Paul's Crash-Landing in Jerusalem

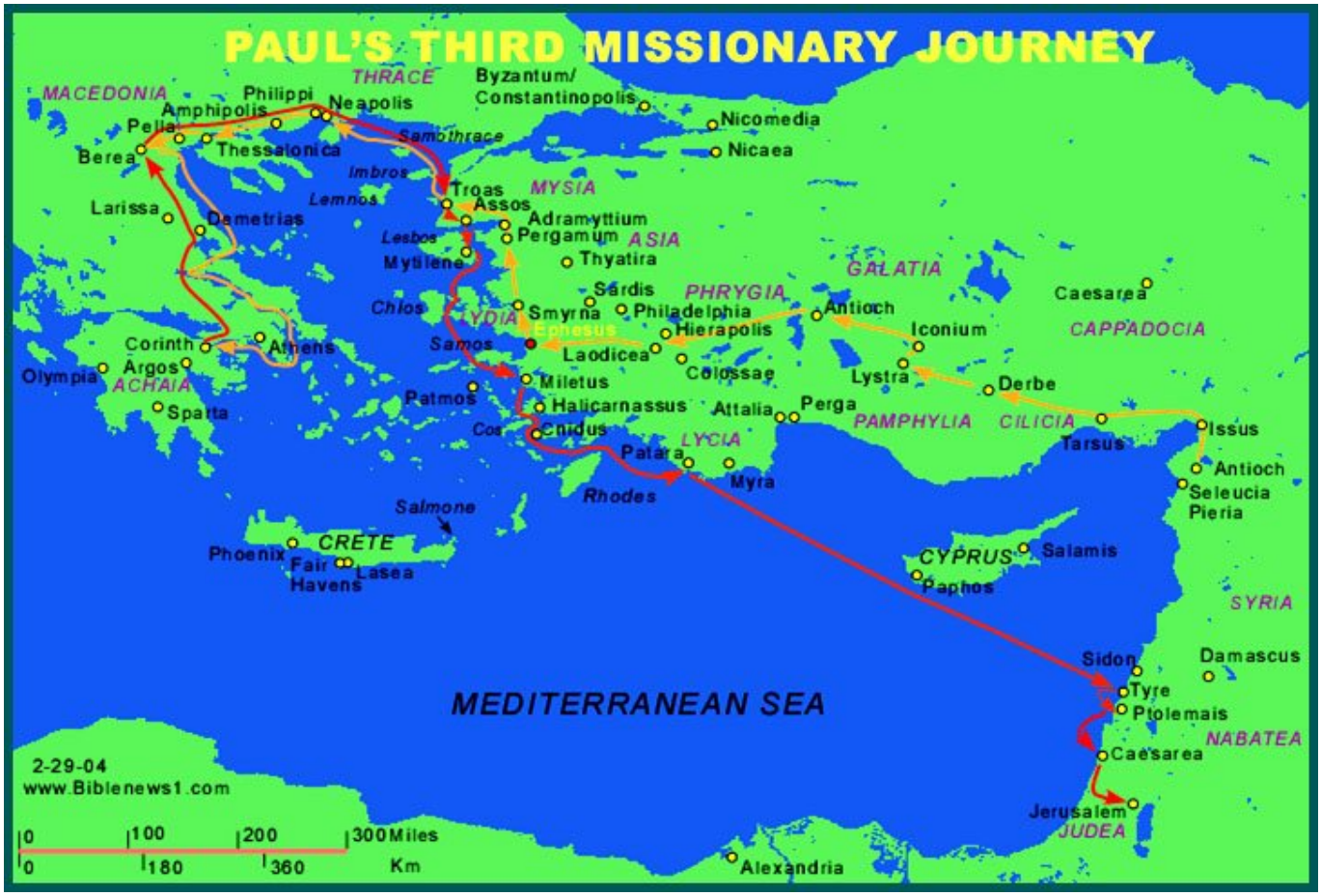
V 1 Now it came to pass, that when we had departed from them and set sail, running a straight course we came to Cos, the following day to Rhodes, and from there to Patara.

"Had departed from them." **Or "torn away from them" seems to be the original meaning. It was difficult to part from the Ephesian elders.**

"Cos." **A city and an island.** ***"Rhodes."*** **An island southeast of Cos in whose harbor stood the Colossus of Rhodes, a 30-meter statue to the Greek god of the sun, Helios, and one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.** ***"Patara."*** **A busy port city in the south of Asia Minor (Turkey). Each port marked the end of a day's sailing. The ship did not sail at night as that was dangerous so near the coast.**

V 2 And finding a ship sailing over to Phoenicia, we went aboard and set sail.

"Sailing over to Phoenicia." **Realizing he would never reach Jerusalem in time for the Pentecost Feast if they kept hugging the coast, Paul decided to risk sailing directly across the Mediterranean Sea to Tyre of Phoenecia on a bigger ship.**



Third Missionary Journey

V 3 When we had sighted Cyprus, we passed it on the left, sailed to Syria, and landed at Tyre; for there the ship was to unload her cargo.

"When we had sighted Cyprus." **Seeing Cyprus to the north (*"on the left"*), they did not land there but *"sailed to Syria, and landed at Tyre".* The voyage from Patara to Tyre normally took five days.**

V 4 And finding disciples, we stayed there seven days. They told Paul through the Spirit not to go up to Jerusalem.

"Finding disciples." **The church in Tyre probably was founded by those who fled Jerusalem after Stephen's martyrdom, a persecution that Paul himself had instigated many years earlier.**

"Who said to Paul through the Spirit, that he should not go up to Jerusalem." **Paul gets another warning from the disciples in Tyre. Note that, when others received messages against making the Jerusalem trip, the word *"Spirit"* is capitalized; this is because their messages came from the Spirit of God. But when Paul was *"bound in the spirit to Jerusalem"* (20:22), the word *"spirit"* was not capitalized by the translators – an indication that Paul's "spirit" and the Holy "Spirit" were not that much in sync with each other.**

V 5-6 When we had come to the end of those days, we departed and went on our way; and they all accompanied us, with wives and children, till we were out of the city. And we knelt down on the shore and prayed.
When we had taken our leave of one another, we boarded the ship, and they returned home.

"They all accompanied us, with wives and children." **Paul and company received quite an escort and royal send-off as they left the city of Tyre.**

V 7 And when we had finished our voyage from Tyre, we came to Ptolemais, greeted the brethren, and stayed with them one day.

"We came to Ptolemais." **25 miles south of Tyre.**

V 8 On the next day we who were Paul's companions departed and came to Caesarea, and entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him.

"We entered the house of Philip the evangelist… one of the seven." **Philip was one of the seven who were appointed to supervise the *"daily ministration"* in the very early church. (Acts 6:3) He was also the one who evangelized Samaria and witnessed to the Ethiopian eunuch.**

V 9 Now this man had four virgin daughters who prophesied.

"Four virgin daughters who prophesied." **That they were virgins may indicate they had some kind of special calling from God. In those days a married woman was bound to her household and had little opportunity to serve God outside of it. These daughters of Philip would not likely have been allowed to teach or preach in those days, but they could have**

ministered on a one-to-one basis, using their prophetic gift. Just as the Greek religion had its female "oracles", so these women could have served in a similar capacity as godly sources of spiritual counsel and wisdom.

V 10 And as we stayed many days, a certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea.

"Came down from Judea." **Caesarea was actually part of Judea, but because it was the Roman capital, Jews considered it a foreign city. Agabus was the same prophet who in Acts 11:28 had predicted a *"great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar"*.**

V 11 When he had come to us, he took Paul's belt, bound his own hands and feet, and said, "Thus says the Holy Spirit, 'So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this belt, and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'"

"So shall the Jews… bind the man." **Was Agabus' prophecy a warning to Paul that he shouldn't go to Jerusalem, or was it just preparing him for what would happen? Well, it was both really. Even without the prophecy, it should have been obvious enough: if he had encountered so much trouble from Jews outside Israel, how much more trouble could be expected from Jerusalem, the very center of the Jewish religion?**

Since the determined apostle was not one to be dissuaded by circumstances or well-meaning counselors, the Lord Himself had to step in and try to dissuade Paul in this dramatic message given through Agabus the prophet.

Agabus' prophetic ministry was reminiscent of that of the prophets in the Old Testament. This type of ministry had a higher profile back in those days, but in the days of the New Testament, the Church began to need more those spiritual gifts that would contribute to furthering the Gospel – gifts of teaching, witnessing, evangelizing, and so on.

V12 -13 Now when we heard these things, both we and those from that place pleaded with him not to go up to Jerusalem.

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."

"We… pleaded with him not to go." **When Peter tried to dissuade Jesus from heading into certain death in Jerusalem, Jesus had to rebuke the voice of Satan. But Paul's counselors, unlike Peter at the time, were mature and Spirit-filled individuals whose counsel Paul should have been taking more seriously. The Holy Spirit was speaking through them, not the Devil, as was the case with Peter. (Matthew 16:21-23) There are times when it pays to give heed to godly counsel, just as there are times when one must ignore the voice of the skeptics and doubters. But it can be difficult sometimes to discern which is which.**

When Jesus knew He was about to enter into the jaws of death, He didn't want to do it: *"If it is possible, let this cup pass from Me"*. But He yielded to God's will, praying, *"Not as I will, but as You will".* (Matthew 26:39) By contrast, Paul's outlook seems brashly over-confident. Paul's willingness to make the ultimate sacrifice of dying *"for the name of the Lord Jesus"*, in different circumstances, might have been deemed as the greatest possible yieldedness to God.

But here it wasn't really yieldedness as much as Paul's own headstrong spirit, and it was causing him to ignore the Lord's warnings not to head to Jerusalem. We don't know what was going on in Paul's mind at the time, but perhaps he was hoping to emulate the Master, or Stephen (the man whose death he had witnessed and probably caused), by dying a martyr's death himself.

It is doubtful that Paul's trip to Jerusalem, knowing he might get imprisoned or killed, could be put on the same level as Jesus' trip to Jerusalem, knowing He would get crucified. The Lord was not asking Paul to risk making that kind of sacrifice at this time. He was probably more interested in keeping Paul alive and free to continue with the work of spreading the Gospel than in having him make a premature sacrifice of himself.

This was not the same Paul who, years earlier, was so attentive to the Holy Spirit that he readily scrapped his own plans to go to Asia and

Bithynia in order to follow the Spirit's leading to head for Greece. (Acts 16) Paul seems now to be plowing ahead in his own strength, insisting that he go to Jerusalem, all the while ignoring the voice of the Spirit advising him otherwise.

As was the case with many other great men of God, like Moses or David or Samson, after many years of successes, perhaps he had become a little too sure of himself. The Holy Ghost was very obviously leading him to avoid Jerusalem, but he brushed it off, relying perhaps on former victories as his guide, rather than on the leading of the Holy Spirit at that moment. Paul's attitude, at this time, seems to border on foolhardiness, a repeat of the same attitude that almost sent him into the theatre at Ephesus where the mob of Diana-worshipers was ready to tear him to pieces.

The Lord had used Paul's fearlessness and willingness to plunge headlong into danger to pioneer and bring the Gospel to numerous cities of the Roman empire. So there is much we can learn from his example of daring and courage. The downside to that kind of faith can be a temptation towards recklessness and taking for granted the Lord's protection. This can be a great temptation, one that Satan even tried to use on Jesus. But Jesus stood on the Word, saying, *"It is written again, 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God.'"* (Matthew 4:7)

Paul's experience in Jerusalem, as we will see, was a good lesson about overconfidence and failure to give earnest heed to the Lord's warnings of danger. There is a fine balance to be found between the necessity of taking risks in order to fulfill God's will versus the need to exercise caution in order to be able to continue doing God's will. We are far more useful to the Lord alive than dead, so it behooves us to yield to how He is leading in the different situations that come up in our lives.

> **Don't for one moment give yourself the credit… Because the moment you get the slightest bit proud of yourself, or you think you're doing something or accomplishing something, watch out!**
>
> **God will really set you back on your heels and show you who's Boss! God is the One who is doing all this, and if we follow Him we can't fail! If we follow the Lord, it's impossible for us to fail, because He is the One who's doing it!**
>
> **It's only when you get big and powerful and popular and**

plentiful that you think you can make decisions on your own, and you think you know what to do, and you think you can get along without God. – And that's where you run into a stone wall! That's where you crash! That's where you make your mistakes, and watch out for that.

[from lecture delivered during the *Jesus Revolution* era, 1970]

The biggest temptation for people who have a lot of natural talent, drive, dynamism and abilities is to just boom, boom, boom, push things through in their own strength! Such natural human force has its limits. "Men of force are men of faults," and their biggest fault is when they keep on going in their own strength, their own force, instead of letting the Lord work through them!

Having so much natural ability, strength and drive is often the very thing that stands in the way of the Lord showing His strength. It's more difficult for such people to just depend on the Lord because they've got so much natural strength that they're used to leaning on… My own Mother had a lot going for her in the natural, a lot of God-given natural talents, abilities, drive, personality, looks, etc. But look what she had to go through before He could really use it all! She was in bed and in a wheelchair for five years!… She didn't have anything else left! – That's when God was able to really use her. Of course, she still had the natural talents and strengths & abilities He'd originally given her, but she learned to lean on Him and let Him use them, and to then give Him all the glory for whatever got accomplished.

[from lecture delivered after the *Jesus Revolution* era, 1989]

From the above passages we can understand what Paul meant in 2Corinthians 12:9-10: *"And He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore, most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me."*

Even Jesus said of Himself, *"I can of Myself do nothing… I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me."* And He counseled us to *"Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me."* (John 5:30, 15:4)

V 14 And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, "The will of the Lord be done."

Unable to dissuade Paul, his counselors had to leave the matter in God's hands: *"the will of the Lord be done."* God works with us and our faith. Sometimes we can force Him to go our way, and even if it's not the best, it will still be *"the will of the Lord"* because He will still be working with us.

> **(Jesus:) …I work in the lives of My children in the ways that I know are needed and I will cause their decisions and experiences to bear fruit in the way that I know is best, both on Earth as well as in the hereafter. Not every decision that each of My children makes is for the best, but I cause all things to eventually work together for good in each of your lives, as we walk the path of this life together.**
>
> **I love each of My children, and even when someone steps outside of what I know would have been the best plan for them, I take them where they're at and work with them and their choices to bring about the best possible outcome… I have all eternity to teach and guide My creations, and although they will each… face some setbacks along the way, wrong choices, mistakes, or stumbles, in My longer-term plan, I can ultimately turn each of these to good and accomplish My purpose in their lives.**
>
> **(from publication of *The Family International* – Nov/2009)**

V 15 And after those days we packed and went up to Jerusalem.

***"Up to Jerusalem."* Although Jerusalem was southeast of Caesarea, because it was elevated on a plateau, one had to travel *"up"* to get there.**

V 16 Also some of the disciples from Caesarea went with us and brought with them a certain Mnason of Cyprus, an early disciple, with whom we were to lodge.

***"Mnason."* A Greek Jew who probably had spent part of his life outside of Israel. It was easier for Luke and other Greeks to stay there than with Jewish Jews. Being an *"early disciple"* means he might have been a valuable source of information to Luke, the author of the Book of Acts, as also were Philip and his four daughters.**

V 17 And when we had come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly.

"The brethren received us gladly." **Arriving finally in Jerusalem, Paul and team brought with them a big blessing: the funds which they had been gathering for almost a year; also, to see the Greek converts was inspiring evidence to the Jerusalem church of the spread of the Gospel in the Roman world. The date was June, A.D. 58, the time of the Pentecost feast, 50 days after Passover.**

V 18 On the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present.

"James." **Brother of Jesus was head of the Jerusalem church.** ***"All the elders."*** **It seems the apostles were not there, not even Peter. Likely they were gone evangelizing in other nations and had turned over administration of the Jerusalem church to others.**

V 19 When he had greeted them, he told in detail those things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry.

"Told in detail." **Paul was able to share many specific testimonies of** ***"those things which God had done among the Gentiles".***

V 20 And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord. And they said to him, "You see, brother, how many myriads of Jews there are who have believed, and they are all zealous for the law;

"All zealous for the law." **Some Jewish believers, in fact** ***"myriads"*** **of them, were still observing the laws of Moses. However, they supposedly did not view the Law as a necessary condition for salvation, so they were a little different from the Judaizers who had earlier troubled the Gentile church, insisting that they had to get circumcised. (Acts 15:1)**

V 21 "but they have been informed about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs.

"You teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses." **This was only a rumor; although Paul had been preaching salvation**

through Christ without the Law among the Gentiles, he was not encouraging Jews to abandon their heritage; in fact, he himself was still observing Jewish customs: for example, he had circumcised Timothy (16:1-3) and had himself taken and painstakingly kept his Nazrite vow some four years earlier (18:18).

V 22 "What then? The assembly must certainly meet, for they will hear that you have come.

"The assembly… will hear that you have come." **James and the elders knew they were going to have to explain to their congregation why Paul was being allowed to mingle amongst them. To this end they set forth a plan, which they felt would appease them. At this point Paul probably should have left Jerusalem as fast as he could; on his previous visit, it didn't seem that Paul stuck around very long; from the sounds of the bare mention of it in Acts 18:22, he merely came, performed his Jewish religious duty, and left quickly without getting entangled in any unnecessary diversions.**

V 23-24 "Therefore do what we tell you: We have four men who have taken a vow.

"Take them and be purified with them, and pay their expenses so that they may shave their heads, and that all may know that those things of which they were informed concerning you are nothing, but that you yourself also walk orderly and keep the law.

"Four men who have taken a vow." **A Nazrite vow, symbolizing total devotion to God. (See note on 18:18)** ***"Be purified with them."*** **Having just returned from a long sojourn in Gentile lands, Paul was considered ceremonially unclean, so he had to undergo ritual purification before he could join the other four men in the ceremony marking the end of their vows.**

"Pay their expenses." **Paul was to sponsor the vows of these four young men. That meant purchasing the sacrificial animals, going through the ceremony with them, and giving formal notice to the priest as to the date of the offering. Such acts were considered a mark of religious devotion; the hope was that this compromise would prove to the church Paul had not forsaken his Jewish heritage.**

Some compromises can be helpful, such as Timothy's circumcision, which aided Paul and team to preach the Gospel more freely. (Acts 16:3) This one, however, backfired, perhaps because it was too much an exercise in man-pleasing; furthermore, from the security point of view, it was too dangerous.

Those several days in a very public place, the temple, gave Paul too much exposure in a city full of devout pilgrims committed to perpetuating old-style Judaism and its anti-Gentile prejudices. But now that Paul had landed in the situation, the expectations of the Church elders could not be ignored; at least it seemed that way; it seemed too awkward now to back out of this new set of social obligations.

V 25 "But concerning the Gentiles who believe, we have written and decided that they should observe no such thing, except that they should keep themselves from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality."

***"Concerning the Gentiles."* The elders make it clear that what they were asking Paul to do did not change the decision of the Jerusalem council regarding the Gentiles. (Acts 15:23-29) Although James and the elders were at peace with this agreement made with the Gentiles, it soon became evident that the rest of the Jewish people did not share that same feeling of sympathy towards them.**

V 26-29 Then Paul took the men, and the next day, having been purified with them, entered the temple to announce the expiration of the days of purification, at which time an offering should be made for each one of them.

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.)

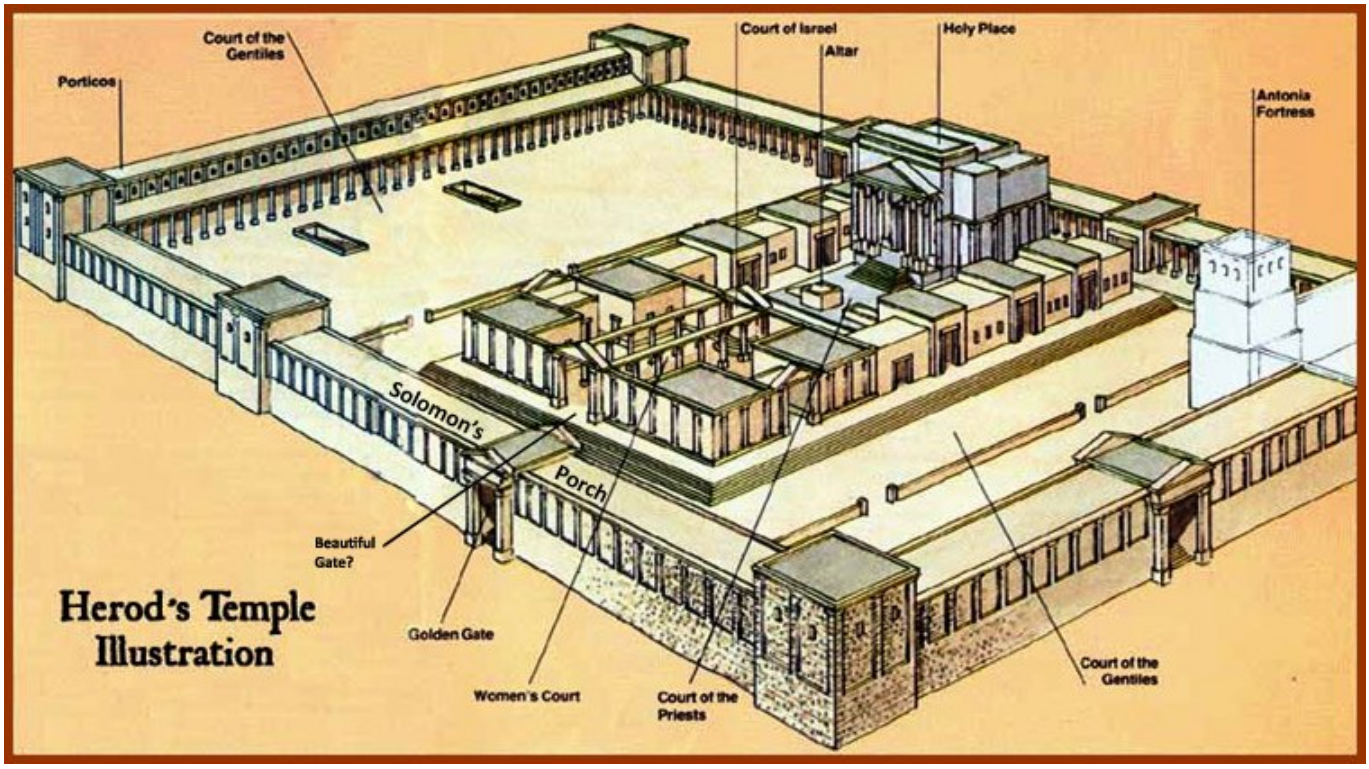
"Seven days."* Length of the purification process. *"Jews from Asia."

Probably these were Jews from Ephesus since they recognized Paul's coworker, *"Trophimus the Ephesian".*

"Men of Israel, help!" **Paul had managed to stay incognito all this time, but the temple ritual ceremony was too much public exposure, and just near the end of it, Paul's cover was blown. The Ephesian Jews quickly pressed the panic button, sounding the alarm, and that was the end of Paul's freedom for a few years.**

"The man, who teaches… against the people, the law, and this place." **As noted already, Paul was not teaching Jews to forsake their heritage. As for the *"law",* this was a sensitive issue; the Pentecost feast had, through the centuries, changed from a harvest time celebration to one of celebrating Moses' receiving of the Law on Mt. Sinai; so at that particular season of the year, any kind of debate about the Law could easily turn into an explosive confrontation. As for the charge of defiling or blaspheming the temple, this was the same false charge that had been used against Jesus and Stephen.**

"Brought Greeks into the temple." **Paul was accused of bringing Trophimus past the court of the Gentiles into the inner court where Gentiles were forbidden. This was certainly false; it would have been a foolish thing to do since the Romans had given the Jews permission to execute any Gentile who might defile the temple.**



V 30 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.

"All the city was disturbed, and the people ran together." **The mob spirit was brewing.** ***"Dragged him out of the temple."*** **To kill Paul on the temple grounds would have defiled the temple.** ***"The doors were shut."*** **The temple guards made sure to protect the temple from "defilement" but made not the slightest effort to rescue Paul from the crowd.**

V 31-32 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.

"Commander." **The tribune Claudius Lysias was the highest-ranking Roman official in Jerusalem. (The governor, Felix, lived in Caesarea.)** ***"The garrison."*** **The 1,000-man Roman occupation force. Their headquarters, Fort Antonia, overlooked the temple complex, and from there sentries**

would have noticed quickly *"that all Jerusalem was in an uproar"*.

"Soldiers and centurions."* Since one centurion alone commanded 100 men, the tribune must have taken at least 200 men, and maybe more. The mob was *"seeking to kill him* (Paul)*"*, but again Roman authority saved the day: *"when they saw the commander and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul."

V 33 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.

***"Two chains."* Assuming, because of the tumult, that Paul must have been guilty of some horrendous crime, the tribune Lysias had him bound.**

V 34 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.

Confusion reigned supreme, so Paul had to be herded into the safety of *"the barracks"* (Fort Antonia).

V 35-36 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!"

***"He was carried by the soldiers."* The soldiers had to carry Paul because of *"the violence of the mob"* who were yelling, *"Away with him!"* (or "kill him!" as in Acts 22:22 or John 19:15). The viciousness of the mob was almost more than the Roman soldiers could handle.**



V 37 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?

"Can you speak Greek?" **Paul's use of the language of educated people startled the chief captain who expected Paul to be an uncultured criminal.**

V 38 "Are you not the Egyptian who some time ago stirred up a rebellion and led the four thousand assassins out into the wilderness?"

"Are you not the Egyptian." **The chief captain Lysias mistook Paul for a certain false prophet, a Jew from Egypt, who had promised to drive out the Romans several years earlier. His forces were attacked and defeated by Governor Felix some three years before, but he himself managed to escape. Lysias assumed the *"Egyptian"* had returned and been captured by the crowd.**

"Assassins." **These were the cutthroats and terrorists gathered by *"the Egyptian"* false prophet; their Jewish nationalism drove them to carry out assassinations of Romans and Jewish sympathizers of Rome. They often would stab their victim under cover of a crowd, and Lysias thought that now one of their leaders had been caught in the act.**

V 39-40 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,

"A citizen of no mean city." **Tarsus was an important cultural center with universities rivaling those of Athens and Alexandria.**

"Permit me to speak to the people." **Paul was about to get his last opportunity to win these, his Jewish brethren, who had already decided what they wanted to believe. To pacify a mob like this was an impossible task, unless one was willing to compromise and tell them only what they wanted to hear. That was what the *"city clerk"* had done with the mob in Ephesus. (19:35-41) But Paul was no city clerk, and, tactful as he tried to be, he was not able to refrain from telling them more truth than they were able to swallow.**

(Continue to ACTS, chapter 22)