

Acts Week 47

Verses 21:24-40

Last week, in verse 24, we left off where the elders of the Jerusalem church wanted Paul to compromise his teachings between keeping the ordinances of the law and understanding grace through the sacrifice of and atonement of our Lord Jesus. Over the years, I have discussed how difficult the change must have been; these are generations who have lived under the law; they knew no other way. It is easy to understand their doubt in this new religious practice; everything they did was a tradition passed down throughout time by God's people.

Had the people understood and accepted Jesus, the course of history would have been significantly altered. However, it fell upon Paul to initiate this transformative movement, infusing it with the necessary vigor and validation. The moment when Paul was asked to join the four men who took the Nazarite vow was not a sign of compromise but a pivotal decision that would shape the church's future. Paul's agreement was not a renunciation of the law and traditions but a progressive evolution from them. Moody¹ and Barclay² both concur that this was not a moment of weakness but a testament to Paul's strength and self-determination.

When Paul tells the Gentiles not to circumcise their children, it is not in defiance of the law; it is more about the freedom and grace that Jesus obtained for the church. Salvation does not come through the traditions and customs of the law but through believing in the sacrifice, the one and only pure sacrifice that came and took our sin upon Himself. We are witnessing Paul's turmoil; certain Jewish leaders support him and want no harm to come to him, so compromise may be the one way to explain his ministry. He must satisfy the nay-sayers. We can look at 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 to understand Paul's reasoning better. "He became all things to all men," but it still had to be difficult and testing to Paul, knowing that reverting back to the law was dangerous and demonstrated an abandonment of the Gospel; we find the explanation in Hebrews 6:4-6 as to why.

Hebrews 6:4-6: 4 For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, 5 and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, 6 if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame.

This compromise would be difficult as we know grace and law are being judged. One side wants the gospel of Jesus, and the other demands the following of the law. Paul

¹ Dwight L Moody, The Moody Bible Commentary, Moody Publishers, Chicago, IL, Page 1726

² William Barclay, The Acts of the Apostles, A New Daily Study, Westminster John Knox Press, Page 183

creates a whole new problem, and things turn bad. The point Paul sought to teach was looking forward as we enter into a new dispensation; the old has been fulfilled, that is, Jesus came, suffered, and died, and the law no longer binds us. But the Hebrews we are looking at want to revert back, knowing that the law saves no one. Taking the vow with the four men is a Jewish form of cleansing; the Nazarite vow would usually be for thirty days; according to most commentary, it appears this time of the four was only seven days, but an official length of time is not in the Bible. I have found no set days for the vow. At the end of the vow, the hair was cut off and the priest burnt the hair as a wave offering.

This was a problem: how could those who had heard Paul's sermons and knew the truth stand by and not have questions? It appears to most that Paul did so, hoping to bring the two factions together. He would have achieved a goal, but it wasn't the right time.

Verses 26-34: 26 Then Paul took the men, and the next day, having been purified with them, entered the temple to announce the expiration of the days of purification, at which time an offering should be made for each one of them.

27 Now 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, 28 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." 29 (For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.)

"Supposed," how many times have we supposed things in our own lives only to find a different truth later on? It is an issue I'm going to guess all of us have faced numerous times, and often for good reason, but good reason is not what provides truth. These charges are not validated in the Scripture, one that he taught men everywhere against the Jewish people and the law, and two that he brought Trophimus into the temple. Both were nothing more than assumptions. It is unclear from our verse that Paul took the men into the temple or went in alone to seek offering. However, Paul had been seen with Trophimus, and the assumption had been made by the Asian Jews who most likely knew him that Paul had taken him into the temple.

30 And all the city was disturbed; and the people ran together, seized Paul, and dragged him out of the temple; and immediately the doors were shut.

After the ceremonial cleansing of the four, which appears to have only lasted seven days, Paul took the men and went into the temple to announce that this tradition had been adhered to. So what now? The answer came quickly. The people were angered and took siege of Paul; he was now in the hands of an angry mob—not at all what he was planning.

This verse seems to indicate that Paul was alone in the temple, for it says they seized and drug Paul out. Had the others been with him, there would have obviously been a lot more commotion.

31 Now as they were seeking to kill him, news came to the commander of the garrison that all Jerusalem was in an uproar. 32 He immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down to them. And when they saw the commander and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul. 33 Then the commander came near and took him, and commanded him to be bound with two chains; and he asked who he was and what he had done. 34 And some among the multitude cried one thing and some another.

Those who seized Paul were filled with hate and wanted nothing more than his death. Apparently, there is a history that indicates the Romans had a center next to the temple, and they got there in time to prevent Paul from being beaten to death.

So the commander of the garrison (which can range from several hundred to more than a thousand) immediately came running. This was a good thing since it stopped Paul's beating. As the commander tried to get answers about what Paul had done, he was given two different views, and it wasn't easy to tell which was the right view; some cried out one thing and some another. Paul was then chained and bound and taken away.

35-36, When he reached the stairs, he had to be carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the mob. For the multitude of the people followed after, crying out, "Away with him!"

These words of hate should resonate with us: John 19:15: **But they cried out, Away with him, away with him, crucify him.** The same words were used for Jesus. A willing hate and despise toward those of different beliefs, yet we do not find them acting toward others similarly. Many did not follow Jewish traditions and laws, but with those who preached Jesus, who is taught as a sign throughout the Old Testament, who they should have known, there was a strong hatred. Can these men claim ignorance? It would be difficult since John the Baptist, the last of the Old Testament prophets, introduced Jesus to the Jews; we also find the faith of Simeon, **Luke 2:26 "And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ."** Surely, Simeon must have shared this with others, but even if not, how was he so trusting and receptive? Yes, it was the Holy Spirit who told him he would one day hold the Blessed Child, but there must have been something that Simeon already knew about the coming King.

37-30: 37 Then as Paul was about to be led into the barracks, he said to the commander, "May I speak to you?"

He replied, “Can you speak Greek? 38 Are you not the Egyptian who some time ago stirred up a rebellion and led the four thousand assassins out into the wilderness?”

39 But Paul said, “I am a Jew from Tarsus, in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city; and I implore you, permit me to speak to the people.”

40 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, saying, This is another one of those irritating breaks in our Bibles, the rest of this conversation is taken up as we begin chapter 22.