

# ***The Book of Acts***

## ***Arrest in Jerusalem***

Lesson #11 for September 15, 2018

Scriptures: Acts 21; 22; 23:1-30; Romans 2:28-29; Galatians 5:6; Matthew 22:23-32.

1. This lesson will focus on events which took place after Paul arrived back in Jerusalem following his third missionary journey.
2. Paul had had serious forebodings about going to Jerusalem. But, he was determined to lead his friends, carrying a large amount of money to help the church in Jerusalem.
3. But, Paul knew that the traditional Jews were absolutely determined to destroy him and his ministry. Some of them had traveled long distances to try to undo the work he had done. Even the Christian church leaders had serious doubts about his gospel to the Gentiles. The very specific issue, as we have noted before, was the question of circumcision. Should Gentiles be required to become fully Jews, following all of the traditional ceremonies including circumcision before they could become Christians? So, Paul realized that he was traveling into a hornet's nest.
4. Do we have any situations like that in our church today?
5. Let us be certain about a few things: (1) Paul had a genuine love for his fellow Jews. (Romans 9:1-5) (2) He longed to have a church that was unified in its understanding of the gospel. (Galatians 3:28; 5:6) (3) He wanted everyone to accept the truth that he had been teaching for years that Jews and Gentiles, in fact, all men and women, are saved by their relationship to Jesus Christ, called faith, and not by the works of the law. (Romans 3:28-30) (4) Paul believed that the inclusive nature of the gospel meant that real Christians would be drawn together, eliminating all distinctions. (Ephesians 2:11-22)
6. Read Acts 21:16-17. Paul and his friends arrived in Jerusalem where arrangements had already been made for them to stay with a Cypriot Christian by the name of Mnason. The next day, Paul and his friends met with the Jerusalem Christians and their leaders and handed over that huge collection of money they had brought from the Gentile believers. (Acts 21:18-22) For a few minutes, the Jerusalem Christians found their hearts warmed to Paul and all that money.

The liberal contributions lying before them added weight to the testimony of the apostle concerning the faithfulness of the new churches established among the Gentiles. The men who, while numbered among those who were in charge of the work at Jerusalem, had urged that arbitrary measures of control be adopted, saw Paul's ministry in a new light and were convinced that their own course had been wrong, that they had been held in bondage by Jewish customs and traditions, and that the work of the gospel had been greatly hindered by their failure to recognize that the wall of partition between Jew and Gentile had been broken down by the death of Christ.

This was the golden opportunity for all the leading brethren to confess frankly that God had wrought through Paul, and that at times they had erred in permitting the reports of his enemies to arouse their jealousy and prejudice. But instead of uniting in an effort to do justice to the one who had been injured, they gave him counsel which showed that they still cherished a feeling that Paul should be held largely responsible for the existing prejudice.

They did not stand nobly in his defense, endeavoring to show the disaffected ones where they were wrong, but sought to effect a compromise by counseling him to pursue a course which in their opinion would remove all cause for misapprehension.—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*\* 402-403.1.

7. But, then their prejudices re-rose. In effect, they said to Paul: “Rumors have been swirling that you have abandoned the Mosaic law and even told Jews not to circumcise their children.”
8. Was that true? No! What Paul was teaching was that everyone must be saved by faith alone. (Romans 1:16-17; 2:28-29; Galatians 3:28-29; 5:6; Colossians 3:11) In his book to the Galatians written just a few months earlier, Paul had tried to eliminate all distinctions of class, sex, race, or even legal status. (See Galatians 3:28-29.)
9. James, the stepbrother of Jesus, leading the Jerusalem Christians at that time, in effect, said to Paul: “We want you to observe a traditional Jewish ceremonial custom to prove to the Jewish people that you are still a good Jew.” In their view Paul was advised to be “politically correct.” He was asked to sponsor a group of Jewish Christian believers who had taken a Nazirite vow and needed to go through a seven day purification ceremony in the temple in order to complete that vow. Didn’t Paul recognize the dangers of doing that?
10. In effect, they were asking Paul to reverse his teachings about the gospel. And they wanted Paul to say that there were, in fact, two gospels: One for Gentiles by which salvation was by faith alone and another one for Jews in which salvation was at least partly by works?
11. Did Paul try to consult God before he agreed to this? Did he have any opportunity to do so? How safe is it to be politically correct?

Many of the Jews who had accepted the gospel still cherished a regard for the ceremonial law and were only too willing to make unwise concessions, hoping thus to gain the confidence of their countrymen, to remove their prejudice, and to win them to faith in Christ as the world’s Redeemer. Paul realized that so long as many of the leading members of the church at Jerusalem should continue to cherish prejudice against him, they would work constantly to counteract his influence. **He felt that if by any reasonable concession he could win them to the truth he would remove a great obstacle to the success of the gospel in other places. But he was not authorized of God to concede as much as they asked.**—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*\* 405.1. [Bold type is added.]

12. It is not easy to go against peer pressure. The closer our peers are to us, the more difficult it is to do so. The time is coming when even family members will turn against us if we maintain our allegiance to the truth. Are we prepared for such an event?
13. Paul had recently come from working among Gentile nations. He had to go through a purification process even before he started working with those Nazirite-vowing Christians. (See Acts 21:26; compare Numbers 19:11-13.)
14. What possible benefit could a Christian gain from taking a Nazirite Jewish vow? Why would they even want to do it? Why is it so difficult for us to give up formerly-cherished ideas?
15. Read Acts 21:27-36. Some Jews who had apparently seen Paul in Ephesus discovered that he was in Jerusalem. He was seen walking around Jerusalem with a Gentile friend, Trophimus. (Acts 21:29) In accordance with their hatred of Paul and all that he stood for,

they immediately assumed that he had taken that uncircumcised Gentile into the temple's inner court; that was a very serious offense. There was a low wall separating the outer court from the inner court in the temple with numerous warnings in Greek and Latin telling Gentile visitors not to enter the inner temple. If they did so, they would be responsible for their own death.

By the Jewish law it was a crime punishable with death for an uncircumcised person to enter the inner courts of the sacred edifice. Paul had been seen in the city in company with Trophimus, an Ephesian, and it was conjectured that he had brought him into the temple. This he had not done; and being himself a Jew, his act in entering the temple was no violation of the law. But though the charge was wholly false, it served to arouse the popular prejudice. As the cry was taken up and borne through the temple courts, the throngs gathered there were thrown into wild excitement.—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*\* 407.1.

16. Immediately, they grabbed Paul and began beating him; a riot ensued. Fortunately for us and for Paul, there was a Roman fortress located next to the temple, overlooking the temple compound. The Roman commander, Claudius Lysias, (Acts 21:31-32; 23:26) had been given a specific responsibility of preventing any rioting in Jerusalem, particularly rioting against the Roman government. He rushed down with a group of soldiers and rescued Paul before they could kill him. Paul was bound with chains and taken to the Roman fortress.

Claudius Lysias is called “the tribune” (in Greek *chiliarch*) 16 times within Acts 21-24. (21:31-33,37; 22:24,26-29; 23:10,15,17,19,22; 24:22)

The Greek term *chiliarch* is said to be used to translate the Roman *tribunus militum* (following Polybius), and also for the phrase *tribuni militares consulari potestate* (Plutarch). The responsibilities of a *chiliarch* were as a “commander of a thousand men”. Essentially, Claudius Lysias is “a high-ranking military officer in charge” of anywhere from 600 to 1,000 men, and this appears to be the case for it is said that his command was over a “cohort” (*speira*) in Jerusalem which is “the tenth part of a Roman legion having about 600 men.”—[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Claudius\\_Lysias](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Claudius_Lysias) (accessed June 12, 2018—*chiliarch*). [Note that the source also has the equivalent Greek letters adjacent to the words *chiliarch* and *speira* in the quotation above.]

17. As we know, all of this was based on false rumors. Paul had not violated any of the traditional Jewish requirements. After all, he had once been a member of the Sanhedrin! Have we ever attempted to pass along damaging rumors, especially about other Christians?
18. Read Acts 21:37-40. Paul then addressed the Roman centurion in Greek, explaining that he was a Jew and a citizen from Tarsus and that he wanted an opportunity to speak to the crowd. He was not, as the centurion had supposed, an Egyptian rebel who had tried to start a revolution against the Roman government. Paul was granted permission to speak to the crowd.
19. Read Acts 21:28 and Acts 22:22-29. According to the book of Acts, Paul spoke to the crowd in Hebrew. It may be that he was actually speaking Aramaic, the common language of the Jews in Palestine at that time. Aramaic and Hebrew are very closely related. Paul told the story of his conversion. When he reached the point where he talked about being sent as an apostle to the Gentiles, suddenly, the crowd got riled up again. It is unlikely that the Roman soldiers or the centurion clearly understood everything that Paul had said. So, in order to

find out the truth, he took Paul inside the Roman fortress and planned to have him examined by flogging. But, when Paul emphasized that he was a Roman citizen, they backed off.

20. Did Paul make a wise choice in requesting to speak to the crowd? Did anyone in that crowd seriously listen to Paul's speech? (See Acts 22:1-21.) Was it a good idea for Paul to tell his conversion story? Couldn't he have told the story without mentioning the Gentiles?
21. Before long, it was clear to Claudius Lysias that the problem was not something involving the Roman government but a religious dispute among the Jews. So, he decided to take the case straight to the Sanhedrin. (Acts 22:30; 23:29)
22. Do you think there were any members of the Sanhedrin who personally remembered Paul?

**Acts 23:1-5:** Paul looked straight at the Council and said, "My fellow-Israelites! My conscience is perfectly clear about the way in which I have lived before God to this very day." <sup>2</sup>The High Priest Ananias ordered those who were standing close to Paul to strike him on the mouth. <sup>3</sup>Paul said to him, "God will certainly strike you—you whitewashed wall! You sit there to judge me according to the Law, yet you break the Law by ordering them to strike me!"

<sup>4</sup> The men close to Paul said to him, "You are insulting God's High Priest!"

<sup>5</sup>Paul answered, "My fellow-Israelites, I did not know that he was the High Priest. The scripture says, 'You must not speak evil of the ruler of your people.'" —American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation\** (2nd ed., Acts 23:1–5). New York: American Bible Society.

23. What should we learn from Paul's initial words to the Sanhedrin? Their initial response was to have Paul slapped in the mouth. What does Paul's immediate response tell us about his general temperament?
24. As we know, the high priest was dressed in very traditional clothing. Shouldn't Paul have known that he was the high priest? Many scholars believe that following the temporary blinding on the Damascus road, Paul's eyesight was never completely normal. So, it is possible that he did not see the high priest clearly.
25. Read Acts 23:6-10. Paul knew that the Sanhedrin was composed of both Sadducees and Pharisees. There were many points, not only of general belief but also of specific doctrines over which these two groups fiercely disagreed. For example, the Sadducees believed only in the inspiration of the five books of Moses, called the Pentateuch; they certainly did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. (Matthew 22:23-32) Paul's statement about rising from the dead was not just a clever way of distracting the Sanhedrin from their avowed purpose to destroy Paul. In actual fact, the resurrection from death was the key issue in Paul's gospel. (See Acts 24:20-21; 26:6-8; and 1 Corinthians 15:14-17.) According to Paul, Jesus was alive and well after having been handed over to the Romans, crucified, dying, rising, and returning to heaven.
26. That night Paul was kept in the Roman fortress. In a vision Jesus Himself appeared to Paul with these encouraging words: "Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome." (Acts 23:11, *NKJV*)
27. Paul had already made it very clear that he planned to travel to Rome. (Acts 19:21; Romans 1:13-15; 15:22-29) Did Paul think at that time that he would be released and allowed to travel freely to Rome? Or, did he suspect that he might go there as a prisoner?
28. Meanwhile, a group of 40 Jews hatched a plan to kill Paul. Read Acts 23:12-17. They

wanted the Sanhedrin to call for Paul to come back for further questioning; but, they were determined to make sure that Paul would never get there because they planned to kill him on the way. What do you think led to such extreme religious fanaticism? Did they think that their salvation would be enhanced by killing this champion of Christianity? In the 1<sup>st</sup> century in Judea, revolutionary and nationalistic fervor was common.

29. God provided a surprising way to protect the life of Paul. Apparently, Paul and a sister both had been educated and brought up in Jerusalem. (Acts 22:3) Based on this passage, we know that she had married and had at least one son. The way this story is worded, calling the son a *neaniskos*, (Acts 23:18,22) suggests that he was probably a teenager and that he was given permission to go and talk to Paul. When Paul heard the story of the plot to kill him, he asked that the young man be taken to the Roman centurion with his story.
30. The Roman centurion decided to act quickly to avoid any further risk for rioting. So, he wrote a letter to Felix, the governor of Judea who lived in Caesarea Maritima.

**Acts 23:26-30:** <sup>26</sup>“Claudius Lysias to His Excellency, the governor Felix: Greetings.

<sup>27</sup>The Jews seized this man and were about to kill him. I learnt that he was a Roman citizen, so I went with my soldiers and rescued him. <sup>28</sup>I wanted to know what they were accusing him of, so I took him down to their Council. <sup>29</sup>I found out that he had not done anything for which he deserved to die or be put in prison; the accusation against him had to do with questions about their own law. <sup>30</sup>And when I was informed that there was a plot against him, at once I decided to send him to you. I have told his accusers to make their charges against him before you.”—*Good News Bible*.\*

31. The letter provided Felix with a fair and good report of the situation. As a Roman citizen, Paul had not only the right to a fair trial before a local Roman court but also the right to appeal to Caesar in case he felt it was unfair. (Acts 25:10-11,16)
32. Historically, we know that Felix had a terrible reputation. But, in this case because Paul was a Roman citizen, he was treated fairly. Paul was put under guard but was allowed to have visitors for the next two years while he was there. Why didn't God release him from prison?
33. If you had been an advisor to Paul before this whole business, what would you have changed? Paul had been determined to take that large contribution from the Gentile believers to Jerusalem. How do you suppose the Jewish Christian leaders felt about all that money when they realized that their recommendations had resulted in the arrest of Paul? Were they secretly happy that Paul was out of the picture? What was Luke doing during Paul's imprisonment? He traveled around.

On this occasion, Paul and his companions formally presented to the leaders of the work at Jerusalem the contributions forwarded by the Gentile churches for the support of the poor among their Jewish brethren. The gathering of these contributions had cost the apostle and his fellow workers much time, anxious thought, and wearisome labor. The sum, which far exceeded the expectations of the elders at Jerusalem, represented many sacrifices and even severe privations on the part of the Gentile believers.

These freewill offerings betokened the loyalty of the Gentile converts to the organized work of God throughout the world and should have been received by all with grateful acknowledgment, yet it was apparent to Paul and his companions that even among those before whom they now stood were some who were unable to appreciate the spirit of brotherly love that had prompted

the gifts.—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*\* 399.2-400.0.

34. Paul could not trust even his closest Christian associates. Basically, even the leaders of the church betrayed him.
35. How would Paul's life have been different if he had not gone to Jerusalem at that time? Do you think he would have made it to Rome and Spain as a free man? Is it a good idea to be politically correct? Will it be safe to be politically correct when it is against the law to be a Sabbath-keeping Adventist? How should we relate to church leadership? In the future, we know that the church organization as we know it will become illegal and will disappear. What will we do then? Might it be possible that some church leaders will compromise and by being politically correct suggest that we can continue being Seventh-day Adventists and just cooperate with the government? How should we relate to such an event if it happens?
36. Do you think that Paul was actually guided by the Holy Spirit to go to Jerusalem? Of course, we know that he was warned several times not to go. Why do you think he went anyway? Did God want him to go to Jerusalem? Ellen White told us that God did not authorize him to compromise as he did with the Christian leaders in Jerusalem. At that time, should Paul have graciously refused and taken his friends and left Jerusalem?
37. What kind of challenges prevent you from sharing the gospel with those with whom you work or associate? Are those challenges more a result of your own insecurities?
38. If we carefully follow God's plans for our lives, will we always be kept safe?
39. How can we be certain that we are always doing the right thing, the thing God wants us to do? In Paul's case, church leadership was wrong! Has that happened at other times in history? Remember that the so-called church leadership eventually led to the formation of the Roman Catholic Church.
40. Read Romans 8:28. There are many ways in which God could have prevented Paul from being arrested. Even after Paul was arrested, there were ways in which God could have freed him from Roman bondage. Why didn't He? Does God's will ever include opposition and suffering for the gospel's sake?
41. Paul clearly understood that he had been chosen by God to be an apostle to the Gentiles. Was it a mistake for him to even think of returning to Jerusalem?
42. Do you think the church leaders in Jerusalem thought that they would promote the unity of the church by asking Paul to do what he did? Paul immediately knew that doing what they requested would be dangerous. Have you ever done something that you thought was really unnecessary in order to build relationships? Or, even for the sake of spreading the gospel?
43. Read 1 Corinthians 9:20. Was Paul following his own advice in trying to cooperate with the Jewish Christians?
44. As Seventh-day Adventists, we have been given the challenge of taking the three angels' messages to the entire world. Is there any way we could do that and carry the gospel to the Muslim world and the communist world without facing challenges, hardships, even potential persecution? Are hardships and even persecution a part of the giving of the gospel? What would you have done if you had been Paul?

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