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Paul's Arrest in Jerusalem
21: 27-36

57 AD

Paul's arrest in Jerusalem DIG: Paul spent more time in Asia than anywhere else (19:8-10). Why might these men be especially upset when they see Paul? Gentiles were forbidden beyond the middle wall of separation under penalty of death. Were these accusations against Paul true? Compare the reaction against Paul in verses 30-31 with that against Stephen in 6:11-13 twenty-five years earlier. What does this tell you about the relationship between Messianic Jews and unbelieving Jews during this period? What memories of lynch mobs does Paul **have (**see **20:23** and **21:13)?**

REFLECT: How consistently do you keep up with the persecution of fellow believers in nations around the world? Why is it important to pray for them? What difference does it make? Which groups or cults do you think are the most critical of believers today? What could be done to lessen the animosity? What can you do to help? Have you stopped to ponder how you would react under life-threatening conditions, when one word of renouncement in Yeshua Messiah would get you off the hook? What makes endurance possible? What would you die for?

This marks a major turning point in the life and ministry of **Paul**. Since **his** conversion on the road to Damascus (**to see link click Bc – Sha'ul Turns from Murder to Messiah**), **he** had ministered freely (except for brief imprisonments such as in **Philippi**). But from this point forward in **Acts, Paul** will be a prisoner. The prophecy of **Agabus** would come true (see **Ck – Paul Went on to Jerusalem Despite Warnings**). The turn of events, however, did not end his ministry. No longer free to travel, he became an **ambassador in chains (Ephesians 6:20)** for **Yeshua Messiah**. As a free man, **he** preached the gospel to throughout the Roman world. As a prisoner, **he** preached the gospel to Roman officials – possibly including the emperor himself. And like John Bunyan, who wrote *The Pilgrim's Progress* while

in the Bedford jail, **Paul** wrote four New Covenant books **(Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon)** during **his** imprisonment at Rome.[509]



The attack of the mob: The seven-day purification process required a cleansing on **the third and seventh days (Numbers 19:2)**. Likely, it was on the prescribed **seventh day** that **Paul** returned to **the Temple** with **the four Jewish men to complete** the ritual**.** But **Jacob's** plan for reinforcing **Paul's** as a loyal **Jew** backfired (see **Cn – Paul's Advice from Jacob and the Elders at Jerusalem**). There, **he** encountered some old enemies, **the** unbelieving **Jewish leaders from Asia** who had come to **Jerusalem** to celebrate Shavu'ot. **They** were likely from **Ephesus**, since **they** recognized **Trophimus**, who was a resident of that **city (**see **verse 29** below**)**. Since **Paul** had ministered in **Ephesus** for three years so **they** had no trouble recognizing **him**. **They' saw Paul in the Temple compound and began stirring up the whole crowd. They grabbed him, shouting, "Men of Isra'el, help (21:27)! They** made it appear that **Paul** had committed an act of blasphemy, and called for help in dealing with it. To **stir up the crowd** against **Paul**, **they** made **three false accusations** similar to the ones made against **Stephen** (see **Aw – Stephen's Testimony to the Sanhedrin**).

First, **they** said that **Stephen** was an enemy of **Moshe (7:17-37)** and **their** religion. In the same way, **they** said that **Paul taught all men everywhere** to be **against our people (21:28a).** But the truth was what **Paul taught** was that being a **Jew** by itself would not save. Obviously, Paul was no enemy of **the Jewish people**, as **Romans 9:1-5** and **10:1** make clear. Nowhere did **Paul** teach **Jewish believers** to forsake **their** customs – merely that **Gentiles** not be pressured to observe them.

Secondly, **they** accused **Paul** of false **teaching against the Torah (21:28b)**, like **they** had accused **Stephen (6:13b** and **7:38-43)**. That was an especially serious accusation at that time, since **many tens-of-thousands** of **Jewish believers** in **Jerusalem** were **zealous for the Torah (21:20b).** Originally a celebration of the first-fruits of the harvest, in **Paul's** day **Shavu'ot** had come to be a celebration of the giving of **the Torah** on Mount Sinai. Charging **Paul** at that time with **teaching** against **the Torah** was sure to infuriate **the crowd**. But the truth was that **Paul** taught that the 613 commandments of **Moshe** were no longer binding on believing **Jews** or **Gentiles**.

Thirdly, **they** said that **Stephen taught against the Temple (6:13a** and **7:44-50)**, and in the same way, **they** accused **Paul** of **speaking against this place (21:28c)**. Because **the Jewish people** revered **the Temple**, an accusation of blaspheming or defiling **it** was also a very serious matter. **Yeshua** was also accused in the same way **(Mark 14:57-58)**, which helped lead to **His death**. **Paul's** accusers undoubtedly hoped for a similar result in **his** case. The truth, however, was that **Paul** taught that **the Temple** was not the *only* place to worship **ADONAI**, and moreover, **Paul himself** honored **the Temple** as **he** was worshiping there before **their** eyes. These charges couldn't have been more serious.

To substantiate these general accusations, **Paul's** accusers came up with a specific one, crying out to **the crowd, "Besides, he has even brought Greeks** past **the middle wall of separation in the Temple** (see **Cn – Paul's Advice from Jacob and the Elders at Jerusalem**) **and defiled this holy place" (21:28d)!** False or not, the accusations spread like wildfire This, however, was not a surprise to **Paul** because **the Ruach ha-Kodesh** warned **him** earlier **that bondage and afflictions awaited him in Jerusalem (20:22).**

The charges were unfounded, and **Luke** makes that clear. **For the** unbelieving **Jews had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city** streets **with him, and they assumed that Paul had brought him into the Temple.** But that was not true, in fact they never actually saw **Trophimus** in **the Temple** compound. **They** made the assumption that since **Paul** was with **Trophimus**, a **Gentile**, publicly in the streets of **Jerusalem**, **he** would not hesitate to bring **him** past **the middle wall of separation** in **the Temple** compound.[510]

The uproar quickly spread. However, Rome demanded civil order in its provinces. A riot was a serious breach of *the Pax Romana* (Roman peace) carrying serious consequences. **The whole city was stirred up, and the people rushed**

together in the vicinity of **the Temple. Their** intent was to **drag Paul** to a place where **he** could be stoned as **they** had done with **Stephen** (see **Ax – The Stoning of Stephen**), so **they grabbed Paul and drug him out** past **the middle wall of separation,** to **the** outer **court** of the **Gentiles**. At that point the chief of **the Temple** guard **shut the** Beautiful **Gate** to prevent any human blood being spilled in the Court of the Women, and thus defile **the** holy **Place (21:29-30).**[511] **The mob** would have succeeded in **dragging Paul** out of **the Temple** compound and stoning **him** to **death**, but **ADONAI** providentially intervened to protect **His servant**. Help arrived in the form of Roman **soldiers**!

It is important to stress that at the beginning of this legal process **Paul** was arrested by the Romans, and not by the **Temple** guard. Had the latter happened, **he** would have been tried and sentenced by the Sanhedrin. But **Paul** had no intention of leaving Roman jurisdiction; **he** would fight any attempt by the Sanhedrin to have **him** extradited. Even if **he** had to appeal to Caesar, **he** would not accept "justice" at the hands of **his** fellow **Jews**. **He** knew very well what had happened to **Yeshua**, and even more to the point **he** knew what had recently happened to **Stephen**, and probably the killing of **Jacob** the brother of **John** as well **(12:2)**. [512]

The arrest of the Romans: The headquarters of the Roman occupation forces was Fortress Antonia, located on a precipice overlooking **the Temple** grounds. **As they were trying to kill him, the news came to the commander of the cohort** of Roman **soldier**s **that all Jerusalem was in chaos (21:31).** In **Acts 23:26**, **Luke** gives **his** name as **Claudius** (a Latin name because it was from Emperor **Claudius** that **his** citizenship was purchased) **Lysias** (**his** Greek name after **he** purchased **Roman** citizenship). Once again, **Luke** artfully introduces a character that will play a major role in the next two chapters. **Lysias** was the ranking Roman official in **Jerusalem** when the governor (whose official residence was in Caesarea) was not in **the City**. **He** was therefore the Roman official most concerned with maintaining order in **Yerushalayim**. During major religious holidays, such a Shavu'ot, the Romans were especially watchful. Thus, it didn't take the alert sentries long to spot the riot breaking out below them, and they had easy access right into **the court** of **the Gentiles** where **Paul** was being beaten.

Having received the report, **Lysias** wasted no time in exercising **his** responsibility to maintain order and hurried straight down to the Court of the Gentiles. **Immediately he took a cohort** of 500 Roman **soldiers and centurions and** immediately **rushed down to them.** This was the same number of Roman

soldiers that arrested **Jesus** in the Garden of Gethsemane (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Le – Jesus Betrayed, Arrested and Deserted**)**.** The massive show of force broke up the riot. **Upon seeing the commander and the soldiers, the Jews** suddenly **stopped beating Paul. Then the commander came up** and **arrested Paul,** incorrectly assuming that **Paul** was an **Egyptian** terrorist (see **Cp – Paul's Testimony on the Temple Steps**). Then **Lysias ordered him to be bound with two chains** (meaning **Paul** was handcuffed to **a soldier** on either side)**,** thus the prophecy of **Agabus** in **21:11** was fulfilled. **And they** immediately **began investigating what he had done. Some in the mob shouted one thing, and some another,** being confused as to why **they** were there**. As Lysias could not determine the facts because of the uproar, he ordered him to be brought into headquarters** in Fortress Antonia **(21:32-34).** There **he** intended to question **the apostle** in private, and if necessary, use torture to extract a confession.



The **soldiers** began escorting **Paul** through **the** enraged **mob** however, renewed **their** rioting and made it impossible for **the prisoner** to walk safely up **the stairway** to the barracks. The mood of the scene is much like the riot in **Ephesus** in **19:1-40**. Therefore, **Paul had to be carried by the** Roman **soldiers.** In mindless, faceless fury, losing all sense of fear of **the soldiers**, **the mob** pushed and shoved, desperately trying to get to **Paul**. All the while **they kept shouting, "Away with him,"** that is, **"kill him" (21:35-36)!**[513] With those words, the majority of Jerusalem had reacted against **Yeshua**, **Peter**, **John**, **Stephen** and

Paul. For our study in **Acts**, this is the final, key, rejection of the gospel.[514]

Later, in **his** letter to the church at **Philippi**, **Paul** made a reference to wanting the fellowship of **sharing in Christ's sufferings (Philippians 3:10)**. **Paul** received **Messiah** by faith, knew **Yeshua** by name, but came face-to-face with **Jesus** through experience. **He** spoke of **Him** through prayer. **He** grew in **Him** through the Word. However, this particular day, **Paul** experienced a fellowship **in His sufferings** unlike any **He** had ever encountered.

Luke seems to be drawing a deliberate parallel between **the sufferings** of **Messiah** and **the sufferings** of **His apostle Paul**. Earlier we have seen the similarity between **their** respective journeys to **Jerusalem** (see **Ck – Paul Went On to Jerusalem Despite Warnings**). Now, **Luke** takes it a bit further, although, of course, **Paul's sufferings** were not redemptive like **Yeshua's**. Nevertheless, first, both **Jesus** and **Paul** were rejected by **their** own **people (Luke 11:14-15; Acts 21:36)**, and arrested without cause and imprisoned; secondly, **they** were both unjustly accused and willfully misrepresented by false witnesses; thirdly, **both** were slapped in the face in court **(23:2)**; fourthly, **they** were both hapless victims of secret **Jewish** plots **(23:12ff)**; fifthly, **both** heard the terrifying noise of a frenzied **mob** screaming**, "Away with him" (21:36)**; and lastly, both **Jesus** and **Paul** were subject to a series of five trials (**Jesus** by **Annas**, **the Sanhedrin**, **King Herod Antipas**, and twice by **Pontus Pilate**; **Paul** by **the crowd**, **the Sanhedrin**, **King Herod Agrippa II** and by the two governors, **Felix** and **Festus**).[515]

Both **Messiah** and **Paul** knew suffering was inevitable. Both **Christ** and **Paul** knew they would end up giving **their** lives – **One** as **Savior** of the world, the other as **His** servant. Both grieved over **Jerusalem**. Both felt compelled to return to **the holy City**. Both knew the horror of being swept up by an angry **mob**. Both experience the newness of every rejection. But no matter how many times it comes, on can hardly prepare for people who want you **dead**. **Paul** did not know when it would happen to **him**, but **he** did know **his Savior**. As **the apostle** fellowshipped in **His sufferings**, **he** had never known **Him** better.

Lord, *it encourages my heart to know that* ***just as the sufferings of Messiah overflow into me, so my comfort overflows through Messiah. As I share in the sufferings, so I will share in the comfort (Second Corinthians 1:5*** *and* ***7).*** *So,* ***even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me: Your rod and Your staff comfort me (Psalm 23:4).***[516]