

ACTS 41 – **Pick Your Battles - Acts 21:17-36**

This is such an **ODD time** in the Apostle **Paul's** life
as we **follow him** into the **END** of the **Book of Acts**

For the last **FOUR Msg's** - Paul has been **trying** to **get** to **Jerusalem** -
& **today** - He finally **gets there**

He's **gone** thru **SO MUCH** - & he's **withstood** so many **Warnings**
& **Exhortations** to **NOT** go to Jerusalem

We **GOTTA KNOW** - after **ALL** the Build-Up
that something **SERIOUS** is **waiting** for Paul here

But **today** - you may be **SURPRISED**
& just **what it is** - that **Paul** finds **himself** in the **midst** of

There is **SO MUCH happening** within our **Text** today

& so much **CONJECTURE** about what's happening
BEHIND the SCENES of this Text

That **we could** have easily **focused** on **3 or 4** different **POINTS**

But I **PRAY** that where I finally **SETTLED** today
is **on something** the Lord can use in **EACH** of our Lives

My prayer - is that we will see Today - that **SOMETIMES**
You Just got to **PICK YOUR BATTLES**

Let's Pray

In our last msg - we left Paul Arriving at the house of an Early Disciple named Mnason -Probably on the outskirts of Jerusalem

& so we pick up in - Acts 21:17–18 (esv)

17 When we had come to Jerusalem, the brothers received us gladly.

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

This had to be quite a scene - Paul had travelled LONG & HARD to get to THIS very meeting

He had Luke & his Mostly Gentile Ministry Team with him & he had all the MONEY from the Gentile Churches with him

& he goes in to meet with JAMES - the BROTHER of Jesus - who is now the LEADER of the Jerusalem Church

& with James are the ELDERS - Some believe (from history) there might've been 70 ELDERS present that day with James

If So - It would've been Patterned after the Jewish Sanheidren Which is kind of a BAD SIGN going in

So Paul & his Battle Weary team come before the leadership of "The Mother Church" - & it starts off - really GOOD

Acts 21:19 (esv)

19 After greeting them, he (Paul) related one by one (in detail) the things that God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry.

Paul shares with them **One by One** (in Detail) - The **Great** things **GOD** had done on this **3rd** (& longest) **Missionary** Journey

NOT what **PAUL** or his **TEAM** had done - but what **GOD** had done

Maybe he told them about how **God** mightily used **APOLLOS** who was the **FIRST** Major **Story** of this journey

& **then** - after many, **many testimonies** - maybe **Paul** told the story of **EUTYCHUS** (the **LAST** Major **Story** of this journey)

who **fell asleep** in church - to his **DEATH** - & God **brought** him **BACK** to life - **so** that **Paul** could go back & **finish** his sermon

Over & over Paul **TESTIFIED** to the **Greatness of God** on the Mission Field

& - **although Luke** doesn't mention it we know **TWO other things** occurred at this meeting

FIRST - Paul had some of the **GENTILE** Christians with him

They had travelled a **LONG WAY** to come & **ENCOURAGE** the Jerusalem church with Paul

SECOND - They came to **GIVE** the sizable **OFFERING** the Gentile **Churches** had **collected** for the believers in **Jerusalem**

& it **most probably** would've been **HERE** that the **Financial Gift** was **GIVEN** for the church

What a GREAT Kick Off;

- A Detailed Testimony of All the Great things God had DONE
- The Gentile Christians showing their LOVE
- & a Large sum of MONEY Given to the Jerusalem church

& so the FIRST sentence of V.20
is Exactly what we would EXPECT

Acts 21:20(A) (esv)

20 And when they heard it, they glorified God . . .

THAT is what Paul had hoped & prayed for

A tangible show of UNITY & LOVE
between the Gentile Churches & the Jewish Church

& THIS THING - that Paul had hoped & prayed for So Much
lasted for Exactly ONE & A HALF Vs's

It was GOOD - But it was Definitely SHORT LIVED

The 2nd half of V.20 Doesn't start with a BUT !!

But it SHOULD - because THAT'S exactly what happens

Acts 21:20(B)-21 (esv)

20 . . . And they said to him, (now watch - because the “glorifying God” is over - it’s time to move on to church politics) *“You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed. They are all zealous for the law* (believing Jews who are Zealous for the Law = Judiazers),

21 and they have been told about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or walk according to our customs.

WHOA - Wait a Minute - **THIS** is a Major **REVERSAL**
in **how** this little **MEET & GREET** was going

Just **HALF a Vs** ago we were **All PRAISING GOD** together

Paul & the **team** had **risked** their **LIVES** All over **2 Continents**
they had **Braved** All types of **Attacks** & **Trials**

& they **FINALLY** get to Jerusalem - & after **ONE & A HALF** verses -
these **church leaders** turn to **POLITICS** & **PUBLIC RELATIONS**

& it **seems to ME** - this little "**issue**" probably wasn't brought up -
until **AFTER** the big **money exchange** had occurred

So **James** & the Elders say - *ok, here's the Problem*

There's a **BUNCH** of Jews here who have **acknowledged** Jesus -
BUT they still **follow the LAW** - to the "**T**" (*Judaizers*)

AND - they're **SAYING** - **YOU** are teaching **the JEWS**
to **STOP** keeping the **law of Moses**

Now Was that TRUE ? - - Was Paul Teaching JEWS that ?

NO - Paul **WAS NOT** teaching JEWS to **STOP** following
the **Laws & Traditions** of Moses

He **WAS** telling **GENTILES** that they didn't have to **START** following
the **Laws & Traditions** of Moses

& He **WAS COUNTERING** the Judaizers **DEMAND**
that the **GENTILES** Be **FORCED** to keep the **Mosaic Laws**

Paul WAS teaching Anyone who would listen - what he wrote in

Philippians 3:9 (NLT)

9 . . . I no longer count on my own righteousness through obeying the law; rather, I become righteous through faith in Christ . . .

Paul WAS teaching that our Righteousness does NOT come from the LAW - but ONLY by FAITH in Christ

But he WAS NOT teaching JEWS to STOP their Traditions

& So - what was being spread in the church was INFLAMMATORY & INACCURATE

Unfortunately - James & the Elders WERE NOT interested in CORRECTING the MISTAKES of the Jerusalem Church

They WERE interested in getting Paul to HELP THEM "Smooth things over" with these Zealous Jewish Believers

& so they come up with a "Politically Correct" Plan that is about to put Paul - in some very HOT WATER

Acts 21:22-24(A) (esv)

22 What then is to be done? They will certainly hear that you have come.

23 Do therefore what we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow (Nazarite Vow);

24 take these men and purify yourself along with them and pay their expenses, so that they may shave their heads . . .

James & the Gang here - come up with a cool PR move to try to SMOOTH OVER this Political Problem

Unfortunately - if the **James Gang** had been **Teaching** the **New Believers** Correctly - they **wouldn't** have had **this problem**

But they had **allowed** the **Judaizers** to **SO INFLUENCE** the Church - that **now** they had to **try** to make Paul **LOOK LIKE** one of **THEM**

& so - **they decide** to have **Paul SEEN** with these **4 men**

who were **finishing** their **Nazarite** Vow - & who **were** about to **make Sacrifices** in the **Temple** to complete it

& **they decide** Paul should be a **PART** of **ALL that**

Now - **Paul himself** had taken a **Nazarite Vow** at the end of his **2nd** Missionary **Journey** - just back in **ACTS 18**

This vow was **normal** after God had **BLESSED** you -
OR - when you had a **GREAT NEED** to bring before God
*It was done kind of like **FASTING** for us*

It involved **NO Meat** - - **NO Wine** - - **NO Working** - - & **NO Haircuts**
& - to **signify the END** of the Vow - **Sacrifices** were made

& **because** of the **COST** of taking this **Vow**
it was **COMMON** for someone to **JOIN IN**

to **PAY** that person's **expenses** during the time of the Vow - **AND**
to **pay the COST** of the **SACRIFICE** at the end of the Vow

& what **James & the Elders** wanted - was for **everyone** to **see Paul**
going thru the **ceremony** (incl'd'g the Sacrifices) **with** these men
AND - **Paying** for it All

& they hoped it would SEND Everyone A MESSAGE !!

In fact - I think BOTH the CHURCH LEADERS - & PAUL
wanted this action to SEND Everyone a Message

The problem is they had DIFFERENT MESSAGES in mind

For Paul - He knew this was NOT a salvation matter

This VOW was Not EARNING Righteousness for these men
It was simply a Jewish Tradition of showing Devotion to God

Paul was certainly NOT breaking his own Commitment
to Righteousness by FAITH ALONE here

I believe he was about to DO - just what he writes in 1Cor 9

(Turn) - 1 Corinthians 9:19–22 (esv)

19 For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them.

20 To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law.

21 To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law.

22 To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some.

THIS has GOT to be what Paul is THINKING here - PLUS . . .

Paul's is SO BURDENED for the Jews -

He wanted SO BADLY for them to be SAVED . . .

That he was Easily WILLING to become LIKE them
in order to try to SAVE them

It meant SO MUCH to Paul - in Rom 9:2-3 - he says (NLT)
2 My heart is filled with bitter sorrow and unending grief
3 for my people, my Jewish brothers and sisters. I would be
willing to be forever cursed—cut off from Christ!—if that would
save them.

Paul was SO SERIOUS about wanting to SEE the Jews SAVED
he was willing to go along with this PLAN

Hoping (I'm sure) that eventually he'd be able to
Share the truth of CHRIST ALONE with his Jewish brothers

& that all SOUNDS Well & Good . . .
& I believe that MUST'VE been Paul's MOTIVE

HOWEVER - The MOTIVE of the Leaders of the Jerusalem Church
was SADLY - Much Different

Let's RE-READ all of V.24 - & we'll see what the Church Leaders
MOTIVE for this plan Really Was

Acts 21:24 (esv)

24 take these men and purify yourself along with them and pay
their expenses, so that they may shave their heads. Thus all will
know that there is nothing in what they have been told about you,
but that you yourself also live in observance of the law.

UH-OH !! - I'm pretty sure THAT is NOT the message
Paul wanted to send to the Jewish Christians

But - Instead of James & the Leaders standing up for Paul
& defending Salvation by FAITH in Christ ALONE

THEY'RE asking Paul to send a SIGN
that he still lived - in OBSERVANCE of the Law

R. Kent Hughes is very DIRECT, & to the POINT here
The mother church was a compromising, prejudiced church, and her sins of lying gossip and spineless accommodation eventuated in Paul's rejection.

OUCH !!

The Mother Church was in a STRUGGLE between LAW & GRACE -
& it seemed - that GRACE - was LOSING

& then - in what seems like a BARGAINING CHIP
The Leaders Remind Paul . . .

he didn't have to play this game with the GENTILES - They WERE
willing to STICK to what they had Already RULED about THEM

Acts 21:25 (esv)

25 But as for the Gentiles who have believed, we have sent a letter with our judgment that they should abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality."

It's like they're saying - *Listen Paul, just do this for us, to help us keep the Jews quiet around here*

& then you can go back to the Gentiles, & do whatever it is you do - with them

BUT NOW - Paul is right Between **A ROCK & A HARD PLACE**

Paul had already written - ***“There is neither Jew nor Greek . . . for you are all ONE in Christ”*** - in **GAL 3**

But he had to somehow balance that with ***“I’m willing to become all things to all people, that I might win some”*** - from **1COR 9**

& so - Paul found himself in a place he **Never INTENDED** to be
& a place he **Never WANTED** to be

& for Paul - **WITHOUT A DOUBT** - it was his **LOVE** for the Jewish people - that **DROVE him** to go along with this **silly plan**

SOME SAY - he was about to make
the most **SERIOUS MISTAKE** of his life

SOME SAY he was just **PICKING HIS BATTLES**
& he decided to **let this one go** - to try to **SAVE** the Jews

& so we read in - Acts 21:26 (esv)

26 Then Paul took the men, and the next day he purified himself along with them and went into the temple, giving notice when the days of purification would be fulfilled and the offering (an animal sacrifice) presented for each one of them.

I believe - Paul wanted **SO BAD** to **SAVE** the Jews -
& to build **UNITY** between the **Jewish & Gentile** believer’s . .

That he decided to **NOT FIGHT** this Battle

HOWEVER - - ***God was about to STEP IN***

I don't know if Paul's decision was **RIGHT** or **WRONG**
there are **Scholars** who believe **BOTH ways**

But I **KNOW this** - **GOD** is **NOT** going to **let** this **HAPPEN**
He's going to **STOP it** - right **NOW**

Maybe because **IF** Paul would've **made** an **Animal Sacrifice**
it would've **seemed** like an **ABOUT FACE**

like Paul was **denying** that the **sacrifice** of **Jesus Christ**
was **SUFFICIENT** - **ONCE** - & **FOR ALL**

But **whatever** the **REASON** - God Definitely **DID NOT** Permit it

Instead - Paul's **STRONG DESIRE** to **SAVE** the Jews
ENDS his personal Freedom - **FOREVER**

Acts 21:27 (esv)

27 When the seven days were almost completed, the Jews from Asia, seeing him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd and laid hands on him,

Paul **May Have** actually been **ON HIS WAY** to make the sacrifices

When (**NOTICE**) - ***Jews from ASIA*** (probably from **Ephesus**)
Stirred Up the whole crowd - & **Laid Hands** on him

These Jews **MAY'VE** even **SEEN** the **RIOT** in Ephesus
& **thought** it looked like a **good approach** to **TRY** Again

But it's **interesting** that - James & the Gang were **SO CONCERNED**
about **PLACATING** the **Jerusalem Jews**

& **then** it was **Jews** from way up in **ASIA** that actually **start the riot**

& Here's how they got everyone all RILED UP

Acts 21:28(A) (esv)

28 crying out, "Men of Israel, help! This is the man who is teaching everyone everywhere against the people and the law and this place . . .

Now this is just too COINCIDENTAL to MISS

In ACTS 6 - you'll find - these are the EXACT SAME accusations that Paul was part of Instigating against STEPHEN - the 1st Martyr

& the Same Charges Paul was Part of using to get Stephen Arrested - are NOW trumped up against Paul himself

THAT is just TOO Ironic - - - But these Jews didn't stop there

Acts 21:28(B)-29 (esv)

28 . . . Moreover (cont'g the accusations), he even 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, and they supposed that Paul had brought him into the temple.

There's no way Paul would bring a Gentile into the "Jewish Only" area of the Temple

But again - When Religious people are out to GET someone they seldom let truth - stand in their way

& they are VERY SUCCESSFUL Here - at "Getting" Paul

Acts 21:30-32 (esv) → →

Acts 21:30-32 (esv)

30 Then all the city was stirred up, and the people ran together. They seized Paul and dragged him out of the temple, and at once the gates were shut.

31 And as they were seeking to kill him, word came to the tribune of the cohort (Roman Commanding Officer) *that all Jerusalem was in confusion.*

32 He at once took soldiers and centurions and ran down to them. And when they saw the tribune and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul.

MAN - Did this Plan BACKFIRE Fast - or What??

**Paul was BENDING all he could BEND
to try to earn the right to minister to his own people**

**& instead - he quickly ends up
on the WRONG SIDE of the UGLY STICK**

The same people Paul was exercising SO MUCH GRACE toward -
were now beating him silly - & Trying to KILL him

**WHO does that sound a LOT like ?? - Sounds a LOT like JESUS -
with these SAME people - in this SAME place**

Some people say Paul made the BIGGEST mistake of his life here -

But to me - it shows that Paul had the SAME LOVE
for the Jewish people - that Jesus had

**EVEN WITH All their sins - & EVEN WITH their extreme tendency
to VIOLENCE over their LAWS**

Paul had **PUSHED** the limits of **GRACE** - in order **to TRY** to get to a **place** where he could **MINISTER** to the Jews

He was **willing to wave** the battle of **traditions & customs** to try to **GET TO** the Real Battle of **Salvation by FAITH ALONE**

But **Unfortunately** - Now - Paul would have to fight **THAT Battle** as a **Prisoner** of **ROME**

Acts 21:33-36 (esv)

33 Then the tribune came up and arrested him and ordered him to be bound with two chains (prob bound to 2 soldiers). He inquired (to the crowd) who he was and what he had done.

34 Some in the crowd were shouting one thing, some another. And as he could not learn the facts because of the uproar, he ordered him to be brought into the barracks (Antonia Fortress).

35 And when he came to the steps, he was actually carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the crowd,

36 for the mob of the people followed, crying out, "Away with him!"

It's **very interesting** that this phrase "***Away with him!***" is **THE EXACT SAME** Greek word used in **JOHN 19:15**

When a Very **SIMILAR CROWD** Demanded the Murder of **Jesus Christ** - **ON THESE EXACT SAME STEPS !!**

The **SAME Response** for Paul - as **Jesus got** - in the **SAME PLACE** - - **makes us** think of the **words of Jesus** in

John 15:20 (esv) → →

John 15:20 (esv)

20 . . . ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you . . .

& **THAT** Certainly came **TRUE** for **PAUL**

Things **hadn’t Worked Out** like **Paul Planned** - & **things hadn’t Worked Out** like the **“Politically Correct” Church Leaders** planned

In fact - Things worked out **SO BAD** - that **from this moment** on Paul would **NEVER** be a **Free Man** again

& so the Question Today is - **WHAT** can we **LEARN** from all this ?

FIRST - For me - I think one of the **biggest lessons** has to be **Paul’s GRACE** toward those who **are still bound** in **Religious LAW**

Paul **LOVED** these **Legalistic Jews** - & he was willing to **PUSH** the **Limits of GRACE** - to **get** a chance to **Minister** to them

Paul could’ve easily **STOOD his ground** with **James & the Elders,** **he had done so** many times - in Many **GENTILE** Settings

But Here - instead of **FIGHTING** that **Theology Battle** - Paul **CONCEDES** to those who are **WEAKER in the Faith**

→ → →

When it came to **CLEAR MATTERS** of **SALVATION**

Paul would **NEVER BUDGE** an **INCH**

But when it came to **matters** of **Culture & Tradition**

Paul made **CONCESSIONS** - in **GRACE**

to try to **GET** to the place - where he **COULD** present **the GOSPEL**
of **Salvation** by **FAITH** in Christ **ALONE**

But - **what about James** & the **Jerusalem Elders** - **YIKES**
what was up with those guys ??

WHY didn't they **BACK PAUL** ?

WHY didn't they **BACK** the **Clear TRUTH**
of **Salvation** by **FAITH** in Christ **ALONE** ??

I DON'T KNOW !!- & I **Don't Know** Why **Churches**
don't BACK that Clear truth **TODAY**

We **DON'T** know **WHAT** they were thinking

but their **ATTEMPTS** to **STRADDLE the LINE** on this issue
Definitely **BACK-FIRED** !!

& of course - the fact that **GOD** **stopped** the **Entire thing**

& **allowed Paul** to be **Beaten** & **Arrested** - **adds** a question
to this text - that we **can't even BEGIN** to answer

But here's what we **CAN** learn → → →

We have GOT to be BOTH:

RIGHT before GOD - in our Personal Commitments to Him - **&**
READY to Show GRACE - to those who aren't there Yet

I believe we can see **PAUL'S Heart** in all this
in **3 Vs's** that he wrote in **Rom Ch 12** - **LET'S TURN THERE**

Rom 12:16-18 (NLT)

16 Live in harmony with each other. Don't be too proud to enjoy the company of ordinary people. And don't think you know it all!

17 Never pay back evil with more evil. Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honorable.

18 Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone.

I believe Paul did **ALL HE COULD** - to **Live in peace** with the
Jerusalem Church - & in essence - **it cost him** - **his LIFE**

May we go & **do** the **SAME THING** !!

Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone

Let's Pray