

## **Paul's Arrest in Jerusalem and Transfer to Caesarea** **Acts 21:17-23:35**

Acts 21:17-26 – Paul meets James in Jerusalem (around Pentecost A.D. 57)

This was probably Paul's fourth meeting with James (Gal. 1:18-19, 2:1, 9; Acts 15:12ff.)

James and the elders (but no apostles) of Jerusalem meet Paul and some of his company ("us") with a warm welcome, but hope to resolve some tensions that are under the surface

Both have had very different, yet ultimately fruitful ministries and Paul has the chance to share what God has done through Paul among the Gentiles just as James shares the fruit of Jewish evangelism in Judea

The tension is not about doctrine (see Acts 15) or ethics (the moral law), but rather about cultures, customs and traditions (e.g. circumcision and "our customs" – but those customs and traditions are potentially explosive matters if mishandled)

Four men under a vow (i.e. a Nazirite vow, see Acts 18:18ff.) – not sure what this is all about, but the point is clear, if Paul does this, people will see that he respects and follows their customs too

The Nazirite vow includes not merely abstaining from wine, avoiding contact with a corpse, leaving one's hair uncut, but at the end of the vow the person shaved their head and offered it at the Temple and presented various offerings (a year-old lamb and ewe, a ram, bread, etc.) That Paul had to pay for all of these things was no small burden.

The purification rites that Paul agrees to probably are not linked to vow of these four men, but purification for Paul who had been traveling in Gentile (impure) territories

The Gentile Christians who have come with Paul are merely reminded to follow the guidelines set at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:19-20), an affirmation that this is not an assertion of the necessity of following the Law of Moses for salvation

Paul agrees and begins purification so that he can enter the Temple in Jerusalem without offense

Acts 21:27-36 – Paul Arrested in the Temple

The main instigators against Paul were not native Jerusalemites, but Jews from Asia (Paul's enemies stick to him like glue)

Accusations: 1) he teaches against "the people (i.e. Jews), the law, and this place (i.e. the Temple)" and 2) he brought Greeks (e.g. Trophimus) into the Temple (past the outer court where Gentiles were allowed entrance, see Eph. 2:14)

Accusations should sound familiar by now (cf. Acts 6:11, 13-14 and Luke 21:5-7; 22:66-71) even though they aren't true (Acts 21:29)

As the mob drags Paul outside of the Temple (with the doors shut!) to kill him, Paul is saved by the Roman tribune (named Claudius Lysias, see Acts 23:26; 24:22) backed up with Roman soldiers

Paul was arrested by the Roman tribune (in charge of 1,000 troops) (in fulfillment of Acts 21:11), but he couldn't understand what Paul had done that was wrong because the crowd was so confusing

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Paul is brought in chains to the Roman barracks – the Antonia Fortress just outside the Temple – but even here Paul must be protected from the raucous mob who cry out for Paul to be condemned to death (cf. Luke 23:18, John 19:15; Acts 22:22)

Acts 21:37-22:21 – Paul's Defense before the people

Just before Paul is about to be brought into the barracks, Paul asks to address the crowd

Here we learn that the tribune mistakenly thought Paul was an Egyptian terrorist who stirred up a revolt with a following of 4,000 men (known as the Sicarii)

This is the second account of Paul's conversion story, this time his words rather than Luke's narration (cf. Acts 9:1-19 and 26:12-18)

Paul addresses the people in Aramaic (a Hebrew dialect, that is, the common language of the people and not Greek) and assures them that he is thoroughly Jewish by his birth and upbringing, zealous for God's people and familiar to the Sanhedrin, but God confronted him, blinded him and appointed him to be a witness for him through Ananias (another committed and well-respected Jew). When Paul returned to Jerusalem the Lord appeared to him again in the Temple and told him to leave Jerusalem and made him an apostle to the Gentiles.

Paul's loyalty to the Jews shouldn't be questioned. Paul's great "change" was not Paul's idea, but God's commission

Acts 22:22-29 – Paul Spared Flogging Because of His Roman Citizenship

It's unclear whether Paul's speech is done, but the crowd is done listening and shout for his death – the thing they find hardest to swallow is this mission to Gentiles, which to them is a sure sign of the proof of their suspicions

The military tribune orders Paul to be flogged (a normal interrogation technique), but just as they are ready to whip him, Paul questions the legality of flogging a Roman citizen (another piece of information the tribune hadn't known)

Paul is spared from flogging, yet still imprisoned until an inquiry into Paul's "offenses" can be held – at this point, keeping Paul in prison was probably as much for his own safety as it was a punishment

Acts 22:30-23:11 – Paul Before the Jewish Council (Sanhedrin)

Instead of asking the crowd for Paul's crimes, the tribune summons the Jewish council (the Sanhedrin)

Paul addresses the Council – people Paul appears not to be familiar with

Paul speaks to them as brothers, professing his devotion to God and a clean conscience, when suddenly the high priest Ananias orders him to be struck

Paul very swiftly rebukes Ananias for taking this action, but the others rebuke Paul for speaking so harshly to the chief priest, to which Paul pleads ignorance

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We haven't met Ananias before (he would have been chief priest during the time of the Jerusalem Council), but he was chief priest from A.D. 47-59, Josephus describes him as popular with the people, but corrupt, and ultimately a collaborator with Rome

Next Paul, understanding that there were both Pharisees and Sadducees on the Sanhedrin, expresses his loyalty to the Pharisees (I *am* a Pharisee!) and claims it is his belief in the resurrection that is the reason why he is on trial

This effectively divides the Sanhedrin (cf. Luke 20:27-40), because the Pharisees are open to the fact that an angel or spirit could have truly spoken to Paul ("we find nothing wrong with this man!")

The division reaches the point where the tribune fears it will turn to violence and once again removes Paul from their presence

At the end of this, Jesus once again appears to Paul and encourages him (cf. Acts 18:9), telling him that he must testify in Rome as he has in Jerusalem (of course, it's going to take a couple of years for this to come to fruition)

### Acts 23:12-22 – A Plot to Kill Paul Made and Foiled

A group of about 40 Jews make a plot – based on the story so far, we are probably to understand this as the Asian Jews who began this whole plan (Acts 21:27) – binding themselves by oath to see Paul dead

The oath the conspirators take is that Paul be anathematized, literally devoted to destruction, which brings to mind God's command to destroy the Canaanites (Deut. 13:16; 20:17)

The conspirators also go to the chief priests and elders and reveal their intentions and ask for their cooperation to lure Paul out in the open where they will kill him

Paul's nephew (sister's son) heard this plan and rushed to tell Paul (despite the fact that he's in custody he was allowed visitors, as opposed to his time in Philippian jail (Acts 16:2)) who in turn has him tell the Roman tribune about the plot

### Acts 23:23-35 – Paul Taken to Felix, Governor of Judea

Believing Paul's nephew's story, the tribune prepares a massive protective squad (200 soldiers, 70 horsemen and 200 spearmen) to escort Paul to Caesarea during the night (3<sup>rd</sup> hour of the night = 9 p.m.) where Paul will be given over to the Roman governor, Felix

The threat against Paul is also a clear threat against Roman soldiers and the general peace of the city

The tribune (Claudius Lysias) sends a letter of instruction to Felix to explain why he was sent

Caesarea was the Roman capital of the whole province of Judea, thus the home of the residence of the governor (procurator)

Antonius Felix governed for about 7 or 8 years from A.D. 52 and was known for being ruthless in stomping out Jewish uprisings, Tacitus (a Roman historian) describes him as "practicing every kind of cruelty and lust, he wielded royal power with the instincts of a slave." He was not exactly

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sympathetic to Jews, which leaves open a big question whether he will be sympathetic to Paul (and thus Christians)

Felix was eventually removed from his governorship by Emperor Nero for poorly handling a Jewish uprising in Caesarea during the time of Paul's imprisonment there

Felix is addressed as his "Excellency" – same form of address that is used to the recipient of the Books of Luke (1:3)/Acts

Paul's Roman citizenship is affirmed, as is Paul's general innocence. Claudius Lysias does not believe there is anything more going on than a dispute over Jewish law, but due process is supposed to be followed and so now an official trial is now being passed off to Felix and Paul's accusers are supposed to appear in Caesarea before him

Antipatris – about 35 miles NW of Jerusalem, about another 27 miles away from Caesarea

Felix receives Paul, asks where he is from (to establish Felix's jurisdiction) and promises to give Paul a hearing as soon as his accusers arrive