

Bible Study

Gods Word in Focus



Week Fifty Three

Acts of the Apostles

Paul in Jerusalem
(21:15-23:22)

Welcomed by Brethren

Paul and his companions proceeded to Jerusalem. They were accompanied by some of the disciples from Caesarea. They were to lodge with Mnason of Cyprus, who was an early disciple. They then met with the Jerusalem brethren, who met them gladly. The next day, Paul and his companions met with James and the elders to give a description of the "things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry." The brethren glorified the Lord upon hearing these things. James and the elders then expounded to Paul the problem he faced. Many myriads of Jews had believed, and they were zealous for the law. They had been informed that Paul taught Jews, living among the Gentiles, to forsake Moses - that is, not to circumcise their children, nor to keep the customs. They expected these Jewish believers to learn that Paul was in Jerusalem. James and the elders gave Paul a plan - he should accompany the four men who had taken a vow; purify himself; pay their expenses in an effort to show that Paul kept the law (customs) as a Jew. They reiterated (cf. Acts 15) that the believing Gentiles were not subject to the law.

Arrested by the Jews

Paul followed the plan from James and the elders. He took the men and was purified with them. They then entered the temple. Jews from Asia saw Paul in the temple. They stirred up the crowd and seized Paul. They cried out charges as James and the elders had expected. Additionally, they charged that Paul had brought Greeks into the temple and had defiled the place. They had seen Trophimus, the Ephesian, with Paul in the city and "supposed" that he had brought him into the temple. The Jews seized Paul and dragged him out of the temple. As they sought to kill him, word came to the Roman commander about the uproar. When the Jews saw the commander and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul. The commander took Paul and bound him with chains. He asked what he had done, but he could not get an answer from the mob. He then took him to the barracks. When they reached the stairs of the barracks, Paul had to be carried due to the violence of the mob. Paul asked to speak to the commander. The commander asked him if he could speak Greek. The commander also asked if he was the Egyptian leader of the assassins. Paul replied that he was a Jew from Tarsus in Cilicia, "a citizen of no mean city." Paul then requested to speak to the people. The commander gave Paul permission to speak to the people. Paul then began to speak to them in Hebrew.

Paul's Defense

Paul addressed the crowd as "brethren and fathers" in Hebrew. The mob became very quiet when they heard that. Paul began his defense by providing his background: He was a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia; he was brought up in Jerusalem at the "feet of Gamaliel;" he was taught "according to the strictness of our father's law;" and he was zealous toward God, just like them. Paul added that he had persecuted the Way to the death. He bound and delivered men and women to prison. He acted under the high priest's and elders' authority. Paul called upon their witness for himself. He had received letters from them to travel to Damascus to bring those of the Way back to Jerusalem for punishment. Paul then described the Lord's appearance to him on the road to Damascus. At about noon, a bright light shined around Paul. He fell to the ground. The Lord asked him why he was persecuting Him. The Lord identified Himself as Jesus of Nazareth. Paul asked, "What shall I do, Lord?" The Lord told him to go into Damascus and he would be told what to do. He was led by the hand into Damascus by his companions, because he could not see. Paul then described his obedience to the gospel when taught by Ananias. Ananias came to Paul. He restored his sight. Ananias told Paul that he had been chosen to "know His will, and see the Just One, and hear the voice of His mouth." Paul was to be "His witness to all men of what you have seen and heard." Ananias told Paul what to do to be forgiven of his sins. He asked Paul, "Why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord." Next, Paul described how the Lord had sent him to the Gentiles. Paul returned to Jerusalem. He was praying in the temple, and was in a trance. The Lord appeared to him and told him to quickly depart from Jerusalem for the Jews would "not receive your testimony concerning Me." Paul attempted to explain to the Lord that he could make the Jews understand. He responded that the Jews knew of his persecution of those of the Way. He added that he had even consented to the death of Stephen, holding the killer's clothes. The Lord told Paul of His plans for him. Paul was to depart. He was sent far away to the Gentiles.

The Response of the People

The Jews listened until the Gentiles were mentioned. When the Jews heard that he was sent to the Gentiles, they raised their voices, "...he is not fit to live!" They tore their clothes and threw dust in the air. At this point, the Romans prepared to examine Paul under scourging. The Roman commander ordered that Paul be brought into the barracks. The commander wanted to know why they shouted so against Paul. He ordered that Paul should be examined under scourging. The soldiers bound Paul with thongs. Paul asked the centurion standing nearby, "Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman, and uncondemned?" The centurion told this to the commander. The commander asked Paul if he was a Roman citizen, and Paul affirmed that he was. The commander then indicated that he had purchased his citizenship at a great price; however, Paul noted that he was a Roman by birth. The soldiers were frightened by this. They were afraid because they had bound a Roman citizen, and they were about to scourge him.

Paul Before the Sanhedrin

When Paul was before the Sanhedrin council, he stated that he had lived in "all good conscience before God." Ananias, the high priest, commanded that he be struck on the mouth. Paul responded, not knowing that he was the high priest, "God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! For you sit to judge me according to the law, and do you command me to be struck contrary to the law?" Those standing nearby asked Paul if he would "revile" the high priest. Paul then quoted the scriptures, "You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people." Paul recognized that there were Sadducees and Pharisees present in the Sanhedrin. He made it known that he was a Pharisee, and that he was being judged concerning "the hope and resurrection of the dead." This caused a dissension among the Sanhedrin, as the Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection and the Pharisees did believe in the resurrection. The scribes of the Pharisees spoke out that they found nothing evil in Paul. The Roman commander became afraid that harm would come to Paul, so he ordered the soldiers to take Paul back to the barracks.

The Plot Against Paul

The following night, the Lord appeared and spoke to Paul. He was to be the Lord's witness at Rome, as he had testified for Him in Jerusalem. Some Jews then planned to kill Paul. More than forty Jews banded together and took an oath to kill him before they ate or drank anything. The plotting Jews went to the chief priests and elders to present their plan. They requested that the chief priests and elders would contact the commander, and have Paul appear before the council again for further inquiry. The forty or more Jews would lie in wait to kill him along the way. Paul's nephew heard of the ambush plot. He went to Paul in the barracks and told him what he heard. Paul had his nephew taken to the commander. The commander took him aside and heard the plot. The commander told the young man to tell no one that they had spoken about the plot. Paul's nephew then departed from the commander.