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### How Paul Began to Stumble in Jerusalem

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## HOW PAUL BEGAN TO STUMBLE IN JERUSALEM

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF ACTS  
ACTS 21:15-19  
NUMBER 100

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ACTS 21:15-19 "And after those days we took up our carriages, and went up to Jerusalem. There went with us also certain of the disciples of Caesarea, and brought with them one Mnason of Cyprus, an old disciple, with whom we should lodge. And when we were come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. And the day following Paul went in with us unto James; and all the elders were present. And when he had saluted them, he declared particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry."

In this passage we have arrived at the area of Paul's great sin and his act of legalism. Someone asks, "How could Paul give all these glorious messages along the way during this trip and be out of fellowship?" Have you not been listening to this discussion? Paul is not yet out of fellowship and will not be until he goes through the gates of the city of Jerusalem.

ACTS 21:15 "And after those days we took up our carriages, and went up to Jerusalem." "Took up our baggage" refers mainly to the money they had collected for the poor saints in Jerusalem and they were soon to deliver it to them. The words "Went up" are quite appropriate for Jerusalem is in the mountains and you go up over two thousand feet in altitude before you finally arrive in the city.

ACTS 21:16 "There went with us also certain of the disciples of Caesarea, and brought with them one Mnason of Cyprus, an old disciple, with whom we should lodge." This simply points out the person with whom they had spent the last night before going on their trip to Jerusalem.

ACTS 21:17 "And when we were come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly." At this point Paul gets out of fellowship. We are going to see him out of the geographical will of God and later on we will see him out of the operational will of God. I am sure the money they brought along had something to do with the fine reception they received when they arrived in Jerusalem.

ACTS 21:18 "And the day following Paul went in with us unto James; and all the elders were present." James was the head pastor in Jerusalem and naturally they would report to him. The elders refers to the pastors, so here is a pastors' conference in Jerusalem and Paul and his companions report in to them.

ACTS 21:19 "And when he had saluted them, he declared particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry." Paul saluted them and they said, "Dear Brother Paul, how glad we are to see you again", but in reality they wanted to cut his throat.

Paul gave them a running account of his great spiritual victories on his missionary journeys. The word for "He declared" means that he narrated in detail his missionary journeys and this must have taken quite a long time. Apparently the money was delivered to them in connection with Paul's missionary report.

Let us get the Jerusalem setting. There were lots of lazy pastors in Jerusalem and instead of teaching Bible doctrine they took the Mosaic Law and began to teach it. Today some pastors learn the plan of salvation and the way of morality and that's about all they teach. It is not really the Christian way of life, for they leave out the great volume of Bible doctrine which is necessary for the growth of mature Christians. Pastors of this kind do not study and therefore have little to teach. So these Jerusalem pastors are very disturbed at Paul's report. They gave some recognition to his report, but they are really upset.

Here we begin a series of disastrous things that will lead to Paul's blunder. How could such a great man as Paul fall into a trap like this? How could he become legalistic and act so contrary to all that he will write in the Book of Galatians?

First of all, in verses 20-24, we are going to note the bad advise of James and these Jerusalem pastors. Now when you compare James with the writings of Paul you can quickly see how different these men really are. James wrote a little book and it is a simple book and one of the weakest books in the New Testament for doctrine. In the Book of James the unbeliever is always looking at the believer. The believer says that he was saved by faith. But the unbeliever can only think in terms of what he sees. He can't look down within the Christian and see his faith, so the only thing the unbeliever can see is works, production, accomplishment. So the whole purpose of the little book of James is to show how the unbeliever looks at the saved man. James says, "Abraham was justified by works". Now when did that happen? James goes on to say--"When he offered up Isaac". But we know that Abraham was justified fifty years before that time when he first met Christ and believed on him when he was down in Ur. So James is looking at the Christian from the standpoint of production. Rahab was saved when she heard about Moses and the Exodus of the Children of Israel, but in the book of James we read that Rahab was justified by works when she hid the spies. It simply means that in the book of James we are looking at the Christian's life from the eyes of the unbeliever who doesn't understand the new birth and has to have some outward physical evidence on which to fasten his eyes. But works is not justification by faith. But you see, you are not saved by offering up your children on altars or by hiding spies on the roof. So when people confuse salvation by faith as compared with salvation by works you see how sloppy they can get in their thinking. Salvation by faith and salvation by works do not contradict each other. It is so simple it is almost superficial. James wrote that kind of a book and it does not have the deep doctrine that you find in Paul's writings.

ACTS 21:20 "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" Now for the rest of this chapter we are going to see Paul out of the will of God.

"And when they heard it" is an aorist, active, participle and should read, "Having heard Paul's report they began to glorify the Lord, BUT said unto him". That's like people saying to you, "That was a good sermon, BUT". Or like saying to a woman "you are beautiful, BUT". Or like saying to someone who has been hard at work "I thank you for your good work, BUT". They really mean to say, "That's great, Paul, BUT we are Jew and we have our way of doing things and this grace business you are always talking about doesn't fit in with what we believe and teach". This is actually what is going to come out in these verses.

You see, these Jerusalem pastors were embarrassed that they were entertaining a controversial figure. No doubt Paul had been their scorn in many sermons. They are saturated in legalism and they didn't go along with Paul's doctrine. They can't argue with Paul's success and the big offering, but they can't wait to involve Paul in some act of legalism. They are going to trap him so they can say, "Paul has changed his mind and he believes that the Mosaic Law has great importance in the Christian way of life". These pastors are going to get Paul to go into the temple and commit an act of legalism that is contrary to grace. They want to neutralize the grace of God in Paul's life.

So we read "BUT they said unto him, BROTHER". Now that phrase smells immediately, especially in the superficial way they said it here.

The words "Thou seest" are very important. The word for see they use here is not "Blepo" which means to glance at something, nor is it the word "Horao" which means to take a complete view of something. The word for see that they use here is "Theoreo" the word from which we get "theory". It means to be a spectator and draw a conclusion from the situation which may or may not be true, and it means that generally it is not true.

So they say, "Now you observe, Brother Paul, (And they smiled so sweetly as they said it) how many thousands of Jews who are legalistic here in Jerusalem." Their emphasis was to show that they too were successful. If he had won many on his missionary journeys, they wanted him to know they had won many in Jerusalem.

The conclusion they gave Paul was "These Jews subsist zealous for the law."

Let's take some points on this last phrase

1. The decadence of the Jerusalem Church can be seen from the fact that thousands of Jews in Jerusalem were using the keeping of the Mosaic Law as their basis for spirituality. They were devoted entirely to the Mosaic Law. Their whole life was tied up with the Mosaic Law.
2. These Jerusalem believers were totally legalistic and totally ignorant of living by grace and Bible doctrine.
3. These Jerusalem leaders desired for Paul to cater to their legalism. They realized that Paul had had great success under grace but now they want him to switch to legalism.
4. Therefore the pastors of Jerusalem invited Paul to participate in an act of legalism--but they do not invite him to teach or preach to their congregations. They don't ask him to come to their churches and hold a Bible conference. And remember, Paul was the greatest Bible teacher in the world.
5. The thing they invited Paul to do was not an act of expediency or something built on the law of love. The thing they invited Paul to do constituted a compromise of Bible doctrine. Paul knew better. Later in Galatians he will say, "Stand fast in the liberty".
6. These Jerusalem pastors had misunderstood and misused and abused the doctrine of the Mosaic Law.

The True Doctrine Of The Mosaic Law

1. Look at the overall structure of the Mosaic Law.  
The Mosaic Law is divided into three parts.
  - a. The moral code. These are the Ten Commandments.  
They were given to show a man that he has an old sin nature.  
They were given to show a man that he is spiritually bankrupt.  
The Ten Commandments are to furnish a moral background for man so the human race can survive upon the earth. The Ten Commandments insure the survival of the four divine institutions.
  - b. The Ordinances. This is the spiritual code and was designed to present Christ. The Levitical Code, the Holy Days, the Tabernacle and Temple were all designed to present Christ to the people.
  - c. The Judgments. This is the social code and was for believers and unbelievers alike. It includes laws of taxation, the conservation of the soil, laws of marriage, health and economics, and etc.
2. Look at the recipients of the Mosaic Law.  
To whom was the law given?
  - a. It was given to Israel, the nation. (Exodus 19:3, Lev. 26:46, Romans 3:19)



- b. The law was not given to the Gentiles. (Deut. 4:8, Romans 2:12-14)
  - c. Christians are not under the Mosaic Law. (Acts 15:5 and 24, Romans 6:14)
- Therefore the Mosaic Law was not given to the church.

Those Christians in Jerusalem were not under the Mosaic Law but were under a way of life God had provided for the Christians. This way of life for the Christian centered around the filling of the Spirit and knowledge of Bible doctrine.

- 3. Christ fulfilled the law. Matthew 5:17  
The life of Jesus fulfilled the three phases of the Mosaic Law. He lived a perfect life for 33 years. This is the first and only time in history every commandment was kept and kept perfectly. He fulfilled the Ordinances of the law by dying on the cross. He ministered to his own nation and fulfilled his own responsibility as a citizen.
- 4. Christ is the end of the law for believers. Romans 10:4  
Christians are not under the system of morality of the Ten Commandments but a much higher system. The Mosaic Law is based on what you do. Christianity is based on what you think. This is accomplished by the filling of the Holy Spirit and knowledge of doctrine. Under the Mosaic Law you can think one thing and do another. This is not true under grace.
- 5. Believers in the Church Age are under the higher law of spirituality. (Romans 8:2-4, Galatians 5:18--22--23)
- 6. The Mosaic Law has great limitations.  
They cannot justify. (Galatians 2:16, Romans 3:20 and 28)  
They cannot provide salvation and give life. (Galatians 2:21)  
They cannot solve the problems of the Old Sin Nature. (Romans 8:3)  
This is where the pastors in Jerusalem missed the boat.
- 7. What then is the purpose of the Mosaic Law during the dispensation of the church?  
They were given to convince the unbeliever that he is a sinner and needs a Saviour.  
The law can communicate the framework of salvation by teaching the meaning of sacrifices and holy days, and etc.  
The Ten Commandments give a basis for prosperity and stability in a nation.
- 8. The law cannot save or provide spirituality.  
Those thousands of Jews in Jerusalem, to whom those pastors referred, had been fed legalism and didn't understand the true meaning of spirituality. They had gratitude for the offering of money, and they listened to Paul's missionary report, but they cut him down when it came to doctrine and grace and substituted legalistic religion instead.

We will see next time how they succeeded in getting Paul out of fellowship.