

## Lesson 9 - 23 September 2012

### Paul Is Assaulted in the Temple

**Lesson Scope:** [Acts 21:1-22:21](#)

#### Lesson Focus

The apostle Paul was God's special messenger to the Gentiles. He was now returning to Jerusalem from his third missionary journey after traveling countless miles and visiting numerous churches that he had helped to establish on earlier journeys. All along the way Paul had nurtured and encouraged both the brethren and their leaders.

As Paul was returning, the Spirit gave him a growing sense that imprisonment and suffering awaited him at Jerusalem. At Caesarea, a prophet named Agabus emphasized this reality. The local brethren, as well as Paul's traveling companions, urged him to change his plans. Paul, however, would not be deterred. He was ready to suffer and even to die if necessary.

The Christian is "not ashamed of the gospel of Christ." With divine truth burning in his heart, he "cannot but speak the things which [he has] seen and heard."

The word witness used in the Lesson Aim applies to "one who can or does aver what he has seen or heard or knows." Life and actions testify to the value and effect of faith. He is a messenger of the Gospel because of what it accomplished within him.

We see in discussing Paul's acceptance of the direction given in 21:23, 24 that he attached no saving merit to his actions; neither did he expect Gentiles to observe Jewish rites.

**Lesson Aim:** To see involvements of being a witness for the Lord.

**Theme Verse:** [Romans 1:16](#). For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

## Lesson Text:

### Submitted to God's Will

[Acts 21:10-14](#) <sup>10</sup> And as we tarried *there* many days, there came down from Judaea a certain prophet, named Agabus. <sup>11</sup> And when he was come unto us, he took Paul's girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver *him* into the hands of the Gentiles. <sup>12</sup> And when we heard these things, both we, and they of that place, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem. <sup>13</sup> Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. <sup>14</sup> And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done.

### Willing to Communicate

[Acts 21:17-24](#) <sup>17</sup> And when we were come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. <sup>18</sup> And the *day* following Paul went in with us unto James; and all the elders were present. <sup>19</sup> And when he had saluted them, he declared particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry. <sup>20</sup> And when they heard *it*, they glorified the Lord, and said unto him, Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law: <sup>21</sup> And they are informed of thee, that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise *their* children, neither to walk after the customs. <sup>22</sup> What is it therefore? the multitude must needs come together: for they will hear that thou art come. <sup>23</sup> Do therefore this that we say to thee: We have four men which have a vow on them; <sup>24</sup> Them take, and purify thyself with them, and be at charges with them, that they may shave *their* heads: and all may know that those things, whereof they were informed concerning thee, are nothing; but *that* thou thyself also walkest orderly, and keepest the law.

### Steadfast in Crisis

[Acts 21:27-33](#) <sup>27</sup> And when the seven days were almost ended,

the Jews which were of Asia, when they saw him in the temple, stirred up all the people, and laid hands on him, <sup>28</sup> Crying out, Men of Israel, help: This is the man, that teacheth all *men* every where against the people, and the law, and this place: and further brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place. <sup>29</sup> (For they had seen before with him in the city Trophimus an Ephesian, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.) <sup>30</sup> And all the city was moved, and the people ran together: and they took Paul, and drew him out of the temple: and forthwith the doors were shut. <sup>31</sup> And as they went about to kill him, tidings came unto the chief captain of the band, that all Jerusalem was in an uproar. <sup>32</sup> Who immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down unto them: and when they saw the chief captain and the soldiers, they left beating of Paul. <sup>33</sup> Then the chief captain came near, and took him, and commanded *him* to be bound with two chains; and demanded who he was, and what he had done.

[Acts 21:40](#) <sup>40</sup> And when he had given him licence, Paul stood on the stairs, and beckoned with the hand unto the people. And when there was made a great silence, he spake unto *them* in the Hebrew tongue, saying,

### **Questions for Study**

#### **Submitted to God's Will**

1. Aside from Agabus's testimony, why did Paul expect opposition at Jerusalem?
2. How can a person experience rest when suffering for Christ seems imminent?

#### **Willing to Communicate**

3. In what ways did the brethren at Jerusalem confirm Paul's missionary efforts?
4. Why could Paul reasonably consent to the elders' request?
5. At what point do efforts to accommodate contrasting viewpoints lose their effectiveness?

#### **Steadfast in Crisis**

6. Evaluate the Jews' accusations against Paul.

7. What seems to have been Paul's attitude in this threatening situation?
8. How is God using civil authorities today to aid our Gospel witness?

### **Analyzing the Passage**

Acts 21:17 marks the end of Paul's third missionary journey, at Jerusalem. His first and second journeys began and ended at Antioch.

James apparently was the acknowledged head of the church at Jerusalem (Acts 21:18). Paul came to James and the elders and gave a report of his work among the Gentiles, telling what great things God had wrought.

What the leaders then requested of Paul was an effort to appease believing Jews. How they responded we do not know. The plan was interrupted by the unbelieving element in the temple. The Jews who stirred up the people (Acts 21:27) recognized Paul from their contacts with him in the cities of Asia Minor. Likely they were present in Jerusalem for the day of Pentecost (Acts 20:16). Paul's acceptance of the Gentiles as equals was an inflammatory issue with these people.

### **Principles and Applications**

#### **Submitted to God's Will**

1. A witness for the Lord can expect to face opposition (Acts 21:10-12). The Lord's people belong to the heavenly kingdom; they are not of the kingdom of this world, which Satan rules. Satan uses religious people as well as others in his efforts to frustrate and destroy God's work. We can expect to face opposition as long as we are in this life.
2. The prospect of persecution and death does not shake the faith of a true witness for the Lord (Acts 21:13-14). He even considers himself happy to be worthy to suffer for the cause of Christ (Acts 5:41). He knows, on the basis of God's promises, that persecution will eventually end, and he will experience eternal joy in the presence of Christ.

### **Willing to Communicate**

3. A witness for the Lord seeks the support and fellowship of the church (Acts 21:17-19). The spirit of independence ignores the fact that God has not given all His spiritual gifts to any one person. God's plan is that His people work together, complementing and assisting each other. The love of the brotherhood, as they work together, gives a powerful witness that the Gospel is of God.

4. A true witness recognizes any success of his ministry to be a result of God's blessing (Acts 21:19-20). "Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain" (Psalm 127:1). "So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do" (Luke 17:10).

5. True witnesses for the Lord rejoice when they see God at work among men (Acts 21:20). Paul set a good example of giving God the glory for the results of his own sacrificial labors. When our main goal is to advance the Gospel cause, we will rejoice in the good things that happen, even if others receive credit for our spiritual work.

6. Others may at times misunderstand the message of a true witness (Acts 21:20-21). Christ Himself was misunderstood, even though He was perfect. Therefore, we should not be surprised when others fail to understand us; we are imperfect creatures both in our hearing and in our speaking. Such occasions test our patience and our love for others.

7. A true witness will do all he can to avoid misunderstandings and offenses (Acts 21:23-24). Paul taught the need to sacrifice personal freedoms in order to avoid giving offense. "Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend" (1 Corinthians 8:13). Having that attitude goes a long way toward preventing offenses and resolving misunderstandings.

### **Steadfast in Crisis**

8. The forces of evil will rise in opposition to God's messengers (Acts 21:27-30). Wherever a good work is progressing, Satan will be there to hinder it. Slander, false accusation, and intimidation will be used against the faithful Christian worker in an effort to hinder him. The Christian's desire is to improve where possible and never give up.

9. God uses civil authorities and laws to protect His faithful witnesses (Acts 21:31-33). Many times in history God has allowed authorities to persecute the faithful, but in many other situations He has used them to protect His people.

The law allows many of us exemption from social security, vehicle insurance, and military service. Freedom of speech and religion allows us to operate our own schools and to spread the Gospel openly.

10. A true witness is ready to speak his testimony for the Lord (Acts 21:40). Paul was eager to address even those who hated him and tried to kill him. Peter spoke for all true witnesses when he said, "For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20).

### **Important Teachings**

1. A witness for the Lord can expect to face opposition (Acts 21:10-12).

2. The prospect of persecution and death does not shake the faith of a true witness for the Lord (Acts 21:13-14).

3. A witness for the Lord seeks the support and fellowship of the church (Acts 21:17-19).

4. A true witness recognizes any success of his ministry to be a result of God's blessing (Acts 21:19-20).

5. True witnesses for the Lord rejoice when they see God at work among men (Acts 21:20).

6. Others may at times misunderstand the message of a true witness (Acts 21:20-21).

7. A true witness will do all he can to avoid misunderstandings and offenses (Acts 21:23-24).

8. The forces of evil will rise in opposition to God's messengers (Acts 21:27-30).
9. God uses civil authorities and laws to protect His faithful witnesses (Acts 21:31-33).
10. A true witness is ready to speak his testimony for the Lord (Acts 21:40).

### **Answers to Questions**

1. Aside from Agabus's testimony, why did Paul expect opposition at Jerusalem?

Paul knew that the Lord had used him mightily among the Gentiles and that the unbelieving Jews hated him as a heretic. Jerusalem was the center of Judaism; Paul would certainly be seen and identified. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit had indicated through others besides Agabus that Paul would suffer at Jerusalem (Acts 20:23).

2. How can a person experience rest when suffering for Christ seems imminent?

Jesus told His disciples that they could expect to suffer just as He had been persecuted (John 15:20). Rejoicing is possible in the midst of suffering (Matthew 5:11-12; Acts 5:41) not only because God rewards faithfulness in suffering but also because the Lord can effect good results when His people endure it patiently. The indwelling Holy Spirit imparts rest.

3. In what ways did the brethren at Jerusalem confirm Paul's missionary efforts?

The brethren received Paul and his traveling companions gladly. All the elders gathered to hear Paul's report. They rejoiced and gave God the glory for what He had done through Paul's ministry among the Gentiles.

4. Why could Paul reasonably consent to the elders' request?

Paul and the elders did not see disharmony between this action and the previous decision of the church regarding the Gentiles (Acts 21:25). Paul was willing to identify with the Jews as much as possible in order to reach them with the Gospel or to aid their spiritual growth (1 Corinthians 9:19-20).

5. At what point do efforts to accommodate contrasting viewpoints lose their effectiveness?

In Paul's situation, for example, if either the Jews or the Gentiles had perceived his actions to be hypocritical, he would at that point have lost his credibility. One who desires to harmonize differing viewpoints must be able at any time to give either side a forthright and accurate explanation for his words and actions. He dare never sacrifice principle.

6. Evaluate the Jews' accusations against Paul.

They accused Paul of teaching "all men every where"—actually a tribute to his energetic and effective ministry. They accused him of teaching against Jewry, the Mosaic Law, and the temple. What Paul actually taught was that these things were part of God's plan to accomplish salvation for all people. God had displaced the old system with the church and the Gospel. On the basis of supposition, the Jews falsely accused Paul of bringing a non-Jew (Trophimus) into the temple, thereby polluting it.

7. What seems to have been Paul's attitude in this threatening situation?

Obviously Paul lived with a continuous commitment of his life into God's hands. The people would have killed him, but his interest was in speaking to the people in an effort to help some.

8. How is God using civil authorities today to aid our Gospel witness?

In North America and some other countries, God's people have freedom to travel, to publish, to assemble publicly, and to preach openly. The government grants tax-exempt status to religious organizations and their activities. Rulers offer us protection against those who would harm us.

### **Summarizing the Lesson**

A witness for the Lord faces many uncertain circumstances, but he labors patiently on, knowing that even the greatest sacrifices in this life will pale in comparison to the glory of heavenly reward.

## **Research Guide**

1. Research the involvements of the vow in Acts 21:23-24.
2. Read the Scriptures listed under "Expediency" in Nave's Topical Bible.