

SUNDAY SCHOOL MATERIALS FOR ADULTS

LESSON 4



PAUL ARRESTED IN JERUSALEM

Scripture Text: Acts 21:18-40

Paul, with his companions, at last, reached Jerusalem in spite of warnings of the Spirit that he would be imprisoned there.

The Jews believed that Gentiles could not be saved. God showed them it is His will to save Gentiles as well as Jews. Some Jews then held that to be saved, Gentiles must be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses. The Apostles concluded from God's workings that Gentiles were not bound by the Law. Many Jews believed that although Gentiles were free from the Law, Jews were not. They held that no Jew when saved was free to quit the practice of the Law ceremonies. Paul taught that these ceremonies were not necessary since it is faith in Christ that saves. Neither did he prohibit Jews from keeping them if they wished. Read **Galatians 5:6; Galatians 6:15; Colossians 3:11**.

MEMORY VERSE: *Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf.*

—1 Peter 4:16

DAILY READINGS:

- Mon.—**Acts 15:6-31** Gentiles not bound by the Law.
- Tue.—**Romans 3:19-31** Ceremonies of Law not necessary.
- Wed.—**Galatians 5:1-14** Law burden to Christian liberty.
- Thu.—**Colossians 2:8-23** Regulations, ordinances removed.
- Fri.—**Galatians 3:19-29** The function of the Law.

Devotional Reading: 1 Peter 4:12-19 The Christian and suffering.

Paul's Story to the Elders

Acts 21:18-22 Paul and his group met with James and all the Jerusalem elders. They were the spiritual leaders of the church there. Paul told what things **God had wrought . . . by his ministry**. Notice that he gave credit to God, not himself. Souls had been saved, sick healed, and miracles wrought. These were **among the Gentiles**. This was an important fact, for it showed God's acceptance of the Gentiles. They had been accepted while following Paul's teachings, that is, without adhering to the Law of Moses. This justified Paul's teaching, showing divine approval of it.

The elders **glorified the Lord** for the good things He had done. Then they told Paul the feeling of the Jews toward him. The Jews had heard that Paul taught the Jews in his travels **not to circumcise their children** or to keep the customs of the Law. Being **zealous of the law**—strongly loyal to it—they rejected this teaching. The elders feared an uprising of Jews against Paul when they knew of his presence.

Paul's Mission in Jerusalem

Paul told the elders the burden he had—God's working with the Gentiles. Was this the purpose that made him risk danger of death to reach Jerusalem? It would seem so.

The controversy was serious. It threatened to split the church into two divisions—lawkeepers and nonlawkeepers. This must not be. Jesus said He had sheep among both Jews and Gentiles, and **there shall be**

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one fold, and one shepherd (John 10:16). He prayed that the church might be one (**John 17:11, 20-23**). To keep them one, Paul spent years of effort and now risked his life. He did not take a one-sided position. It was not necessary to keep the Law, neither was it necessary not to keep it. The emphasis was put upon being made a new creature by faith in Christ.

The Elders Agree on a Plan

Acts 21:23-26 To show the people that Paul kept the Law and that the report of his teaching was incorrect, the elders asked Paul to go through a ceremony of purification according to the Law with four men who had a **vow on them**—a solemn promise made to God. We are not told the exact details of the ceremony, but for a general idea of it, see **Leviticus 14:8-9** and **Numbers 8:6-7**. The elders agreed with Paul that Gentiles need not keep the Law except to abstain from eating food offered to idols, blood, or strangled animals, and from fornication. They recalled the letter written to the Gentile Christians telling them so (**Chapter 15**).

Paul, following the elders' suggestion, joined the four men in purifying themselves by washing of their clothing and bodies, shaving off their hair, etc. Then they went into the temple and prepared to have an offering of an animal sacrifice made for each of them.

If the unity of the church is so important as to require the risk Paul took to preserve it, we cannot lightly break it. Jesus said oneness of His people would cause the world to believe in Him (**John 17:21**). Nothing can unite saints and sinners, but nothing should be allowed to separate saints from saints. We should use extreme care not to divide the church, but to heal any division. Let us reach our hand in fellowship to every blood-washed one. It is very important that we keep the unity of the church.

The Jews Seize Paul

Acts 21:27-30 The week-long ceremony was nearly completed. Jews from Asia, in Jerusalem for the Passover, were watching for an opportunity to lay hold on Paul. No doubt their bitterness for Paul had smoldered since encountering him in Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and other places. Now seeing him in the temple, they shouted to the people that he had polluted the temple. They jumped to the hasty and unfounded conclusion that he had taken Trophimus, a Greek and so a Gentile, into the temple. The temple was for Jews only. They only **supposed** that Paul had taught against the Law of Moses. It is wrong to act upon unfounded rumors. They shouted that Paul taught against the people, the Law, and the temple. The people ran, seized Paul **and drew him out of the temple**.

Paul Is Rescued by Soldiers

Acts 21:31-39 **They went about to kill him** by beating him. Fierce hatred! **All Jerusalem was in an uproar**. The chief captain of the soldiers heard of it. He was a Roman with authority. He took soldiers and ran down to Paul and had him **bound with two chains**. He tried to examine into the matter but was prevented by the great confusion. To take Paul into the castle, soldiers were forced to carry him up the stairs to escape the violence of the people. Paul asked the chief captain to be allowed **to speak unto the people**.

Paul Permitted to Speak

Acts 21:40 Paul was not satisfied to leave the people. He had a message for these thousands gathered in anger. He loved them. He received permission to speak to the people. Standing on the castle stairs, Paul **beckoned with the hand** to quiet the people. Next week we will look at his message to them.

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