

In this chapter we find the beginnings of Paul's adversity in Jerusalem. He is apprehended by the Jews, who begin to beat him and would have killed him had the Roman authorities not intervened. The things that Paul would have to suffer and his eventual trip to Rome to face his accusers are all part of God's plan to help spread the gospel through Paul's writings.

**Verses 1-17:** After leaving Miletus where he had said farewell to the elders from the Ephesian church (Acts 20:17-38), Paul continues his journey to Jerusalem. As he traces Paul's journey to Jerusalem, Luke mentions multiple times that Paul is warned of the arrest that he will face in Jerusalem (vs. 4, 10-11). Some have suggested that Paul traveled to Jerusalem in disobedience to the Spirit of God, but that seems unlikely. After hearing many of the brethren pleading with him not to go to Jerusalem, he finally states that he is doing so in obedience to God: **Acts 21:13-14** "Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done." When Paul finally arrives in Jerusalem, he and his group are warmly welcomed by the brethren (v. 17).

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18 And the *day* following Paul went in with us unto James; and all the elders were present.

The next day after arriving in Jerusalem, Paul meets with James and the elders of the Jerusalem church. This James was the half-brother of Jesus and was serving as the head of the Jerusalem church. He had presided over the council in Acts 15, which had met concerning the question of Gentiles being required to be circumcised and keep the law (Acts 15:13-21).

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19 And when he had saluted them, he declared particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry.

After greeting James and the elders, Paul begins describing the things that God had done through him in his ministry among the Gentiles. The word "particularly" is actually three Greek words literally meaning "one by one." Paul didn't summarize his missionary journeys but detailed each thing that God had done, one by one, giving God the glory for it all.

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20 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:

**"And when they heard *it*, they glorified the Lord"** – James and the elders were pleased that the gospel of Jesus Christ was spreading among the Gentiles and they glorified the Lord for causing it to happen.

**"and said unto him, Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe"** – They point out that the gospel had been spreading among the Jews as well and that there were many thousands of Jews believing on Christ at that time.

**"and they are all zealous of the law"** – Belief in Jesus Christ does not cause a Jew to cease being a Jew. Since Jesus is the Jewish Messiah, faith in Him actually makes a Jew even more of a Jew. The Jewish believers that James and the elders are speaking of were not trusting in the law for salvation. In fact, belief in Christ had made them even more enthusiastic about obeying God's law.

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21 And 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.

**"And they are informed of thee"** – These Jewish believers had heard reports of Paul's activities during his missionary journeys among the Gentiles. Some may have been true, but many were false.

**"that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses"** – Some reports had said that while Paul was traveling in Gentile regions, he was teaching the Jews that he encountered that they should forsake Moses and everything that Moses had taught and commanded. This was a cardinal sin to a Jew since Moses was a man of God and had basically shaped what it meant to be a Jew.

**"saying that they ought not to circumcise *their* children"** – Circumcision goes to the core of being Jewish. Not only was circumcision prescribed by the Mosaic Law (Lev. 12:1-3), but before the law was given, God had given circumcision as the token of the covenant between God and Abraham (Gen. 17:10), the father of the Jewish race. These false reports said Paul was teaching Jews to not circumcise their children, which would be breaking the covenant God made with Abraham.

**"neither to walk after the customs [*things prescribed by the law*]"** – Jesus Himself criticized the keeping of the traditions of men (Mark 7:9), but these "customs" refer to things done as prescribed by the Mosaic Law. The false reports were saying that Paul was teaching that Jews should abandon all things that made them Jewish and become as Gentiles.

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22 What is it therefore? the multitude must needs come together: for they will hear that thou art come.

James and the elders ask what should be done to handle the situation. They know that it is inevitable that these Jewish believers will gather and want answers when they hear that Paul has returned to Jerusalem.

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23 Do therefore this that we say to thee: We have four men which have a vow on them;

James and the elders instruct Paul on how to deal with the situation. They happened to have four men who were currently engaged in a Nazarite vow, a distinctly Jewish custom prescribed by the Mosaic Law (Num. 6:1-21). Taking a Nazarite vow was a voluntary dedication of oneself to God for a period of time. During the time of their vow they were to keep themselves ceremonially clean. They could not drink wine, be exposed to a dead body, or cut their hair. At the end of their vow, they were to shave their head and offer certain sacrifices to the LORD.

24 They take, 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.

**“Them take, and purify thyself with them”** – Paul had been traveling among the Gentiles for an extended period of time and was considered to be ceremonially unclean. He had to be purified before he could take part (as their sponsor) in the ceremony ending these four men’s vows. It’s also possible that he began his own Nazarite vow as he did in Acts 18:18.

**“and be at charges with them, that they may shave *their* heads”** – Shaving the head marked the completion of a Nazarite vow. They were also required to offer certain sacrifices as along with shaving their head to complete their vow. Paul was to pay the expenses for the sacrifices needed so that the men could complete their vow before God and shave their heads.

**“and all may know that those things, whereof they were informed concerning thee, are nothing”** – If Paul did this, he would be showing his approval of this Jewish custom and demonstrating that the reports saying that he had forsaken his Jewish heritage were rumors that were not true.

**“but *that* thou thyself also walkest orderly [to stay in line], and keepest the law”** – The Greek word translated “walkest orderly” can refer to a soldier who marches in his place, following orders. The idea is that Paul would be showing that he was not a rogue Jew who was advocating that other Jews join him in abandoning the Jewish beliefs and practices. Rather, he was still a good Jew who respected and obeyed the Mosaic law.

25 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.

James and the elders remember the decision that was made in Acts 15 concerning the question of whether or not Gentiles should be circumcised and made to keep the Mosaic law. They acknowledge that while keeping the law is good and proper for Jews, the Gentiles were not under such a requirement except for the commandment they sent to the Gentiles (Acts 15:19-20).

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.

Paul could have protested if he thought that James and the elders were asking him to renounce the things he had been preaching among the Gentiles, but that was not the case here. They understood that keeping the law did not bring salvation to a Jew but was obedience to the commands of God. Thus Paul complied with their request and after purifying himself, entered the temple with the four men to take part in the seven-day ceremony that ended the men’s Nazarite vow with an offering and the shaving of their heads.

27 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, 28 Crying out, Men of Israel, help: This is the man, that teacheth all *men* every where against the people, and the law, and this place: and further brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place. 29 (For they had seen before with him in the city Trophimus an Ephesian, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.)

Before the seven days of the purification ceremony had ended, Jews which had come from “Asia” (Asia Minor) to observe Pentecost saw Paul in the temple. Since Paul had spent a lot of time in Asia Minor ministering among the Gentiles, these Jews from that area recognized him and immediately began to cause trouble. They call on the other Jews for help and begin accusing Paul of teaching that the Jews, the Mosaic law and the temple in Jerusalem should be disregarded. They also falsely assumed that Paul had defiled the temple by bringing a Gentile into it. They had seen Paul earlier within the city with a Gentile man named Trophimus and incorrectly believed that Paul had brought him into the part of the temple where Gentiles were forbidden.

30 And all the city was moved, and the people ran together: and they took Paul, and drew him out of the temple: and forthwith the doors were shut. 31 And as they went about to kill him, tidings came unto the chief captain of the band, that all Jerusalem was in an uproar.

**“And all the city was moved [to become excited; agitated; provoked], and the people ran together”** – These false accusations upset the whole city as people ran to aid Paul’s accusers and/or to see what was causing the excitement.

**“and they took Paul, and drew him out of the temple: and forthwith the doors were shut”** – They drag Paul out of the temple complex and shut the doors behind him, barring him from reentering or perhaps to prevent further defilement of the temple.

**“And as they went about to kill him, tidings came unto the chief captain of the band, that all Jerusalem was in an uproar”** – The people were reacting emotionally with no thought to giving Paul a trial and a chance to speak for himself. The uproar caught the attention of the Roman soldiers who were part of the occupying force, who immediately notified their commander.

32 Who immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down unto them: and when they saw the chief captain and the soldiers, they left beating of Paul.

The chief captain arrive on the scene with soldiers and centurions to take control of the situation. The Jews were planning on beating Paul to death but they stopped and ran in fear when the Romans arrived. Since he took more than one centurion (each commanding 100 men), the chief captain must have taken over 200 men in order to suppress the potentially violent situation.

**Verses 33-40:** While the chief captain is having him taken to the castle, Paul asks for permission to speak to the crowd.