

PAUL'S ARREST IN JERUSALEM

Acts 21:17- 36

STRUCTURE

Key-person: Paul

Key-location: Temple courtyard in Jerusalem

Key-repetitions:

- Jerusalem church leaders' reception of Paul and his companions: glad to see them (Ac 21:17); praised God at hearing Paul's report (Ac 21:20); concern about false rumors that believers heard about Paul (Ac 21:20-21).
- Reactions against Paul: false rumors spread against Paul (Ac 21:21); Jews from Asia made a false assumption and falsely accused Paul (Ac 21:28-29); mob tried to kill Paul (Ac 21:31); Roman commander rescued Paul (Ac 21:32).
- False accusations against Paul: Jewish believers heard that Paul taught Jews who lived among non-Jews to turn away from the Law of Moses, not circumcise their sons and not obey Jewish customs (Ac 21:21); Jews from Asia accused Paul of bringing a non-Jew into the temple area (Ac 21:28-29); some in the mob shouted one thing and some another (Ac 21:24).

Key-attitudes:

- Jerusalem church leaders' joy at seeing and hearing Paul.
- Jerusalem church leaders' concern about rumors the Jewish believers heard about Paul.
- Asian Jews' hatred of Paul.
- Mob's violence toward Paul.
- Roman commander's concern for keeping order.

Initial-situation:

Jewish leaders in Jerusalem opposed Jesus' followers. They hated Paul because he did not share their racial prejudice against non-Jews. Paul preached to non-Jews and planted churches among them. On each of his three missionary journeys, Paul suffered opposition from the Jews. Paul ended his third missionary journey by traveling to Jerusalem. When he was traveling to Jerusalem, he was informed several times that he would be arrested and face trouble from the Jews.

Initial-problem:

Paul arrived in Jerusalem and the spiritual leaders told him the rumors that Christian Jews heard about him.

Final-situation:

The Roman commander rescued Paul from mob violence. The crowd kept shouting about Paul, "Kill him!"

BIBLE STORY

Paul and his companions arrived in Jerusalem. There the believers were glad to see them. The next day Paul and his companions went to see James, the brother of Jesus. All the spiritual leaders (elders) were present. Paul reported in detail what God did among the non-Jews through his ministry.

The spiritual leaders heard Paul's report and praised God. Then they told Paul, "Thousands of Jews believed, and all of them are zealous for the Law of Moses. Jewish believers heard rumors that you teach Jews, who live among non-Jews, to turn away from the Law of Moses, not circumcise their sons and not obey Jewish customs. We'll give you our advice. Four men with us have made a vow. Join these men in their purification rites and pay to have their heads shaved. Then everybody will know that these are false rumors about you and that you, yourself, live in obedience to the Law of Moses. We've already written to non-Jewish believers our decision that they should abstain from food sacrificed to idols, blood, meat of strangled animals, and sexual immorality." The next day, Paul purified himself along with the four men (Ac 21:17-26).

The seven days of purification were nearly over when some Jews from Asia saw Paul at the temple courtyard. They grabbed Paul, shouting, "Men of Israel, help us! This man teaches everywhere against our people, our Law, and this place. He brought non-Jews into the temple area and defiled this holy place." They saw a non-Jew from Ephesus in Jerusalem with Paul and assumed that Paul brought the non-Jew into the temple courtyard.

A mob formed. The mob seized Paul and dragged him from the temple courtyard. Immediately the courtyard gates were shut. The mob tried to kill Paul. News reached the Roman troops' commander that all the city of Jerusalem was rioting. The commander immediately took officers and soldiers, and charged the crowd. The mob saw the commander and his soldiers and stopped beating Paul.

The commander arrested Paul and ordered him to be bound with chains. He interrogated Paul. Some in the crowd shouted one thing and some another. The commander could not get the truth because of the uproar, so he ordered that Paul be taken into the barracks. The mob's violence was so great that soldiers had to carry Paul. The crowd kept shouting, "Kill him!" (Ac 21:27-36).

GENERIC DIALOGUE QUESTIONS

1. What catches your attention in the story?
2. Is there anything in the story that is hard to understand?
3. Who are the main characters in the story?
4. What problems did the characters face?
5. How did the characters face their problems?
6. How have you faced similar problems?
7. Is there someone in the story who is similar to you or who is different from you?
8. What does the story tell about God?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What concerned James and the other Jerusalem spiritual leaders when Paul arrived in the city?
2. What suggestions did the Jerusalem church leaders give Paul?
3. What can we do to lessen the misunderstandings that some have against the church?
4. How did Paul's reactions to James' suggestion illustrate the principle in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23?
5. How do you decide when you should give in for the sake of others, and when you should stand firm on your principles?
6. What accusations did those who instigated the mob make against Paul?
7. How did Paul become a prisoner?
8. What false accusations do people make today against Christians?

LIFE-LESSONS

1. **New believers may bring cultural baggage with them.** The spiritual leaders of Jerusalem informed Paul that thousands of Jews had become believers, and all of them were zealous for the Law of Moses (Ac 21:20). Jews became Christians; however, they retained their Jewish heritage and cultural baggage.
2. **Christians should remain firm on essentials to Christian beliefs, but be flexible on non-essentials.** Paul took a Jewish religious vow, not because he needed to, but to help keep peace in the Jerusalem church (Ac 21:22-24). Paul had strong convictions, but he was willing to compromise on the non-essential. He became all things to all people so that he might save some (1 Cor 9:19-23).
3. **Those who accuse others before investigating the facts, will oftentimes make false accusations.** Jews from Asia had seen Trophimus the Ephesian with Paul, and they incorrectly judged that Paul had taken him into the temple (Ac 21:27-29).
4. **Some religious people falsely think they serve God when they use the devil's tools to defend their religious customs and traditions.** Jews in Jerusalem thought they were defending their Jewish religion when they lied, made false accusations against Paul, and tried to kill him (Ac 21:27-31). Jesus accused Satan of being the father of lies and a murderer from the beginning (Jn 8:44).

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

1. **Chant:**

Words in **bold and underlined** are stressed. Stress words by stretching them out instead of increasing volume.

| Group 1 | Group 2 |
|--|--|
| Though I am <u>free</u> and belong to no one, | I have made myself a <u>slave</u> to everyone, to win as many as possible. |
| To the <u>Jews</u> I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those <u>under the law</u> I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. | To those <u>not having the law</u> I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. |
| To the <u>weak</u> I became weak, to win the weak. | I have become <u>all things</u> to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. |
| I do all this for the sake of the <u>gospel</u> , | that I may <u>share</u> in its blessings. |
| All | |
| <p>“ Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.” (1 Corinthians 9:19-23 NIV).</p> | |

2. **Twitter Prayers** (short, concise prayers):

Invite listeners to pray about the story in “twitter” length prayers.

- Tell God how they feel about the story.
- Pray for persecuted Christians.
- Pray for courage to be true to God when confronted by people who oppose the truth.