

## 75. Paul Was Seized in Jerusalem

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand why the elders of the church at Jerusalem asked Paul to take a Jewish vow. We saw that Paul was willing to follow their advice, because he was willing to do whatever was best to spread the Gospel among both the Jews and the Gentiles. We have also seen that Paul had been warned in every city that he would face bondage and imprisonment in Jerusalem. Today, we will see how those warnings were fulfilled.

Acts 21:27-30 says, “Now when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews from Asia, seeing him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd and laid hands on him, crying out, ‘Men of Israel, help! This is the man who teaches all *men* everywhere against the people, the law, and this place; and furthermore he also brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place.’ (For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.) And all the city was disturbed; and the people ran together, seized Paul, and dragged him out of the temple; and immediately the doors were shut.” Paul had spent time on the third and the seventh day in the temple to fulfill the Jewish vow that he had taken. On the seventh day, some of the Jews from Asia saw Paul in the temple.

Paul had spent about three years in Ephesus which was the main city of Asia. After three months, many of the Jews had turned against Paul. Later, the silversmiths that made images of the idol Diana also stirred up the Gentiles against Paul. As a result, it was Jews from Asia that suddenly stirred up the whole crowd in the temple courtyard against Paul. Then, the Jews from Asia seized Paul and cried out to the other Jews in the temple courtyard, “Men of Israel, help! This is the man who teaches all men everywhere against the people, the law, and this place; and furthermore he also brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place.” We see that the Jews from Asia made four accusations against Paul. They said that everywhere Paul went he taught against the Jewish people. They said that he taught against the law. They said that he taught against the temple. They said that he had brought Greeks into the temple and defiled the temple.

The Jews from Asia has seen Trophimus who was from Ephesus with Paul in Jerusalem. Those Jews were in Jerusalem just like Paul for the celebration of Pentecost. They immediately assumed that Paul had also brought Trophimus into the temple. Here, we see that the Jews from Asia saw an opportunity to take out their anger against Paul. Word quickly spread through the city. As a result, the people began to run together to the temple. Then, the Jews seized Paul and started dragging him out of the temple. Once they had him out of the temple, they immediately shut the doors of the temple.

Acts 21:31-36 says, “Now as they were seeking to kill him, news came to the commander of the garrison that all Jerusalem was in an uproar. He immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down to them. And when they saw the commander and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul. Then the commander came near and took him, and commanded *him* to be bound with two chains; and he asked who he was and what he had done. And some among the multitude cried one thing and some another. So when he could not ascertain the truth because of the tumult, he commanded

him to be taken into the barracks. When he reached the stairs, he had to be carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the mob. For the multitude of the people followed after, crying out, ‘Away with him!’” Here, we see that the goal of the Jews was to kill Paul quickly before anyone could stop them.

The commander of the garrison of Roman soldiers in Jerusalem heard that the entire city of Jerusalem was in an uproar and he was afraid that a riot might quickly start. Fort Antonia, where the soldiers lived, was right next to the temple courtyard and overlooked the grounds. As a result, the commander quickly took all of the soldiers available and rushed to the place where they had just dragged Paul from the temple. When the Jews saw the commander, they immediately stopped beating Paul. Then, the commander came to Paul. He assumed that Paul had committed some great crime and ordered the soldiers to bind him with two chains. Then, the commander asked the people who this man was and what he had done.

The people began to shout different things, because most of them had no idea what Paul had done. Here, we see one of the things that happens when people make assumptions. They react even though they do not know the truth. The people were trying to kill Paul and most of them had no idea if he had even committed a crime. This was forbidden by the Jewish law. Deuteronomy 19:15 says, “‘One witness shall not rise against a man concerning any iniquity or any sin that he commits; by the mouth of two or three witnesses the matter shall be established.’” The following verses, in Deuteronomy, also required that the judges had to make diligent inquiry before anything was done to make certain that there were no false witnesses.

The Roman commander could not determine the truth because of everything that was happening at that moment. As a result, the commander decided that Paul should be taken into the barracks. The commander realized that as long as the people were so angry, both Paul and his own soldiers were in danger. As the commander and the soldiers started to take Paul to the barracks, the whole crowd followed them. The mob was so violent that it became necessary for the soldiers to carry Paul to protect him from the crowd as they approached the stairs that led into the barracks.

The leaders of the mob were eager to kill Paul. Even though the Roman soldiers were carrying him, the people did not stop. Instead, they continued to follow the soldiers as they carried Paul. They were crying out, “Away with him!” This was the same thing that the Jews had said about Christ. John 19:15 says, “‘But they cried out, ‘Away with *Him*, away with *Him*! Crucify Him!’ Pilate said to them, ‘Shall I crucify your King?’ The chief priests answered, ‘We have no king but Caesar!’” Here, we see that the leaders of this mob had the same hatred for Paul that had been shown against Christ. Religion often uses power and control to get what it desires. Mature Christianity will always act out of love. Paul had earlier said in Acts 21:13, “‘Then Paul answered, ‘What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.’” Paul had such a love for both Jews and Gentiles that he was willing and ready to die for his faith.

Acts 21:37-40 says, “‘Then as Paul was about to be led into the barracks, he said to the commander, ‘May I speak to you?’ He replied, ‘Can you speak Greek? Are you not the Egyptian who some

time ago stirred up a rebellion and led the four thousand assassins out into the wilderness?’ But Paul said, ‘I am a Jew from Tarsus, in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city; and I implore you, permit me to speak to the people.’ So when he had given him permission, Paul stood on the stairs and motioned with his hand to the people. And when there was a great silence, he spoke to *them* in the Hebrew language, saying.” We will see in our next two topics what Paul said that day.

Here, we see that Paul spoke to the commander as he was about to be taken into the barracks. Paul said in Greek, “May I speak to you?” Greek was the language of the educated people, not the language of criminals. As a result, the Roman commander was surprised. The Roman commander had made the assumption that Paul was the Egyptian that had earlier stirred up a rebellion. That Egyptian had four thousand followers that he led out into the wilderness. That Egyptian had promised to drive out the Romans. He had been defeated and several hundred of his followers had been killed. However, he and the rest had escaped and, like terrorist groups today, would kill individuals whenever they had the opportunity.

Paul explained to the Roman commander that he was a Jew from the city of Tarsus in the Roman province of Cilicia. The city of Tarsus was a well-known city, because it had one of the leading universities in the Roman Empire. He said that he was a citizen of a well-known country. He would explain later to the chief captain that he was a Roman citizen, because he was the son of a Roman citizen. Then, Paul made a request of the commander. He asked if he could have permission to speak to the people. The commander then gave him the permission that he had requested.

Paul was standing on the stairs that led into the Roman fortress. Since he was on the stairs, he was above the people and they could all see him. Then, Paul motioned to the crowd of Jews that had followed the Roman soldiers as they brought Paul to the fortress. When Paul motioned with his hand, the crowd suddenly became very quiet. The Jews in the land of Israel during the New Testament time spoke the modern Hebrew (Aramaic) language rather than the original Hebrew. 2 Kings 18:26 says, “Then Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, Shebna, and Joah said to *the* Rabshakeh, ‘Please speak to your servants in Aramaic, for we understand *it*; and do not speak to us in Hebrew in the hearing of the people who *are* on the wall.’” From this verse, the Aramaic language had already become common among the leaders of the Jews more than six hundred years earlier.

In this passage, we see that several people had made assumptions rather than asking questions to learn the truth. Both the Jews and the Roman commander had made assumptions and we see that Paul was nearly killed as a result. We want to help our physical and spiritual children realize the danger of making assumptions, because such assumptions can cause many problems. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to seek the truth instead of making assumptions.