

Acts of the Apostles

Week 27: Acts 21:17-22:21

Paul's Arrival in Jerusalem (21:17-26)

- Paul is received warmly by the Christians in Jerusalem (21:17).
- Paul visited James and gave a detailed report of what God had done among the Gentiles.
- Paul credits his mission to God, a proper praise, and a reminder that the Gentile mission was God's idea and not Paul's.
- James responds to Paul's report by praising God and then delivering a report of his own: "Many thousands" of Jews in Jerusalem have believed in the gospel. God continues to work among both Jews and Gentiles (21:20).
- A new issue has arisen: some people are spreading rumors that Paul is encouraging Jews to abandon the law of Moses including the circumcision of their children (21:21).
 - o Both believing and unbelieving Jews in Jerusalem remain "zealous for the law" (21:20).
 - o These rumors have further damaged Paul's reputation and put him in great danger.
 - o The rumors are untrue. Paul had Timothy circumcised (16:3); took his own Nazarite vow (18:18) and continued to travel to Jerusalem for important festivals (20:16).
- James proposes a plan for improving Paul's reputation. Paul will sponsor four men who are making religious vows at the Temple (21:23-24).
 - o If these are Nazarite vows, the men would each offer a male lamb, a ewe lamb, and a ram, along with grain and drink offerings and unleavened bread (see Numb 6:14-17).
 - o Paul would incur quite an expense to pay for all four's sacrifices.
- James has no qualms with Paul's mission to the Gentiles and reaffirms their previous decision about what his ministry to the Gentiles would look like (v 25; see Acts 15).
- Paul accommodated James' request to promote the unity of the church and its evangelism among the Jews of Jerusalem.

Paul Arrested (21:27-39)

- The plan backfires. Jews from Asia saw Paul at the Temple and stir up trouble.
 - o There is a good chance that these are Jews from Ephesus who had previously caused Paul trouble.
 - o Trophimus, one of Paul's traveling companions, was from Ephesus.
 - o The Jews saw him with Paul in the city and assumed that Paul had brought this uncircumcised man into the Temple (21:29).
- They start spreading further rumors of Paul and outright accuse him of bringing an uncircumcised man into the Temple (21:28).
 - o The Temple area was divided into two courts with a wall serving between the inner (Jews only) and outer courts (Gentiles allowed).

- Signs were posted on the wall that declared, “No foreigner is to enter within the forecourt and the balustrade around the sanctuary. Whoever is caught will have himself to blame for his subsequent death” (Garland, 229).
- These men succeed in stirring up the whole city. A mob forms with the intent of killing Paul (21:30).
 - After Paul is dragged out of the inner court, the gates were slammed shut (21:30).
 - God may intend for the Temple to be a house of prayer for all nations (Isaiah 56:7), but these zealous souls slam the gates on even the rumor of such an event.
 - Contrast this with Paul’s language in Ephesians 2:13-16.
- The only thing that saves Paul is the intervention of the Roman guards who “run down” to the Temple courts, likely from the fortress Antonia at the corner of the Temple complex (21:31-32).
 - Rome did not care about who was right or wrong in this inter-Jewish squabble.
 - They were concerned about keeping the peace.
 - They did so with at least two centurions (officers) and their men.
- The commander had Paul arrested and carried off to prevent further violence. Even as Paul is escorted away the people clamor for his execution (21:33-35).
- The commander mistakes Paul for a member of the sicarii, a Jewish terrorist group that often attacked Jewish leaders (21:37-38).
- Paul responds that he is a Jew, something he is proud of, but also notes that he is a Roman citizen from Tarsus (21:39).

Paul Speaks to the Crowd (21:39b-22:21)

- It might seem strange that the commander allows Paul to speak to the crowd, but Paul was a Roman citizen, he was not a part of the mob, and perhaps the commander thinks Paul might be able to calm everyone down if he is allowed to speak (21:39b-40).
- At first, it appears to work. The crowd quiets when Paul begins to speak in their language (v 40b).
- Paul begins by identifying with their zeal, saying that he used to be just like them, zealous for the law and willing to use violence to defend it (22:3-5).
- What changed Paul was an encounter with the living Christ (22:6-10).
 - Paul recounts his testimony of being blinded by an encounter with Christ.
 - The testimony echoes other times he shares his story (9:4-5; 26:14-15).
- The details about Ananias are important.
 - Ananias was a “devout observer of the law and highly respected by the Jews in Damascus” (22:12).
 - Paul was not lead astray by crazy people.
 - Rather, God, working through divine revelation and through these faithful Jews took the scales from his eyes and restored Paul’s sight, changing how Paul saw the world.
 - Paul understood the Lordship of Christ and his own need for grace and forgiveness – “Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name” (22:16).
- Paul understood his call to go and preach to the Gentiles by Christ himself (22:17-21).

Sources

Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Academic, 2007).

David E. Garland, *Acts*, Teaching the Text Commentary Series (Grand Rapids MI: BakerBooks, 2017).

I. Howard Marshall, *Acts*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove IL: InterVarsity, 1980).