

# The Christian Arsenal

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## ACTS 21:1-22:21

So far in our study of the **Book of Acts**, we've seen Paul as he visited city after city and how he planted church after church and how he won many people to saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. We know that most of the people Paul led to Jesus were Gentiles. Paul traveled many thousands of miles and most of his journeys were into Gentile regions. Paul had a longing for **all** people to come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, but Paul had been set apart by the dear Holy Spirit to carry the message of salvation to the Gentile people.

But, Paul was a Jew. Paul had been away from Jerusalem for a long, long time. The deep desire of Paul's heart was to go to Jerusalem. Paul wanted to spend Pentecost with the believers in Jerusalem.

Not only that, but Paul was carrying a collection to the believers in Jerusalem. Luke doesn't tell us this, but Paul tells us in **Romans 15** that he was taking a collection as he went to Jerusalem. Paul wanted to make sure that the money collected by the Gentiles for the Jews in Jerusalem reached its destination.

By the way...this collection was given by poor people in Macedonia and Paul knew they gave out of their poverty and Paul was bound and determined to get this collection to the mother church in Jerusalem.

Last week we saw that Paul set off on his long awaited journey to Jerusalem...remember last week that Paul's ship had a stopover in Miletus and he sent for the Ephesian elders to come to Miletus so he could see them one last time.

Well, we pick up today as Paul and his companions get back on board the ship bound for Israel. On the way to Israel, Paul's ship had to unload its cargo in Tyre and so Paul and his companions stayed in Tyre seven days.

Let's pick up at **21:4**...

Now, let me just say that this is a controversial verse. Some theologians say that Paul was definitely disobedient to God in continuing on his journey to Jerusalem...others say Paul wasn't disobedient.

In **KJV** this verse reads... "the disciples said through the Spirit he should not go up to Jerusalem."

In the **NAS**, this verse reads that the disciples said through the Spirit that Paul should not set foot in Jerusalem.

In the **NIV**, this verse reads that the disciples urged Paul through the Spirit not to go on to Jerusalem.

I believe the Holy Spirit revealed to them Paul would have hardships in Jerusalem and they were supposed to give Paul courage, but they tried to stop him instead.

What had Paul done in the past? What was the pattern of Paul's ministry?

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The pattern of Paul's ministry was to be led by the Holy Spirit. Remember back in **chapter 16** when Paul wanted to go to Bithynia and the Spirit of God wouldn't let him? Remember when God gave Paul a vision that told him to go to Macedonia?

The pattern of Paul's ministry was to be led by the Holy Spirit. So, did Paul openly defy and disobey the Holy Spirit in going ahead with his plans to go to Jerusalem?

I truly don't know. But, knowing Paul's past as we do, I tend to believe Paul did not disobey God.

Some say **verse 20:22** refers to the Holy Spirit and some say it refers to Paul's spirit...whichever it refers to...both were in agreement for Paul to go.

Paul had been warned before about what persecution awaited him at Jerusalem. Last week, Paul said in **20:23** that the Holy Spirit had told him time and again that bonds and affliction awaited him in Jerusalem.

...**"bound by the Spirit"** represents bound by bonds later.

So, Paul knew all this...yet Paul was determined to go to Jerusalem. I believe Paul believed he was doing the right thing. I believe Paul was a godly man, and that he was spiritually sensitive and guided by the Holy Spirit. I also believe Paul thought that whatever might happen at Jerusalem, God would further the Gospel through it, and He did...and we're going to see that as we go through the coming weeks.

Again in **verses 10 and 11**, Paul is warned about what would happen to him in Jerusalem. This prophecy so upset the men who were with Paul that they begged him not to go. Note that Agabus didn't tell Paul not to go...he simply told Paul what awaited him there.

So...whether it was right for Paul to go or not...Paul went...

## **Verses 13-14...**

The bottom line is that Paul and his friends finally arrived in Jerusalem. **Verse 17** tells us they were received gladly. Really, this was the only bright spot in the story of this visit of Paul to Jerusalem.

Can you imagine how this must have been? Paul with great joy, probably said,

"Brethren, let me introduce to you my dear friend, Dr. Luke. Luke and I have been friends for a long time. Oh, and let me introduce you also to Titus and Sopater and Aristarchus and Secundus from Macedonia, Gaius from Derbe and Timothy, my dear son in the faith from Lystra. From Asia, please meet Tychicus and Trophimus. These men represent churches that have contributed to the collection that we present to you."

Then Paul probably introduced to his Gentile friends James...maybe he mentioned that James was the brother of the Lord Jesus. And probably James then introduced the rest of the Jewish believers who were there to Paul and his friends.

I believe there was a sweet and joyous feeling on Paul's and his friends' part at their glad reception by the Jewish believers. Well, what happened after that? What happened **after** Paul was gladly received by his fellow Jewish believers in Jerusalem and **after** Paul gave to them the money he had collected for them?

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## **Verses 18-21...**

First, we see here that Paul told these Jewish believers of the many from among the Gentiles who had come to salvation...and what did the Jewish believers do? They glorified God!

And, you know...I wish it stopped there. But it doesn't. The next thing they did was begin to tell Paul that the thousands of Jewish believers were still zealous for the Law. They also told Paul that these believers who were still zealous for the Law had heard that Paul was teaching the Jews who live among the Gentiles that they didn't have to be circumcised and they didn't have to walk in the customs and traditions of Moses.

These folks were upset with Paul over this. And the believers who were speaking with Paul didn't know what to do about it...

**Before we go on...let me ask you...did these Jewish believers who lived in Gentile areas need to be circumcised to be saved? Did they have to walk in the customs and traditions of Moses to be saved? NO! Of course, they didn't!**

Well, the next thing these folks did was to devise a plan for Paul to become more acceptable to the other Jewish believers in Jerusalem.

**Verses 23-26** tell us that Paul was advised by the Jewish believers to enter into a vow with four other Jewish men. They advised Paul to pay the expenses of having their heads shaved. They advised that Paul should go into the Temple with these men and then everyone would know that Paul still had regard and respect for the Mosaic Law.

**Why** did these Jewish believers suggest this? They suggested this in order to make Paul more acceptable.

In **verse 25**, James is assuring Paul there would be no change in decision rendered for the Gentiles, but we see one (Paul and his Gentile friends) free from traditions and one group (James and the other Jewish elders) not wanting to depart from tradition. They are saying, "Paul...do this for tradition's sake only!"

Why did Paul agree to it? After all, Paul had never been really bothered by the fact that other Jews looked down on him for the way he conducted his ministry. I mean, the Jewish Law seemed to be a non-issue with Paul.

For instance, in **1 Corinthians**, Paul wrote if a man is already circumcised when he comes to Christ, that's fine, but if he isn't he certainly didn't need to get circumcised in order to come to Christ.

**Paul wrote the entire *Book of Galatians* to tell folks that it wasn't necessary to walk in the customs and traditions of the Law anymore. Paul saw absolutely no value and very much danger in remaining shackled where Christ had made men free.**

**In fact, it was in *Galatians* that Paul said he had to confront Peter with this very thing. Remember, Paul was eating with Gentiles, a thing considered to be unclean to the devout Jew, UNTIL some men came from James...from Jerusalem. Then, Peter wouldn't eat with the Gentiles because he feared what these men would say.**

**So...with that in mind, why in the world did Paul consent to this plan?**

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Paul knew he was in for a hard time in Jerusalem. We've already covered all that! But, Paul certainly wanted to do all he could within reason to be conciliatory and to go out of his way to continue to be gladly received by his fellow Jewish Christians. **Paul had tried to be all things to all men in order that he might win a few...**

So...Paul did what the Jerusalem elders requested. He went through the rituals, took his place with the other men who had taken the vow and for the benefit of the Jews, did his best to prove he wasn't seeking to tear down their beloved traditions.

For the sake of Christian unity and peace, Paul went through with it, hoping it might do some good...

## ***THEN, HIS WORLD EXPLODED!!!***

**Verses 27-29** tell us that when the seven days' requirement for purification was almost over the Jews from Asia...remember, these are unbelieving Jews who were no doubt in Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost...laid hands on Paul in the Temple and they began to stir up the other Jews. Their charge was that Paul had taken one of his Gentile companions, Trophimus, into the Temple. Paul hadn't done this...they had simply seen the two men together in the city and **verse 29** tells us "they supposed that Paul had brought him into the Temple."

### **Verses 30-36...**

As Paul was being brought to the barracks in chains...Paul spoke to the commander and told him who he was...and asked could he address the people. When the commander found out that he wasn't the man from Egypt who had stirred up a revolt, he allowed Paul to speak to the people.

Before we get into Paul's address, let me just say this...

Do you wonder what James and his fellow elders were thinking as they perhaps ventured onto the roofs of their homes, and observed what was going on over at the Temple?

Do you wonder if they were praying that this wouldn't begin a new outbreak of persecution directed at their church?

Do you think maybe they thought... **"Why in the world did Paul have to come to Jerusalem anyway? If he had money for us, why couldn't he have sent it some other way?"**

We don't have any record of these folks standing up for Paul, do we?

Maybe I'm being too hard on these fellows...after all, these folks had lived a very sheltered and isolated life in Jerusalem. These Jewish believers had not been out on the mission field. They hadn't seen what Paul had seen, nor had they done what Paul had done. They had seen Jews right there in Jerusalem saved by the blood of Jesus and then they had allowed, maybe even encouraged them to partake in all their old Jewish traditions and customs.

Was this wrong?

Yes, it was wrong to get so caught up in these things that they failed to live in the light of the freedom the Lord Jesus Christ had bought for them.

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You know...when we come to the Lord Jesus Christ as a sinner, confessing our need for salvation, we don't become instantaneously sanctified, do we? We don't automatically and miraculously lose all our cultural practices, do we?

Folks who are saved in Africa or El Salvador or Indonesia or Russia are not going to swiftly lay aside all the things that have become a part of the all their lives, are they?

What I'm trying to say is that if folks don't worship exactly like us...or look exactly like us when they to their church or come to our church, is that wrong?

I mean...can God handle that?

I certainly believe He can...I believe He sanctifies those who are truly His...day by day...moment by moment...and I believe He teaches those who are truly His...precept upon precept...line upon line.

You know, it probably wasn't a terrible thing during this "transition period" of the early church for these folks to still hold onto their some of their Jewish ties and traditions...

But there comes a time when we must put aside those things that would take our eyes off the Lord Jesus. There comes a time when we must look at the situation and see if we're putting our faith in these things...these rituals...these customs and regulations and traditions and if these things are more important to us than our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, then something is wrong...

And I believe because these Jewish believers had been living in Jerusalem, surrounded by all the Jewishness of Jerusalem, they had slipped back into their old customs a little too much...

By the way...Many who come to church on Sunday believe they are saved by fulfilling their family's tradition of church attendance.

Let me ask you, are you more like these Jewish believers or are you more like Paul? What I mean is...are you perfectly content to stay in

your comfort zone...wrapped in your safe cocoon...  
surrounded by your fellow Christians who think like  
you and dress like you and talk like you

OR are you

like Paul...willing to leave your comfort zone and  
have doors slammed in your face or be laughed at  
or rejected or even persecuted for your faith?

I'm afraid if I were honest before you this morning, I would have to say that most of the time, I'm more like these Jewish believers...wanting to live every day in my comfort zone!

Well, **chapter 22** gives us Paul's address to the Jews in Jerusalem. It's an outstanding and profound testimony of his salvation on the Damascus Road. It gives us more detail than the account of Paul's conversion in **Acts 9**.

So...let's look at Paul's address to the Jews in Jerusalem. Remember whom he's addressing here. He's been taken by the crowd in the Temple...I would imagine that most of these folks were unbelievers.

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## **Acts 21:40-22:5...**

In these few verses we see Paul is putting forth the fact that he was once controlled by Judaism. As Dr. John Phillips put it...

**Verse 3** tells us Paul was born into a Jewish family...

**Verse 3** also tells us Paul was bred in a Jewish fold...

**Verse 4-5** tells us Paul was bold for the Jewish faith...

Do you see what Paul is doing? He's establishing a connection with these Jewish people. He's saying...were you born a Jew? I was, too!

Were you bred a Jew? I was, too!

Were you bold for the Jewish faith? I was, too!

In fact, in his unconverted days, Paul had been a persecutor of the church and his aim was to stamp out Christianity and Christians altogether!

But then, something happened to Paul...

Verse 6-8...

So far as we know, Paul had never known the meek and lowly Jewus of Nazareth. I mean, Paul had not been one of His earthly disciples.

Paul had not been called from mending the nets by the sea...

Paul had not been called from the tax collectors' booth...

Paul had never walked with Jesus and talked with Jesus. He had never seen Jesus weary from His ministry of preaching and teaching and healing.

The first glimpse Paul ever had of Jesus had been a blinding vision of the Lord on the road to Damascus. And he carried that vision with all his life and spoke of it often.

Jesus said, **"Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?"**

I've always loved that verse. Beloved, when you're persecuted as a Christian for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ, Jesus Himself is persecuted! Jesus so identifies Himself with you and me that when you and I are persecuted, He is persecuted as well!!!

## **Verses 9-13...**

The last thing Saul had seen before being blinded was the face of Christ. The first thing he saw when he regained his sight was the face of a Christian. Paul didn't call Ananais a Christian as he spoke to these Jewish unbelievers, however. Instead, he described Ananais as being **"devout by the**

**standard of the Law and well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there."**

## **Verses 14-15...**

Paul was told by Ananais that God had chosen him to be a witness

**"unto all men of what you have seen and heard."**

This was to be Paul's life...

He was to bear witness to all men...not just the Jews.

Paul was leading up now to his great call to evangelize the Gentile world.

Paul was making it very clear that his commission was conveyed to him by a fellow Jew...a devout Jew...a Law-keeping Jew.

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Paul hoped by laboring this point he would somehow bridge the wide gulf of the religious prejudice and racial pride that separated the unbelieving Jews and the believing Jews...and the Jews and the Gentiles.

## **Verses 16-18...**

After being obedient to the Lord in baptism, Paul went away to Arabia (we know this from the **Book of Galatians**), but when he returned to Jerusalem, he said he went and prayed in the Temple.

Paul was building his case. Paul was a good speaker and he knew these people were paying attention to him. But Paul also knew he had reached a critical point in his story.

Paul knew these people. Paul knew the scorn and the hatred they had for the Gentiles. Paul knew their arrogance and he knew their prejudice and he knew their pride. **Paul knew all this because he once had been exactly like them!!**

Think about this...the **“safe thing”** for Paul to do would have been to merely beg their pardon for the misunderstandings that had come up...to merely explain to them that he hadn't had a Greek in the Temple! But, Paul had been called by God to be a witness to all men. So, Paul had to tell them everything...

Paul had to declare to the **“whole counsel of God.”**

## **Verses 19-21...**

Paul was doing all he could to get these folks to realize that there must have been a very good reason that he had changed from being just like them, a hater of the Gentiles, to being just the opposite.

Jerusalem was no mission field for Paul. God told him so...Paul's mission field was the Gentile world. The Greeks, the Barbarians, the Romans...all the people the Jews looked upon as “dogs.” Under Paul's ministry, those dogs would become the Lord's sheep.

Why was this so offensive to the Jews? What was their objection to Paul's ministry among the Gentiles? They were objecting to Paul's teaching that Gentiles could be saved without adhering to the Law of Moses...without becoming Jewish.

God saves people His way, and His way is through the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

If you're a Jew, you come to God as a Jew, but it must be through Christ Jesus.

If you're a Gentile, you come to God as Gentile, but it must be Christ alone.

Why must we come in this way and not in some other way?

Why can't we invent our own way?

It's because God sent Jesus Christ to be our Savior and Lord. It's not a matter of whether we think He's the best way...it's a matter of whether we know He's the only way.

Folks today aren't any different than those Jews who were listening to Paul.

Folks today want to come to God their own way, don't they? Folks today despise and hate the Gospel as much as the folks who were in the Temple at Jerusalem that day, don't they?

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It may be simple and it may be humble (and humbling), but the Gospel...the death, burial and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ is **the** way and the **only** way to be saved and my prayer is that all of you are saved. If you're not, I pray God will give you the grace to embrace this great salvation with all your heart!!

Paul was a bold witness for Jesus. Next week and in the following weeks we're going to see how brave and how bold.

Paul had two great passions...

Paul had a passion for Jerusalem and he had a great desire to see Rome.

Jerusalem pulled him and Rome pulled him, as well. And we're going to see in a few weeks that Paul indeed will go to Rome, by way of Jerusalem and he will go in chains. As far as we know, the rest of Paul's life would be spent as a prisoner.