



G R A C E

REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

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THE BOOK OF ACTS

Sermon Notes

Paul in Route to Rome, Part 2

The Apostle Paul is Attacked in Jerusalem

Acts 21:27-36

April 20, 2008

I. The Jewish Crowd Seizes Paul

II. The Roman Commander Seizes Paul

III. The Jewish Crowd Demands Paul's Death

- ◆ In the modern Church today, as has been true in nearly every age throughout the Christian Church, there are many sincere Christians who are convinced that our generation will be the last prior to Christ's return [or, perhaps, a "Rapture"].
- ◆ Furthermore, many of these same individuals look to events in the Middle East as confirmation of such a belief.
- ◆ One of the events they "long" for is the eventual rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem, and possibly the reinstatement of the sacrificial system. This, it is believed [through prophecies such as Daniel's 70th Week in Daniel 9] will occur during the first half of the Tribulation.
- ◆ Consistent with this system is a belief in an eventual literal 1,000 year reign of Christ in a physical, literal kingdom.
- ◆ Yet the difficulties with this belief system is that it is greatly focused on the **physical things...the shadows**. Yet, it was Christ who fulfilled them all.
- ◆ Consequently, one must ask, "What is the purpose of the Temple being rebuilt or a literal reign of Christ [when His kingdom is not even of this world]?" Or, "Why would we even want a rebuilt Temple when we have Christ!?"
- ◆ It is fascinating that even the Jews of the first century had a difficult time with these same issues. They were so focused on the physical world – the physical Temple, the physical priesthood, physical circumcision, that they missed the One to whom they pointed.

I. The Jewish Crowd Seizes Paul

- ❑ The ritual cleansing associated with the vow would have occurred on the third and seventh days of the vow [Numbers 19:12]
- ❑ The seven day cleansing period represents a “new creation” – pointing to the Christ and our position as new creatures through the Head of the New Creation, our Lord Jesus.
- ❑ The scene, here, most certainly occurs on the seventh day of the vow.
- ❑ Jews from recognize Paul and make two claims against him.

1. The first charged leveled against Paul, in **Verse 28**, is that “This is the man who preaches to all men everywhere against our people and the Law and this place...”

- In this first charge, the Jews mention three aspects of Paul’s “blasphemy.” They all involved Paul preaching against:

▪ Our People

- This charge is likely related to the rumors mentioned by the Jerusalem elders in Acts 21:21, when they said that Paul had been teaching “all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or walk according to our customs.”
- The “mark” of the people the Jews are speaking of was circumcision – the sign of the Abrahamic covenant.
- For the Jews, “our people” is limited to a specific race of people – ethnic Jews. Furthermore, this group of people” is marked with the sign of circumcision.
- Therefore, what the Jews are saying is that Paul is attacking “our people” by telling the Jews not to circumcise their children [a charge that is patently false].

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- Yet, there is certainly an element of truth to what the people are saying. The reason is that “**our people**” is a group whose characteristics are determined by not just the Law, but Jewish tradition. The Pharisees and Rabbis, not God Himself, had determined what the stipulations were for inclusion in their community – and it was always works-based.
- However, Paul may have been speaking against “our people”, but, he was perfectly consistent with supporting “God’s people” – those saved by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ...those who had received the circumcision of the heart by the working of the Holy Spirit.

▪ **The Law**

- The second aspect of this accusation by the Jews was that Paul was preaching “to all men everywhere against...the Law...”
- This, of course, was untrue.
- However, once again, from the perspective of the Jewish zealots, there was an element of truth to it.
 - The reason was that although Paul was not preaching against the Law of Moses, he was preaching against “the Law of the Jews.”
 - In John 8:15-18, Jesus says, “You judge according to the flesh; I am not judging anyone. But even if I do judge, My judgment is true; for I am not alone in it, but I and the Father who sent Me. Even in *your law* it has been written that the testimony of two men is true. I am He who testifies about Myself, and the Father who sent Me testifies about Me.”
 - There appears to be, in these words of Jesus, an implication that the law of the Pharisees differed from the Law of Christ.
 - Indeed it did. The Law of the Pharisees, and most first century Jews, consisted of the Law of Moses **PLUS** rabbinical and Pharisaical tradition. Therefore, “your law” was NOT the Word of God.
 - Clearly the Word of God was not **sufficient** for the Pharisees.
- So it would have been with these Jews.
- Paul may have attacked “**the Law**”...as they knew it. However, he was perfectly consistent with the *true* Law, and the One to whom it pointed...the One in whom it was fulfilled...the Lord Jesus Christ.

▪ **This Place**

- Finally, Paul was accused of preaching “against this place.”
 - “This place” was certainly the Temple.
 - The similarities between this charge and the one made against Stephen, in Acts 6:11-14, are striking. Here, some men who belonged to the Synagogue of the Freedmen said, “This man never ceases to speak words against this holy place and the law...”

- Like the previous two aspects of this charge, the people were partially correct.
 - Although Paul was not technically preaching “against” the physical Temple, he preached about the One to whom the Temple pointed.
 - Although Paul was not “against” the physical Temple; he was not “for” it either.
 - In fact, for Paul, there was no more need for the physical Temple, as Christ, the fulfillment of the Temple, had come, died, was resurrected, and ascended to the right hand of the Father.

2. The second charge Paul is accused of by the crowd, also recorded in **Verse 28**, is “...he has even brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place.”

- This charge is most certainly false – with no basis of truth.
- In fact, in **Verse 29**, Luke writes, “For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with him, and *they supposed* that Paul had brought him into the Temple.”
- The accusation, here, was that technically, Paul had brought a Gentile into the Temple’s Inner Court.
- There were no witnesses [which was required by Jewish Law] – just suppositions.
- Yet, if, in fact, this charge were true, then Paul would have aided in the desecration of the Temple. There could have been no more serious charge.
- However, as I. Howard Marshall wrote, “It is ironical that this should have been the charge against Paul at a time when he himself was undergoing purification so that he would not defile the Temple!”
- Furthermore, Darrell Bock comments, “The irony is that as Paul seeks to support his Jewish roots, he is accused of not caring about them.”
- Not only this, but the greatest irony is that it was the Jews who rejected [“defiled”] the perfect Temple [the *fulfillment* of the Old Testament Temple] – Jesus Christ Himself. They are the ones who stand guilty through their actions! Just as Christ said to the Jews as He stood in the Temple in John 2:19, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”
- Notice that there is such vagueness to the charges leveled against Paul. In fact, it is as though the people cannot even say the name of Paul...stating, “This...man...” This is not uncommon in Luke’s writings [Luke 23:4, 14; Acts 4:16; 5:28].

- According to multiple archeological discoveries, as well as ancient writings, such as those from the Jewish historian Josephus [*Ant.* 15.11.5], Gentiles were strictly prohibited from entering into the main Temple area.
- Large, four-and-a-half-foot tall stone markers surrounded the Court of Women in the Temple complex, announcing to the Gentiles that they were prohibited from entering into the sanctuary.
 - Two of these stone markers have actually been found in the Temple area: one in 1871 and the other in 1935.
 - On these stone markers were inscriptions in Greek and Latin with a dire warning: “No foreigner may enter within the barricade which surrounds the temple and enclosure. Anyone who is caught trespassing will bear personal responsibility for his ensuing death.”
 - In fact, even Titus, the Roman general who later became Emperor, had given the Jews “leave to kill such as go beyond it (that is, the barricade), though he were a Roman.” [Josephus, *Wars*, VI.2.4] In other words, this was one of the ways the Romans sought to appease the Jews – to allow them to kill even Romans who wrongfully penetrated the barrier between the Outer Courts and the Sanctuary.
 - This barrier is most certainly what Paul was considering when he wrote of the “dividing wall of hostility” between Jews and Gentiles in Ephesians 2:14.
 - Yet, the Jews sought to preserve this divide.
 - Most certainly, though, the Jews are concerned with the issue of the Gentile race defiling the Temple’s purity.

- Then, Luke writes in **Verse 30**, “Then all the city was provoked, and the people rushed together, and taking hold of Paul they dragged him out of the temple, and immediately the doors were shut.”
- Luke writes, in **Verse 30**, “...all the city was provoked...”
 - Once again, Luke’s use of hyperbole here demonstrates the chaotic nature of the accusing crowd.
- The phrase, “...**and immediately the doors were shut**” is one of the most profound statements in this section of Acts.

- Speaking in Great Britain in 1864, T.D. Bernard stated, “Believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets’ and ‘having committed nothing against the people or customs of [his] fathers’, he [Paul] and his creed are forced from their proper home. On it as well as him the Temple doors are shut.”
- “For Luke himself, this may have been the moment when the Jerusalem temple ceased to fill the honorable role hitherto ascribed to it in his twofold history. The exclusion of God’s message and messenger from the house once called by his name sealed its doom: it was now ripe for the destruction which Jesus had predicted for it many years before (Luke 21:6).” F.F. Bruce
- This scene is likely occurring during the mid-50’s A.D. Consequently, in just over a decade, the Roman army will lay siege to Jerusalem and destroy the Temple – never to be rebuilt again.
- It was precisely because the Jews had “shut the doors” to the Gospel message, that God judged them through the Roman siege of A.D. 70.
 - To begin with, the fall of the Temple was God’s judgment. They had rejected Christ and His messengers, to include the Apostle Paul.
 - Yet, it was also an act of God’s grace. For the Temple and its sacrificial system to remain, the Jews would have continued to place their trust in the system, and their ability to keep it. However, just as the Lord Jesus Christ predicted, in Matthew 24, the Temple was destroyed, marking the end of the era.

II. The Roman Commander Seizes Paul

- Next, after “the doors [of the Temple] were shut,” Luke states, in no uncertain terms, in **Verse 31**, “While they [the Jews] were seeking to kill him [Paul]...”
 - In other words, there was no question as to what the purpose of the Jews was...they wanted Paul dead.
 - This, once again, parallels the life and trials of Christ.
- Luke, then, continues in **Verse 31**, “While they were seeking to kill him, a report came up to the commander of the Roman cohort that all Jerusalem was in confusion.”
 - Notice, the nature of the report that “came up to the commander of the Roman cohort”: “*all* Jerusalem was in confusion.”
 - This is certainly a common element in so many half-truths [lies]. The problem is nearly always made to be greater than it truly is.

- A professor of mine once told me: “Remember, Satan has the unique ability to make one voice sound like a thousand.”
- Luke notes that “a report came up to **the commander of the Roman cohort.**”
 - A Roman cohort [1,000 soldiers total] was made up of about 75% infantry [foot soldiers] and 25% cavalry [horse-mounted soldiers].
 - The Roman troops most certainly came from the Fortress of Antonia, situated at the northwest corner of the Temple complex, elevated just slightly above the rest of the area. This would allow the Roman soldiers to view the entire complex area, thus maintaining order [one of the towers was over one hundred feet high]. However, as the Fortress was not actually located in the Temple itself; therefore, the sanctity of the area was not violated.
- In **Verse 32**, Luke, then, writes, “At once he [the Roman commander] took along some soldiers and centurions and ran down to them...”
 - With the presence of the Roman commander as well as at least two centurions, it seems that this must have been a contingent of at least two hundred [200] soldiers. In other words, the Roman leadership saw this potentially as a very serious issue.
 - Not only does this parallel the scene with Paul in Ephesus, but it is strikingly similar to the scene when Christ was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane. In the Garden, “a crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the scribes and elders” [Mark 14:43] came to arrest Jesus.
 - As with Jesus, Paul was not breaking any Law, Jewish or Civil, and the authorities sent overwhelming forces to “subdue” him.
- Luke continues, in **Verse 32**, saying, “...and when they saw the commander and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul.”
 - It was the chief captain, Claudius Lysias [Acts 23:26], 2 centurions, and possibly as many as 200 soldiers, to subdue the crowd and seize [actually, “rescue”] Paul.
 - Here is yet another ironic scene: Paul, a man committed to the Law and Christ, the fulfillment of it, is “saved” with the arrival of pagan, Roman forces.
 - Yet, this scene also reflects the fulfillment of the prophet Agabus’ prophetic prediction in Acts 21:11

III. The Jewish Crowd Demands Paul's Death

- Luke writes, in **Verses 33-34**, “Then the commander came up and took hold of him [Paul], and ordered him to be bound with two chains; and he began asking who he was

and what he had done. But among the crowd some were shouting one thing and some another, and when he could not find out the facts because of the uproar, he ordered him to be brought into the barracks.”

- The Romans are more “lawful” than the Jews who claim to follow it. They ask Paul what he had done – the Jews did not even do this.
- Also, notice the nature of this crowd: it was marked with absolute confusion.
- In fact, this mark stands in direct contrast to the very nature of God Himself. Consequently, where the Spirit of the LORD is, there is order, for God is a God of order. However, when people are led by their own pride and selfish desires, confusion will inevitably emerge.
- In one last bit of irony, these Jewish zealots, highly committed to the Law, cannot even agree on the right charges against Paul [“some were shouting one thing and some another, and when he [the Roman commander] could not find out the facts...”]. In fact, according the **Jewish Law**, the Apostle Paul cannot be declared guilty, as no testimony can be confirmed on the basis of “two or three witnesses” [Deuteronomy 19:15]. Consequently, the very Law that the Jews claim to defend actually vindicates Paul in this context!
- Interesting, this scene parallels the situation with Paul in Ephesus [Compare 21:30 with 19:29; and 21:34 with 19:32].
- In Ephesus, in Acts 19:32, Luke writes of the pagan followers of the Greek goddess Artemis, that “some cried out one thing, some another, for the assembly was in confusion...”
 - These are virtually the exact words that Luke uses to describe the Jews here in 21:34.
 - The point seems rather clear: **the Jews are no different than the pagan Gentiles...they are no more lawful or righteous.**
- Warren Wiersbe writes, “The original troublemakers must have escaped during the great excitement, knowing that they could not actually substantiate their charges.”
- Finally, in **Verses 34b-36**, Luke states, “...he [the Roman commander] ordered him [Paul] to be brought into the barracks. When he got to the stairs, he was carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the mob; for the multitude of the people kept following them, shouting, ‘Away with him!’”
 - Finally, the commander decides that Paul is not safe and needs to be brought into the barracks.
 - Once again, the pagan Gentile Romans save Paul from the Jews.

- Then, as the Romans carry Paul into the barracks, the Jews shout, “Away with him!”
 - As John Stott, rightly notes, “...the crowd was shouting, ‘Away with him,’ just as nearly thirty years previously another crowd had shouted about another prisoner” [Luke 23:18].
 - This is the final parallel in this section to the trials of Christ.
 - Just as the Jewish crowd shouted at Jesus Christ: “Crucify Him!” when given the opportunity to free Him over Barabbas; so, now the crowd yells, concerning Paul, “Away with him!”, that is “Kill him!”

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- At this point in the Book of Acts, the city of Jerusalem has turned against Jesus, Peter, John, Stephen, and Paul.
- Consequently, as Darrell Bock writes, “For Acts, this is a final, key rejection of the gospel.”
- Yet, Paul remains committed to the very Gospel that his fellow Jews have so violently rejected.
- One must ask, “Throughout all this turmoil, I wonder if Paul questioned whether or not he was doing to the right thing?”
- It is quite possible that Paul did, in fact, question at times whether or not he was consistent with what God had called him to do.
- However, Paul also understood that when we are passionately pursuing what God has called us to do, we will always face difficulties. In fact, these difficulties will often make us question whether or not we are “doing the right thing.” Yet, as we persevere through these trials, we learn that, rather than distractions, they are confirmations as to what God has called us to.
- May we, like Paul, remain committed our calling and the Gospel message in the face of persecution and difficulties.