to do whatever united the entire Church, Jew and Gentile alike

Acts 21:25 *But as for the Gentiles who have believed, we have sent a letter with our judgment that they should abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality."*

Acts 21:26 Then Paul took the men, and the next day he purified himself along with them and went into the temple, giving notice when the days of purification would be fulfilled and the offering presented for each one of them.

In Paul's case, to be truly free is to be free even from his freedom

Acts 21:27-28 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, 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."

These accusations are designed to create mob violence

Acts 21:29 For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city, and they supposed that Paul had brought him into the temple.

No way Paul would have done this. This action always resulted in the death penalty

Acts 21:30-31 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. And as they were seeking to kill him, word came to the tribune of the cohort that all Jerusalem was in confusion.

Acts 21:32 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.

Acts 21:33-36 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. 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. And when he came to the steps, he was actually carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the crowd, for the mob of the people followed, crying out, "Away with him!"

2 chains (hands and feet?) like Agabus had predicted in vv.10-11

Acts 21:37-38 As Paul was about to be brought into the barracks, he said to the tribune, "May I say something to you?" And he said, "Do you know Greek? Are you not the Egyptian, then, who recently stirred up a revolt and led the four thousand men of the Assassins out into the wilderness?"

Acts 21:39-Acts 22:1 Paul replied, "I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no obscure city. I beg you, permit me to speak to the people." And when he had given him permission, Paul, standing on the steps, motioned with his hand to the people. And when there was a great hush, he addressed them in the Hebrew language, saying: "Brothers and fathers, hear the defense that I now make before you."

Acts 22:2-3 *And when they heard that he was addressing them in the Hebrew language, they all became even more quiet. And he said, "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated at the feet of Gamaliel according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God as all of you are this day.*

Paul now gives his "defense" (apologia) for why he is a Christian:

Loyalty to his Jewish heritage

The facts about his conversion to Jesus the Messiah

First, his Jewishness and his former enthusiasm for Judaism

Acts 22:4-5 *I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering to prison both men and women, and the high priest and the whole council of elders can bear me witness. From them I received letters to the brothers, and I journeyed toward Damascus to take those also who were there and bring them in bonds to Jerusalem to be punished.*

Second, his encounter with the risen Jesus

Acts 22:6-8 *As I was on my way and drew near to Damascus, about noon a great light from heaven suddenly shone around me. And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?' And I answered, 'Who are you, Lord?' And he said to me, 'I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.'*

Acts 22:9-10 *Now those who were with me saw the light but did not understand the voice of the one who was speaking to me. And I said, 'What shall I do, Lord?' And the Lord said to me, 'Rise, and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all that is appointed for you to do.'*

Acts 22:11 *And since I could not see because of the brightness of the light, I was led by the hand by those who were with me, and came to Damascus.*

Third, the commission Jesus gave him

Acts 22:12-16 *And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there, came to me, and standing by me said to me, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight.' And at that very hour I received my sight and saw him. And he said, 'The God of our fathers appointed you to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear a voice from his mouth; for you will be a witness to him to everyone of what you have seen and heard. And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.'*

The "God of our Ancestors" called him (v14)

God called Paul to be a witness to everyone, Jew and Gentile (v16)

God gave Paul instructions on how to proceed in his calling (v16)

Then Paul shares a part of his story we didn't read about in Acts 9

Acts 22:17-20 *When I had returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, I fell into a trance and saw him saying to me, 'Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about me.' And I said, 'Lord, they themselves know that in one synagogue after another I imprisoned and beat those who believed in you. And when the blood of Stephen your witness was being shed, I myself was standing by and approving and watching over the garments of those who killed him.'*

Acts 22:21-22 *And he said to me, 'Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles.'” Up to this word they listened to him. Then they raised their voices and said, “Away with such a fellow from the earth! For he should not be allowed to live.”*

Their problem? Gentiles

How does Paul respond?

- He is calm in the midst of threats on his life

- He is courageous in telling the truth of his experience with Jesus

- He is consistent in fulfilling his calling, in spite of their rage

How can we respond?