

Acts 21 through 25

Fourth Journey - the Defense of the Gospel

21:1-14 **From Miletus to Caesarea**

21:4 Warning to Paul through the Spirit by disciples

21:10,11 Warning / prediction by Agabus the prophet

21:15-40 **At Jerusalem**

21:18 &cf. Paul to James and elders

21:26-32 Paul - the offering, the vow, the temple.

Positive: Paul's love for his kinsmen after the flesh

Negative The one who taught that the ritual law was over was about to offer a

useless sacrifice Acts 15 Galatians 2

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Whatever view we take - God providentially prevented it from happening! Galatians 4:9-11 - the "beggarly elements"

21:21 This was the argument of the Sanhedrin! See 6:14

This chapter (indeed this section of Scripture) raises an important question - the right or wrong of Paul's actions.

1. Twice - the Spirit of God warning
2. Paul - the temple and the sacrifices

22:1-30 **Before the Multitude (Jews)**

22:1-21 Testimony recounted

22:22-30 Citizenship appealed to

22:22,23 Jewish response

22:17-21 compare 9:25 & 2Corinthians 11:32,33

23:1-10 **Jerusalem before the Sanhedrin (last mention in Acts)**

23:1 1Timothy 1:13; 4:2 Titus1:15

23:3 Reminiscent of Matthew 23:27 the Lord's rebuke of Pharisees

23:5 Satire? How they treated the true High Priest and Ruler!

- 23:6-8 Paul divides the parties over the resurrection
- 23:9 Pharisees on Paul's side here
- 23:11 The Lord seemingly distant is ever close. The period of time following - did Paul wonder? Lord's purpose for Paul - Rome
- 23:16-22 God working providentially behind the scenes - using natural means as opposed to supernatural phenomena

Jerusalem now behind - Rome ahead!

- 23:23 Note 23:11. Now look at 23:16 and 23:23. "Natural" means used
- 24:1-26 **Caesarea - before Felix**
- 25:1-27 **Before Festus and Agrippa**

23:23-35 *Why did Luke find it necessary in his orderly presentation of the gospel and its progress to include such elaborate historical detail? Certainly not just for a geography and history lesson!*

In this section (19:21-28:31) the days of freely and openly preaching the gospel is past. Instead there began a succession of interrogations, judicial inquiries, appeals, and trials. Prior to this Paul had mostly preached, lectured, and discussed the gospel; now he defends it.

Note Luke's wisdom in filling the remainder of his book with an account of Paul's defense. Luke doesn't just give us more examples of Paul's sermons and tell of the churches he planted, Etc. A few more samples sermons would have added little to our understanding of the gospel he preached.

In the comparatively few years Paul had preached serious misunderstandings and misrepresentations, both of his gospel and of his behavior, had been gaining widespread circulation

Some of the misunderstandings of Paul were outrageous. He was accused of being the Egyptian **leader of a terrorist group** four thousand strong (21:37-39)!

The orator Tertullus hired by the Jews to conduct the prosecution's case before Felix asserted, "We have found this man to be a **troublemaker, stirring up riots** among the Jews all over the world" (24:5). True, riots had broken out over Paul and his preaching in cities like Thessalonica and Berea; but who started the riots was another question altogether.

The Jews from Asia alleged **sacrilege** (21:28-29), yet he never once attempted to bring Gentiles, not even Christian Gentiles, into the parts of the temple from which they were forbidden.

We find that instead of simply preaching the gospel, Paul defends it at the highest levels in both Jerusalem in the east and Rome in the west.

It was the very wisdom of God, therefore, that led Luke to devote the last section of his work to Paul's defense both of the gospel and of himself, so that we too may have any misconceptions dispelled.

It is easy, then, to see Luke's wisdom in devoting the last section of his work to Paul's defense of the gospel. Not quite so easy to see at first sight is why he should have recorded it at such length—it forms about one-third of the book—in such detail, and with what appears to be, again at first sight, a certain repetitiousness. (DWG)

1. At **one level**, Luke was once more a travel-companion of Paul's and an eyewitness of some of the events that took place. He was therefore in a position to have gathered a great deal of detailed information.
2. **Secondly**, he obviously had an eye for a good story, with vivid, detailed, accurate reporting. His long, detailed, technically and geographically accurate description of the shipwreck in Acts 27 is a famous example.

Luke had a **deeper purpose** than simply sketching in the circumstantial detail surrounding Paul's life during this period. Paul was set for the defense of the gospel, as he later phrased it in a letter to the church at Philippi (Phil. 1:17). But to defend the gospel adequately, he would have to do more than simply defend the gospel: **he would have to defend himself, his character, and behavior**. At the various public gatherings, judicial inquiries and trials, the bench and the public would of course be interested to hear his exposition of the gospel and to discover that it was **not subversive political propaganda**, nor the **unhealthy notions of some bizarre sect**. But they would also be weighing up his character and personality and sifting the reports of his past and recent behavior, with the result that the impression they formed of the gospel itself would be inseparably bound up with, and influenced by, their assessment of Paul himself. In that sense Paul *was* the gospel. (DWG)

Paul was not content simply to correct his accusers' version of what he had, and what he had not, done in the temple. Of his own initiative he chose twice to relate at length the story of his conversion (22:1-21; 26:9-23); because the effect the gospel had had on his life and conduct, on his outlook, aspirations, goals and methods, was an integral and inescapable part of the defense of the gospel itself.

What kind of a man was Paul, then?

- 1) Note the **Courtesy and propriety** with which he behaved both towards the pagan temple at Ephesus and its objects of veneration (19:37), and towards the sanctity of the Jewish temple at Jerusalem (21:26; 24:12-13, 18);
- 2) His **attitude to money** (20:33-35) compared with that of the businessmen at Ephesus (19:24-27) and with that of governor Felix (24:26);
- 3) His **moral and physical courage** (20:19-20, 23-24, 27; 21:10-13; 21:31-32 with 21:39-22:21; 27:20-26, 30-35),
- 4) His **balanced attitude to suffering**—he was prepared to endure anything, death included, in his loyalty to the Lord Jesus and to the gospel if and when it was necessary (20:24; 21:13), and to do so without any desire for revenge (28:19); but he was not unhealthily eager to suffer unnecessarily (22:24-29; 25:10-11).

5) **Concerned for theology and doctrinal purity** (20:30), but **equally insistent on the social responsibility of the church** (20:35),

6) A man who **bears more than his share** of the down-to-earth practicalities of life (20:33-34; 27:30-36; 28:3).

7) Festus' claimed that Paul was a **crazed academic** (26:24); but at the same time, Luke's detailed reporting allows us to make up our own minds as to where the real fanaticism lay (19:34; 23:12-13);

8) The way he responded to **corruption** when he came across it, whether in religion (23:1-3, 14-17) or in the civil administration (24:26; 25:3, 9-11).

But what about the apparent repetitiousness?

The **real argument between Christianity and Judaism**, even to this day, is not, in spite of all that is said, about who was ultimately responsible for Christ's death. The real argument between them—and indeed between Christianity and all other religions and philosophies is about whether Jesus, who died, really rose from the dead. Luke has seen the importance of Paul's repeated insistence on this point; and obviously **he was not deterred by fear of being charged with repetitiousness from recording it four times over:**

23:6 "I stand on trial because of my hope in the resurrection of the dead."

24:15 "I have the same hope in God as these men, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked."

26:6-8 "And now it is because of my hope in what God has promised our fathers that I am on trial today...it is because of this hope that the Jews are accusing me. Why should any of you consider it incredible that God raises the dead?"

28:20 "It is because of the hope of Israel that I am bound with this chain."

The Pharisees, who were far more numerous than the Sadducees, believed that there would one day be a resurrection of the dead. They were certainly not prosecuting Paul in the Roman courts for believing in this resurrection. They too would have held it to be Israel's hope; but at the same time they would have disputed Paul's assertion that Jesus had been raised from the dead.

If Paul had been maintaining that some otherwise unheard of private man had risen from the dead, even the Sadducees could have afforded to dismiss him as the lunatic Festus declared him to be. There would have been no cause for all the heated animosity and the persecution and prosecution of Paul.

Why then all the heat and anger? Because Paul was saying that the hope of Israel was far more than that there should be a general resurrection of the dead one day. According to Paul the hope of Israel, testified to by Moses and all the prophets, was that the Messiah must suffer (i.e. die), and then, as the first to rise from the dead, He was destined to proclaim light both to the people (of Israel) and to the Gentiles (26:22-23).

Now Jesus had claimed to be that Messiah; and in order to destroy His claim the nation's leaders had, ironically, *seen to it that He died*. Now they must at any cost deny that He had risen again. That was the real reason, according to Paul, why they were prosecuting him. But in so doing they were denying what in fact was Israel's most glorious hope, and trying to put out the light which that resurrection shed over Israel and all the nations. Of course, they disagreed with Paul

Luke's formal arrangement of the material of this section in five movements is determined at its most basic level by the major geographical divisions of Paul's journey first to Jerusalem and then to Rome (19:21).

The first movement covers the journey from Ephesus to Jerusalem (19:21-21:16).

The second relates what happened to him in Jerusalem (21:17-23:11); and a special message from the Lord to Paul, indicating that he must witness in Rome.

The third movement (23:12-24:27) describes how and why he was taken from Jerusalem to stand trial before the Roman governor Felix in Caesarea; and also why, although Paul was clearly innocent, Felix deferred his verdict and left Paul in prison two years.

The fourth movement (25:1-26:32) tells how when Festus succeeded Felix, and a trial before Festus proved inconclusive, Festus was inclined to give in to the Jews' request for Paul to be sent back to Jerusalem to have his case further investigated there. To avoid this, Paul appealed to Caesar.

The fifth and final movement, therefore, describes how Paul was sent directly from Caesarea to Rome, tells what happened on the way, and concludes with a brief sketch of how he spent his time there as he waited for his case to be heard (27:1-28:31).