

Ministry of The Holy Spirit
Compromise or Courage?
Acts 21:17-40

Last time...Paul's journey from Miletus to his assent to Jerusalem

Along the way, in Troas and in Caesarea, Paul faced Spirit-filled push-back from the brethren and a prophetic warning about going to Jerusalem
But..."I am ready!"

This time...in Jerusalem, are Paul's decisions/actions those of compromise or courage?

To understand what Paul is thinking and doing, it is helpful to bear in mind the chronological sequence of God's progressive revelation of Truth thru Scripture
Thus far in the Ministry of the Holy Spirit...

[MoHS chart]

Let's make our way thru the balance of Acts 21, and then circle back with the benefit of the written revealed Truth at the time of these events

v17 After all the foreboding in every city about his going to Jerusalem, Paul arrives and in time for the Feast of Pentecost

And his reception by the brethren...the Family of God in Jerusalem...was warm

- sweet fellowship of friendly faces for the persecuted believers
- the loving presentation and thankful reception of the love offering from the Gentile churches

v18 The next day, Paul meets with the church leadership

- James
 - pastor of the church
 - son of Joseph and Mary
 - half-brother of Jesus
 - "author" of the first Church-wide Epistle
- the elders
 - all Jews
 - unnamed
 - Peter and John and other Apostles would have been named so the Holy Spirit has sent them elsewhere during this time

v19-20a After greetings are exchanged, Paul gives the leadership of the Church at Jerusalem his ministry report

- declared particularly – in great detail
- the things God had worked – Acts of the Holy Spirit vs Acts of the Apostles
- among the Gentiles – the mystery of salvation

Acts 10 Peter sent by the Holy Spirit to Cornelius, Roman centurion

Acts 15 1st Church Council regarding Gentile believers as a result of Paul's 1st Missionary Journey

Rom 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.

1 Tim 3:16 And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.

Paul gave detailed testimony of what God did...and the Jerusalem leadership rightfully glorified the Lord

They did NOT glorify Paul, the Lord's servant, because servants seek the glory of their Master

v20b-21 James and the elders now turn Paul's attention to the matter at hand – the Feast of Pentecost, one of 3 compulsory feasts to be attended by every Jewish male (if possible)

Now in Jerusalem are "many thousands of Jews that believe and are zealous for the Law"
Who are they?

And what do they believe?

Are they religious, Law-abiding Jews that

- believe in the Living God of AI&J?
- do not believe that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ?

Are they religious, Law-abiding Jews that

- believe in the Living God of AI&J?
- believe Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God?

Are they religious, Law-abiding Jews that

- believe in the Living God of AI&J?
- believe Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God?
- Gentile believers in Jesus must convert to Judaism to be saved?

Are they a combination of all of the above...a mixed multitude?

Putting on hold for a moment the answers to those questions, all those Jews are aware

- of Paul
 - by reputation
 - by personal experience
 - by reading “his” letters
- that Paul teaches the Jews of the Diaspora (not living in Jerusalem but among the Gentiles) to
 - forsake Moses i.e. the Law
 - not circumcise their sons
 - not live according to Jewish traditions

Is the “awareness” of the Jews based on fact or fiction?

Are these things true or is what Paul saying being twisted?

Has Paul taught the Jews to forsake Moses/the Law?

No

What has Paul said?

Gal 3:21-29

Rom 3-4

Has Paul taught the Jews to not circumcise (sign of God’s covenant with Abraham) their sons?

No

What has Paul said? (in order of God’s progressive revelation of truth)

Gal 5:2-4 Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace.

1 Cor 7:18-20 Is any man called being circumcised (Jewish)? let him not become uncircumcised. Is any called in uncircumcision (Gentile)? let him not be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God. Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called.

Rom 2:28-29 For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither *is that* circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he *is* a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision *is that* of the heart, in the spirit, *and* not in the letter; whose praise *is* not of men, but of God. (as says Scripture, Deut 10:16 and Jer 4:4)

Has Paul taught the Jews to abandon their Jewish traditions?

No

What has Paul said?

1 Cor 11:1 Be ye followers of me, even as I also *am* of Christ.

What did Jesus say?

Mark 7:6-13

But here we have the root of the trouble that awaits Paul here –

- gossip
- the twisting and misrepresentation of God's truth
- the lack of knowledge about Scripture

James and elders in Jerusalem continue with the situation at hand as it concerns Paul

v22 What is it therefore – Get ready, Paul!

You are “Public Enemy #1” and they are on the lookout for you!

And they will find you because you and all the many thousands of Jews are going
to gather in the Temple for the Feast

News will spread like wildfire that you are there

v23-24 We live in this town

We are being persecuted by our own people the Jews

We do not want any more trouble than we already have

Tensions are already too high

Therefore, we ask you to do what we propose

Situation: 4 men have taken a Nazarite vow (Num 6)

They are going to complete their vow (the days of their separation)
and offer sacrifices this feast

Proposal: You

- receive them, go with them
- purify yourself with them, keeping the Jewish religious ritual for ceremonial cleansing
- pay their expenses, each of them needing to bring
 - a lamb of the first year without blemish for a burnt offering
 - a lamb of the first year without blemish for a sin offering
 - a ram without blemish for a peace offering
 - basket of unleavened bread and meat offerings
 - a drink offering
 - (our study in Leviticus...)

so they can shave their heads (fulfill their vow of separation)
and so all the thousands of Jews that believe and are zealous of the
Law may know

- all these reports about you and what you are teaching are not true
- you also walk orderly...a Law-abiding Jew, not a rebel or an apostate that they believe you to be
- you also still keep/observe the Law

Timeout!

What progressive revelation of God thru Scripture has already been written...
and by whom?!

James 2:10 For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one *point*, he is guilty of all.

James 2:14-26 Faith vs Works, Faith that saves works
Religion: men doing things to get God's attention/approval
Relationship: God has done to get man's attention

What progressive revelation of God thru Scripture has Paul already written?

Gal 3:11-14 But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, *it is* evident: for, The just shall live by faith. And the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them. Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed *is* every one that hangeth on a tree: That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

1 Cor 5:7b For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us

Rom 3:19-20 Law declares the whole world guilty before God for by the Law is the knowledge of sin

Rom 7:12-25 the Law is holy, just, good, spiritual...but

What is going on here?!

Has James compromised the faith and the Gospel in the face of persecution?

Is James advocating the compromise of the Law of liberty in order to keep the peace?

Is he asking Paul to also compromise the faith, the Gospel, and the Truth?

Have the pressures of persecution "moved" James off the simplicity of Jesus Christ and the grace of God?

Has James "read" Galatians and/or Romans?

Do the Jewish Church leaders in Jerusalem not understand what has been revealed thru Paul?

v25 Now James reaffirms the (his) decision of the 1st Church Council (Acts 15) regarding Gentile believers.

But, on the heels of v23-24, is James saying that there are 2 kinds of

- believers?
- salvations?
- Churches?

Is Luke 12:48 (the Law and prophets to the Jews) about religious ritual observation or relationship depth?

v26 How did Paul respond to James' proposal?

Without (recorded) argument or objection

He accepted it!

- went thru the Jewish religious rituals with the 4 Nazarites
- bought and brought the burnt, sin, and peace offerings for all of them

What is Paul thinking?!

v27-29 They, Paul and the 4 Nazarites, were almost done, when...Jews from Asia (probably Ephesus) recognized Paul and "pulled the fire alarm"

v11 begins

The prophesy of Agabus and the testimony of the Holy Spirit in every city starts to unfold

"This is Paul!

This is the man we told you about that teaches against, us Jews, the Law/Moses, and this temple! (all gossip and twisted misrepresentations)

This man even defiled the Temple by bringing a Gentile (whom they must have also recognized) into the holy place!"

(a false accusation and an unverified assumption)

Note: flow of people via Court of Gentiles to Court of Women to Court of Men
signs before the Court of Women warning Gentiles to go no further under threat of death

Result of the fire alarm?

A fire!

v30 And all the city was moved...NOT a revival!

The Jews of Asia ignited the assembled Jews with their words, and a mob was birthed
Paul was dragged...undoubtedly not gently...out of the Temple
The Temple doors were immediately shut...on a very important day

Paul's ministry in cities ended in either revivals or riots...usually riots
Here we go again...

v31-32 The mob attacks Paul with murderous rage
Mob mentality is always violent

The situation has suddenly become a career and life threatening event to the Roman
authorities; Rome had a Zero tolerance policy toward rebellion and insurrection

Pentecost was as Passover –

- the population of Jerusalem swelled to perhaps 2 million Jews
- nationalistic fervor of the Jews ran high
- rebellion/insurrection was a grave threat to the Roman Empire

The Roman Governor of Judea at the time was a cat named Felix
He was not even in town, he was in his HQ in Caesarea

The news of another Jewish uprising quickly was told to the highest ranking Roman
official in town, the chief captain (commander of thousands of Roman soldiers),
resident in Antonia Fortress overlooking Temple Mount
He rallied his troops and centurions and rushed into the tumult

When they saw the great show of force coming by Rome, the Jewish mob stopped
beating Paul; that had been beating him, intent on killing him

v33-34 The chief captain seized and arrested Paul, having him bound with chains to 2 Roman
soldiers, of the husky and nasty bent, I'm sure
The prophesy of Agabus comes true

Then the chief captain demands to know from the Jews who this guy is and what he did
to cause this dangerous and illegal uproar

Instead of clarity, he gets confusion from the mob
Unable to ascertain the facts, he commands that Paul be taken to Antonia Fortress...
for interrogation!

v35-36 Because the Jews were in a murderous rage, Paul had to be carried overhead by the soldiers, lest he be killed by the mob
And since the Roman soldiers would not allow them to kill Paul, the mob cries out that they kill him

v37-38 Rescued from the Jews by the Romans, Paul calmly and respectfully speaks to the chief captain
“May I have a word with you?”

“Huh?! You can speak Greek?
(only civilized people spoke Greek, non-Greek speakers were called Barbarians)
Are you not that Egyptian, a real bad guy, who about 6 years ago challenged the Roman Empire here in Jerusalem?”

v39 Paul identifies himself to the chief captain

- a Jew
- a citizen of Tarsus, a city of prominence in the Roman Empire

Then Paul requests to speak to the very people who just bull rushed him and beat him with the intent of killing him

v40 Given the weight of his citizenship of Tarsus, the chief captain gives the Greek-speaking Paul permission to speak to the raucous mob screaming for his death
When he beckoned with his hand for their attention...the tumultuous mob quickly became silent

How?
By Whom?
A miracle, a work, of the Holy Spirit

And Paul, having just spoken in Greek to a Greek, now speaks Hebrew to the Hebrews

Let's circle back and re-visit this account so we know what the Holy Spirit is telling us about Paul's decisions/actions – were they of compromise or courage?

v17 What was in the Apostle Paul's heart as he ascended into Jerusalem?
Love, the love of God

Rom 9:1-5	in action!
Rom 10:1-4	in action!
Rom 15:25-26	in action

v20 Who are the “many thousands of Jews that believe and are zealous for the Law” that are later ignited into a murderous mob?

Bear in mind 1 Cor 10:32 Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God:

In the progressive revelation of God thru Scripture, there are 3 kinds of people:

1. unbelieving Jews
2. unbelieving Gentiles
3. the Church, believing Jews and believing Gentiles

v20 certainly speaks of religious, Law-abiding Jews that

- believe in the Living God of AI&J
- do not believe that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, the Son of the Living God

What is under attack by these religious Jews?

- the purpose of the Law
- the Gospel of Grace, “Paul’s Gospel”
- the Identity and Deity of Jesus Christ
- the salvation of the Gentiles

Gal 1:4 (the Lord Jesus Christ) Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father

Gal 2:16 Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.

Rom 1:16-17 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. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.

Rom 3:19-20 Law declares the whole world guilty before God for by the Law is the knowledge of sin

Rom 5:1 Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ

Rom 5:20-21 Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.

But, in historical context, the multitude was probably mixed because something else is also in play: Satan's attack on the unity of the Church – Jewish vs Gentile

At this time, the Church in Jerusalem is

- exclusively Jewish
- still very attached to the Law, the sacrifices, and the traditions
- wrestling with the revelation of God

Gal 3:28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.

1 Cor 12:13 For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether *we be* Jews or Gentiles, whether *we be* bond or free

So v20 probably also included “Judaizers”, religious Law-abiding Jews that

- believe in the Living God of AI&J
- believe Jesus is the Christ
- Gentile believers in Jesus must convert to Judaism and keep the Law to be saved...anti-grace religion
- opposed Paul at every turn

v22-26 What is in the mind of the Apostle Paul when seemingly “goaded” by James and the elders to compromise his knowledge of God's revelation and the Gospel?

The Love of God

The Law of Love to not stumble the weak in faith, the Royal Law,
as James also knows

James 2:8 If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well:

1 Cor 9:19-22 in action

1 Tim 1:5 Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and *of* a good conscience, and *of* faith unfeigned

Note: Future to this time, in God's progressive revelation thru Scripture, what will come out of the Love of God in Paul's heart and mind?

The inspired Epistle to the Hebrews (thru the Apostle Paul, I believe),
the Holy Spirit's commentary on

- the Law
- the sacrificial system
- the Levitical priesthood

v39-40 A child of the Light asked for and is given an opportunity to speak into the darkness of religion

This takes...great courage

v13 is NOT bluster, it is uncompromised courage!

True is Acts 9:15-16 **Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.**

Love does not compromise

Love is not weak or cowardly

Love is the fulfillment of the Law!!! (Rom 13:10)

Love is the union of words and deeds...

v13 is a proclamation of Love and Paul is living it

Application

The Church in these last of the last days is faced with compromise

- water down the gospel
- play down Jesus
- tickle ears
- steered by men
- turn from the Truth to fables
- Coexist, embrace unity at the expense of truth

and

courage

- follow Jesus
- stand on the Gospel of Grace that is ALWAYS under attack
- boldly proclaim the name of Jesus, the only name given under heaven among men whereby we must be saved from eternal death
- tingle ears – turn to face the Son or face the coming judgment of God
- unity in the Spirit of Truth

Many will compromise, few will have courage

Still true to this day,

1 Thes 3:3-4 no man should be moved by these afflictions: for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto. For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; even as it came to pass, and ye know.

1 Thes 3:8 For now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord.

To courageously and uncompromisingly stand fast in the Lord,

1. Love the Truth

Only by the Truth of God will we NOT be deceived by the world

- AI

Google: CEO wants to make a digital god

ChatGPT: Microsoft want to decide elections

Joe Rogan Podcast ala “War of the Worlds”

1st application of AI: words (ala the Jews from Asia in v27-30)
(do not be naïve!)

- Transgender delusion
- gender confusion
- UFO frenzy
- antisemitism
- abortion industry

Only by knowing the Truth will we know what we are to do in the midst of
false accusations, twisted misrepresentations, false assumptions, and
ignorance of the mob mentality of the world’s “progressives”

2. Speak the Truth with Love

With the heart of God and the mind of Christ, lovingly and gently and meekly
yet boldly speak Truth to

- family
- prodigal children
- friends
- whoso crosses our path

for time is running out

We overcome evil with good

We are not to return evil for evil

With loving boldness, have the courage to share the Good News

Start a conversation

The more we share, the more the Holy Spirit gives us to share

ALTAR CALL