**Acts of the Apostles
A Study of New Testament History**
**Lesson 19
Acts 21:17 – 23:35**

**Paul's Last Visit to Jerusalem**

**Introduction:**

Upon Paul's arrival in Jerusalem he immediately reports the good news of "those things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry." But Paul's success had not been just among the Gentiles. Untold numbers of devout Jews had become believers as well. Unfortunately, the false accusations that had plagued Paul during his three missionary journeys were still a source of contention and posed an imminent threat to the apostle. His enemies had completely distorted his teachings, especially those concerning circumcision. It was said of Paul 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" (Acts 21:21). While Paul had vigorously contended that circumcision should not be required of Gentile believers in Jesus Christ, he had never insisted that Jewish believers forsake the practice of circumcising their children in accordance with Jewish law, nor had he forbade them from practicing their customs. In fact, Paul had kept many of these customs himself.

Paul knew that during the conversion of Cornelius and his household, Peter and those with him had witnessed the Holy Spirit being poured out on uncircumcised Gentiles (Acts 10). Furthermore, the matter of circumcision had been brought before the apostles and elders in Jerusalem following Paul's first missionary journey (Acts 15). The conclusion of that gathering, which was expressed in a letter to be circulated among Gentile Christians, was unmistakably clear: ". . . we have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, saying 'You must be circumcised and keep the law' – to whom we have no such commandment . . ." (Acts 15:24).

However, to appease Paul's critics, James and the elders who were with him urged the apostle to openly demonstrate his love for the law by publicly keeping the Nazarite vow along with four other Jewish believers. But despite Paul's efforts, certain Jews from Asia saw him in the Temple and quickly stirred up the crowd. He was falsely accused of defiling the Temple by bringing Gentiles into the holy place. Had he not been rescued by the commander of the Roman garrison and placed in protective custody, Paul would have most certainly met with an untimely death. After being granted permission to address the mob in his own defense, Paul told the dramatic story of his conversion. But the crowd once again became enraged, shouting "Away with him!" As the commander prepared to "examine" Paul by scourging, the apostle quickly revealed that he was a Roman citizen and entitled to all the legal protection afforded citizens.

The following day the Roman commander ordered the chief priests and the council (the Sanhedrin) to appear before him in hopes of learning why the Jews were so intent on harming Paul. However, as soon as Paul said, "I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee, concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead I am being judged," the members of the council began arguing among themselves. The Pharisees in the council, who naturally believed in the resurrection of the dead, were immediately set at odds against the Sadducees who denied any claims of resurrection.

Paul's success at setting the members of the council against one another so enraged his enemies that a plot was immediately formed to kill him. Some even vowed "we will eat nothing until we have killed Paul" (Acts 23:14). When word of the plot reached the Roman commander, he ordered that Paul to be taken to Caesarea during the night under heavy armed guard. Paul would not only be protected there, but also be permitted to plead his case before the governor, Felix.

**Memorization:**

Acts 22:16 – *"And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord."*

**Key Events of Acts 21:17 - 23:35**

* Paul returns to Jerusalem
* Arrest at the Temple and Paul's defense before the mob
* Jews in Jerusalem plot to kill Paul
* Paul sent to Felix in Caesarea

**Link to Online Bible Study Tools:**

These websites contain numerous Bible Versions and Translations, Concordances, Dictionaries, Lexicons and many other useful tools: http://biblos.com/ and http://www.biblestudytools.com/ (Click on "Our Library" at the top of the home page)

**The Exposition:**

**I. Paul returns to Jerusalem (Acts 21:17 – 22:30)**

**A. Paul's reception by the church (Acts 21:17-26)**

1. With whom did Paul meet the day after returning to Jerusalem, and what was their reaction to his work?

2. What warning and advice was Paul given?

3. Why would Paul be urged to show the Jews in Jerusalem that he walked "orderly" and kept "the law"?

4. What did Paul do?

**B. Paul arrested in the Temple (Acts 21:27-36)**

1. Who were those that stirred up the crowd and brought false accusations against Paul?

2. What did they accuse him of doing? What led them to make this accusation?

3. How was Paul saved from death?

**C. Paul's defends himself before the mob in Jerusalem (Acts 21:37-22:21)**

1. Who did the commander think Paul was, and how does Paul identify himself?

2. Use a Bible dictionary or other resource to explain why the city of Tarsus in Cilicia was such a well-known and well-respected city among Romans.

3. What things did Paul say to the crowd that captured their attention, and why would these things be important?

4. What did Paul say about his opposition to "this Way", and why do you think that would impress the crowd?

5. How does Paul describe his encounter with Jesus Christ?

6. How does Paul describe Ananias?

7. What did Ananias command Paul to do upon receiving his sight, and why was it so important that Paul not wait?

8. What does this statement of Ananias say about the purpose and importance of baptism?

9. What warning had the Lord previously given Paul?

**D. The mob's response and Paul imprisoned (Acts 22:22-30)**

1. What did Paul say to the crowd that stirred up their wrath again?

2. What was the commander of the garrison going to do with Paul, and what stopped him?

3. How did the commander gain his citizenship compared to how Paul gained his?

4. Why did the commander bring Paul before the chief priests and the council?

**II. Paul brought before the Chief Priest and the council (Acts 23:1 – 23:22)**

**A. Paul's defense (Acts 23:1-10)**

1. What was Paul's opening defense before the council, and what happened when he said this?

2. What was Paul's reaction, and how did he publicly shame the high priest?

3. How did Paul turn the members of the council against one another?

4. What was the response of the Pharisees? Who in Acts made a similar argument regarding the preaching of the apostles?

**B. The Jerusalem Jews plot to kill Paul (Acts 23:11-22)**

1. How did the Lord reassure Paul that his life would not end in Jerusalem?

2. What was the vow Paul's enemies had taken, and how did they plan to seize Paul?

3. Who heard of this ambush and what did he do?

**III. Paul sent to Felix in Caesarea (Acts 23:23-35)**

**A. Paul taken into protective custody (Acts 23:23-24)**

1. What did the commander do to protect Paul from this plot, and where did he send him?

2. Using a Bible dictionary or some other reference source, give a brief biography of Felix to governor.

**B. The letter (Acts 23:25-30)**

1. How did the commander, Claudius Lysias, explain the plot against Paul and his reason for sending the apostle to Felix?

**C. Paul delivered to Felix (Acts 23:31-35)**

1. What were the soldiers guarding Paul ordered to do after arriving in Antipatris, and who was left to guard Paul?

2. After Paul arrived in Caesarea, what did Felix do upon reading the letter from Claudius Lysias?

**Application:**Be prepared to discuss what lessons can learn from these events, and how these lessons can be applied to present-day situations.