

Thoughts on Acts Twenty-One

The end of the third preaching journey provided much traveling, resting, and visiting friends and family members. As evangelists, Paul and his companions had many of each. Traveling, even by ship, was a long and tiring process. When they came to Caesarea, they stayed in "the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven" (Acts 21:8). Saul, the enemy of Christians that had stood with those who stoned Stephen, became the apostle Paul and was welcomed as a brother by Philip. Days later, a prophet named Agabus arrived to tell Paul that chains awaited him in Jerusalem. Paul knew he would be given to the Romans and preach to high-ranking Roman officials, but the demonstration of being bound, as Agabus wrapped Paul's belt around his arms and legs, was new information.

With the same warning from many different prophets, the people begged Paul not to go on to Jerusalem. However, Paul had been told from the beginning, "I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake" (Acts 9:16). He said to the Ephesian elders, "And now, behold, bound by the Spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me. "But I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself, so that I may finish my course and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:22-24). Paul was bound, put under obligation to the Spirit, to go where and when the Spirit directed.

When Paul arrived in Jerusalem, he received advice from men that tried to find a single solution to many problems. The Temple leaders and elders hated Paul as a defector, a traitor to his training as a Pharisee. Others hated him for not circumcising the Gentiles. And Rome had begun to note the conflict and difference between the followers of Christ and the Jewish nation. James, the brother of Jesus, and the other elders of the Jerusalem church, suggested a demonstration to show that Paul respected the traditions and the Temple. Paul's participation in the plan results in people today accusing Paul of being ignorant that the Law was no longer binding. Others say he was hypocritical like Peter did at Antioch (Galatians 2:11-13). But Paul had written Romans, 1st and 2nd Corinthians, and Galatians. He also declared that "I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God" (Acts 20:27). Paul acted on what he taught; The Law was no longer in force (Romans 7:1-6); (Galatians 3:24-25), and Justification comes by faith in Christ, not by the Law of Moses (Galatians 2:16). And yet Paul, a Jewish Christian, could observe customs of the Law as it applied to national rather than spiritual Law. (Acts 16:1-3), (18:18); (1 Corinthians 9:19-20). Paul was not following customs to receive remission or justification of sin but to help others to complete a vow. The primary accomplishment of this incident was to provide an opportunity to place Paul into the protective custody of Rome, where he would remain until after completing the task of presenting the gospel to Caesar and his household.

It was widely known that Paul associated, worked, and traveled with Gentiles. Seeing Paul in the Temple, where only sanctified Jewish men could go, caused some in the crowd to believe he had taken his Gentile friends into an area forbidden to them. They jumped to a false conclusion without seeing the Gentiles and began shouting their displeasure with Paul. There is a lesson on beliefs overriding facts that will have to wait for now. The first step in Paul's incarceration is based on a false assumption, "*For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with him, and they supposed that Paul had brought him into the temple*" (Acts 21:29). In all that happened to Paul because

of the Jew's hatred of him, his love for them never changed. His attitude was expressed as he wrote to Rome from Corinth before he went to Jerusalem. *"I am telling the truth in Christ; I am not lying, my conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises, whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen"* (Romans 9:1-5).

From the time Paul arrived in Jerusalem until his death, he was an example of Jesus' teaching. *"I say to you, Love your enemies; bless those cursing you, do well to those hating you; and pray for those abusing and persecuting you, so that you may become sons of your Father in Heaven. Because He causes the sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and unjust"* (Matthew 5:44-45 LITV).