

Scripture Reading:

Acts 21:27 “Now when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews from Asia, seeing [Paul] 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.) 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. 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 & 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. So when he could not ascertain the truth because of the tumult, he commanded him to be taken into the barracks. 35 When he reached the stairs, he had to be carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the mob. 36 For the multitude of the people followed after, crying out, "Away with him!" 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.”

"Paul is Arrested"

As we saw last week, the Apostle Paul has caused quite an uproar in the city of Jerusalem despite his attempts to be at peace with all men. Next week we will see him address those who tried to beat him to death, giving them hope through Jesus who had converted him as he went to persecute the Saints at Damascus. What we have before us this morning are various details about his arrest...

- And I think it is worth noting that we have a good many details about his arrest.

Luke could have moved his orderly account along much faster at this point by simply saying that the same Jews who caused Paul trouble in Asia, now stirred up a crowd that tried to kill him and as he was arrested by the Romans to restore peace he was allowed to address the crowd and then give Paul's Gospel message. We know that such brevity was the case at many of Luke's other accounts of Paul's mission journeys, so I think it is appropriate to ask why Luke gives many details here at this point?

We have references to the Roman garrison, the commander, centurions, soldiers, the staircase that can still be seen as part of the Jerusalem ruins and the commander's repeated attempts to ascertain just what happened. I hope to show that this provides us with some important context for the significant events taking place at that time AND an important lesson for us when it comes to trusting God for our own circumstances today.

What is clear is that Jerusalem is a troubled and occupied city. The Romans had gone to great lengths to control Jerusalem because it was a troublesome city. God's chosen people had rejected God's Messiah and as is always the case whenever we spurn God's help, their lives now suffer as a consequence.

Jerusalem was a troubled city where mobs and rebellions were common. Thus the Romans had many troops right next to the Temple in a garrison that King Herod had built for them.

As we see from the text, the Roman commander was quick to respond when he heard there was trouble.

- The Jews were obviously used to such actions and knew that Rome could be swift & cruel because they immediately stopped beating Paul.

The commander wanted to maintain peace: So once he had restored some order by putting Paul under arrest, he tried to ascertain what had happened, in part so that further trouble could be avoided.

- **First he discovered that the mob does not really even know why they were so upset.**
- **Next he learns that his initial assumption about Paul being one of the usual suspects is wrong.**
- **And as we shall see next week, he then allows Paul to speak to the crowd in the hope that it might reveal to him what was going on.**

This commander was trying to do his job and in the coming days he would have a good deal of contact with the Apostle Paul providing for his safety:

- **So we can hope that he at some point joined with the Centurion who stood at the foot of the cross while Jesus was crucified in declaring, truly this was the Son of God.**

However, we are not told what happens to this man and we return to the question of why Luke gives so many details at this point in his account. The Apostle Paul is making his final journey to Jerusalem for all the good reasons we reviewed last week.

- **God uses the Romans to protect him and in the end to bring him to Rome where he wanted to go.**

Although I am sure that many Jews and Romans thought they had brought Paul under control with his arrest and many trials, we will see that the Holy Spirit was carrying out His plan for the Kingdom... In the end Paul is at Rome, the center of world power in that day, “preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him.”

All of these details remind us about the religious and political turmoil that was present in Jerusalem at that time and we must remember that James and Paul were both very concerned for the many converted Jews who were still in the city and zealous for the law. Jesus had warned that this city was going to be destroyed and that not one stone would be left upon another at this great Temple.

They would have taken seriously these warning from Jesus and would have over the years come to understand more and more of the truth in the prophecies about the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple that are found in the Old Testament.

- **Perhaps nowhere more vividly than with the Prophet Ezekiel.**

The Prophet Ezekiel is given two major tasks as the one on the wall that is to sound the warning for God’s people:

- **He shows the utter destruction of the City of Jerusalem where God dwelled in the earthly temple.**
- **He shows the utter glory of the New Kingdom shown as a glorious new temple where life giving waters flow to all the nations of the earth.**

As we move through these final chapters of Acts, one of my goals is going to be to make BOTH of these truths more real to us... Sadly we have left the destruction of Jerusalem and all that it means in the dust bin of history, not giving it much thought, and at the same time we have diminished our focus on the New Jerusalem and what it means for the Kingdom of Jesus to fill the earth.

- **When we think about the leaders of the Church there in Jerusalem, along with the Apostle Paul, we must realize that they would have been focused on those early chapters of Ezekiel and probably still trying to take in that whole idea of world conquest.**

We saw Paul’s heart for his people the Jews and this would have been shared by James and other converted Jews there in Jerusalem at the time. However, they had heard the warning about destruction from Jesus and knew that the generation He referred to was coming to a close and thus the end for Jerusalem and the Temple could not be far off.

Some of what Ezekiel wrote, we can read almost academically as a good example of how to use illustrated sermons, but they would have been chilling pictures to those living in Jerusalem in that day who had eyes to see what the Prophet was revealing. Rome controlled the world of that day and their armies had laid siege to many great cities around the world.

- It is noteworthy that the first image which Ezekiel presents is the city of Jerusalem under siege.

The second image relates to the trouble that was common within Jerusalem in that day:

- The many mobs and divisions that we have seen here in Acts.

When the Romans finally did lay siege to this city, much of the suffering and deaths were caused by internal strife and even civil wars within the city. There were three major factions and during the siege some even went so far as to destroy the food held in storage to make a point or hurt a rival group which led to massive starvation.

- All of this had been foreseen by the Prophet Ezekiel!

As the time approached we need to understand that those words of Ezekiel would have become more and more chilling. Pondering the troubled conditions of that day in Jerusalem let us read from the 5th Chapter of Ezekiel's prophecies: "And you, son of man, take a sharp sword, take it as a barber's razor, and pass it over your head and your beard; then take scales to weigh and divide the hair. *[divided into thirds, just like the city]*

2 You shall burn with fire one-third in the midst of the city, when the days of the siege are finished; then you shall take one-third and strike around it with the sword, and one-third you shall scatter in the wind: I will draw out a sword after them. 3 You shall also take a small number of them and bind them in the edge of your garment. 4 Then take some of them again and throw them into the midst of the fire, and burn them in the fire. From there a fire will go out into all the house of Israel. 5 "Thus says Jehovah God: 'This is Jerusalem; I have set her in the midst of the nations and the countries all around her. 6 She has rebelled against My judgments by doing wickedness more than the nations, and against My statutes more than the countries that are all around her; for they have refused My judgments, and they have not walked in My statutes.' 7 Therefore thus says Jehovah God: 'Because you have multiplied disobedience more than the nations that are all around you, have not walked in My statutes nor kept My judgments, nor even done according to the judgments of the nations that are all around you'-- 8 therefore thus says Jehovah God: 'Indeed I, even I, am against you and will execute judgments in your midst in the sight of the nations. 9 And I will do among you what I have never done, and the like of which I will never do again, because of all your abominations. 10 Therefore fathers shall eat their sons in your midst, and sons shall eat their fathers; and I will execute judgments among you, and all of you who remain I will scatter to all the winds. 11 Therefore, as I live,' says Jehovah God, 'surely, because you have defiled My sanctuary with all your detestable things and with all your abominations, therefore I will also diminish you; My eye will not spare, nor will I have any pity. 12 One-third of you shall die of the pestilence, and be consumed with famine in your midst; and one-third shall fall by the sword all around you; and I will scatter another third to all the winds, and I will draw out a sword after them. 13 'Thus shall My anger be spent, and I will cause My fury to rest upon them, and I will be avenged; and they shall know that I, Jehovah, have spoken it in My zeal, when I have spent My fury upon them. 14 Moreover I will make you a waste and a reproach among the nations that are all around you, in the sight of all who pass by. 15 So it shall be a reproach, a taunt, a lesson, and an astonishment to the nations that are all around you, when I execute judgments among you in anger and in fury and in furious rebukes. I, Jehovah, have spoken. 16 When I send against them the terrible arrows of famine which shall be for destruction, which I will send to destroy you, I will increase the famine upon you and cut off your supply of bread. 17 So I will send against you famine and wild beasts, and they will bereave you. Pestilence and blood shall pass through you, and I will bring the sword against you. I, Jehovah, have spoken.' "

These are not pleasant words to read even today, but I hope you can begin to understand how chilling they would have been to the leaders of the Jerusalem church in that day as the end of the generation that Jesus spoke the same warnings to drew to a close.

- They knew that they had the responsibility to prepare the Saints there at Jerusalem and I would argue that Paul's arrest, his final sermon and trials were all part of this final preparation.

There was a reason that the Romans had built this garrison at the center of the city: Jerusalem was difficult to control and these types of mob actions were not unusual.

At the same time, the Roman presence reminded them that there was now a powerful empire that could lay siege to Jerusalem in the way that Ezekiel had described in chapter four. In fact I am pretty sure it would have given the Christian leaders some pause, because it was well known that NO city had ever survived a Roman siege... Jesus had told them to flee when they saw the armies surrounding the city, but how was that to happen?

- While all of this was difficult to understand from a human perspective, they were ready to obey and trusted that God would lead them when the time came.
- And yes, the Lord did in the end provide an amazing opportunity for those Saints still in Jerusalem.

The Jews revolted against Rome just a few years after the events we are studying and it brought orders for the siege of Jerusalem under General Vespasian sometime around AD67. Thus the Christians experienced what Jesus had predicted almost forty years before, "And when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near."

- BUT now that the siege had begun, with crucifixion awaiting any who tried to flee, how were they going to obey the command of the Lord to flee?

As we often learn slowly throughout our Christian walk, God does not give us commands that we cannot obey...

- We just struggle sometimes to see how what He is telling us to do is possible and even good for us!

Such is the case here: After General Vespasian began this siege, God brought great turmoil to the City of Rome. Even the Romans had had enough of the Emperor Nero:

- He was driven from the City of Rome and committed suicide.

His successor, emperor Galba was murdered just four months later and a year of civil war broke out that was called the year of the four emperors. *[mention the decline of Rome & the history tapes]*

In the end, the Romans turned to the popular General Vespasian and he left the siege of Jerusalem to return to Rome to become the next Emperor.

- This provided the opening that Jesus knew His followers would have and the Christians then fled the city of Jerusalem.

Sadly those who had hardened their hearts against Jesus & His commands saw the temporary removal of the siege as a sign of God's great favor on Jerusalem and MANY Jews flooded into Jerusalem believing they would defeat the Romans and that their city would stand forever.

However, the new Emperor of Rome sent his son Titus to finish the job and at least a million Jews lost their lives as Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans or because of the many cruel mob actions like those predicted by Ezekiel so long ago.

I think this is why Luke gives us some of the details about the Roman presence in Jerusalem and the turmoil of the city at that time. All of this context will also help us to understand the final message that Paul is about to deliver to the people in Jerusalem as they receive one last warning from their covenant God.

But I would also like us to consider the important lessons for us today. Jesus and the Prophets of old had clearly said what would happen & what was to be done in Jerusalem. Those who listened were saved and blessed and those who refused to listen were in the end cursed and lost.

- This principle is true today and it applies to a single individual Saint or to the greatest of nations.

Psalm one gives this important advice to any person who wants to be blessed in their Christian walk:

“ Blessed is the man Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor stands in the path of sinners, Nor sits in the seat of the scornful; 2 But his delight is in the law of Jehovah, And in His law he meditates day and night. 3 He shall be like a tree Planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; And whatever he does shall prosper. 4 The ungodly are not so, But are like the chaff which the wind drives away. 5 Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, Nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. 6 For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, But the way of the ungodly shall perish.”

Those who listen to God will be like healthy trees providing delicious fruit.

Those who ignore God will end up like chaff, the waste and dust that is carried away by the wind.

- Those in Jerusalem who rebelled in the end died amidst unspeakable cruelty and suffering.
- Those who fled were used by God to establish the thousand year reign of Christendom in Europe and began the advance of the Kingdom of Jesus throughout all the world.

This BIG picture is given to us in Psalm 2: “Why do the nations rage, And the people plot a vain thing? 2 The kings of the earth set themselves, And the rulers take counsel together, Against the Lord and against His Anointed, saying, 3 "Let us break Their bonds in pieces And cast away Their cords from us." 4 He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; Jehovah shall hold them in derision. 5 Then He shall speak to them in His wrath, And distress them in His deep displeasure: 6 "Yet I have set My King On My holy hill of Zion." 7 "I will declare the decree: Jehovah has said to Me, 'You are My Son, Today I have begotten You. 8 Ask of Me, and I will give You The nations for Your inheritance, And the ends of the earth for Your possession. 9 You shall break them with a rod of iron; You shall dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel.' " 10 Now therefore, be wise, O kings; Be instructed, you judges of the earth. 11 Serve the Lord with fear, And rejoice with trembling. 12 Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, And you perish in the way, When His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him.”

- It is NO accident that we sing both of these pivotal Psalms often here at Church of the King!

And whether we think of simple domestic examples or international examples, there will be times that it is very difficult to see how things are going to work out the way God has promised:

- Our job is not to doubt God but to be faithful when it is hard to see the end of the road He has put before us.

When a small child is going through a particularly rebellious time, it is easy to start doubting that God’s instructions about the rod are really what is needed for THIS child.

When a wife is struggling with a husband that is unbelieving or disobedient it is easy to start doubting that THIS man can be won without a word as Peter promised... Instead we hear something like, “it just won’t work with my husband.”

When a family is struggling to make ends meet it is difficult to believe that the wealth of the wicked will flow to the righteous, but in the end such will be the case, though perhaps not in their lifetime.

And we can even turn to international affairs, where today we too often see nations turning away from God’s wisdom about how to wage just wars: Sure it would be nice to protect civilians and not destroy the fruit trees, BUT we are fighting terrorists!

All of these situations require the type of patience that the leaders in the Church at Jerusalem were demonstrating in those trying time...

Were they fearful of what lay ahead?

- **I am sure they were!**

Could they know all the details about what would happen?

- **They certainly could not!**

Were they faithful to the commands that Jesus gave?

- **Yes, they were and according to what historical accounts we do have, not a single Christian was lost in the siege of Jerusalem.**

What about trials we might face today?

Will we have fear at times in our lives?

- **Yes, we will!**

Will we struggle to see what God is going to do in our situation?

- **Yes we will!**

Should we remain faithful to the commands that Jesus has given us?

- **Yes we should, often remembering the wisdom that Moses gave to those entering the promised land long ago:**

“The secret things belong to Jehovah our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.”

Communion Meditation: Psalm 23:

“A Psalm of David. The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. 2 He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. 3 He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake. 4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over. 6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me All the days of my life; And I will dwell in the house of the Lord Forever.”