

Abounding Grace Christian Church

The Acts of the Holy Spirit through the Church – Part 65

I. Exposition of Chapter Twenty One (Continued).

A. Verses 15-19 – Paul goes to Jerusalem and is Welcomed by the Church.

1. Verse 15 – “And after those days we packed and went up to Jerusalem.” – From Caesarea to Jerusalem was about 65 miles. This would have taken about three days by foot and about two days by horse.
2. Verse 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.” This was, no doubt, a fairly large group of people. There would have been the seven men mentioned in 20:4, Paul’s team, including Luke and then the group that went with them from Caesarea. The Nelson Study Bible asserts:

“Although they had been told repeatedly that Paul would be beaten and arrested in Jerusalem, Paul’s traveling companions continued to travel with him. They would not leave Paul in his moment of crisis. During times of suffering, true friends stick close to provide comfort and assistance (see Prov. 17:17).”¹

- a. “...a certain Mnason of Cyprus...” – This is the only mention of this believer in the entire New Testament. Seeing he was from Cyprus (like Barnabas) he may have been able to give

Paul

a report on the church in Cyprus. Dr. Stanley Horton adds some interesting thoughts:

“These brothers from Caesarea knew a believer, Mnason, who, like Barnabas, was from Cyprus and ‘one of the early disciples,’ that is, one of the 120. Like Barnabas also, he would be sympathetic to Paul’s ministry and not object to entertaining Gentile believers. He was known as one who delighted to entertain strangers (foreigners). The Western reading has Mnason’s house between Caesarea and Jerusalem.”²

3. Verse 17 – “And when we had come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly.” – The word “received” means; “to accept the presence of a person with friendliness—‘to welcome, to receive, to accept, to have as a guest’³ The addition of the word “gladly” seems to heighten their reception with the meaning: “pertaining to experiencing happiness, implying ready and willing acceptance”⁴
4. Verses 18-19 – “On the following *day* Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present. When he had greeted them, he told in detail those things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry.”

- a. “...Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present...”

- 1) Paul went to see James who was apparently the leader of the Church in Jerusalem. As we’ve already seen in **chapter 15 (part 49)**, this was James, the Lord’s brother (**cf. Galatians 1:19**). In other words, this was Jesus’ half-brother, the son of Joseph and Mary who, during Jesus’ ministry on earth, did not believe but later became not only a believer but the leader of the Jerusalem church. He also is the author of the Epistle of James. (**cf. Matthew 13:55; John 7:5; Acts 1:14**). **NOTE:** The Apostle James had already been killed (**cf. Acts 12:1-2**).

- b. “...he told in detail those things which God had done among the Gentiles...” – Notice Paul didn’t report what he did, but what God did! He simply saw himself as a vessel, or a conduit through whom God would flow. He humbly gave God the glory. Reporting what the Lord had done was a usual pattern for him (**cf. 14:27; 15:4; 15:12**). Again, the Nelson Study Bible adds some great thoughts:

“The evidence of how God changed the lives of Gentiles was presented to the Christians in Jerusalem. The strongest evidence was the Gentile believers themselves who had accompanied Paul to Jerusalem. At this time, Paul may have also given the money he had been collecting from the Gentile Christians (11:27–30; 1 Cor. 16:1). The love the Gentiles expressed to their suffering Jewish brethren was a mark of their genuine conversion.”⁵

B. Verses 20-25 – James and the Elders share a Concern with Paul.

¹Nelson Study Bible, Earl D. Radmacher, gen.ed. (Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, 1997), 1749.

²Stanley M. Horton, *Acts: A Logion Press Commentary* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 2001), 349-350.

³Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 452.

⁴Ibid, 302.

⁵Nelson Study Bible, Earl D. Radmacher, gen.ed. (Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, 1997), 1751.

1. **Verses 20-21** - Though they were glorifying the Lord for all that had been accomplished, they warned Paul of those who were believing Jews, yet were "...zealous for the law." The word "zealous" means; "one who is deeply committed to something and therefore zealous"⁶ Thayer's Lexicon adds: "one burning with zeal"⁷.

Dr. Thomas Constable writes:

"Having rejoiced ('glorified') over Paul's account of the Gentiles' conversion, the elders also added that 'thousands' of 'Jews' had become believers, many of them in Jerusalem. Estimates of the population of Jerusalem at this time range between 30,000 and 50,000. The elders explained that these Jewish Christians had some misgivings about Paul's ministry, about rumors they had heard. The word on the streets was that Paul was going beyond his actual practice of not requiring Gentile converts to undergo circumcision or to obey the Mosaic Law. They had heard he was instructing Jewish converts not to practice circumcision or to observe the customs of Judaism. This was a false report. Paul did not teach that these customs were wrong, but just that they were unnecessary for justification and sanctification."⁸

2. What did Paul teach about the Old Testament Law?

- a. It reveals the sinfulness of man (cf. **Galatians 3:19**). Although the Law was good and holy (**Romans 7:12**), it did not provide salvation for the nation of Israel. **"Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin."** (**Romans 3:20**; cf. **Acts 13:38-39**).
- b. It reveals to humanity that no one can keep the Law but everyone falls short of God's standard of holiness. That realization causes us to rely on God's mercy and grace. When Christ came, He fulfilled the Law and with His death paid the penalty for our breaking it (**Galatians 3:24**; **Romans 10:4**). By faith in Him, the believer has the very righteousness of Christ imputed to him.

3. **Verses 22-25 – James and the Elders give Suggestion to Paul to ease the Tension.**

- a. **Verse 23-24 – Therefore do what we tell you: We have four men who have taken a vow...** These two verses seem strange to most of us. Stanley Horton is helpful to our understanding. He writes:

"Now, since all in Jerusalem would surely hear that Paul had come, what should be done? James and the elders had a suggestion that they hoped would avoid a split in the Church. They saw a way to stop the rumors and show they were false. Four of the Jewish believers had taken a vow upon themselves, obviously a temporary Nazirite vow. By this vow any Israelite man or woman could declare their total dedication to God and to His will. Usually the vow was taken for a limited period of time. At the close of the period they had chosen, they would offer rather expensive sacrifices, including a male and female lamb, a ram, and other offerings. Then they would shave their heads as a sign that the vow was completed (Num. 6:14-20)."⁹

1) Warren Wiersbe adds:

"All they asked was that he identify himself with four men under a Nazarite vow (Num. 6), pay for their sacrifices, and be with them in the temple for their time of purification. He agreed to do it. If it had been a matter involving somebody's personal salvation, you can be sure that Paul would never have cooperated; for that would have compromised his message of salvation by grace, through faith."¹⁰

2) Paul's actions here seem to coincide with something he wrote to the Corinthian church:

"For though I am free from all *men*, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those *who are* under the law, as under the law, that I might win those *who are* under the law; to those *who are* without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those *who are* without law; to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all *men*, that I might by all means save some."
I Corinthians 9:19-22

- b. **Verse 25** – This is a reiteration of the conclusion of the conference that was held a few years

⁶Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, 297.

⁷Joseph Henry Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Being Grimm's Wilke's Clavis Novi Testamenti* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House., 1977)

⁸Thomas L. Constable, *Notes on Acts* (<http://www.soniclight.com>: Sonic Light Publication, 2019), 421.

⁹Horton, 351-352.

¹⁰Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 491.

earlier as is recorded in Chapter 15 (cf. 15:19-20).