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Acts 21:1 - 22:21



Acts - Steve Gregg

In Acts 21:1-22:21, Paul faces opposition and ultimately arrest in his journey to Jerusalem. Despite warnings about his fate, Paul is determined to follow through with a Nazarite vow and observe Torah practices among Torah-observant people. When he arrives in Jerusalem, he is falsely accused of teaching Jews to forsake Moses and is arrested after obeying James's instruction to enter the temple. In his subsequent testimony, Paul emphasizes his Jewish background and his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus, but his mention of preaching to the Gentiles incites anger in the crowd.

Transcript

Let's look at Acts chapter 21. Paul is en route to Jerusalem and his third missionary journey is complete, but several chapters are devoted to his travels to Jerusalem, and he does make some stops in a few places. He stopped for seven days in Troas to minister.

That's where he raised Eutychus from the dead. Then he stopped in Miletus where he summoned the elders of the church and gave them a final farewell speech. He must have been detained at least four or five days there, just because of the time it would take to send messengers up to Ephesus from Miletus and to get word back, get them to come back down.

And so he takes ship again, he's finished speaking to the Ephesian elders. They're all weeping because he told them he's pretty sure he'll never see them again. And of course, that's always a hard thing to hear from someone you're affectionate towards, especially someone who lived with you for a couple years or more and to whom you're very indebted and become very affectionate to.

But they weep and they come with him to the ship and he gets on the ship in Miletus. It says, now it came to pass that when we departed from them and set sail running a straight course, we came to Kos and the following day to Rhodes and from there to Petara. Now Kos and Rhodes are islands, and the fact that it mentions that they came to them may mean that they provisioned the ship or something there.

They did apparently land there briefly. And then from Petara, or some manuscripts say from Myra. Petara and Myra are both of them on the southern coast of Asia Minor.

Myra is about 50 miles further east. So whether they sailed from Rhodes to Petara or from Rhodes to Myra is not known for certain because there's a manuscript difference there. Myra is the most of the two.

Myra is the more important seaport. So it may be that that's where they sailed from. They sailed from there.

They found a ship, another ship, sailing over to Phoenicia, which is of course modern Lebanon. And we went aboard and set sail. And when we had sighted Cyprus, we passed it on the left and sailed to Syria and landed at Tyre, for there the ship was to unload her cargo.

Now that that trip across open sea, they've been kind of doing short hops from island to island, but now they sailed across open sea for 400 miles from either Myra or Petara. It was about 400 miles to Tyre, which was in Phoenicia. Now they were going to stay there.

They're going to move south and go down to Jerusalem, but apparently that was where their ship had to let off cargo. They were going to catch another ship from there to head further south. But while they were in Tyre, they stayed for a while.

It says in verse four, in finding disciples, we stayed there for seven days. Now we've not read previously of Christians in Tyre. These probably were originally evangelized by some of those who fled from Jerusalem when Stephen was stoned, those who are mentioned in the latter part of chapter 11.

People fleeing from Jerusalem everywhere at that time of persecution went to all regions, including this area. So this church probably had existed from that time on, though Paul, to our knowledge, had never visited it. So he spent seven days there, and it says they told Paul through the Spirit not to go to Jerusalem.

Now the wording of this makes it sound certainly that the Holy Spirit was telling Paul not to go and that the Holy Spirit didn't want him to go. There are people who feel that Paul should and needed to go, and the Holy Spirit was leading him to go, and those who feel that way when they look at a verse like this, what they usually say is, well, through the Spirit, what they really got from God was that Paul was going to suffer when he comes to Jerusalem, and they personally didn't wish that for him, so they, from their own sentiments, urged him not to go. Now I suspect that that is what Paul at that time felt was happening, too, or else he wouldn't have gone.

I believe if Paul believed that they were really speaking by the Spirit, telling him not to go, that he wouldn't have gone. I think he would have taken that warning and been obedient, but he must have assumed that they were speaking from their own

sentiments, and this points out that even in the apostolic times, the gift of prophecy had to be tested, and it wasn't always easy to know whether a prophecy was genuine or not. These guys were prophesying to Paul that he shouldn't go, the Holy Spirit didn't want him to go, and he must have had doubts about their authenticity.

He had it in his heart to go. He felt the Holy Spirit was leading him to go, and so these people trying to dissuade him, he just kind of brushed them off. Now we don't know how Luke felt about it at the time, we do know that just a few verses later, when Agabus prophesies that Paul will be bound there, Luke joins in with those trying to persuade Paul not to go, but he doesn't obey them either, but Luke includes himself among those that sought to persuade Paul not to go, which means that Luke apparently had become convinced personally at this time that Paul was making a mistake.

Paul did not think he was making a mistake, or we very rarely think we're making a mistake, even when we are. So it would seem that at this stage, the Holy Spirit is warning Paul more and more that if he goes to Jerusalem it's going to be a bad outcome, and in this particular place, in the church of Tyre, the Holy Spirit seems to be specifically saying, don't go. Now whatever may have been the actual case, Paul felt that these people were not speaking by the Spirit, but what's interesting is that Luke wrote this years later.

Paul was probably still in prison at the time that Luke wrote this book, and Luke, in writing this account, writes it as if it is his opinion at that time that they were speaking through the Spirit. Remember the way Luke words things, it can be worded differently, but he worded it in a way that reflects his convictions about the matter at the time of writing, which was years later. In retrospect, it would seem perhaps that he and Paul, at the time these utterances were given, did not quite see them the same way.

Luke and others may have seen them as from the Holy Spirit, Paul not convinced that they were, but looking back and writing about it, Luke says they were speaking by the Spirit, and he may in fact be reflecting Paul's later opinion in retrospect too. I mean after all, I doubt that Paul and Luke were not on the same page in these later years. They probably very much saw things the same.

I'm sure that Luke could not have published Acts without Paul's approval. After all, it's the story of, it's the authorized, not the unauthorized biography of Paul, you know. I'm sure that Paul probably saw it the way that Luke did, but at this later date, after sitting in prison for four years, and yet apparently Paul didn't see it that way at this time.

It just shows that spiritual people can be mistaken about spiritual guidance. Even Paul could be. Now some don't think Paul was wrong, but if Paul was not wrong, it strikes me that Luke must be wrong in writing this way, because he doesn't say that these men received revelation through the Spirit that it would be bad for Paul to go, and therefore they told him not to go, but they warned him by the Spirit not to go.

I don't know how to understand those words differently than to say the Spirit of God was telling him don't go. But again, Paul wasn't convinced that was the source of this of this counsel. So when he had come to the end of those days, we departed and went on our way, and they all accompanied us with wives and children until we were out of the city, and we knelt down on the shore and prayed.

Apparently before getting on a ship again, they prayed with the church, and that was probably the last time he ever saw them. And when we had taken our leave of one another, we boarded the ship, and they returned home. Now when we had finished our voyage from Tyre, we came to Ptolemaeus.

That's 40 miles down the coast. They could have walked or even taken horses that distance, but whatever reason, they took ship from Tyre to Ptolemaeus, and we greeted the brethren. There apparently was a church there also that we didn't know about previously, and stayed with them one day.

On the next day, we who were Paul's companions departed and came to Caesarea. Now that was another 40 miles down, so they hopscotched down from Tyre to Ptolemaeus to Caesarea in 40 mile increments, and they came to Caesarea and entered the house of Philip the evangelist. Remember him? That's the Philip from chapter 8 who was one of the seven originally, and it says so here too, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him.

It says, now this man had four virgin daughters who prophesied, and as we stayed many days, a certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. We had encountered the same prophet from Judea in chapter 11 when he had prophesied of the famine that was coming in the days of Claudius, and now we see the same man again coming from Judea to Caesarea, which is 64 miles away. Whether Agabus kind of made the rounds of the churches and prophesied in them, if he was an itinerant prophet, we don't know.

We do know that in the days shortly after the apostolic period, when the book called the Didache was written, which was a very important early Christian book, the Didache, which you can still read of course, it's available, was from probably the end of the first century, and it describes the church order and church practices about baptism and Eucharist and things like that. Lots of valuable information about the early church, but it's clear in the Didache that the churches could expect prophets to come and visit them, because the Didache gives them ways to know if someone's a true prophet who comes and visits them. If he stays more than three days, he's a false prophet.

If he asks for money, he's a false prophet. So this is what the Didache teaches. So at the end of the first century, the church had this understanding of how to deal with these prophets who come through.

Well, Agabus is obviously a true prophet, but he may have traveled around to the

churches, as we know later on other prophets did. He may have just come and happened to be there while Paul was there, or he might have heard that Paul was there from Jerusalem and decided to come down because he had a word from God for him. I have a word for Paul, so I'm going to go see him in Caesarea.

And so Agabus came down, and when he had come to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own hands and feet and said, thus says the Holy Spirit, so shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him to the hands of the Gentiles. Now some people think Agabus's prophecy wasn't quite accurate, and especially people who say, you know, the gift of prophecy can be a little off and still be genuine. I don't agree.

I think the gift of prophecy, if it's genuine, has to be right on. But technically, it wasn't the Jews who bound Paul, as Agabus said, it was the Romans. And he says the Jews will bind him and deliver him over to the Romans.

But what actually happened was the Jews caused a riot, and the Romans intervened and rescued Paul from the riot and bound him briefly as they interrogated him. So Paul was bound by the Romans, not by the Jews. And some say, see, Agabus wasn't correct.

But this is picking at nits. This is really not a problem. It's very common in scripture to say that somebody did something when it's really done on their behalf or at their instigation.

For example, Peter has said in Acts chapter 2 that the Jews crucified Jesus. Paul says the same thing in 1st Thessalonians chapter 2. He says the Jews crucified Jesus. Well, Jews don't crucify people.

Romans crucified people. Jesus was crucified by the Romans. But the Bible says the Jews did it.

Why would it say that? Because the Romans had no interest in crucifying Jesus. The Jews forced their hand. They did it to please the Jews.

It was the Jews who actually blackmailed Pilate to get him to do it. Yeah, the Romans did it, but they did it at the instigation of the Jews. And therefore, it can be said properly the Jews did it.

They're the responsible parties. Likewise, when Paul was arrested, the Romans intervened and bound Paul and took him into custody, but it's because the Jews had started a riot and were about to kill him. So it was the Jewish actions that caused Paul to be bound, even if it was technically the Romans that put the shackles on him.

So this is not a false prophecy anymore than the retrospective. Paul saying the Jews crucified Jesus is a false historical statement. It's commonplace for something to be done by one party on behalf of another or at the instigation of another, and the one who

instigated is the one who's said to be the one who did it.

Remember, it says that Judas in Acts chapter one says Judas took the money that he'd gotten and bought a field with it. But Matthew says he actually abandoned the money in the temple and they bought the, you know, the authorities in the temple bought the field with his money. But that's him buying it.

It was purchased post-mortem. He was gone. He was dead, but they used his money to buy it, so he bought it.

It's just a manner of speaking. It's not uncommon for us to speak that way in modern times either. So this is not a false prophecy, even though the wording of it is not precise.

It is not giving false information. Now it says when Agabus did this, Luke says in verse 12, when we heard these things, both we and those from that place pleaded with him not to go up to Jerusalem. So we see that Luke himself is joining with the others in urging Paul not to go.

So Luke at this point is convinced that Paul's making a mistake. He's heard the prophecies. Now Agabus didn't say not to go.

Agabus just said when you go, you'll be bound by the Jews, and the Holy Spirit had been testifying that in every city to Paul. As he says in chapter 20 and verse 23, he says the Holy Spirit testifies in every city saying that chains and tribulations await me in Jerusalem. So there were lots of times that Luke had occasion to hear, along with Paul, prophecies that Paul would suffer in Jerusalem, but it wasn't until he came to Tyre that certain men said to his feet, don't go.

Now Luke at this point is starting to get the message, Paul's not supposed to go there, and so Paul joins with the others in trying to urge him not to. So Paul and Luke are not on the same page at this particular point, but I believe that later they were, and I think later on when Luke wrote this, years later, that Paul probably sought Luke's way too, but we don't know for sure, but it would seem likely in retrospect. All right, now it's interesting too, they were staying in the house of Philip the Evangelist.

He's the only man in the Bible called an evangelist, though we know there were other evangelists, we just don't know their names. Paul said in Ephesians 4, 11, that Christ gave to the church some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors or shepherds and teachers. The shepherds, of course, and teachers were the elders.

The evangelists were people like Philip, but he's the only man who's actually called an evangelist. When Paul writes to Timothy, he tells him, do the work of an evangelist, which makes it sound like Timothy will, you know, kind of his work will overlap that of an evangelist, but Timothy was not strictly an evangelist nor a pastor, he was an apostle. Timothy is addressed by Paul in his letters as a legate of the apostles.

He's a representative of Paul, so Timothy is not strictly a pastor, he's not strictly an evangelist, but he's told to do the work of an evangelist, as Paul himself did, though Paul was an apostle and not an evangelist. He did the work of an evangelist as well. How many people in the church were called evangelists, we don't know, but again Ephesians 4, 11 mentions that Christ gave some evangelists, and this is the only man whose name is given, Philip, who's called that, and yet earlier he was what we might have called a deacon in the church, but he branched out into church planting and evangelistic work, and probably the church in Caesarea was probably founded by Philip's preaching.

Now by this time he was older, this is years, decades later, and he has four daughters, apparently mature daughters, and they are prophetesses in the church, they all prophesy. What's interesting is that though Paul was staying in a house where there were four prophetesses, when a prophecy was to be given to him, they didn't give it, but Agabus came from Jerusalem and gave it. I don't know why that is.

Some have suggested that it would be considered improper for a personal prophecy to be given by a man, by a woman, that's not necessarily the case, but it may be the reason. We don't know why there were four prophetesses in the house, and when it came time for Paul to have a prophecy given to him, it wasn't given by the girls who lived in the same house. In any case, they must have prophesied in the church on a regular basis, and Paul in 1 Corinthians 11 talks about women prophesying in the church with their head covered and so forth, so we know there were women as well as men who prophesied in the church.

There was quite a concentration of them in this particular house. Now Luke says that he and the others there tried to persuade Paul not to go. Then Paul answered, what do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? For I'm ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.

So when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying the will of the Lord be done. So Luke gave up trying to persuade Paul, and so did the others. Paul was pretty stubborn about this.

He knew what he was going to do, and so he just said, well, the will of God be done in the matter, and Luke stayed with him and traveled with him, though he thought he was making a mistake. Now after those days, we packed and went up to Jerusalem. Now from Caesarea to Jerusalem, as I said, is 64 miles.

When it says we packed, it might suggest they were packing horses. They did some of their travel probably on horseback, and therefore they wouldn't have to walk 64 miles in this particular case. Also, some of the disciples from Caesarea went with us and brought with them one Menaision of Cyprus, an early disciple with whom we were to lodge.

It would appear that this man had a home in or near Jerusalem. He had been in

Caesarea, but when Paul and his company left Caesarea, this man came back to his house offering lodging to Paul and his team. This man is simply described as being from Cyprus, which of course Barnabas was too, and as an early disciple, probably meaning one of those who was saved in the early chapters of the book of Acts when Jerusalem was exploding with conversions.

And when we had come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. On the following day, Paul went with us to James, and all the elders were present. Now remember, James is the prominent one.

In the early chapters of Acts, Peter was the prominent one in the church of Jerusalem, but Peter had taken on more of a, probably more of an international ministry. Not very early on, but by the time of chapter 12, when Herod has arrested Peter and put him in prison, intended to kill him, and the angel got Peter out of jail, Peter left town and may not have lived in town much of the time after that. Before he left town, he told the people at the prayer meeting, go tell James I'm leaving, which was no doubt a pre-arranged signal.

Apparently he'd made arrangements with James that someday probably James is going to have to step in for him because he's, when things get too hot or when he gets sent out to other missions, James should step in as his replacement. So Peter tells the Christians, tell James, and from that point on James appears to be the leader in the church in Jerusalem. He was at the Jerusalem council in chapter 15.

Peter and Paul and Barnabas all gave testimony, but James gave the verdict. James gave the final judgment. He was obviously the default leader, if not the official leader of the church in Jerusalem.

So Paul comes to Jerusalem and he meets with James. Now we know some things that were not known to James and Paul at this time because we have the whole book of Acts and the later chapters are known to us, and that is that Paul never was able to leave Jerusalem a free man to go to Rome like he planned to. When he arrived in Jerusalem, his plan was simply to deliver money to the church, maybe hang out through the feast of Pentecost because that's when he was hoping to get there, so stay there for about a week and then catch a ship to Rome and then later to Spain.

That was Paul's plan. But as we read this, we know that that didn't happen and we could easily forget that Paul was just visiting for a few days in his own mind and in the mind of James, and yet James feels that Paul needs to use this opportunity to ingratiate himself somewhat to the church in Jerusalem who had suspicions about his activities, as we shall see. So on the following day, Paul went in with us to James and all the elders were present.

When he had greeted them, he told them in detail those things which God had done

among the Gentiles through his ministry, and when they heard it, they glorified the Lord and they said to him, you see, brother, how many myriads of Jews there are who have believed, and they're all zealous for the law, for Torah observance. There were thousands and thousands of believing Jews in Jerusalem. It's a huge church apparently.

Even though many had fled and spawned other churches throughout the empire, there's still a lot settled in Jerusalem and probably a church that kept growing, and so they've got thousands, but they've never separated themselves at all from Torah observance. You have to realize how difficult it would be for Christian Jews in that time to do so. It's very easy for us to sit around with a Torah observant Christian and discuss academically the merits or the biblical case for or against Torah observance.

It's a very unemotional thing for us probably, but for a Jew living in Jerusalem, a city that's centered around the temple, and for all its history was a temple worship-centered city. Everyone in it, well not every last person, but most people in it Jewish, observant Jews whose whole life is centered around the temple, and now some of them have gained the Messiah as their identifier. They now recognize the Jewish Messiah.

It's not obvious to them that having the Jewish Messiah means you don't continue your Jewish activities. They continue deep culture. We know Peter was still doing so when the sheet appeared to him in a vision on Joppa.

That was years after Pentecost. Peter was a Jerusalem Christian Jew, and he had never eaten anything unclean at that particular time in chapter 10, and probably the Jerusalem Jews did not, Christian Jews there, and they were Torah observant. Now when people are Torah observant, they can be of two minds about this.

They can say observing Torah is optional, but we just choose to do it, and there are Torah observant Christians today who have that attitude. No one has to do this, but we find it meaningful. If you've been raised Jewish, you're in the temple precincts, you live down the street from the temple, everyone around you is Torah observant, you might just say, hey, it's natural.

I've done this all my life before I knew Christ, and even after. There's no reason not to do this stuff. It's not evil.

Doing this stuff is not evil. No one has to do it, but I enjoy it. It's just part of my culture and part of what I learned to enjoy, and there are people today who say, you know, no one has to keep the Torah, which is true, but they say we kind of enjoy it.

Keeping Sabbath, keeping the festivals in the Jewish manner, it's meaningful. Well, that's good. That's fine.

Let them. That's not a problem, but the other position of Torah observance among Christians sometimes is they say observing Torah doesn't save you. Jesus does, but once

you've been saved, of course, it is our assignment to please God, and pleasing God means keeping the Torah.

So they would suggest you're not justified by keeping the Torah. You're justified by faith in Christ, but now that you're a Christian, keeping the Torah is kind of mandatory, because that's what pleases God, and living to please God is a Christian assignment. So, I mean, I agree that pleasing God is our assignment as Christians.

We're to live to please God, but I don't agree that the Torah describes the duties of the Christian church. I believe that the teachings of Jesus do, and the apostles, not the teachings of Moses, and yet there are, it's very difficult sometimes for someone who takes the first position. You don't have to keep Torah, but I find it meaningful and spiritually enriching to do so.

It's hard not to morph into the other attitude and say everyone should be doing this. Seventh-day Adventists, for example, are modern Christians who believe in keeping Sabbath on Saturday, and many of the Sabbatarians I've met, they just say it's enjoyable. The Sabbath is a delight.

Taking one day off just to meditate on God and not do any work, it's very enriching spiritually. Everyone would benefit from this, they would say, but it's not long before someone with that attitude is saying everyone should keep the Sabbath. God requires people to keep the Sabbath, this is the commandment of God, and so I think the Jerusalem church probably, although decisions were made at the Jerusalem Council that Gentiles do not have to keep the Torah, I think there's a pretty strong feeling among many of the Jerusalem Christians that at least Jews should keep the Torah, and even Gentiles would be better off if they did.

And we find that James and the brethren in Jerusalem tell Paul, we got myriads here of Jewish believers who believe in Jesus, but they're zealous for Torah observance, they're zealous for the law, but they have been informed about you, and they've heard a rumor about Paul, that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, nor to walk according to the customs. Now, Paul didn't teach any such thing. Paul didn't tell Jews what they should or not should not do.

He believed that Peter and James and John were the ones appointed to minister to the circumcision, he was primarily sent to the uncircumcision. Paul's concern was what Gentiles did primarily. Now, if a Jew, all the Gentile churches had some Jews in them.

The Church of Rome being an example, there were some Jews in the Church of Rome who were Jewish Christians, and they were apparently interested in Torah observance, but most of the church in Rome was Gentile and didn't. And Paul writes, for example, in Romans 14, about these differences in the church. One man esteems one day above

another, another man esteems every day alike.

No doubt the Jewish believers were tending to observe Sabbath and other days above other days, others, the Gentiles, were not. And Paul says, let everyone be fully persuaded in his own mind. Paul didn't mind if Jewish people wanted to keep Torah, let them do it.

But Gentiles, don't put that on the Gentiles. And so, when the rumor went around that Paul was forbidding Jews to circumcise their children or to keep the customs and telling them to abandon Moses, he wasn't doing that. It was not his interest in doing that.

He wasn't trying to tell Jews what to do or not do about the Torah. What he was telling us, don't make my Gentile converts have to do that, because that's not required. So, the rumor they heard about Paul was not correct.

And it must have frustrated him to know that, like when Jesus was on the cross, and people said, you who said you'd destroy the temple and build it again in three days, I just feel like Jesus must have said, I didn't say that. You didn't hear me right. You know, I said you destroy this temple and in three days I'll raise up.

But when he's on the cross and they're mocking him saying, you said you'd destroy the temple. You know, how frustrating it is for people to misunderstand you and think they've got you. You know, they misquote you and then prove that what they misquote is wrong.

Paul must have felt that way when people had it almost right. He did tell the Gentiles not to circumcise and not to keep the custom of Moses, but he didn't say about the Jews. And so, the rumor was a slight twist of what he did and quite different, not correct.

What then, verse 22, the assembly must certainly meet for they will hear that you've come. Paul could not come to town without it becoming a news item. Everyone, all the Christians would know that he was there.

Therefore, do what we tell you. We have four men who have taken a vow. This would be a Nazarite vow, as it turns out, just like Paul had taken in Acts 18, 18.

We see that he shaved his head because he had a Nazarite vow. He probably did not at this time. They say, take them and be purified with them and pay their expenses so that they may share, excuse me, shave their heads and that all may know that those things of which they were informed concerning you are nothing, but that you yourself also walk orderly and keep the law.

Well, Paul did walk orderly and keep the Torah when he was with Torah people. And when he was not, he didn't. So, he didn't mind showing these Jews, since he's among them, that he keeps the law because he did that.

That was, in fact, his policy to keep Torah when he's with people who keep Torah. He makes that clear in 1 Corinthians 9. But it was also his policy not to keep the Torah necessarily when he was with people who did not. So, he didn't mind accommodating them here.

This is not a compromise on his part. Now, what were they asking to do? The Nazarite vow, as I mentioned, involves a period of time where you've committed yourself not to touch anything from the grapevine, not to come near dead body, and not to shave or cut any of your hair. This could be for a month or longer, could be a lifetime.

But these four men had taken such a vow, obviously not for a lifetime, because they were now ready to cut their hair. That's what you do at the end of the vow. Number six talks about this.

At the end of the vow, you shave your head, you burn your hair to the Lord as an offering, and you offer other offerings, which would cost some money. There are some expenses involved in bringing the Nazarite vow to an end and shaving your head. So, they say, listen, Paul, if you take some money, and it may be from the collection that was brought from the Gentiles that he was to use the money, because I don't know how much money Paul had of his own, but you take some of your money and you pay their fees at the temple, then everyone will see that you're observing temple law.

A person who's rejecting the laws of Moses wouldn't be participating in Nazarite ceremonies, they're saying. And so, you purify yourself. The reference to purifying himself probably is due to the fact that when Jews traveled in Gentile lands and came to Jerusalem, they were not considered to be immediately clean.

They had to go through a purification ritual before they could participate in the normal temple festivities, because it was considered that if a Jew went into a Gentile land, they became defiled by being out of the Holy Land. So, they had to be purified when they came back. And so, purify yourself and pay the vows for these four men, and that'll impress the Jewish believers that they were wrong in what they heard about you, that you are not abandoning the law as they've heard.

Verse 25, but concerning the Gentiles who believe, we, this is probably James speaking, we have written and decided that they should observe no such thing, except that they should keep themselves from things offered to idols, from blood, and from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. So, James is just summarizing what they had decided at the Jerusalem Council. He's saying, you know, we did make a decision that Gentiles don't have to do any of these things, but we didn't say anything about the Jews.

So, we are, you know, wanting you to affirm that you support Jews keeping the Torah, even though you're Gentile converts, we're not putting that on any of them, but we want you to show that you support Jews keeping the Torah. Now, Paul, in his own heart of

hearts, might not have felt much support for the policy of Jews keeping Torah. He himself kept it irregularly.

He was a Jew, and he only kept it to accommodate Jews. He didn't do it because he felt it was necessary. But again, he didn't want to rock the boat.

He felt like the Jewish mission was not his mission. That was the mission of Peter, James, and John. He's going to submit to them in this.

He would do it his way on the Gentile mission field. He'll do it their way when he's in their territory. So, he goes along.

Then Paul took the men the next day, having been purified with them, entering the temple to announce the expiration of the days of purification, at which time an offering should be made for each of them. Now, he didn't get much done there. This is so tragic.

It was the fact that he obeyed James' instructions that got him arrested. If he had not gone to the temple, he might have remained a free man the rest of his days. But he was trying to please the Jews, and ironically, it was in doing so that he got hated by the Jews, and they tried to kill him because they assumed things about him that weren't true, as we shall see.

When the seven days were almost ended, 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 teaches all men everywhere against the people, the law, and this place. And furthermore, he also brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place. Now, these are not local Palestinian Jews.

These are Jews from Asia, where Paul has ministered for several years, where the Jews were continually opposing him in Asia. Remember in the previous chapter, when he's talking to the elders of Ephesus, which is Asia, he says, You know all the things I suffered at the hands of the Jews. The Jews were always Paul's chief opponents, and here some of the Jews from Asia are there for the festival, for Pentecost, and they see him in the temple and say, Oh, this is the guy who's telling everyone not to keep the temple observances, to forsake Moses.

What a crazy thing to say. He's there in the temple observing mosaic ordinances. What a ridiculous accusation.

This guy's telling everyone to avoid this place and to avoid the Moses rules, and they say it at the very time that he is accommodating a request that he participate in the mosaic ceremonies in the temple. I mean, the falseness of the accusation should have been transparent right from the beginning, but they did get the Jews stirred up, and it says they stirred up the whole crowd and laid hands on him, crying out, Men of Israel, help. Now, we already read what they said.

For they had previously seen Trophimus, the Ephesian, with him in the city, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple. Now, Trophimus was one of the companions that traveled to Jerusalem with Paul. He was an Ephesian.

Therefore, the Ephesian Jews knew him by sight. They knew he's a Gentile, and seeing him in the city with Paul, they jumped to the conclusion that Paul had brought him into the temple. Now, what a stupid thing to assume.

Of course, Paul would not do that. We know from Josephus and other sources that the temple had multiple courts. The most, the outer court was the court of the Gentiles.

Gentiles were allowed to go in that part, but the next court in toward the center was the court of the women, and only Jewish men and women were allowed to go. There were no Gentiles. The next court in was the court of the men or the Jews, which meant only the Jewish men and not women.

There's an increasing restrictiveness as you go from one court to the next toward the temple itself, but there was a wall between the court of the Gentiles and the court of the women to warn Gentiles not to go any further. They were allowed to be in the court of the Gentiles, but the sign on the wall when they came to the gate that went into the court of women said, you know, essentially, Gentiles enter at your own risk. Any Gentile who goes beyond this point will be responsible for his own death.

These plaques have been found. Archaeologists have found these plaques from these walls, and we know that it was death penalty for a Gentile to go beyond this. Now, obviously, there's no problem with the Gentile being in the court of the Gentiles, so these Jews are claiming that Paul has sacrilegiously brought a Gentile, Trophimus, beyond that point into the court of the women they're allowed to go in.

What a ridiculous thing. Paul is bending over backward to not offend the Jews. As a temple Jew himself, most of his life, he would know very well you don't take Gentiles beyond this point, and so he would never have done so.

I mean, if he wanted to be in their face, if he was antagonistic, if he wanted to really challenge the whole validity of the temple system, he might do something like that, but that was the opposite of what he was concerned about. His concern was to make it very clear he's actually supportive of the Jews. He's actually not interested in violating them, so he certainly would not have taken a Gentile beyond that point.

They just assumed he had, and all the city was disturbed, and the people ran together and seized Paul and dragged him out of the temple, and immediately the doors were shut. So they actually shut the doors of the temple, apparently to keep the rioters on the outside of it, and temple services were closed down for a little while, maybe for the rest of the day, because of Paul. Not really because of Paul, because he didn't do anything,

but because these idiot Asians, these Jews from Asia who lied about him and falsely accused him and stirred people up.

It disturbed the whole worship experience at the temple and even closed it down for others who might have legitimately wanted to go in there and worship God. Now, as they were seeking to kill him, news came to the commander of the garrison that all Jerusalem was in an uproar. There was a fortress, a military fortress, built right next to the temple.

It's called the Antonio Fortress, and there was a cohort of Roman soldiers stationed there to keep peace in Jerusalem. The Roman capital of the region was Caesarea. That's where the governor lived and where Roman administration was housed in Caesarea, but they had to have soldiers stationed right there in Jerusalem because there's so many disruptions that Jews caused through the years.

They were very ungovernable. Frankly, any Roman that was assigned by Rome to govern Jerusalem, that man usually felt like he was being punished for something because they were a very ungovernable people. And so they had a cohort of a thousand soldiers.

Now, I told you earlier this week that a cohort was usually 600 soldiers, but they had a special cohort of a thousand soldiers at the Antonio Fortress in Jerusalem. And this man who's called the commander of the garrison is what's called the tribune. His actual office, you know, like a centurion was over a century or a hundred soldiers.

A tribune was over a cohort. In this case, the translation of this word tribune into Greek literally means a commander of a thousand. So there were a thousand soldiers there.

And the tribune heard a commotion, which was not probably that unusual in Jerusalem, but he sent down soldiers to see what it was about. Now, this commander is mentioned again and again. Sometimes he's interacting with Paul, sometimes he's doing other things, but there's frequent references to this commander.

We never get his name until chapter 23 and verse 26 when he actually is writing a letter to Felix, the governor, as he's sending Paul for protection to Caesarea. He sends along a letter to Felix and in chapter 23, 26, he identifies himself Claudius Lysias. So this is the tribune of the cohort in Jerusalem and his name is Claudius Lysias, though he's simply called the commander through the entire narrative.

So he immediately took soldiers and centurions and ran down to them, just ran down the steps of the fortress into the crowd. And when they saw the commander and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul. So they were apparently beating him incessantly until the soldiers showed up.

So he's pretty bruised up and damaged at this point, but he still was able to preach a sermon, as we shall see. Then the commander came near and took him and commanded him to be bound with two chains and asked who he was and what he had done. Now, he

couldn't get a straight answer.

It says some among the multitude cried one thing and some another. And when he could not ascertain the truth because of the tumult, he commanded him to be taken into the barracks. Now, the tribune here couldn't get a straight answer from the Jews about who Paul even was, but we find in the next few verses that he formed his own theory about who Paul was, but it was not correct.

And when he reached the stairs to go up to the barracks, Paul had to be carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the mob. So the soldiers had to carry Paul like a crowd surfing situation above the heads of the crowd because they were reaching for him and trying to beat him and hit him and stuff. What a madhouse this was.

Just another day in Jerusalem. For the multitude of the people followed after, crying out, away with him. So even though he was now in protective custody of the Romans, the people didn't stop calling for his death.

And as Paul was about to be led into the barracks, he said to the commander, may I speak to you? And the commander said, can you speak Greek? He asked him in Greek apparently, can I speak to you? You see, a lot of the Jews were speaking Aramaic and the commander apparently didn't, he was not fluent in Aramaic, so he had a hard time getting answers in Aramaic. But when Paul spoke to him, can I speak to you, he spoke Greek. Oh, you speak Greek? Are you not that Egyptian who some time ago raised an insurrection and led the 4,000 assassins out into the wilderness? There actually was known, I think Josephus is the source for this, a rabble rouser some years before this that had claimed to be the Messiah falsely and had led a bunch of Jews, not, I forget the number, it's not 4,000 that Josephus gives, but it's, you know, the numbers could have been muddled.

But he led some people out into the wilderness claiming that he was going to part the river and destroy Jerusalem and so forth, and it never happened of course. His movement vanished, but the man got away. And for some reason, I don't know why, this tribune, when he arrested Paul, not really having any information about who Paul was, assumed he might be that man and assumed perhaps that the Jews were angry at him for his false claims of having been the Messiah and so forth.

So it's just kind of a theory that he had formed. But apparently the Egyptians did not predictably speak Greek, not well. And when Paul spoke to him in good Greek, he thought, aren't you that Egyptian? And Paul said, I'm a Jew from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city.

By the way, Tarsus, as I said, was a university town, a very famous university town, an intellectual center, and therefore, he says, I'm from Tarsus, I should be able to speak Greek. You know, if anyone who's educated in the Roman Empire would speak Greek, he

says, I'm from not an insignificant city here. I implore you, permit me to speak to the people.

Now, it's interesting that the tribune allowed Paul to do so. Paul was now a prisoner. He's asking to address the mob.

But the tribune perhaps feels like he'll get some answers if more can happen here. So he's going to let Paul speak to the mob. But Paul's going to speak in the language of the Jews, which means Claudius Lysias is not going to be able to understand what Paul's saying.

He's just going to see the reaction of the crowd. And eventually, when the crowd erupts again, he hauls Paul up to interrogate him in the barracks. But he does allow Paul to speak to the crowd.

So when he had given him permission, Paul stood on the stairs and motioned with his hand to the people. And when there was a great silence, he spoke to them in the Hebrew language, usually the Hebrew language, when it mentions it in the New Testament, means Aramaic. The Hebrew people spoke Aramaic.

So it's the language of the Hebrews. Men, we have Paul's sermon beginning chapter 23, 22, verse 1. Men, brethren and fathers, hear my defense before you now. And when they heard that he spoke to them in their own language, they kept the more silent.

Then he said, I am indeed a Jew born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, taught according to the strictness of our father's law, and was zealous toward God as you are all today. So he speaks words that are calculated to ingratiate himself to them. He speaks their language, for one thing, and they like that.

And then he talks about them, that you're men, you're my brothers, my fathers. I was like you. You're zealous for God.

I can see you really love God. I can see you really are zealous for God. I was like you too.

I grew up in this city. I was under Gamaliel, by the way. You all respect him.

Gamaliel was like the most respected member of the Sanhedrin, besides the high priest. So he said, I studied under Gamaliel. These things were calculated to give him credibility with the crowd.

And he even gives them the benefit of the doubt that they're zealous toward God, which some of them might have been or might not have been. But he said, I was like you are today. I persecuted this way.

Again, the way as a name of Christianity. He uses this term a couple times in chapter 19 as well, and other places. I persecuted this way to death, binding and delivering into

prisons, both men and women, as also the high priest bears me witness at all the council of the elders, from whom I also received letters to the brethren and went to Damascus to bring in chains, even those who were there in Jerusalem to be punished.

Now, he says the high priest bears me witness. In this crowd, probably the high priest was visible. I mean, he operated there at the temple.

There was a big crowd of people. He probably would have shown up either to be an instigator or at least an observer. And Paul the high priest here, he'll tell you I'm not making this up.

That guy right there, the high priest, he bears witness, don't you? Remember, you gave me letters. Remember you and the whole council of the Sanhedrin gave me letters telling me to go to Damascus and arrest these people. So he kind of calls on the high priest as a witness to his story, too, which is probably wise as well.

I mean, probably gave him more credibility that way, too. Now, it happened as I journeyed and came near Damascus at about noon. Suddenly, a great light from heaven shone around me and I fell to the ground and I heard a voice saying to me, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? Of course, this is the second time we're hearing this story.

We hear Luke's version of it in chapter nine. Now we're hearing Paul's version of it. So I answered, who are you, Lord? And he said to me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.

Now, those who were with me indeed saw the light and were afraid, but they did not hear the voice of him who spoke to me. You remember in chapter nine, I think it's verse seven, there's a slightly different version of what the people with him experienced. It says there that they heard a voice, but they saw no man, is what it says there.

The people who were with Paul, they heard a voice, but they saw no man. This says they saw a light, but of course we already know they didn't see a man. They didn't see Jesus.

They saw a light only. They heard a voice, we read in chapter nine, but here it says they didn't hear the voice of one speaking to him. Now, they may have heard Paul's voice, Saul's voice as he spoke to Jesus, but they didn't hear the other voice.

They only heard one voice. It was a two-way conversation. The voice they didn't hear was the voice of Jesus.

It's also possible that the word hear is taken in the meaning of to hear with perception or to understand, that they didn't understand the voice. It was just noise to them. In any case, verse 10, so I said, what shall I do, Lord? Now, this question is not recorded in the account in chapter nine.

In chapter nine, it just records what Jesus told him to do, but here Paul says, I asked, what should I do, Lord? Which is a way of pointing out that he had already decided to submit. He was a rebel until he had the vision. He doesn't know who it is he's seen until he says, who are you? And he's told, I'm Jesus.

But even then, the question is, what's he going to do? Is he going to continue to rebel? No, he's going to submit. What should I do? What do you want me to do, Lord? So he's already, in a sense, willing to take instructions from Jesus, his newly met conqueror. And the Lord said to me, arise and go into Damascus, and there you will be told things which are to be appointed for you to do.

And since I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of those who were with me, I came to Damascus. Then one Ananias, a devout man, according to the law, having a good testimony with all the Jews who dwelt there, came to me. Now, in Acts nine, we read how that Ananias was visited by Christ too, and Christ gave him an instruction in a vision to go and talk to Saul.

Paul leaves that out because that wasn't his experience. He can't testify to that. It did happen, and Luke tells us about it in chapter nine.

But Paul's simply testifying to what he experienced. So what he experienced was Ananias showed up. Notice he describes Ananias as a devout man, according to the law, and one respected by the Jews.

So, of course, Ananias was a Christian, but he was apparently a Torah observant Christian in Damascus. And Paul makes a point of saying so because he's talking to the Jews. Listen, we Christians, Ananias, for example, who's the guy who brought me into the fold and baptized me, he wasn't anti-Jewish.

He was a devout Jew. All the Jews in town respected him. He's trying to point out there's not any reason for them to see Judaism and Christianity as hostile to each other.

Here's a man who is a Christian who baptized even me, he says. But he was also, you know, kept the law and the Jews respected. He's doing all he can to ingratiate himself to the audience and try to minimize the distance between them, that is, philosophically and religiously.

And so he said, he came to me and stood and said to me, brother Saul, receive your sight. And at that same hour, I looked up at him, which means his sight was regained. Then he said, the God of our fathers has chosen you that you should know his will and to see the just one and to hear the voice of his mouth.

For you will be his witness to all men of what you have seen and heard. And so at this point, Paul is doing the very thing. And I said, he will witness to what he's saying.

He's now witnessing to them as he had done all over the Roman Empire of the things he'd seen and heard. And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord. Some people understand this to be saying that baptism washes away sin.

He says, be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord. But you see, wash away your sins is couched between two clauses. One, be baptized.

The other is calling on the name of the Lord. Either one of them could be seen as explaining how you wash away your sins. You wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.

And you get baptized to show that that's where you're at. Be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord would suggest that it's calling on the name of the Lord, not being baptized that saves you. The last verse in Joel chapter two, which is quoted by Peter at Pentecost and by Paul in Romans chapter 10 is, whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

So you get saved by calling on the name of the Lord, not by being baptized. But you do get baptized. If you get saved, you get baptized.

But you wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord. That's what both Peter and Paul elsewhere say, and which they're quoting from Joel chapter two when they say so. Then it happened when I returned to Jerusalem and I was praying in the temple that I was in a trance.

Now we don't have this information earlier in Acts. Luke does not record this. And this would have been three years later, by the way, because Paul was in Damascus when he got saved and which is what's taught, which is verse 16.

But verse 17, he's back in Jerusalem praying in the temple. That would be three years later, according to Galatians 1, 17, and also described in Acts chapter nine. That's that two week visit that Paul had after he's, after he'd been saved for three years.

And I saw Jesus saying to me, make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, for they will not receive your testimony concerning me. So I said, Lord, they know that in every synagogue I imprisoned and beat those who believed on you. And when the blood of your martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by consenting to his death and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.

Then he said to me, depart, for I will send you far from here to the Gentiles. Now, when Paul said this, the audience responded. We'll have to wait until after our break to read about their response.

But this is how his sermon closed. You could see that everything about his sermon was

calculated to ameliorate the crowd. He speaks of them as brethren, fathers, zealous for God as he himself can relate to.

He was trained as a devout Jew and Pharisee under Gamaliel. The man who baptized him into the faith was a devout Jew, also respected by the Jews. And it was while he was in the very temple, the temple that they say he doesn't believe in.

He was in that temple when Jesus appeared to him in a vision and told him to go to the Gentiles. Now, unfortunately, that same go to the Gentiles was more volatile, proved to be more volatile than I think Paul anticipated it being. And it was when they heard that that the crowd exploded.

But we'll we'll take a break here and come back to that.