

Acts 21:18-27

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[0 : 0 0] 21. Acts chapter 21.

Last week when we left off, Paul had arrived in Jerusalem. And he had been greeted by James and the elders.

And they had received him gladly. And so that's where we left off with Paul. And so we'll pick up today in verse 18. And the day following, Paul went in with us unto James, and all of the elders were present.

And when he had saluted them, he declared particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry. And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord and said unto him, Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe.

And they are all zealous of the law. They are informed of thee that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs.

[1 : 1 5] What is it, therefore, the multitude must needs come together, for they will hear that thou art come. Do therefore this, that we say unto thee, we have four men which have a vow on them.

Take them and purify thyself with them, and be at charges with them, that they may shave their heads, and all may know that those things whereof they were informed concerning thee are nothing, but that thou thyself also walkest orderly, and keepest the law.

As touching the Gentiles which believe, we have written and concluded that they observe no such thing, save only that they keep themselves from things offered to idols, and from blood, and from strangled, and from fornication.

Then Paul took the men, and the next day, purifying himself with them, entered into the temple, to signify the accomplishment of the days of purification, until that an offering should be offered for every one of them.

And we'll read verse 27 also. And when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews which were of Asia, when they saw him in the temple, stirred up all the people, and laid hands on him.

[2 : 2 5] And so there's a lot happening here that requires thinking back to the Old Testament. So we'll look at some Old Testament references as we go through here, but a lot is happening kind of under the surface that we have to be aware of to fully appreciate what's going on.

But here we have Paul reporting back to James and the elders. And so we see that the Jerusalem church is no longer under the leadership of the apostles. The leadership is James and the elders.

And this is not James the apostle. This is James, the half-brother of Jesus, who would later write the epistle of James. And so this is not one of the twelve, but it's Jesus' half-brother, who would come to faith shortly after Jesus' resurrection.

Remember, Jesus had family members that didn't believe until after he was ascended back to heaven, and raised and ascended back to heaven. They finally believed James being one of them. And so here is James and all the elders.

These are people of the Jerusalem church. Remember, that was where the church was birthed. That's where the church was started in Jerusalem. And James has been there. And the elders are with him.

[3 : 42] They greet Paul, and they receive him gladly. And when he had saluted them, he declared particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry.

And so Paul was reporting to them about all the Gentile conversions and the things that God had done through his ministry among the Gentiles. Remember, that's been a source of contention from the beginning, even back to chapter 15, where you had the Jerusalem council, where they came together, men from Antioch, people from Jerusalem come together and say, we've got all these Gentile converts, what do we do with them?

Do we put them under the law of Moses? Do we say they don't have to be under the law? So that was the first major church council where they had to come together and make a decision. And some of that decision was repeated here in verse 25.

But Paul is here making a report of what the Lord had done. And when it says declared particularly, that means he went into great detail. He wasn't just given an overall summary.

He gave them a very detailed explanation, a detailed description of what God had done to the Gentiles through his ministry.

[4 : 52] And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord. And so they were very excited to see that Gentiles were believing because they were understanding now this was not just all about them, that God had opened up the door of faith to the Gentiles.

He was bringing Gentiles in and that there was going to be one body in fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel. And also Amos has been quoted as well.

And these were all prophecies being fulfilled in the bringing in of Gentiles and Jews into one body. And Paul is going to spend a lot of time with that when he writes to the Ephesians.

A little bit later, when he writes from prison to the Ephesians, he's going to talk about, you know, God has broken that wall that divided the Jews and Gentiles and brought us all together in one body in Christ.

And so once they hear about that, now it's James's turn. He said that when they heard it, they glorified the Lord and said to them, Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe, and they are all zealous of the law.

[6 : 00] And the word thousands there is where we get our word myriads from, meaning tens of thousands, like not just a thousand or two. This is a lot of people. This could be as many as 10,000 or maybe even more than that.

So this is thousands and thousands of Jews have believed, and they are all zealous of the law. And so not from a we need to do this to be saved, but because they are converted, they are believers now, there's a desire to obey the commandments of the Lord.

That's one of the signs of someone is truly born again. First John says, you know, we know that we know him if we keep his commandments. If there's a desire in our heart to obey him and we're doing it from the heart, that comes from being saved.

That's the evidence of salvation is a desire to obey the Lord. And so they are all zealous of the law. And so we're still in this kind of transitional period.

They know that the law doesn't save them. They've been told that. But yet what part of the law can they still hang on to? Because traditions die hard, right? Customs are not easy to break.

[7 : 11] And if you've been doing this all your life and you're 40 or 50 or 60 years old, and you've been doing this day after day after day, and yes, you're now a believer in Christ, but there are some customs that still are hard to give up.

In fact, even after Jesus has died and rose again, ascended back to heaven, the church has been born and things are transitioning, there will still be Jewish practices going on in the temple up until 70 A.D.

when it's destroyed by the Romans. And so there are some Jewish customs, and they would still observe certain days. Remember, Paul was even trying to be back to Jerusalem before the Feast of Pentecost because there were some things he still observed.

Again, not for salvation, but as just being a Jew and wanting to serve the Lord in that way. And so the question becomes, how much do you hang on to?

How much starts to interfere with what Jesus has done? That's the big question. And it's interesting that the two main characters here are Paul and James because much ink has been used to determine if Paul and James were in disagreement with each other in their epistles.

[8 : 21] Right? Paul writes in Romans, it's by faith alone. James seems to say something about works. And so people have said, well, there's a contradiction there between Paul and James, and even Martin Luther said, James is an epistle of straw.

And he didn't really like the epistle of James. But when you understand that they're not contradicting, they're coming at it from a different perspective, then it all fits together. Paul is coming at it from the perspective of how God works in salvation.

He works by faith alone in Christ alone. It's all a work of God. And James is coming at it from the perspective of this person says they're saved. How do we know it? We look at their works.

We look at their actions. That's the only way we can see evidence of faith is by what they do. And so when you look at it from that perspective, you have harmony. You don't have contradiction.

Remember, if you ever have a contradiction in scripture, it's not the scripture. You got to go back and figure out where you missed something, because if there's a contradiction there, you missed something somewhere. Scripture is harmonization.

[9 : 23] It all fits together without contradiction. And so when you see that Paul and James are approaching the same thing from a different perspective, then it kind of comes together. But here they are again, Paul and James.

And James is going to tell Paul that they're all zealous of the law, and they are informed of thee. In other words, a rumor has been spread about you. It's been said that although a rumor has no legs to stand on, they sure get around quickly.

Right? So rumors will spread, and people will believe them. And people will, even those rumors that are straight up lies, people will believe them a lot quicker than they believe the truth.

That's just human nature. We believe a lie a lot quicker than we'll believe the truth. Look how many people reject the gospel. Right? The gospel is truth. The gospel is 100% truth. But look how many people reject it for something else.

And that something else will be a lie. But they'll flock to that. They'll grab onto that and hold onto it for all of its worth. And they'll reject the gospel. And so truth is often rejected for a lie.

[10 : 31] For some reason, humans believe a lie. And we'll be hearing a lot of them this year, coming up to November, and people will believe them. All right?

So it's been said that who do you vote for? The one that told the most believable lie. Right? So we're going to hear a lot of things that people jump on this year and accept this truth only to find out that somebody has not been completely honest with them.

But that's just human nature. We flock to a lie a lot quicker than we'll flock to a truth, especially if it's a rumor. If it's a rumor that's about somebody in a prominent place or a prominent position, people will jump onto that.

And what starts out as a little bit of a rumor, kind of like the telephone game you used to play in school, remember, by the time it got to about the second or third person, it was changing. By the time it got to the last person, especially if you had 25 or 30 people in the room, it didn't resemble anything like it started.

It had built and built and built until it was completely non-like it started. And that's the way rumors go. Rumors will get started, and people will say something and say a little bit of the truth, but then they'll add something to it, and then that thing will snowball, and by the time it gets around to the original source, it doesn't look anything like they said.

[11 : 46] But yet people are believing it. And this is what's happening about Paul. They are informed of thee that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses.

Now they're saying all this to a man who just recently shaved his head because he participated in a Jewish vow. So therefore he hasn't completely said don't do this. And they're also saying this to a man who had Timothy circumcised before he was going to go evangelize the Jews.

So this, you can see the rumor here has no weight, but yet people will believe this. And so they, thou teachest the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, remember the story of Timothy, neither to walk after their customs.

What is it therefore that multitude must needs come together for they will hear that thou art come? And so here's, this rumor started about Paul.

Remember Paul is the man that wrote to the Jews, I became as a Jew that I may win the Jews. And so he wasn't saying, you know, forsake all the customs. He was a person that tried to be to Jerusalem in time for the Passover.

[12 : 54] But that didn't happen. So later on he said, I want to be there by Pentecost. So here's one that's still trying to make those Jewish pilgrimage feasts, just like they've been doing all the time.

And so these rumors about Paul were, were not correct, but yet people believe them. And it kind of sounds like some of the same accusations they made against Stephen.

And the same accusations they made against Jesus. See, the methods don't change. The methods kind of stay the same. Here it's probably some of the same people that were opposing Jesus and opposing Stephen.

But even though we're 2,000 years removed, a lot of the things haven't, haven't changed in the methods that they use. And so even, go back to the Garden of Eden. What was, what was the serpent's approach to Eve?

Yea, hath God said. So casting doubt or trying to put, adding words to something God said or questioning God's, what God had said. So the method hasn't changed.

[13 : 54] It's, it's, it works. So there's been no need for them to change it. And so that method is still, is still the same after all these years. And so what is it therefore the multitude must needs come together for they will hear that thou art come.

Basically the fact that you're here is going to cause trouble. That's what James is telling them. They're going to hear that you're here and then they're going to show up is what James is telling him. So James is, in a way he's like, we're glad to see you but the fact that you're here may cause trouble.

It's basically what he's telling Paul. It's so good to see you but it could cause trouble. Do therefore this that we say to thee, we have four men which have a vow on them.

So James has a way to kind of hopefully pacify the anger of this Jewish mob that they may be dealing with here shortly. And so James is going to propose this idea to Paul. And it's going to sound good from, on the surface but there's something you have to remember that we got to go back to the Old Testament to look at.

Do therefore this that we say to thee, we have four men which have a vow on them. Take them and purify thyself with them and be it charges with them that they may shave their heads and all may know that those things whereof they were informed concerning thee are nothing but that thou thyself also walkest orderly and keepest the law.

[15 : 14] So if you'll do this then it'll show these people that these rumors aren't true and will kind of pacify their anger. It is the plan.

And so here's these men with a vow on them. Now most likely we have every reason to believe this is a Nazarite vow that these men are under. Why do we think that?

Well they're in the temple and they're going to shave their heads. That's how you ended a Nazarite vow. A Nazarite vow ended under two circumstances. One if you violated the vow you had to shave your head and go through this purification thing.

And then two most of the time the Nazarite vow was done for a limited amount of time. Maybe 30 days maybe longer but it was usually a time limit. Now there are situations where it was a Nazarite vow for life in the case of Samson.

He was to be a Nazarite for life. He was never to shave his head and other things. They basically had three things that they had to agree to by this vow.

[16 : 15] Now this is a vow of consecration consecrating themselves to the Lord and it was a good and honorable thing to do that. And there were three things that this vow contained.

One they had to abstain from anything related to the fruit of the vine. Now some people say well that just includes wine or strong drink. That's true it does but it also includes grapes.

It includes raisins. It includes anything that would be from the vine that would be in production of those things as well. Grapes, raisins, anything of that sort. Even things like vinegar they had to abstain from because it may have some of those things in there.

And then they couldn't touch anything that was dead. They had to stay away from dead things. Dead people, dead animals, dead all kinds of stuff. And then they could not shave their head during the time of this vow.

So those were the three things they were supposed to avoid. Now when this was over there was a special ceremony they had to go through. And so we need to go back to Numbers chapter 6 to get more information on this.

[17 : 29] Numbers chapter 6. Numbers chapter 6. Numbers chapter 6.

Numbers chapter 6. Numbers chapter 6. Numbers chapter 6. Numbers chapter 6. Now if you hold your place in Numbers, I'm going to refer back to verse 24 of our text in Acts 21 where it says, Them take and purify thyself with them and be at charges with them.

In other words, there were some expenses that involved in the final ceremony that would happen after the Nazarite vow had ended. They wanted Paul to pay for them. That they may shave their heads and all may know that those things were of, they were informed of thee concerning the law or nothing but that thou thyself also walkest orderly and keepest the law.

So in Numbers chapter 6 it says, And the Lord spake unto Moses saying, Speak unto the children of Israel and say unto them when either man or woman shall separate themselves to vow a vow of a Nazarite to separate themselves unto the Lord.

He shall separate himself from wine and strong drink and shall drink no vinegar of wine or vinegar of strong drink neither shall he drink any liquor of grapes nor eat moist grapes or dried.

[18 : 53] All the days of his separation shall he eat nothing that is made of the vine tree. From the kernels even to the husk all the days of the vow of his separation there shall no razor come upon his head until the days be fulfilled in that which he separateth himself unto the Lord he shall be holy and shall let the locks of the hair of his head grow.

All the days that he separateth himself unto the Lord he shall come at no dead body. He shall not make himself unclean for his father or for his mother for his brother or for his sister when they die because the consecration of his God is upon his head.

All the days of his separation he is holy unto the Lord. So basically if he had a family member to die he couldn't help in the preparation of the body for burial as long as he's under this vow.

He had to be completely removed from dead things. And so it goes on to tell about it and then at the end verse 13 and this is the law of the Nazarite when the days of his separation are fulfilled he shall be brought unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation and he shall offer his offering unto the Lord one he lamb of the first year without blemish for a burn offering and one ewe lamb of the first year without blemish for a sin offering and one ram without blemish for peace offerings and a basket of unleavened bread cakes of fine flour mingled with oil and wafers of unleavened bread anointed with oil and their meat offering and their drink offerings and the priest shall bring them before the Lord and shall offer his sin offering and his burn offering.

And he shall offer a ram for a sacrifice of peace offerings unto the Lord with a basket of unleavened bread. The priest shall also offer his meat offering and his drink offering. And the Nazarite shall shave the head of his separation at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation and shall take the hair of the head of his separation and put it in the fire which is under the sacrifice of the peace offerings.

[20 : 50] And so here's how they were to end it. Not only was there a way to what they had to do while they were under this vow, there was a proper way to say this vow was over. The days are finished and we're done.

And so this is what these men are doing. And so James says, Paul, we want you to participate in this with them. So we want you to participate in the days of purification and we want you to be at charges with them.

And so basically they would, the temple would finance, people would help, the offerings financially would help provide the sacrifices because that would be expensive.

And so Paul was going to finance this. Paul was going to agree to pay the bill basically for the sacrifices that would be brought there. And also this would include those sacrifices.

Verse 26, then Paul took the men and the next day purifying himself with them entered into the temple to signify the accomplishment of the days of purification until that an offering should be offered for every one of them.

[21 : 59] In other words, Paul is saying, okay, I'll go through this with them. So he shows up at the temple saying the days are coming to an end. So they're going to have their seven days of purification.

And then after that seven days, that's when the offering should be offered. But remember what one of those offerings were, a sin offering. So Paul was about to participate in a Jewish ceremony that offered a sin offering.

But hadn't all the sin offering been taken care of in Christ on the cross? And so Paul was about to participate in a Jewish ceremony involving a sacrifice.

But notice what happened. And when the seven days were almost ended, before the sacrifice could be made, is when they came in and took Paul. So Paul had agreed to participate in something that would end with a sacrifice of a sin offering to pacify a Jewish mob.

And it didn't work. He didn't even get to do the sacrifice before the mob came in and arrested him. So was Paul in the right place being in Jerusalem?

[23 : 08] We'll find more about that later. But was Paul about to do the wrong thing here? Yes. To participate in this ceremony involved an offering of a sacrifice.

And Jesus was the final and ultimate sacrifice for sin. And he's doing this in front of the very Jewish people that sacrificed, that crucified the Lord. And so Paul is about to get himself into trouble, but the Lord preserves him out of it.

Before the sacrifice can be offered, the Jews come in and arrest him. So this was, this was a, the Lord preserved the integrity of the gospel here.

Because Paul was about to participate in, in, in, the offering process at the end of the offering process. At the end of a Nazarite vow. But the Lord protected him. But notice what they said, verse 25.

As touching the Gentiles, back in Acts chapter 21, As touching the Gentiles which believe, we have written and concluded that they observe no such thing, save only that they keep themselves from things offered to idols, and from blood, and from strangled, and from fornication.

[24 : 11] And so they, they weren't concerned about what Paul was preaching to the Gentiles. In fact, this came straight from what they agreed on in the Jerusalem council in chapter 15. They were repeating what they said there.

But they were just very much concerned with what Paul's message was looking like among the Jews, and rumors that had been circulated about him. Even to the point where they said, Paul, participate in this Nazarite closing ceremony with these people, just to show the Jewish people that you're really not against them practicing the law.

And so this is still in that transitioning period where the Jews are trying, a lot of even believing Jews are trying to figure out, you know, where should we be? Law? New covenant?

And in fact, there's going to be a whole book of the Bible dedicated to showing them the old covenant versus the new covenant, and how the new covenant is superior. That book would come later, the book of Hebrews.

The former pastor of 10th Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, Donald Barnhouse, said the book of Hebrews was written to Hebrews to tell them to quit being Hebrews. But you're now Christians, and you are under the new covenant, so that you don't have to obey the, you're not under the old covenant anymore.

[25 : 25] The law of God, God's commandments, the things that it's still right to obey those commandments, but we're not doing it ceremoniously for a relationship to God.

That has been taken care of in Christ. Now we can obey those commandments because Christ in us, through the power of the Holy Spirit, helps us to obey the commandments of the Lord. And we're not, we don't have to go sacrifice an animal when we sin, because Jesus has been that ultimate sacrifice for us.

And so that's what the book of Hebrews will teach them. They haven't got that book yet. They haven't read that letter. And so they're still, they're still working their way through this new time in church history, still trying to work through things.

But here's Paul, almost got himself in real trouble, but the Lord protected him out of that. And so now he's going to be arrested, he's going to be taken into custody, and he's going to be treated not so well.

And so we'll see how that goes next time. We'll see Paul arrested, brought before the chief captains, and then he'll eventually be put in front of the Jewish people.

[26 : 35] He'll recount his testimony on the Damascus road, and then he'll eventually appear before the Sanhedrin, and then he'll be headed toward Rome. So we'll see that as we progress.

Let's pray. Father, we thank you.