

## THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

Acts 21:15-29 | Session 61 | Paul Returns to Jerusalem | A.D. 60

Verse 15-17--

**We...went up to Jerusalem.** The word **carriages** is a verb in the Greek. The word means *to carry one's goods or personal property*. In other words, "we packed our baggage." They took along an **old disciple**. **Old** is the Gk. word *arche* and can mean old age, or from the beginning, or early. The Greek also allows for this to be translated, *the disciples took us to an early disciple, Mnason, and we stayed with him*. Regardless, he had a house in Jerusalem, and they stayed with him. There is nothing else to know about **Mnason**. Paul and company are welcomed when they arrive in Jerusalem: **the brethren received us gladly**. These verses are historical notes and add interest to our reading. Those in Jerusalem are certainly happy to see Paul and everything seems to be going well, but that is all about to change in our passage next week.

Verse 18-20—

The next day Paul met with the leaders in Jerusalem, headed by James. It was an anticipated meeting as **all the elders** (presbuteros) **were there**. Paul **declared** to them **the things God had wrought** (this word is the past participle of *work*). Today we might say *the work God did, or the work God had done among the Gentiles*. Paul's work with the **Gentiles** (*Gk: ethnos=nations*). Paul uses this word *ethnos* for Gentile Christians, or *the uncircumcised*. Paul has already had a meeting similar to this back in Acts 15. When Paul wrote to the Galatians (See Gal. 2:7), he made it clear to them that there were two gospels being preached; one by Peter of the circumcised (i.e., Jews; the national gospel) and one of Paul of the uncircumcised (i.e., Gentiles, the individual gospel of Grace). Paul is clearly talking to them about the gospel of grace. So, when Paul declared what God had wrought among the Gentiles, it did not come as a surprise to the elders. But then, after **they heard it they glorified the Lord**, the council told Paul what was happening in Jerusalem. There are **many thousands of Jews...which believe**. When we hear the word believe, we tend to want to read our own experience into the passage; Oh, they are believers just like us! But the sentence continues, **and they are all zealous of the law**. These are believers in Jesus as the Messiah, who are still living under the law of Moses. They are what we might call *kingdom believers*, not *grace believers*. These are Jews who have believed that Jesus was their Messiah and that they killed him and have thus repented and have been baptized for the remission of their sins. In fact, if we say that these *Christians* were like us, then they were being disobedient because all believers today are FREE FROM THE LAW. The law is not of faith (Gal. 3:12). This is where we have to rightly divide the Scripture.

Verse 21—

The fake news has made it to Jerusalem that Paul **teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses**, specifically Paul is accused coercing parents **not to**

**circumcise their children** and to not **walk after the Jewish customs** (i.e., that which has been prescribed by Law). Paul has a problem; he is a marked man.

Verses 22-24—

**What is it therefore** (What should be done about this?) We need a solution, because the word is going to get out that you are here. Recall that Paul had taken a vow back in Acts 18:18. We were not told what the vow was for but in our notes, we said that *in order to complete the vow, it had to be done at the door of the Temple. This is why we speculated that Paul was in a hurry to get back to Jerusalem*. Now, the Jewish elders have a plan. There are four other men who have also taken such a vow. If Paul joined them, it would show the thousands of Jews that Paul is also zealous for the Law as they are.

Verse 25—

The Gentiles, however, were not required to keep the Law. It appears James and the elders want to make that clear. What they discussed in the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 still holds true; **the Gentiles which believe...observe no such thing...**

Verse 26—

**Then Paul took the men**. This is an indication that what Paul was about to do was not a way to trick the Jews into believing he was one of them, rather Paul too was zealous for the Law. Just to enter into the Temple required that one embrace and obey Judaism. **Purifying themselves**, there were various ways for purification *among them* would be ceremonial washing in a Mikvah (baptism), and purification by offering a sacrifice. In this case Paul and the others ceremonially washed and then later an **offering** was sacrificed **for every one of them**.

Verse 27-28—

The Law of Moses regulated how many days of purification were necessary (Numbers 6:9). **The Jews which were of Asia...when they saw him in the temple, stirred up the people**. Asia Minor, probably the Jews who knew of Paul from Ephesus where he spent three years teaching. Unfortunately, they got his message wrong. They mixed what he was teaching to the Jews with what he was teaching to the Gentiles (1 Cor. 9:19-22). It's the same mixing of law and grace we face today. The false accusations against Paul were:

**-that teacheth all men every where against the people** (the People always being the Jews, or Israel).

**-against the Law.**

**-against the Temple.**

Their false accusations were based on one thing. They **had seen him...in the city with Trophimus and Ephesian...supposed that Paul had brought him into the temple**.