

## 085 - A Jew to the Jews to Win the Jews - Acts 21:15-26

Call to Worship: Hebrews 13:14-15

Scripture Reading: Joshua 22:5

Sermon: "A Jew to the Jews to Win the Jews" Acts 21:15-26

Benediction: 2 Peter 3:18

### INTRODUCTION

We have travelled with Paul from Europe over to Asia, now down to Judea.

We have heard him warned that in Jerusalem chains and persecution await him.

We have learned from him that he is ready to be chained, and even to die in Jerusalem, because he is compelled in the spirit to testify there to the gospel of the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

Today we go up with Paul from the coast up into the hills, from Caesarea to Jerusalem. We see Paul, who for years has lived as a gentile to the gentiles to win the gentiles to Christ, now living as a Jew to the Jews to win the Jews.

### BODY

#### I. Paul's acceptance by the Jewish believers of Judea

- A. some of the disciples from Caesarea accompanied him (16a)
- B. one of the disciples from Caesarea lodged him (16b)
- C. the brethren in Jerusalem received him gladly (17)
- D. James and all the elders listened to his report and glorified the Lord (20a)
- E. James called him "brother"
- F. It warms my heart, and I hope it warmed Paul's, to see this kind of welcome the missionary apostle receives back home in Jerusalem

#### II. The state of religion among the Jewish believers in Jerusalem

- A. Many tens of thousands had believed
  - 1. Amen!
  - 2. What a work of God's grace!
  - 3. If the hardened sinners, zealous for a corrupt religion, guilty of the blood of Jesus Christ, were forgiven through faith in Jesus Christ, won't you also believe in Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins?
  - 4. If you have so believed already, won't you glory in the grace of God, reminding yourself to put no confidence in the works of the flesh
  - 5. Could we be prompted to pray for our loved ones, our kinsmen, who are in corrupt religion, who perhaps even rail against us for our believe in the sovereign grace of God, that the Lord will be merciful to them even as He was to the Jews in Jerusalem so long ago?
- B. They were zealots for the law; this would have been about the year A.D. 60  
It may seem strange to us, but the Jews, even Jews who believed in Jesus Christ, were

very slow to understand that the ceremonial laws of the Old Covenant, given through Moses, were no longer in effect. They really did not, on the whole, grasp this until the destruction of Jerusalem, including the temple in A.D. 70. After enough centuries, when the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple have been mostly forgotten, and confusion on this point is now having quite a time in God's church among Jewish believers, and even gentile believers. Think about how long the Jewish believers stayed in a state of weak conscience regarding the old law.

1. incident in Acts 10, Peter's vision, when it is unthinkable to him that he would eat something ceremonially unclean; this is about A.D. 42, about 12 years after the death and resurrection of the Lord
2. incident in Acts 15, where some people in the church conference are saying that unless the gentiles obey the law of Moses, they cannot be saved, is about A.D. 52; the church as a whole, and definitely James and the other leaders, know this is wrong regarding the gentiles, but the fact that the church has a serious meeting to address the issue of whether the *gentiles* have to obey the law of Moses shows what the state of mind must have been regarding whether or not the Jews had to obey the law of Moses
3. the letter to the Romans, Paul writes that if a person has a weak conscience concerning eating certain meat, or concerning holy days, the strong should bear with him in these things; this was about A.D. 58
4. this visit of Paul's to Jerusalem is in about A.D. 60
  - a. the Jewish believers knew that the Gentiles did not have to obey the law, although it seems that did not sit well with some of them
  - b. but as for themselves, not only did they still obey the law of Moses, they were zealots for the law
5. from Rome in about A.D. 62, Paul writes to the Colossians; apparently the gentiles there were still be told by Jewish believers that they should obey the old covenant ceremonial laws of Moses  
*Colossians 2:16-17 So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, (17) which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.*

### III. Paul's reputation among the Jewish believers in Jerusalem

1. Paul's enemies among the unbelieving Jews in Asia were saying things about him
2. that he teaches the Jews living among the Gentiles to forsake Moses
  - a. they ought not to circumcise children
  - b. they ought not to walk according to the customs
3. these things being said about Paul are not true
  - a. Paul does teach that circumcision is of no real importance, but does not teach that Jews ought not circumcise their children
  - b. Paul does teach that holding to the Jewish customs is not necessary, but does not teach Jews that they ought not walk according to the customs
  - c. Paul most definitely does not teach the Jews to forsake Moses; in defending

himself, Paul insists that he believes and preaches the truth of all the scriptures  
4. so, these things are not true, but they are being said about him; Paul has a reputation among the Jews in Jerusalem, even the believers, that he teaches Jews to forsake Moses

#### IV. Paul's move to help the Jews of Jerusalem, regarding his reputation

1. James judged that there was the need for Paul to do something to address the problem of his reputation (22), which would be a problem for the Jews
  - a. for the believers
  - b. for the unbelievers
2. James and the church elders proposed that Paul display publicly that he did not despise the law of Moses (23-24)
  - a. he would join in the ceremonies of some Nazirites in the temple
  - b. this would show the Jews in Jerusalem that the things being said about Paul were not true
    - i. if Paul is seen obeying the law of Moses, then it can't reasonably be maintained that he is teaching Jews not to obey the law
    - ii. if Paul is seen obeying the law of Moses, then it can't reasonably be maintained that he is not willing to obey the law of Moses
  - c. there was no need of Paul's gentile companions to do anything in this regard, a point already ruled on in the past (25)
3. Paul accepted this plan and began to carry it out
  - a. he underwent ritual purification (a point that will be important later, when he is accused of defiling the temple)
  - b. he entered the temple and undertook a part of the Nazirite ceremony

#### V. Paul's motivation for acting this way among the Jews of Jerusalem

You know my natural reaction, maybe yours also, is, "Hey, you don't have to follow that law! Don't go doing what the Jerusalem Jews want you to do, just because they want you to!" And we are thinking that largely because of what Paul himself has taught us about how we are free from those Old Covenant ceremonial laws. So, if Paul knows he is free from all of that, what is his motivation for submitting to it? It is not explained here, but is explained in passages of Paul's letters. I am drawing from three passages: Romans 9:1-3; 1 Corinthians 9:19-22; 2 Corinthians 5:10-11)

- A. He knows that we all must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, to receive what he deserves for what he has done during this life
  1. all who have to receive their just punishment at that time will be thrown with the devil and his angels into the lake of fire for everlasting death
  2. all who have been crucified with Christ through faith in Him will inherit eternal life
- B. The fact that so many of Paul's fellow Jews, his kinsmen, have not believed in Jesus Christ is a great sorrow, an unceasing anguish to Paul's heart

C. So, in fear of the Lord regarding the final judgment, Paul persuades men to repent of sins, believing in Jesus Christ to save them

D. In order to persuade Jews to believe in Jesus Christ, Paul is willing to please the Jews regarding keeping of the Old Covenant law of Moses

1. it might seem that Paul is crazy to do what he does---going right up to Jerusalem, and into the very temple, the seat of power for the corrupt Jewish religion that has killed the prophets and even the Son of God, Jesus Christ, to participate in the ceremonies of a covenant law that has expired!

2. but it is not insanity that takes Paul into the temple to perform those expired ceremonies---it is the love of Christ that compels him

E. Here is how Paul explains this, how the love of God shown through Christ compels him to do what he does

1. Christ died, the One for all, and rose again to life; now all those who have died with Him through faith, and live in Him, should not live for themselves, but for Him!

2. In this, God has reconciled us to Himself through Christ, not counting our sins against us, since they were counted against Christ as our substitute

3. Having been so reconciled to God, He has now given us the work of preaching His word to other sinners, so that they also can be reconciled to God through faith in Christ!

4. Paul goes to Jerusalem, the center of all Jewish life, as an ambassador, speaking as God's representative, pleading with the Jews to be reconciled to God through Jesus Christ, the sinless one who became sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him!

5. Paul does all of this because the great love God has shown to us in Jesus Christ compels him to it!

F. As to these Old Covenant ceremonies in the temple,

1. Paul knows well enough that there is nothing to them anymore; they are expired now that the New Covenant in Christ has come;

2. but God is being patient with the Jews, allowing these Old Covenant ceremonies to go on in the temple for 40 more years after the death and resurrection of Christ.

3. so Paul is willing, compelled by the love of Christ, to submit to the ceremonies of the law of Moses if James and the elders think it will help his reputation with the Jews (remember that Paul has come to Jerusalem to testify to the gospel of God's grace!)

G. Listen to Paul's defense of this practice, of obeying Old Covenant laws

1 Corinthians 9:19-22 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 . . . (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.