

ACTS 21: 17-24

LAST WEEK we discussed how when Paul and his companions came to Jerusalem, he was asked to pay for the sacrifices of 4 Christian Jews who were under a Nazirite Vow and were ready to declare the end of their days of consecration which the vow required. Paul did this without any comment, thereby giving tacit consent to their scheme to placate both believing and unbelieving Jews.

We know that he had already written to the Church at Corinth about his “gospel method”:

1 Corinthians 9:19-23 NKJV (19) For though I am free from all *men*, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; (20) and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those *who are* under the law, as under the law, that I might win those *who are* under the law; (21) to those *who are* without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those *who are* without law; (22) to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all *men*, that I might by all means save some. (23) **Now this I do for the gospel's sake, that I may be partaker of it with *you*.**

We have to be careful not to judge Paul as a “man-pleaser”, changing his message to reach different people! As he might say “God Forbid”!

Paul’s message was always the same:

1 Corinthians 1:21-24 NKJV (21) For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. (22) For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; (23) **but we preach Christ crucified**, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, (24) but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

No, the message was Christ. His behavior and methods changed to fit the people he was trying to reach. He would never tell a Jew to violate the law as he would never tell a gentile to obey all the customs, traditions and ways which the Jews observed.

“This passage has often been looked to for the idea of ‘accommodation’ in evangelism, that is, of adapting the *message* to the language and perspective of the recipients. Unfortunately, despite the need for that discussion to be carried on, this passage does not speak directly to it. This has to do with how one *lives or behaves* among those whom wishes to evangelize.” (Gordon Fee)

Paul was “hyper-focused” on getting people to accept their messiah or savior! To paraphrase Romans 10:4 – Christ is the **END** of Paul’s Gospel **methods**!

NOTE, however, it should go without saying that you don’t need to become a murderer to reach a murderer.

NOW: What happens next is seen by some as some sort of “Christian karma” – Paul’s accommodating behavior has been seen as sinful because he agreed to and even paid for the sacrifices for the 4 Messianic Jews (aka, Christian Jews). Therefore, Paul suffered consequences of his ill-conceived decisions.

NOT!!!!

Paul was warned at least three times that persecution awaited him in Jerusalem. AND, RIGHT AT THE START, Paul was told that he must suffer for Christ’s Name Sake!

Let’s read and see what happened:

(Acts 21:26 NKJV) 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.

A BURNT OFFERING, A SIN OFFERING AND A PEACE OFFERING;

Even with everything said in Paul’s defense, this still bothers me. Did not even the last great prophet of the OT, John the Baptizer, declare: **“Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”**

More on this later.

(Acts 21:27 NKJV) 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.)

GUZIK teaches: It was absolutely prohibited for Gentiles to go beyond the designated “Court of the Gentiles” in the temple grounds. Signs were posted which read (in both Greek and Latin): **“No foreigner may enter within the barricade which surrounds the temple and enclosure. Any one who is caught trespassing will bear personal responsibility for his ensuing death.”** The Romans were so sensitive to this that they authorized the Jews to execute anyone that offended in this way, even if the offender was a Roman citizen.

Now, we can’t let their lies go unnoticed! They accuse Paul of being anti-Jewish, anti-Law and anti-Temple! To make matters worse, they accuse him of defiling the temple because of the “greeks” who accompanied him. As Miracle Max’s wife would cry out “LIAR! LIAR!”.

(Acts 21:30 NKJV) 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.

Paul is removed from the Temple grounds and the crowd begins to beat him!

They wanted to kill him, right there in the outer courtyard area of the temple mount. Paul had been near death because of the attacks of murderous mobs before ([Act 14:5](#); [Act 14:19](#)),

(Acts 21:31 NKJV) Now as they were seeking to kill him, news came to the commander of the garrison that all Jerusalem was in an uproar.

Roman guards were always on the ready to quell any local disturbance.

(Acts 21:32 NKJV) He immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down to them. And when they saw the commander and the soldiers, **they stopped beating Paul.**

While they had the “right” to kill him, God intervened! This was not the day nor manner of Paul’s death!

(Acts 21:33 NKJV) 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.

Hmmm...Agabus’s prophetic picture of Paul being bound was certainly being fulfilled!

Evidently, the 2 chains were on either arm of Paul with a guard on either side.

(Acts 21:34 NKJV) And some among the multitude cried one thing and some another. So when he could not ascertain the truth because of the tumult, he commanded him to be taken into the barracks.

With the truth no longer in sight, the crowd becomes a mob and perhaps the phrase “all hell breaks loose” isn’t so far from the truth!

(Acts 21:35 NKJV) When he reached the stairs, he had to be carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the mob.

Still chained, Paul is weak from his beating and must be carried by the guards.

(Acts 21:36 NKJV) For the multitude of the people followed after, crying out, "Away with him!"

Seems a bit reminiscent of Stephan’s stoning and even Jesus’s day of crucifixion some 27 years earlier!

(Luke 23:18) And they cried out all at once, saying, Away with this *man*, and release unto us Barabbas:

(John 19:15) But they cried out, Away with *him*, away with *him*, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar.

(Acts 21:37 NKJV) 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?"

I searched and searched...couldn’t find any reference to this in Josephus’s writings (as indicated by Guzik).

(Acts 21:39 NKJV) 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."

No Mean city: that is, well known!

(Acts 21:40 NKJV) 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,

(Acts 22:1 NKJV) "Brethren and fathers, hear my defense before you now." (2) And when they heard that he spoke to them in the Hebrew language, they kept all the more silent. Then he said: (3) "I am indeed a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of **Gamaliel, taught according to the strictness of our fathers' law, and was zealous toward God as you all are today.** (4) **I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women,** (5) **as also the high priest bears me witness, and all the council of the elders, from whom I also received letters to the brethren, and went to Damascus to bring in chains even those who were there to Jerusalem to be punished.**

Besides the obvious similarities to Stephen's situation and of course Jesus's, there's something else that needs to be discussed.

Some 27 years before, the Holy Spirit came and built a church body;

Peter, the denier became Peter the proclaimer.

Luke summarizes the situation in:

[Act 2:42-47](#) And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. (43) Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. (44) Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, (45) and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. (46) So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, (47) praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

Now, a quarter of a century later, the mother church was poor in more ways than just monetarily. The church, instead of affecting life around them with the Gospel of Christ Jesus was being influenced by those "zealous for the Law". And while the moral and civil law was good, you can't put a Band-Aid on top of an internal cancerous mass to cure it. A believer's motivations and methods are NOT outside-in! They are inside-out; They are God-initiated and God-completed – for Jesus Himself is both " the author and finisher of *our* faith".