



Lesson 9:

Paul's Arrival in Jerusalem

Acts 21:17-23:22

Note: In chapter 21, Luke makes reference to “purification rites.” Paul had taken a Nazarite vow like the one mentioned in Acts 21 in Acts 18. Nazarite means “dedicated one.” A Nazarite was one who made a self-imposed vow of commitment to the Lord. As part of the vow, the person refrained from cutting their hair, drinking fermented drinks or coming in contact with the dead. If the person somehow broke the vow, which usually lasted for 30 days, they were required to go through a purification rite. The purification meant waiting seven days and then shaving the head and making offerings of the hair, two doves and lamb on the eighth day.

1. **Read Acts 21:17- 26.** The Jerusalem Council took place in 49 A.D.; it is 57 A.D. when Paul arrives back in Jerusalem. What does the reception that Paul receives reveal about the doctrine of the church in Jerusalem at this time? What lesson do you learn from these verses?
2. **Read Acts 21: 27- 39.** Think about the phrase that Luke included in verse 30, “and immediately the gates were shut”. Why do you think he included this detail?
3. As you linger over these verses and seek to envision the scene, what does Paul’s request in **verse 39** reveal about his mindset during these frantic moments?

Note: In Acts 22, Paul begins an address to the angry crowd by suggesting that he was going to present a defense, instead of defending himself he shared how he came to faith in Christ and the implications of that conversion.

4. **Read Acts 22: 1- 30.** We have read Paul’s conversion account in Acts 9. Compare the two accounts and describe how you see Paul emphasizing certain points in his testimony in order to heighten the impact on the hearers.

Note: *Paul is involved in one of the most frightening days of his life – he has been seized by a mob, arrested and bound in chains, reviled by an angry crowd, threatened with flogging and then thrust before the hostile group of men who made up the Sanhedrin.*

5. In light of what Paul has gone through, read **2 Corinthians 11:24-31, 12:7-10, Philippians 3:7-11** and **1 Timothy 1:12-17**. How do you see his doctrine affecting his living? Share your thoughts about these verses.

Read Acts 23:1-22.

Note: *Paul's response to the High Priest causes difficulty for readers – is he being sarcastic or authentic when he backs down? It is possible that Paul did not recognize the High Priest because (1) Paul suffered from defective eyesight due to a bad case of malaria (2) he may not have been wearing his priestly robes (3) in the confusion Paul could not see who had spoken to him, or (4) Paul did not expect a High Priest to act this way.*

6. Do you think Paul was acting like a Christian when he accused the High Priest of being a whitewashed wall? (See Luke 11:39, Matthew 23:27, Ezekiel 13:10 -16, Matthew 7:1 to think through your answer.)

7. It is said that we behave the way we behave because we believe the way we believe. Another way to say that would be our orthodoxy (correct teaching) determines our orthopraxy (correct practice). How do you see Paul using this principle to his advantage in chapter 23? Can you share ways that your orthodoxy or orthopraxy have been affected by studying Acts?

Closing: *Paul is not the only believer who has been willing to risk life and limb for the sake of the gospel of Jesus. Would you take a moment to pray for those in the world who are imprisoned, beaten, killed and persecuted for the faith that we hold with such ease? November 11 is the National Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church. <http://www.persecution.org/suffering/index.php>*