

## **Acts 21b** (21:17 – 36)

17 Paul and his Greek brothers arrive at the home of Mnason in time for Pentecost 57 A.D. Mnason is a Greek name and since Paul's group is mostly Greek the Jerusalem church arranged for them to be where they were more comfortable. The Jewish believers may have had a hard time housing them with their different customs. Still, the church received them warmly. The financial gift certainly showed their unity and concern for the Jewish Christians.

18 –20a At the beginning, it was the apostles that lead the Jerusalem congregation. They have apparently gone to outlying areas to fulfill the Great Commission. Now the elders of the local churches together lead the church with James (the brother of Jesus) as the spokesman. Paul probably presented the financial gift at this time and went on to share testimony after testimony of how God was changing lives. He was careful to give the glory to God. (Romans 15:18; 1Corinthian 15:10)

20b –22 Once Jews converted, many had even more of a desire to keep the Law. They could now see that it was a picture of Christ. The New Testament never condemns them for continuing in the Old Testament rituals. Paul did call them weaker brothers. (See 1 Corinthians 8-10) They did not understand that God is pleased with the perfect life of Jesus and their efforts, even though in a desire to please God, added nothing to it. Those who joined the church but still clung to works of the Law were no doubt the ones who started the vicious rumors about Paul. (Acts 15:1) The language implies that this had been drummed into the minds of the Hebrew church.

It was also a time when the animosity toward Gentiles within Israel was growing into a crescendo. Felix was brutally crushing all signs of Jewish nationalism. The claim they made against Paul was false. He was in the process of keeping the Nazarite vow and had Timothy circumcised. He did argue that Gentile converts need not worry about keeping the Law. These lies threatened the likelihood of conversion of other Jews in Jerusalem. We must be very careful when we speak against another Christian work, especially Christian leaders. (1Timothy 5:19)

The elders of Jerusalem agree with Paul, but they do not want to offend the weaker brothers. To confront the issue of whether or not they needed to obey the ritual laws would hinder potential converts from hearing. Sometimes a clash is inevitable.

23-26 They tried to show by example that Paul was not against the Law, but it backfired. They suggested Paul subsidize those who were completing their Nazarite vows by helping to pay for their sacrifices: the fee for the hair cutting ceremony, a year old lamb and ewe lamb, a ram, a basket of bread and various

grain and drink offerings. (Numbers 6:14-17) Paul would then join with them in the ritual as their sponsor (considered an act of piety), but first he had to perform a cleansing ritual for himself before he could enter the Temple grounds. Jews would ritually wash themselves on the third and seventh day upon returning from Gentile lands. This would make it clear that the allegations against him were false. (1 Corinthians 9:22-23) Was this compromising or was it becoming all things to all men in order to win some? Consider Romans 14; Acts 18:18.

25 James stands by the previous ruling that Gentile converts don't need to adhere to ritual Jewish laws.

27-29 What the jealous Jews of Ephesus couldn't get away with in Ephesus, they sought to do in Jerusalem. Recognizing Trophimus who lived in their city, and Paul who had ministered there for 3 years, they assumed Paul had brought him into the Temple. The outer court was open to Gentiles, but the inner Temple had a short wall around it with warning inscriptions that Gentiles would be executed if they enter. One of those inscriptions is in the Archeological Museum in Istanbul, Turkey. The other accusation is that he taught against the Law. Pentecost celebrated the giving of the Law. It was a false accusation but the perfect one to stir up the crowd.

The Temple would be crowded with local Jews and those from foreign lands. Thinking someone had blasphemed or defiled the Temple area or spoke against the Law, they quickly turned into a lynch mob. They didn't recognize that he was completing ritual cleansing ceremony, only that the man they hated was in their most sacred place. The plan of the Jewish Christian elders had failed, but God's plan was moving forward.

30 Paul was bringing the light of Christ. It's ironic he was shut out of the Temple that was going to be destroyed in about a decade.

31-33 During the Feasts, the Fortress of Antonia that adjoined the Temple would have a thousand soldiers ready to act. When they saw the riot taking place, 200 or more soldiers swooped in to arrest the man being beaten. Paul would have been killed if they had not intervened. Paul was bound as Agabus predicted.

34 – 36 The commander can't get a clear accusation so he took Paul to the fortress. "Away with him!" means to execution. (Luke 23:18) Josephus mentioned these stairs that went from the colonnade into the fortress. The prophecies had come to pass. In Paul's attempt to bring unity and disprove the lies against him, he ended up under arrest in Roman jail, the beginning of years of imprisonment, time to write some of the letters in the New Testament, and a witness to high Roman officials, including the household of Caesar. Romans 8:28

