

THE BOOK OF ACTS

CHAPTER 21

PAUL IS WARNED

THE CHALLENGE OF CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

When we are warned by the Holy Spirit, it is important to obey regardless of our own personal desires, even when our desires appear to be good. The Holy Spirit is sent to lead us, guide us, and show us things to come. He will help us avoid problems in our lives if we are willing to listen, even if His guidance is contrary to our own set agenda.

We must also guard against serving God by the law rather than by grace. Religion will always attempt to blind us to the freedom of living by the grace of God, emphasizing self-efforts rather than God's enabling power.

SEVERAL WARNINGS ABOUT JERUSALEM (1-14)

During their journeys, Paul and his companions land in Tyre where they remain for seven days. The disciples in Tyre warn Paul, by the Holy Spirit, not to travel to Jerusalem. Paul and his team then voyage to Ptolemais and Caesarea. They enter the home of an evangelist named Philip who has four daughters who prophesy to Paul. Then a prophet named Agabus comes from Judea and prophesies to Paul, warning him of what awaits him if he travels to Jerusalem. Finally, everyone present pleads with Paul not to go to Jerusalem, but he is determined, his mind is made up, and he will not be persuaded.

DISCIPLES IN TYRE WARN PAUL

Act 21:1 Now it came to pass, that when we had departed from them and set sail, running a straight course we came to Cos, the following day to Rhodes, and from there to Patara.

This chapter begins the account of Paul's great failure. From this time on, Paul is a prisoner. His prison time begins in Jerusalem (21-23), moves to Caesarea (24-26), and ends in Rome (27-28). While Paul is bound, the gospel is never bound because the Word can never be stopped. The message continues even when the messenger is in chains.

Paul has been warned in many cities not to go to Jerusalem (20-23); he will be warned by the saints in Tyre (21:3-4), by Philip's daughters (8-9), by Agabus (10-11), and his own companions (12). Paul rejects their guidance. He becomes hardheaded by rejecting the guidance of the Holy Spirit and accepting the guidance of carnal men. He will take a vow in the streets of Jerusalem (24).

As Paul leaves the pastors of Ephesus, it is an emotional departure. It is difficult on Paul and the elders to separate and for Paul to go on his way. He and his team will revisit a few resort

islands on their way to Jerusalem. They first come to Coos, the birthplace of Hippocrates, a beautiful island famous for its medical schools. Next, they sailed to Rhodes, a large island northeast of Crete, famous for its navy, located in a strategic point between the Aegean and Mediterranean seas. Then they travel to Patara, a pleasure city on the coast between the West and Middle East. Here they board a ship to Phoenicia.

Act 21:2 And finding a ship sailing over to Phoenicia, we went aboard and set sail.

Phoenicia is an early seafaring nation famous for its navy and worldwide commerce. The Phoenicians sailed to America long before anyone else. It was a large country located south of Syria. Tyre is a chief city in Phoenicia. It was quite a task to sail from Patara to Phoenicia. The distance was about 340 miles.

Act 21:3 When we had sighted Cyprus, we passed it on the left, sailed to Syria, and landed at Tyre; for there the ship was to unload her cargo.

They do not stop at Cyprus but sail by and dock in Tyre, a free city of Roman Syria. It had been destroyed by Alexander and partially rebuilt by Herod. Along with its sister city, Sidon, it was always popular for its heathenism. It was the object of many Biblical prophecies (Isaiah 23: 1-17; Joel 3:4; Matthew 11:22). While the ship is unloading its cargo, Paul finds some believers, strong disciples.

Act 21:4 And finding disciples, we stayed there seven days. They told Paul through the Spirit not to go up to Jerusalem.

There are not many disciples in the city of Tyre, so it takes some searching to find Christians, much less disciples filled with the Word and sensitive to the Holy Spirit. Paul and his team remain in Tyre for one week. He ministers to the believers and they to him. Paul must have mentioned to them about his upcoming trip to Jerusalem. He probably told them in wonderful terms of his plans to preach the gospel and what he thought was the leading of the Holy Spirit to go, even though he would face bonds. While he spoke, the same Holy Spirit revealed and warned the disciples that Paul should not go to Jerusalem. God will move from disciples in Tyre giving warning to a prophet in Caesarea, but Paul will still not listen.

Act 21:5 When we had come to the end of those days, we departed and went on our way; and they all accompanied us, with wives and children, till we were out of the city. And we knelt down on the shore and prayed.

Act 21:6 When we had taken our leave of one another, we boarded the ship, and they returned home.

These people are so thankful for Paul coming to minister to them, they follow him and his team to the dock and pray with him before he boards the next ship.

Act 21:7 And when we had finished our voyage from Tyre, we came to Ptolemais, greeted the brethren, and stayed with them one day.

And when we had finished our course (completed our mission) from Tyre, we came to Ptolemais (Tol-o-mais), and saluted (greeted) the brethren, and abode with them one day.

Ptolemais is a very old and famous city in the ancient world. In Judges 1:31, it is the city of Accho. When Alexander sailed into its natural harbor, he named it Ptolemais for his famous general Ptolemy, who later became the ruler of Egypt. Today it is the famous seaport of Haifa. Word had already spread about Paul coming, and the disciples in Ptolemais came out to greet him.

PAUL WARNED BY PHILIP'S DAUGHTERS

Act 21:8 On the next day we who were Paul's companions departed and came to Caesarea, and entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him.

And the next day we that were of Paul's company departed, and came unto Caesarea (cf. 10:1): and we entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven (original deacons, 6:5); and abode with him.

Philip had been used by the Lord to fulfill the prophecy of Jesus "into Samaria" (1:8) in Acts 8 where he held the Samaritan revival. He also led the Ethiopian eunuch to the Lord (8:26-39) and based himself in Caesarea after being translated by the Spirit to Azotus (8:40).

For some time, Paul remains in Caesarea and receives two warnings about continuing to Jerusalem.

Act 21:9 Now this man had four virgin daughters who prophesied.

Philip's daughters are not prophets like Agabus, but they are known to move in the Holy Spirit and prophecy. They fulfill Joel 2:28. They are proficient in the ways of the Holy Spirit, coming from the home of an evangelist. The phrase "did prophesy" in this passage indicates that Philip's daughters were not new to operating in prophecy; it also indicates they prophesied at that very moment over Paul.

Since Paul has been warned against going to Jerusalem, it can be assumed from the context that these daughters also prophesied to Paul not to go to Jerusalem.

Act 21:9 Women and New Testament Ministry (Philip's Daughters), BIBLICAL WOMEN. his reference to Philip's daughters' each exercising the gifts of prophecy makes clear that women did bring God's word by the power of the Holy Spirit and that such ministry was fully accepted in the early church. This is reinforced by Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:5, where he directs 1) that a woman may "prophesy," but 2) that she must be properly "covered," that is, rightly related to her husband or other spiritual authority, a regulation incumbent upon all spiritual leaders---male or female (see 1 Timothy 3:1-13).

It is puzzling why the place of women in ministry is contested by some in the church. Women had an equal place in the Upper Room, awaiting the Holy Spirit's coming and

the birth of the church (Acts 1:14). Then Peter's prophetic sermon at Pentecost affirmed the OT promise was now to be realized: "your daughters" and "maidservants" would now share fully and equally with men in realizing the anointing, fullness, and ministry of the Holy Spirit, making them effective in witness and service for the spread of the gospel.

Though the place of men seems more pronounced in the number who filled leadership offices, there does not appear to be any direct restriction of privilege. Note: 1) the direct mention of Phoebe as a deacon ("servant," Greek *diakonia*, Romans 16:1); 2) John's letter to an "elect [chosen] lady" with instructions concerning whom she allows to minister in her "house" (a designation for early church fellowships, 2 John); and 3) 1 Corinthians 1:11 and Philippians 4:2, where Chloe and Euodia seem to be women in whose homes believers gather. The method of designation suggests they were the appointed leaders in their respective fellowships.

The acceptance of women in a public place of ministry in the church is not a concession to the spirit of the feminist movement. But the refusal of such a place might be a concession to an order of male chauvinism, unwarranted by and supported in the Scriptures. Clearly, women did speak---preach and prophesy---in the early church (see 1 Timothy 2:8-15).

PAUL WARNED BY AGABUS

Act 21:10 And as we stayed many days, a certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea.

Paul is now running into another pioneer of the early church. Paul had met Agabus in the early days of the church at Antioch. Agabus had first prophesied to the entire church of an upcoming drought headed to Jerusalem (11:28). Here Agabus will prophesy again, but this time to an individual, Paul, about his upcoming imprisonment.

Act 21:11 When he had come to us, he took Paul's belt, bound his own hands and feet, and said, "Thus says the Holy Spirit, 'So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this belt, and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.' "

The "girdle" is a money belt wrapped around Paul's waist. Paul has received an offering from Macedonia and is taking it to the saints at Jerusalem (Romans 15: 24-28). Paul usually delegates this responsibility, but this time he convinces others (and himself) that it would be better accomplished by himself personally. In other words, Paul takes the money himself as an excuse to go to Jerusalem. God intends for Paul to go to Spain and then to Rome. Paul has decided to do this after he has accomplished his mission at Jerusalem.

The money belt is used as an illustrated sermon. The money will be a blessing to those in Jerusalem but a curse to Paul.

Agabus does not correctly prophesy to Paul. He tells Paul the Jews will bind him and turn him over to the Romans. However, it is the Jews who tried to kill Paul, and the Romans rescue him (verses 27-33).

The New Testament prophets are not like those of the Old Testament. They are not stoned for missing the voice of the Holy Spirit. The anointing on the office of prophet was stronger in the Old Testament than in the New. The Old Testament prophets wrote Scripture. The New Testament prophets did not. The Old Testament prophet was replaced by the New Testament apostle. This is why New Testament prophets were to be judged in church by the other prophets (1 Corinthians 14:29-32).

21:11 The Issue of Personal Prophecy, PROPHECY. The Bible clearly allows for personal prophecy. Nathan brought David a confrontive “word” from God (2 Samuel 12:13); Isaiah predicted Hezekiah’s death (Isaiah 38:1); and in this text Agabus told Paul he faced trouble in Jerusalem. “Personal prophecy” refers to a prophecy (“word”) the Holy Spirit may prompt one person to give another, relating to personal matters. Many feel deep reservations about this operation of the gift of prophecy because sometimes it is abused. True “words” may be used to manipulate others, or they may be unwisely or hastily applied. This passage reveals safeguards against abusive uses of personal prophecy, allowing us to implement this biblical character. First, the “word” will usually not be new to the mind of the person addressed, but it will confirm something God is already dealing with him about. From acts 20:22-24 we know Paul was already sensitive to the issue Agabus raised. Second, the character of the person bringing the “word” ought to be weighed. Agabus’s credibility is related not to his claim of having a “word,” but to his record as a trustworthy man of God used in the exercise of this gift (11:28; 21:10). Third, remember that the prophecy, or “word,” is not to be considered “controlling.” In other words, such prophecy should never be perceived as dominating anyone’s free will. Christian living is never cultish---governed by omens or the council of gurus. Paul did not change his plans because of Agabus’s prophecy or because of the urging of others (verses 12-14); he received the “word” graciously but continued his plans nonetheless. Fourth, all prophecy is “in part” (1 Corinthians 13:9), which means that as true as that “part” may be, it does not give the whole picture. Agabus’s “word” was true, and Paul was bound in Jerusalem. But this also occasioned an opportunity to eventually minister in Rome (acts 23:11). Finally, in the light of a “word,” we should prayerfully consider the word as Mary did the shepherds report (Luke 2:19). A hasty response is never required: simply wait on God. We should then move ahead with trust in God, as Hezekiah did. He had been told that he would shortly die; but he prayed instead of merely surrendering to the prophecy, and his life realized its intended length---and shortened by his

diseased condition. Occasional personal prophecy is not risky if kept on biblical footings, but neither is it to become the way we plan or direct our lives.

PAUL'S TEAM PLEADS WITH PAUL

Act 21:12 Now when we heard these things, both we and those from that place pleaded with him not to go up to Jerusalem.

Those pleading with Paul are Paul's team and the group present who hear the message by Agabus. Apparently, Agabus gives this message in the presence of many people from the church. Paul is called forward for a demonstration of the Holy Spirit's message. Paul has now had three warnings by the Holy Spirit; the saints at Tyre, the daughters of Philip, and now Agabus. Paul's team and the Caesarean congregation are smarter than Paul. He will not listen. God will now quit striving with Paul and let him do what he is determined to do.

Act 21:13 Then Paul answered, "What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."

These friends and disciples are crying because they fear for Paul's life. They know he is going to Jerusalem out of God's will. They have seen it confirmed many times. Their crying got to Paul, and he knew they feared for his life. But he had already made up his mind to go and die if need be.

Here Paul is being stubborn. Paul's attitude is commendable, but his reasons for going are wrong. If he were to die, it would not be in the name of Jesus, but because of stupidity. He is being noble but stupid.

Act 21:14 So when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, "The will of the Lord be done."

They continue reasoning with Paul after his answer, but he will not change. They leave Paul alone and turned him (and their frustration) over to the Lord. They can no longer take the care of Paul upon themselves; it will cause them to sin. They know they have gone as far as they could.

PAUL AND HIS TEAM GLADLY RECEIVED (15-30)

Once Paul and his companions arrive in Jerusalem, the brethren warmly greet Paul and his team. The next day, Paul greets James and the elders and begins to testify about what God has been doing among the Gentiles through his ministry. The elders Paul addresses tell him to take a vow to demonstrate brotherly love in preaching the message of grace. Paul takes a Nazirite vow because of the influence of the elders in Jerusalem. Seven days after his arrival in Jerusalem, Jews from Asia who have seen Paul in the temple stir up the people against him. A mob is formed and they grab Paul and drag him from the temple.

PAUL AND HIS TEAM GLADLY RECEIVED

Act 21:15 And after those days we packed and went up to Jerusalem.

Among the baggage is the offering for the saints at Jerusalem from the believers of Macedonia (Romans 15: 25-26). They go “up” to Jerusalem because it is an ascent from Caesarea to Jerusalem.

Act 21:16 Also some of the disciples from Caesarea went with us and brought with them a certain Mnason of Cyprus, an early disciple, with whom we were to lodge.

A group of disciples went with Paul and his team to Jerusalem. Mnason was a Greek Cypriot like Barnabas. The group spends their last night in his home before they leave Caesarea.

Act 21:17 And when we had come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly.

Paul is now out of God’s will. God has been warning Paul not to go, and Paul has not heeded. At the gates of Jerusalem, Paul is disobedient and officially out of God’s protection. Money came with Paul, and this is one reason he is gladly received. This offering has been received over a period of time from Greece and Asia. In verse 17, Paul meets the brethren. In verse 18, he will meet the church leadership.

PAUL MEETS WITH THE ELDERS

Act 21:18 On the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present.

Jerusalem has weak leadership. They do not stand up for the Word, and legalism has entered in. Instead of defending grace, they have allowed born-again Pharisees to run the church, and they have put these Jewish believers under the law of Moses for salvation and spirituality. These legalistic leaders were truly born again as the church was growing (6:7), but they are not correctly taught and so bring the law of Moses into the church. Because of their knowledge of the Old Testament, few withstand them and they become the church leaders.

Act 21:19 When he had greeted them, he told in detail those things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry.

And when he (Paul) had saluted (greeted) them, he declared particularly (in detail) what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry.

In the past, this has always worked (11:18; 15:6-19). Peter and Paul have told the church at Jerusalem about the miracles, signs, and wonders God has performed among the Gentiles. They have also been saved and filled with the Holy Spirit and spoken with tongues just as the saints at Jerusalem. This has always caused a great amount of praise and admission of grace.

Act 21:20 And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord. And they said to him, "You see, brother, how many myriads of Jews there are who have believed, and they are all zealous for the law;

The church leadership admits Paul is right, but they are faced with many Jews who have received Jesus and are still clinging to the law of Moses. James is simply saying they are afraid of the Jews. They do not want to lose people from the church or lose their offerings. They have become the very people they broke away from.

They should have stood for the Word and not allowed these Jews to have influence over the beliefs and government of the church.

They call Paul "brother." They begin with religious talk, but Paul is wiser than this. He recognizes manipulation, but he so wants to speak to his own people, he tolerates their religious talk. They tell Paul the Jewish converts want the law. "What can we do when so many thousands want to keep the law of Moses?" Weak leadership produces a weak congregation. These converts are zealous for the law because the leaders are. The leaders have given up on the good fight of faith. They have yielded to the pressure, and so will Paul. The church has become legalistic, and the city will soon go under.

Act 21:21 but they have been informed about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs.

And they are informed of (concerning) thee, that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake (apostasia: falling away) Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs.

These Jewish leaders had been running Paul down from the pulpits. Paul has a bad reputation in Jerusalem. He cannot be argued with face to face, so they have chosen to run him down when he is not present. Paul is too brilliant with the Word to be challenged publicly.

They have done this before and lost. Paul has Jewish converts in each city of his missionary journeys. He usually preaches to the Jews in the synagogues first. Those who did not receive his message sent warnings back to Jerusalem, distorting his message. Paul has not taught the Jews not to circumcise their young boys; he has taught them to not circumcise them for spiritual reasons. He has truly taught them to forsake the law of Moses because it has been fulfilled in Jesus. He has taught them to turn from the shadows to the substance (Colossians 2:17).

Act 21:22 What then? The assembly must certainly meet, for they will hear that you have come.

Paul is a very controversial figure. They will not come together to reason but to argue and malign Paul. They will want to kill him (verses 27-31). Paul is now beginning to understand how far this city has fallen into legalism and how liberal the leadership has become toward them. James and the church leaders are more concerned about not offending people than standing up for the truth. Paul is now slipping into their way of thinking. "Let's do anything that allows us to preach to them."

THE STRATEGY OF THE ELDERS TO WEAKEN PAUL

Act 21:23 Therefore do what we tell you: We have four men who have taken a vow.

Do therefore this (imperative mood) that we say to thee: we have four men which have a vow on them:

These men have switched from the defensive to the offensive. They are now commanding Paul to become legalistic in order to preach grace. They are saying to Paul, "Be like us. We have four leaders from our church who have taken a seven-day vow and shave their heads. Join with them Paul, shave your head and show the people you are one of us and there is no division. Show them brotherly love."

Act 21:24 Take them and be purified with them, and pay their expenses so that they may shave their heads, and that all may know that those things of which they were informed concerning you are nothing, but that you yourself also walk orderly and keep the law.

James is minimizing grace while magnifying unity around the law, legalism. This is blasphemous. These men have not unified around grace. Why should they now want Paul to unify around religion? Why must Paul stand with them? Paul should now be telling these men to stand with him around the truth all of God's Word. Paul has never considered grace to be nothing. He does believe in walking orderly, but by the Holy Spirit and grace, not by keep the law.

This argument, that Paul does not believe in walking orderly, is a tactic used by weak people. Because you do not believe the way they do, they accuse you of not believing in holiness, the move of the Spirit, grace, etc.. Anything can be taken to an extreme by the excessive Christian and used against the balanced believer.

Act 21:25 But concerning the Gentiles who believe, we have written and decided that they should observe no such thing, except that they should keep themselves from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality."

They are appealing to Paul's Jewish heritage. They are making the gospel different by race. "It is all right for your converts not to keep the law, Paul, because they are Gentiles. But you are a Jew. You above everyone should know how important keeping the law is to a Jew. This is cultural, part of our heritage. You are different than the Gentiles you preach to."

At this point, Paul should have seen the spiritual and religious arrogance coming from the church leaders and should have left Jerusalem and told his team he had been wrong to come in the first place. He should have asked God to forgive him and headed for Rome.

PAUL TAKES A JEWISH VOW

Act 21:26 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.

Then Paul took the men, and the next day purifying himself (passive voice) with them entered (having entered) into the temple, to signify (give public testimony) the accomplishment of the days of purification, until that an offering should be offered for every one of them.

Paul swallows their hypocrisy. He will now do something he teaches against in the book of Romans. He is about to "sin that grace may abound." He will take a Jewish vow in order to preach grace to the Jews. Paul goes through the purification rights of the temple, something that was totally abolished at the cross. Paul knows this and has even taught it (Colossians 2:16-17).

This purification rite is when Paul enters the temple, stands before the leaders, and vows to abstain from a number of items for thirty days. Vows could include abstinence from certain foods, shaving, sex, etc.. This vow is described in numbers 6:1-21 as the Nazirite vow.

21:26 offering, *prospora* (pros-for-ah); a bringing to, setting before, presenting, sacrificing, a gift, the act of offering, or the thing offered. The word includes giving kindness and bestowing benefit. Paul engaged in the purification ceremony. It was not necessary for his salvation, but was an act of devotion to God. Paul's principle was being all things to all men in order to win them.

Act 21:27 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,

And when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews which were of Asia, when they saw him in the temple, stirred up all the people, and laid (epibal-lo: threw themselves, attacked), hands on him,

When the week was almost ended, all hell breaks loose. Paul has stood publicly each day in the temple with four church elders and made this vow before the multitudes. Each day he announces he will not eat certain foods and that he is shaving his head, etc..

Just before the seventh day, certain man in the multitude recognize Paul and begin a riot. Asian Jews in Jerusalem for Pentecost recognize Paul from Ephesus. They see him make the vow and begin to stir up a riot against him. They throw themselves at Paul, attacking him and then cry out to the people for help.

Act 21:28 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."

Crying out (shouting), Men of Israel, help (boetheo: come running, aid, relieve): This is the man, that teacheth all men (Jews and Gentiles) everywhere (Asia, Macedonia, Achai) against the

people (Jews), and the law (Mosaic) and this place (the temple): and further brought Greeks (Gentiles) also into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place.

The “Greeks” referred to are Trophimus (verse 29). Places are not holy and nationalities do not pollute. This is religious and national pride, jealousy, and prejudice.

These people do not shout all their accusations in unison, but instead say one thing and another. This verse lumps together everything that was said.

Act 21:29 (For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.)

These people are jealous of Paul’s success in Ephesus. When they are in Jerusalem, they see Paul with Trophimus and assume wrongly that Paul has taken him, a Gentile, into the temple. They use this to incite the Jews with the belief that Paul is weakening their religion by bringing Gentiles into their system and holy place.

These people are more zealous for tradition than they are for truth and the accompanying signs from God (cf. 2 Peter 2:19). Here, Peter gives a description of religious teachers. They make promises they cannot keep. They are slaves themselves. How can a slave give you liberty? They tell you of freedom from sin when they are steeped in sin themselves. The one seeking freedom is bound, overcome, and brought to bondage by the very one promising liberty. The result is being brought into worse sin than what the individual began with.

A RIOT IN JERUSALEM (31-40)

As the mob attempts to kill Paul, a chief captain of the Roman army and his soldiers run toward the rioting crowd. When the mob sees the soldiers, they stop beating Paul. The chief captain has Paul bound in chains and sends him to prison while they try to determine who he is and what he has done. Paul is led into the Roman fort where he explains to the chief captain who he is and asks to speak to the people. He has granted permission.

MOB DETERMINES TO KILL PAUL

Act 21:30 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.

And all the city was moved (kineo: kinetic, to stir), and the people ran together (rioted): and they took (seized) Paul, and drew (dragged) him out of the temple: and forthwith (immediately) the doors were shut.

In the temple, they observe the law of no killing. Outside, however, they are overlooking the law of murder. Religion only observes the convenient laws and disregards those that slow down its cause.

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

And as they went about (sought) to kill him, tidings (news) came unto the chief captain of the band (Roman army, 1000 men), that all Jerusalem was in an uproar.

Mob violence is running the city. They are using religion to disobey the law and murder someone without a trial. There will only be an execution. They can never trap Paul by legal means in Corinth (Chapter 18) or Ephesus (Chapter 19), so they are breaking the law themselves. This is why the Romans have every right to come in and seize and protect Paul. The chief captain (tribune) is a leader of one thousand soldiers in the Roman garrison. This represents the extent of law in the church. When the religious person violates civil law, he must face the system. The Romans represent law and order, especially in the midst of chaos.

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

Who (commander) immediately took (grabbed the nearest) soldiers (foot soldiers) and centurions (captains over 100), and ran down unto them (the rioting Jews): and when they saw the chief captain and the soldiers, they left beating Paul.

This commander is such a contrast to Pontius Pilate who catered to the people. This ruler knows the law, order, and the destructive potential of mobs. Since those beating Paul fear the death sentence for murder, they stop. They then stand back and scream accusations to justify themselves. Their intent is to convince the Roman government to kill Paul since they can't without suffering the consequences.

Act 21:33 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.

Then the chief captain came near, and took him (Paul), and commanded him to be bound with two chains; and demanded (investigated) who he was, and what he had done.

Paul is taken for his own protection until he can be tried. He is bound with two chains, which is the way the Romans bound the prisoners (12:6). The military leader remains calm and reacts smoothly in an emotional event. He now demands information after putting the mob and Paul in their proper places.

CONFUSION IN THE MOB

Act 21:34 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.

And some cried one thing, some another, among the multitude: and when he (the officer) could not know the certainty (get this straight facts) for the tumult (riot), he commanded him (Paul) to be carried into the castle.

The Roman officer inquires of the mob about who Paul is and what he had done, but he cannot get a straight answer. There are as many opinions as people in the mob. Paul is taken into the Antonia Fort named for Mark Antony, a close friend of Herod. Herod had this castle built in Jerusalem in honor of his friend.

THE REACTION OF THE MOB

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

As the soldiers come to the steps of the court, they are forced to carry Paul in the air over their heads to prevent him from being killed by the mob running after them. Paul is rushed by the mob on the stairs. The Jews know the accuracy of Roman law, and that there is little chance of seeing Paul sentenced since he has done nothing illegal. Paul has simply offended their religious, traditional thinking. They now decide to kill Paul on the steps and forget whether it is legal or illegal, or whether or not the Romans witnessed the killing. They feel it is worth losing their own lives to see Paul dead. The Roman soldiers have risked their own lives to uphold the law and protect a man who has yet to be tried.

Act 21:36 For the multitude of the people followed after, crying out, "Away with him!"

The Jews go up the stairs right behind the Roman soldiers. They are shouting the same thing the mob was crying before they crucified Jesus. However, this time the group is comprised predominantly of believers.

Legalism causes believers to act just like or even worse than unbelievers.

PAUL AND THE CHIEF CAPTAIN

Act 21:37 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?"

And as Paul was to be led into the castle, he said unto the chief captain, May I speak unto thee? Who (the tribune) said, Canst thou speak Greek?

This is the Fort where Herod lived for a while. It was more than 100 yards wide and long. It had four towers, each seventy-five feet high. Inside was a small city with a parade route around called Gabbatha. This is where the mob stood when Jesus was brought before Pilate.

The tribune does not know Paul is an aristocrat. He had been beaten and looks like a common criminal. When Paul speaks aristocratic Greek, it surprises the soldier.

Act 21:38 Are you not the Egyptian who some time ago stirred up a rebellion and led the four thousand assassins out into the wilderness?"

Art not thou that Egyptian, which before these days madest an uproar (revolution), and leddest out into the wilderness (desert) four thousand men (his syndicate organization) that were murderers (sikarios: assassin)?

Paul appears to be a common criminal, and the officer thinks he is an Egyptian crime figure of a syndicate called the Sikari, the name taken from their weapon of choice, a dagger called a sikari. This leader was from Egypt and had baffled Roman law for some time. In 54 A.D., this gangster had organized a revolution by calling himself a prophet and swaying many of the Jews to follow him. He had actually been hired by Jewish leaders to draw followers against the government and had managed to arouse 30,000 people in Jerusalem to revolt and overthrow Rome. The Romans had attacked the mob, killed 400, and taken many prisoners. But the Egyptian criminal escaped with 4000 men into the Negev and operated from there for the next 40 years. They were still in operation when Rome destroyed Jerusalem in 70 A.D.

Once the officer discovers Paul is not this Egyptian criminal, he gives him great protection.

Act 21:39 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."

But Paul said, I am a man which am a Jew of Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean (insignificant) city: and, I beseech thee, suffer (allow) me to speak unto the people.

Paul is telling him, "I'm not an Egyptian. I am from Tarsus."

Tarsus has been made a free city by Rome. It has a mountain range nearby: called the Tarsus range, which had one pass running through it called the Cilician Gates. Alexander used it in his conquests. The pass runs into Cilicia where Tarsus is located. Tarsus is a university city, which immediately explains Paul's education to the officer. Since Tarsus is a free city, they are considered Roman citizens. Paul was born a Roman citizen. He is submissive to the Roman leader and asks for permission to speak.

This leader (Claudius Lucius [23:26]), born an aristocrat who purchased his citizenship, represents all that is great in Rome. Felix, the leader in Caesarea, will later represent all that is rotten.

Act 21:40 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,

Paul is now speaking under the protection of the Roman Empire. He will use this protection to teach the Jews and give his testimony.