

# A MINISTRY FOR HUNGRY SAINTS

UNDER THE EXALTED CHRIST, THE GOSPEL BEGINS TO SPREAD

# THE ACTS

† THE BOOK OF ACTS

## OF THE APOSTLES

WORD OF TRUTH MINISTRIES, Associated

*An overview of the Book of Acts, by Given O. Blakely*

### ACTS 5:31-32

*"Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Savior, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are His witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey Him."*

"Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." (Acts 4:12)

### Lesson #88

### COMMENTARY ON: 21:20-29

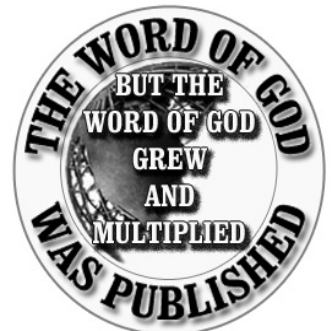
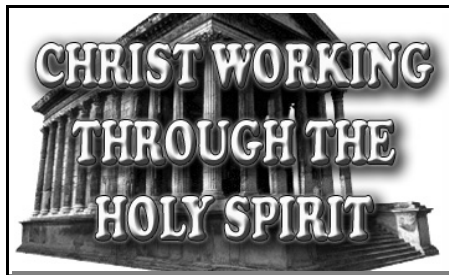
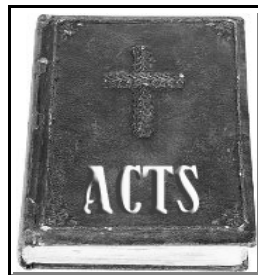
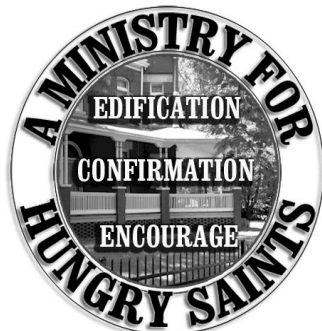
#### PAUL PURIFIES HIMSELF WITH FOUR MEN TAKING A VOW

There is a certain versatility in newness of life that is scarcely comprehended in our time. In fact, throughout history it has been misunderstood and abused by professing Christians. Those with a Law mindset do not comprehend the text before us. It violates what they perceive to be the will of the Lord. However, when human opinions differ from the decisions made by men who are of the caliber of James and Paul I hardly see that we have any choice concerning who to follow. Upon the advice of James, and in order to remove a stumbling block from those whose understanding was not yet mature, Paul will join four Jewish believers who have made a vow, and will pay the expenses related to that vow. When he is seen in the Temple by some Jews from Asia, they stirred up the people, and laid their hands on Paul, telling the people he had been speaking against the Jews and their customs. With all the people being in an uproar, the accusers took Paul from the Temple, and shut the temple doors.

### ACTS 17:26-27

*"And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after Him, and find Him, though He be not far from every one of us."*

" . . . and ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." (Acts 1:8)



Since May, 1993, a ministry instituted for the encouragement of believers in Christ

# The Book of Acts

## Lesson Number 88



**A MINISTRY INITIATED IN MAY 1993, AND DEDICATED TO STRENGTHENING THOSE WHO ARE IN CHRIST, BY BUILDING THEIR FAITH, ENHANCING THEIR JOY AND STABILIZING THEIR HOPE, ENABLING THEM TO WORK OUT THEIR SALVATION WITH FEAR AND TREMBLING.**

**TRANSLATION LEGEND:** ALT=Analytical-Literal Translation (2005), **AMPLIFIED** =Amplified Bible (1965), **ASV**=American Standard Version (1901), **BBE**=Bible in Basic English (1949), **DRA**=Douay-Rheims (1899), **ERV** =English Revised Version (1885), **ESV**=English Stand Version (2001), **GNB**=Good News (1966), **GWN**=God's Word (1995), **IE**=International English (1973), **ISV**=International Standard Version (1967), **JPS**=Jewish Publication Society (1917), **KJV**=King James Version (1611), **LITV**= Literal Translation of the Bible (1976), **LIVING**=Living Bible (1971), **MESSAGE**=The Message (1993), **MKJV**= Modern KJV (1962), **MONTGOMERY**=Montgomery's New Testament (2001), **MRD**=Peshitta-James Murdock Translation (1852), **NAB**=New American Bible (2002), **NASB**=New American Standard Bible (1977), **NAU**=New American Standard Bible (1995), **NIB**=New International Bible, **NIV**=New International Version (1984), **NJB**=New Jerusalem Bible (1985), **NKJV**=New King James Version (1979), **NLT**=New Living Translation (1996), **NRSV**=New Revised Standard Version (1989), **PHILLIPS**=J B Phillips New Testament (1962), **PNT**=Bishop's New Testament (1595), **RSV**=Revised Standard Version (1952), **TNK**=JPS Tanakj (1985), **Webster**=The Webster Bible (1833), **WEYMOUTH**=Weymouth's New Testament (1903), **WILLIAMS**=William's New Testament (1937), **TYNDALE**=Tyndale's Bible (1526), **WYCLIFFE**=Wycliffe New Testament (1382), **YLT**=Young's Literal Translation (1862).

**THE INSPIRED RECORD OF HOW THE ENTHRONED CHRIST, BY MEANS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, WORKED THROUGH HIS HOLY APOSTLES AND GODLY MEN, TO SPREAD THE WORD OF THE GOSPEL THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE WORLD, AND TO BRING EDIFICATION AND STABILITY TO MEMBERS OF CHRIST'S BODY.**

----- Lexicon and Bible Translation Codes with Identification -----  
**LXICON LEGEND:** **FRIEBERG** = Friberg Lexicon, **UBS** = UBS Lexicon, **LOUW-NIDA** = Louw-Nida Lexicon, **LIDDELL SCOTT** = Liddell Scott Lexicon, **THAYER** = Thayer's Greek Lexicon, **LEH** = LEH Lexicon, **GINGRICH** = Gingrich Lexicon

**DISCLAIMER:** The quoting of other translations is not to be taken as a condoning of them. My purpose is rather to show the remarkable diversity, and sometimes outright contradictions that exist among these various versions of Scripture. Our understanding of the Word of God ultimately depends upon our comprehension of the Lord Himself and His eternal purpose. Where this understanding is not present, we are shut up to scholasticism and conjecture, both of which are of the world, not of God.

# PAUL PURIFIES HIMSELF WITH FOUR MEN TAKING A VOW

“ 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: <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. <sup>25</sup> As touching the Gentiles which believe, we have written and concluded that they observe no such thing, save only that they keep themselves from things offered to idols, and from blood, and from strangled, and from fornication. <sup>26</sup> Then Paul took the men, and the next day purifying himself with them entered into the temple, to signify the accomplishment of the days of purification, until that an offering should be offered for every one of them. <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.” . . . . . (Acts 21:20-30)

## INTRODUCTION

**A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE TEXT**  
There is a certain versatility in newness of life that is scarcely comprehended in our time. In fact, throughout history it has been misunderstood and abused by professing Christians. Those with a Law mindset do not comprehend the text before us. It violates what they perceive to be the

will of the Lord. However, when human opinions differ from the decisions made by men who are of the caliber of James and Paul, I hardly see that we have any choice concerning who to follow. Upon the advice of James, and in order to remove a stumbling block from those whose understanding was not yet mature, Paul will join four Jewish

believers who have made a vow, and will pay the expenses related to that vow. When he is seen in the Temple by some Jews from Asia, they stirred up the people, laid their hands on Paul, telling the people he had been speaking against the Jews and their customs, as well as the Law and the Temple. With all the people being in an uproar, the accusers

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- **ALL THE CITY WAS MOVED (21:30)**
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took Paul from the Temple, and shut the temple doors.

Thus a saga commences that will finally terminate with Paul being in Rome, preaching the Gospel as Jesus said he would (Acts 23:11), and then being martyred.

### THE SERIOUSNESS REFLECTED IN THE TEXT

Through this text there is a level of spiritual seriousness that stands in stark contrast to the casualness of our time.

- ⇒ **PAUL.** He has been laboring for the Lord, and now comes to give a report of the how the Lord has worked through his ministry.
- ⇒ **JAMES AND THE ELDERS** listen intently to Paul's report. Giving glory to God for the things that had been done.
- ⇒ **THOUSANDS OF JEWS.** These were Jews who had believed and were concerned about what they had heard relative to Paul. They are described as being "zealous of the law."
- ⇒ **FOUR JEWISH MEN.** Four unnamed men who had taken a holy vow before the Lord, and were in the process of fulfilling it.
- ⇒ **CONCERN FOR THE JEWS WHO BELIEVE.** James is concerned that the believing Jews do now have a false impression of

Paul, and therefore is moved to suggest a certain course of action.

- ⇒ **THE GENTILES WHO BELIEVE.** The Gentiles who had believed were easily directed in a wise course of living by the letters sent to them from the Apostles and elders.
- ⇒ **THE JEWS FROM ASIA.** Although they were opposed to Paul, it was on the basis of their commitment to the Law and the Old Covenant.

**This is the context in which the events of our text take place: one of religious sobriety and zeal.**

I cannot help but observe how different this is from the religious environment of our time. There is almost a total lack of sobriety and spiritual sensitivity in the religious gatherings of our time. A significant percentage of Christian meetings are actually spiritually disarming, catering to the flesh, speckled with humor, and flaunting the wisdom of the world before the faces of the people. It is questionable whether the Holy Spirit **can** work in such surroundings.

The environment of Christian gatherings is a testimonial to where the people have been living. It reveals whether their minds have been set on things above, or things on the earth; whether they have been living for themselves, or unto the Lord. When surroundings make it difficult to receive the Word of God, it is because they are saturated with unbelief.

Those who opposed the truth were generally driven by their religious convictions – whether the Jews, or the silversmiths of Ephesus.

### THE NATURE OF THE WARFARE

War itself is a sobering thing. It is much more so when we ponder what is involved in *spiritual* warfare. Believers are apprised of the fact that they are wrestling "against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high

places" (Eph 6:12). Thoughts and ways of thinking are also involved in the good fight of faith: "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down **imaginings**, and **every high thing** that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity **every thought** to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor 10:3-5).

**Such activities take place in the domain of soberness. I do not know how it is possible to engage such adversarial influences while lacking seriousness.** In fact, delusion itself requires a form of sobriety and seriousness.

The promotion of a casual religion, or one that allows for undisciplined thought, is nothing more than a bottomless pit. When religion is driven by frivolity and humor, an environment is created that is spiritually hostile. A spiritual mind cannot profit from such an environ, because it is antithetical to every aspect of spiritual life, whether it is growing up into Christ, resisting the devil, or engaging hostile forces in spiritual warfare.

### THE DIFFERENCE IN TODAY'S RELIGIOUS ENVIRONMENT

The difference in today's religious environment is largely owing to the lack of godly sobriety. The spiritual posture that is encouraged is one in which Satan can catch the people unawares, for they are ignorant of his devices. It is also one in which the Holy Spirit is not apt to work, because the mind of the people is too close to the earth, and too far from heaven. **The concepts of strangership and pilgrimage are strange to the modern church.** Not loving the world has the sound of an unfamiliar note. The admonition to seek the things that are above has a strange and confusing sound to it, for the people do not appear to be conscience of the existence of such things, much less feel a compulsion to seek after them. All of this has happened amidst a flurry of religious activities, increased mega-churches, and ministers that are writing best sellers. How to religion is a burgeoning business. However

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the results of it all are **not** good. Considering whoever is responsible for feeding the flock of God, all of this has happened on their

watch – which means they did **not** watch as they were supposed to. Someone of responsibility let seducers into the assembly.

Failing to do what is required of them. I do not know how it is possible to ignore this circumstance.

**WHEN THEY HEARD IT, THEY GLORIFIED THE LORD**

*“21:20 And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord . . .”*

The report of *“particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by”* Paul’s *“ministry,”* produced some effects

One can scarcely imagine this kind of report being given to the average church leaders. None of the things that mark successful enterprises were included in the report. Rather, it concerned what God had done through Paul’s ministry. **The capacity**

the saints, **it is by no means the exclusive, or even superior means through which God is glorified or praised.** The *“fruit of our lips”* is certainly not limited to singing (Heb 13:15). Yet, this impression is growing in its impact upon the Christian community. Were you to ask what role the new “worship leader” plays in the congregation, you would be hard pressed to find anyone who did not say it was the person who led the singing, now referred to as “praise and worship.”

**One can scarcely imagine this kind of report being given to the average church leaders. None of the things that mark successful enterprises were included in the report. Rather, it concerned what God had done through Paul’s ministry. The capacity to listen to and absorb such reports is marvelous, indeed.**

**None of these concepts were in place at the time of our text.** When James and the elders heard the insightful report of Paul, they did not begin singing, entering into a time of, what men call, “praise and worship.” While such a thing may very well have been included, most thinking people know is not the default meaning of the text.

among James and the elders of Jerusalem. Their response will reveal, much about them, and where their hearts were focused. Their love for the brethren, and quickness to recognize what the Lord had done will also be made known. There will be no sectarian or factious response, or any attempt to neutralize the report by comparing it to what was being done in Jerusalem.

**to listen to and absorb such reports is marvelous, indeed.** It is the outworking of being reconciled to God, having his laws written upon our hearts, and possessing the Holy Spirit within.

Early in the Acts, it is written that *“men glorified God for that which was done”* (Acts 4:21). This had particular reference to the healing of the lame man at the gate called Beautiful. Later, when Peter reported the conversion of the Gentiles at the house of Cornelius, those who heard him *“glorified God, saying Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life”* (Acts 11:18). In Antioch of Pisidia, when Paul declared that God had commanded *“saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth”* (Acts 13:47), the Gentiles *“were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed”* (Acts 13:48).

**WHEN THEY HEARD IT**

*“And when they heard it . . .”* Other versions read, *“when they heard this,”* NIV *“and hearing it,”* BBE *“On hearing it,”* CJB *“having heard it,”* DARBY *“heard about everything,”* GWN *“after hearing this,”* NLT *“heard these things,”* IE *“had heard his statement,”* WEYMOUTH and *“on hearing this account.”* PHILLIPS

**AND GLORIFIED THE LORD**  
*“ . . . they glorified the Lord . . .”*  
 Other versions read, *“began glorifying God,”* NASB *“praise God,”* NIV *“gave praise to God,”* BBE *“gave glory to God,”* NJB *“were glorifying the Lord,”* YLT and *“they adored and exalted and praised and thanked God.”* AMPLIFIED

Upon hearing the report of Paul, James and the elders *“glorified the Lord,”* or *“gave praise to God.”* Pricisely what does that mean?

In Romans, the Gentile world was charged with **not glorifying God “as God,”** choosing rather to change the glory of God into an image (Rom 1:21). When the churches in Judea heard that Saul of Tarsus, who once persecuted the church, was *“preaching the faith which once he destroyed,”* they *“glorified God”* in him (Gal 1:24). Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, telling them he was praying that God would count them worthy of calling, *“That the*

As it is used here, the word *“heard”* means, *“to attend to (use the faculty of hearing), consider what is or has been said . . . to understand, perceive the sense of what is said.”* THAYER There is interest, attentiveness, and understanding in this kind of hearing. It goes far beyond merely hearing the sound of human speech. There is discernment – spiritual discernment. When Paul reported what God had done through his ministry, these hearers were able to associate what was done with the work and purpose of the Lord.

In our time, There is a great deal of confusion, and even disinterest, in the matter of glorifying the Lord, or praising Him. Some have even equated this with singing choruses. In fact, there is a growing tendency among professed believers to actually limit praising and glorifying God to joint expressions in song. While *“singing and making melody in our heart to the Lord”* (Eph 5:19), and *“teaching and admonishing one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs”* (Col 3:16) – and doing so in our hearts – is an appointed means or bringing profit to

**name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified**” in them (2 Thess 1:12). Peter wrote, *“If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ”* (1 Pet 4:11). To those who were being reproached for the name of the Lord he wrote, *“If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part He is glorified”* (1 Pet 4:14).

Paul wrote to the brethren in Rome, *“That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (Rom 15:6). To the Corinthians he wrote, *“For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s”* (1 Cor 6:20). Peter wrote to dispersed believers, *“Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation”* (1 Pet 2:12). Again he wrote, *“Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf”* (1 Pet 4:16).

**A Brief Summation**

Notice what is said about God being glorified.

- ⇒ God was glorified for what was done.
- ⇒ God was glorified by saying He had granted repentance to the Gentiles.
- ⇒ The word of the Lord concerning the acceptance of the Gentiles was glorified.
- ⇒ God was **not** glorified when the Gentiles to serve gods of their own

making.

- ⇒ The disciples glorified God when they heard that Saul of Tarsus was preaching the faith.
- ⇒ The name of the Lord Jesus is glorified by the upright walk of His people.
- ⇒ Those who minister with the ability

has particular regard to what has been accomplished in Christ Jesus, the implications of those accomplishments, and the general working of salvation in the earth. People cannot glorify the Lord in a state of ignorance, or in a condition in which the hand of the Lord is not clearly seen. When God works, those who recognize and appreciate it can give Him glory. Faith will compel them to do so, and the benefits

**To me, it is no wonder that Satan has so muddied the waters concerning the praise of God. He has brought influences to bear upon unstable hearts which has led them to believe that glorifying the Lord, or rendering praise to Him, will somehow make up for the deficiencies in men**

that God gives make it possible for God to be glorified in all things.

- ⇒ God is glorified when His people are persecuted for righteousness’ sake.
- ⇒ The church is to glorify God with one mouth and one mind.
- ⇒ God is to be glorified in our body, by an upright conversation.
- ⇒ A holy life will provoke enemies to glorify God in the day of their visitation.
- ⇒ Those who suffer as a Christian can glorify God.

realized from such insight will cause them to do it thankfully.

**To me, it is no wonder that Satan has so muddied the waters concerning the praise of God.** He has brought influences to bear upon unstable hearts which has led them to believe that glorifying the Lord, or rendering praise to Him, will somehow make up for the deficiencies in men – that the God from whom they are in practical alienation, will suddenly draw near to them to bless and strengthen them. All of this is perceived as being done in spite of the miserable condition of the people.

**In the word of God, those who glorified God were cognizant of His presence, and were already engaged in the will of God.** They were familiar enough with God to discern His unique and effective work.

**What Does It Mean to Glorify God?**

Glorifying God is an expression of faith and insight. It is the result of beholding the hand of God in the affairs of men. This

**MANY THOUSANDS OF JEWS WHICH BELIEVE**

*“ . . . 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. . . ”*

James and the elders hear of what God had done through Paul among the Gentiles, and immediately think of the Jewish believers. **It was important to them that an incorrect view of Paul’s ministry not be embraced by their own people.** Intuitively, they seemed to be keenly aware that the working of God through Paul’s ministry did not mean that the Jews were being abandoned. Although

the majority of them had not believed on Christ, they had not been discarded by the Lord as a despised race. Only those who did NOT believe were ever rebuked by Paul. Never did he insinuate that, as a nation, they were now a despised and rejected people. Yet, people with just a smattering of knowledge might be drawn to that conclusion. Also, those Jews who had been teaching the necessity of circumcision to be saved (Acts

15:1) may very well have given a report of Paul that could easily lead people to such conclusions.

Now, we are exposed to the reasoning of **holy** men who do not want people to draw the wrong conclusions about the legitimate work of God, or the people through whom that work was being done. Oh, that there were more such people in our time, who would be quick to put-down any misperceptions of those through whom God is working.

**MANY THOUSANDS OF BELIEVING JEWS**

“ . . . and said unto him, *Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe . . .*” Other versions read, “many myriads of Jews who have believed,” <sup>NKJV</sup> “thousands of Jews have believed,” <sup>NIV</sup> “how many thousands of believers there are among the Jews,” <sup>NRSV</sup> “what thousands there are among the Jews, who have the faith,” <sup>BBE</sup> “how many tens of thousands of believers there are among the Judeans,” <sup>CJB</sup> “you can see that thousands of Jews have become believers,” <sup>IE</sup> and “how many tens of thousands of Jews there are among those who have accepted the faith.” <sup>WEYMOUTH</sup>

The impact of the preaching in Jerusalem and the surrounding areas is made known in this text. What a description of the number of believers in a given city at one time: “many thousands.”

The word “many” means, “great . . . how much,” <sup>THAYER</sup> “a considerable amount,” <sup>LOUW-NIDA</sup> “magnitude,” <sup>LIDDELL-SCOTT</sup> and “how great.” <sup>GINGRICH</sup> This term is not applies to the Jews themselves – i.e. “many Jews, or a great number of Jews.” The large number is applied to the word “thousands” – i.e. a staggering number of thousands. As used here, the word “thousands” means “ten thousand . . . innumerable multitude, an unlimited number, like our ‘myriads,’” <sup>THAYER</sup> and “countless thousands.” <sup>FRIBERG</sup> Synonyms would be “thousands upon thousands,” and “tens of thousands.” A similar expression (μυριάδες μυριάδων) is found in Revelation 9:16: “And the number of the army of the horsemen were **two hundred thousand thousand**: and I heard the number of them” (Rev 9:16).

This number doubtless included a number of dispersed Jews who were gathered together in Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost – even as there was on the day of Pentecost following Christ’s ascension into

glory (Acts 2:5). **The difference in this text is that the Jews of reference were all “believers.”**

The term “believers” is never applied to anyone outside of Christ . This is a term applied to those who were “added to the Lord” (Acts 4:14). From Genesis through Malachi, the words “believe” and “believed,” as related to a response to God Himself, are only used favorably nine times, the other use being “believed **not**” (Gen 15:6; Ex 4:31; 14:31; Psa 27:13; 106:12; 116:10; 119:66; Dan 6:23; Jonah 3:5). By way of comparison, they are used 123 times in Matthew through Revelation (58 times in Matthew through John, 30 times in Acts, and 35 times from Romans through the Revelation).

**As Paul stated, believing was not something associated with the Law, or the First Covenant.** As it is written, “And the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them” (Gal 3:12). Other versions read, “not based upon faith,” <sup>NIV</sup> “does not rest on faith,” <sup>NRSV</sup> “not based on trusting and being faithful,” <sup>CJB</sup> “have nothing to do with faith,” <sup>GWN</sup> “does not depend upon faith,” <sup>NAB</sup> and “does not rest on faith [does not require faith, has nothing to do with faith].” <sup>AMPLIFIED</sup>

**T h i s s t a g g e r i n g m u l t i t u d e o f b e l i e v e r s , t h e r e f o r e , c a n n o t b e r e f e r r i n g t o d e v o u t J e w s w h o w e r e n o t i n C h r i s t J e s u s . T h e L a w w a s c a l c u l a t e d t o b r i n g m e n t o C h r i s t ( G a l 3 : 2 4 ) , b u t i t c o u l d n o t i n d u c t t h e m i n t o C h r i s t o r b r i n g t h e m t o b e l i e v e o n H i m . B e l i e v i n g i s a r e s p o n s e t o t h e G o s p e l , n o t t h e L a w ( M k 1 6 : 1 5 - 1 6 ) . I t h a s t o d o w i t h r e s p o n d i n g t o J e s u s , n o t t h e c o m m a n d m e n t s o f t h e L a w .**

Matthew . . . . .	35 AD
Mark . . . . .	42 AD
Luke . . . . .	59 AD
John . . . . .	42 AD
Acts . . . . .	63 AD
Romans . . . . .	57 AD
1 Corinthians . . . . .	56 AD
2 Corinthians . . . . .	57 AD
Galatians . . . . .	53 AD
Ephesians . . . . .	61-63 AD
Philippians . . . . .	61-63 AD
Colossians . . . . .	61-63 AD
1 Thessalonians . . . . .	51 AD
2 Thessalonians . . . . .	52 AD
1 Timothy . . . . .	63 AD
2 Timothy . . . . .	67 AD
Titus . . . . .	63 AD
Philemon . . . . .	61-63 AD
Hebrews . . . . .	61-62 AD
James . . . . .	40-41 AD
1 Peter . . . . .	64-65 AD
2 Peter . . . . .	65-66 AD
1 John . . . . .	63-64 AD
2 John . . . . .	63-64 AD
3 John . . . . .	63-64 AD
Jude . . . . .	66-67 AD
Revelation . . . . .	95 AD

These dates are only human estimates, and there are varied opinions about them. Yet, they offer a valid comparative analysis of general times .

The law was calculated to prepare men for Christ by means of a devoted and consistent life that was lived with an acute sensitivity to the will of God. It was that very circumstance that defiled the conscience, for the Law had no power to effect the changes that it demanded. Like all other believers in the book of Acts, this vast number of Jews were disciples of Christ, having believed and obeyed the Gospel.

**THEY ARE ALL ZEALOUS OF THE LAW**

“ . . . and they are all zealous of the law . . . .” Other versions read, “zealous for the Law,” <sup>NASB</sup> “have a great respect for the Law,” <sup>BBE</sup> “deeply committed to Moses’ Teachings,” <sup>GWN</sup> “zealous observers of the Law,” <sup>NAB</sup> “ardent upholders of the Law,” <sup>NET</sup> “staunch upholders of the Law,” <sup>NJB</sup> “follow the Law of Moses very seriously,” <sup>NLT</sup> “earnest followers of the Law,” <sup>PNT</sup> “very insistent that Jewish believers must continue to follow the Jewish traditions and customs,” <sup>LIVING</sup> “they all think it is very important to obey the law,” <sup>IE</sup> and “enthusiastic upholders of the [Mosaic] Law.” <sup>AMPLIFIED</sup>

In reading a text like this, one must keep in mind that the New Testament Scriptures had not yet been written and dispersed. With some slight differences of view, conservative Bible scholars estimate that the books of Matthew through Revelation were written between 35 AD and 95 AD.

It is estimated that the occasion of our text took place around 57 AD. This being the case, Only Matthew, Mark, John, Galatians, and First and Second Thessalonians had been written – to say nothing of the dispersment of the letters to all of the churches. **The point is that much of the teaching with which earnest disciples are now acquainted was not yet common knowledge among those early disciples.** They had met and discussed extensively the necessity of circumcision, as well as what portions of the Law were still to be honored (Acts 15).

When it says these Jews were zealous for the Law, it does not mean they were adhering to it as a basis of salvation - - attempting, so to speak, to establish their own righteousness. That was the status of unbelieving Jews, not believing ones (Rom 10:3).

**The Old Covenant, with all of its varied ceremonies, was not abruptly**

**terminated on the day of Pentecost.** The sacrifices were no longer valid, as the Gospel announces Christ is the only valid propitiation *“for the sins of the whole world”* (1 John 2:1), Him being the Lamb of God that took *“away the sin of the world”* (John 1:29). John the Baptist prepared the Jews for the Lamb of God through his introductory ministry.

### The Fading of the Old

In an arresting passage, the epistles of Second Corinthians and Hebrews addresses the manner in which the Old Covenant, together with its attending ceremonies, was invalidated from a practical point of view. Keep in mind that we are not speaking of becoming righteous, a propitiation for sin, and acceptance by God. This pertains to the ceremonial aspect of the Law.

### Second Corinthians

- ⇒ The Law is referred to as a ministration of death, engraved on stones (3:7). This is compared to the New Covenant, which is the ministration of the Spirit (3:8).
- ⇒ There was a glory that attended the giving of the Law, but it faded, like the glow of Moses’ face did after he had spoken with God (3:7b). This is compared with the exceeding glory of the New Covenant which continues to increase in glory, rather than decrease (3:8-9).
- ⇒ The Old Covenant was *“done away,”* not by a word of dismissal, but by a greater glory that outshined it (3:11).
- ⇒ Even the lesser glory of the Law blinded the minds of those who were under it, so they could not perceive the glory of God (3:13-15).
- ⇒ The veil of obscurity is lifted only when Christ is seen more clearly than the Law (3:14-16).

### Hebrews

- ⇒ The Law with its attending ceremonies served as a *“example and shadow of heavenly things”* (8:5).
- ⇒ Jesus has a more excellent ministry, being the Mediator of a better covenant that is established upon better promises (8:6).
- ⇒ The New Covenant is of a differing

order, and is not after the manner of the Old Covenant, which was based upon doing (8:9-12).

- ⇒ Now that the New Covenant is in place, the old is **“ready to vanish away,”** which vanishment is one of perception, not mere legality (8:13). Its glory gradually fades, like the glow that was on the face of Moses.

Of this Paul wrote, *“But in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God . . . By honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report: as deceivers, and yet true”* (2 Cor 6:4-8). Those who lacked noble motives gave evil reports of Paul, suggesting that he was too lenient toward sin, and prejudiced toward the Jews. The reports were not true, but were constrained by Satan to so damage Paul’s reputation that people

**In order to facilitate this transition, the apostles’ doctrine told the people of things that could not be continued, and things that remained in place for all believers. As time progressed, those who believed came to see these things more clearly.**

**It is as the glory of the New Covenant dawns upon the soul that the glory of the Old Covenant commences to fade from view.** Because of the remarkable contrast in the nature of the covenants, it apparently took some time before the fog of legalism was sufficiently dispelled. Paul is the agent chosen by God to expound the nature of the New Covenant. He is the one who extensively showed the role of faith in the New Covenant, and the basis of God’s grace in the entire economy. Because his message was not comprehended, false charges were made against him, with some reporting that Paul said, *“Let us do evil that good may come.”* Paul wrote of such people, *“whose damnation is just”* (Rom 3:8).

Even to this very day, the glory and nature of the New Covenant is largely unknown in the professing church. As a direct result of this area of spiritual blindness, all manner of distorted views of the Law, commandments, and Old Covenant ordinances are being perpetrated in the name of Jesus Christ.

In order to facilitate this transition, the apostles’ doctrine told the people of things that could not be continued, and things that remained in place for all believers. As time progressed, those who believed came to see these things more clearly.

### WHAT THEY HAD HEARD OF PAUL

One of the marks of approval among the servants of God is the kind of reports that are circulated concerning them.

would not listen to him. James had heard of these false reports, and will not ignore them. He will suggest that Paul act in such a manner as to confirm they were false allegations.

### Teach All the Jews Which Are Among the Gentiles

*“And they are informed of thee, that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles . . .”* Other versions read, *“all the Jews which live among the Gentiles.”* <sup>NIV</sup> With great subtlety, the report had gone out that Paul had a different message for Jews that were living among the Gentiles. In other words, he would preach one thing in Jerusalem, and another in Antioch; one Gospel in Judaea, and another in Bithynia.

### To Forsake Moses

*“. . . to forsake Moses . . .”* Other versions read, *“turn away from Moses,”* <sup>NIV</sup> *“Give up the law of Moses,”* <sup>BBE</sup> *“abandon Moses,”* <sup>CSB</sup> and *“turn back from and forsake Moses.”* <sup>AMPLIFIED</sup>

There are numerous records of Paul referring to Moses.

- ⇒ *“And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of **Moses**”* (Acts 13:39)
- ⇒ *“Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and **Moses** did say should*

come” (Acts 26:22).

⇒ “And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into his lodging; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of **Moses**, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening” (Acts 28:23).

⇒ “For he saith to **Moses**, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion” (Rom 9:15).

⇒ “For **Moses** describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doeth those things shall live by them” (Rom 10:5).

⇒ “But even unto this day, when **Moses** is read, the veil is upon their heart” (2 Cor 3:15).

⇒ “Now as **Jannes and Jambres** withstood **Moses**, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith” (2 Tim 3:8).

The Jews in Achaia charged that Paul persuaded men “to worship God contrary to the Law” [of Moses] (Acts 18:13). Paul, on the other hand, confessed to Felix, “But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, **believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets**” (Acts 24:14). He also said to Festus, “**Neither against the law of the Jews, neither against the temple, nor yet**

no purpose.

**Paul did not teach that men ought to abandon the Law. He rather taught it was not the means to justification, and that men were under no obligation to keep its unique ceremonies.** This is a fine distinction that the unlearned cannot discern.

**Ought Not Circumcise Their Children**

“... saying that they ought not to circumcise their children . . .”

There is no record of Paul ever forbidding the Jews to circumcise their children. Rather, he taught that circumcision had nothing whatsoever to do with the New Covenant, and that it gave no person a spiritual advantage before God. He also taught that true circumcision was “of the heart, in the spirit,” and not in the flesh (Rom 2:28-29). In other words, like all of the ceremonial Law, and the Sabbath as well, something superior replaced the ancient ceremonies – a greater glory did away with their necessity. Now that men receive a new heart through “the circumcision of Christ” (Col 2:11), outward circumcision is completely unrelated to one’s identity with God and involvement in the covenant over which Jesus presides.

**Neither Walk After the Customs**

“... neither to walk after the customs. . .” Other versions read, “live according to the customs,”<sup>NIV</sup> “observe the customs,”<sup>NRSV</sup> “keep the old rules,”<sup>BBE</sup> “observe the rites of the Law,”<sup>MRD</sup> and “follow the customary practices.”<sup>NJB</sup>

This charge was also false. Paul never advocated an overthrow or abandonment of Jewish customs. He did not call for the closing of the Temple, or the discarding of the synagogue. He was not opposed to the reading of the Jewish Scriptures, or even the observance of Jewish feasts. **Further, his conduct did not reflect such a persuasion.**

⇒ Paul went into the Temple (Acts 21:26; 22:17; 24:12,18; 26:21).

⇒ Paul attended the synagogues (Acts 13:14; 14:1; 17:1-2,10,17; 18:4,19; 19:8).

⇒ Paul observed some of the Jewish feasts (Acts 18:21; 20:1).

⇒ Paul took a vow according to Jewish customs (Acts 18:18; 24:18).

**In Christ Jesus, as declared by the Gospel, a greater light is made known. However, a fuller light is not necessarily a contrary light. It does not obviate the former light, but drowns it in glory – and there is a vast difference between the two. Although men cannot be justified by the Law, a place is still kept for the Law.**

⇒ “But I say, Did not Israel know? First **Moses** saith, I will provoke you to jealousy by them that are no people, and by a foolish nation I will anger you” (Rom 10:19).

⇒ “For it is written in the law of **Moses**, Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn. Doth God take care for oxen?” (1 Cor 9:9).

⇒ “And were all baptized unto **Moses** in the cloud and in the sea” (1 Cor 10:2).

⇒ “But if the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not stedfastly behold the face of **Moses** for the glory of his countenance; which glory was to be done away” (2 Cor 3:7).

⇒ “And not as **Moses**, which put a veil over his face, that the children of Israel could not stedfastly look to the end of that which is abolished” (2 Cor 3:13).

against Caesar, **have I offended any thing at all**” (Acts 25:8). In His epistles, Paul refers to “the Law” one hundred and twenty-eight times, and never in a derogatory manner. He confirms that the Law was never intended to justify (Acts 13:39), that through it is the knowledge of sin (Rom 3:20), and that it has been ended only as a means to righteousness (Rom 10:4).

Paul affirmed that the message he delivered was foretold by Moses (Deut 18:15,18; 30:6).

In Christ Jesus, as declared by the Gospel, a greater light is made known. However, a fuller light is not necessarily a contrary light. It does not obviate the former light, but drowns it in glory – and there is a vast difference between the two. Although men cannot be justified by the Law, a place is still kept for the Law. There is still a valid work that it is to do, for “by the Law is the knowledge of sin” (Rom 3:20). It is still “Our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ” (Gal 3:24-25). We are not “under the Law” (Rom 6:14), but that does not mean it serves

Paul **did** teach that believers were not to allow others to impose Jewish feasts and customs upon them, pointing out that they were a "shadow of things to come," while the real spiritual substance was found in Christ (Col 2:16-17). **Once this was seen, an inordinate attachment to the Jewish customs will not be maintained out of a sense of obligation.** The new creation (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15) desires the "better things," and gravitates to involvement in such things. Even though outwardly it may appear as though Jewish customs are being observed, that is not the case at all. Paul did not go to the synagogue out of a sense of obligation, or commitment to the traditions of the fathers. Rather, it was in order to teach and preach about Jesus Christ. If he did take a vow, it was with Jesus Christ in mind, not with a sense of obligation to the Law.

**Admittedly, this is a difficult thing for the spiritually uncultured mind to comprehend.** A person, for example, who is motivated strictly by Law, as opposed to being tutored by grace (Tit 2:11-12), and led by the Spirit (Rom 8:13-14), is unable to distinguish higher motives.

James will now give his advice with the weaker brethren and their conscience in mind. He will take for granted the genuineness of their faith as well as the freedom in which Paul could operate.

Oh, the blessedness of the liberty that is displayed in this text. In it we see a most noble example of what it means to honor the conscience of another brother, and to avoid doing anything that will lead the weaker brethren – those whose vision is not finely tuned – to be loose in their conduct, living for any other reason than to please the Lord. That is what is to be learned in this text.

**Paul's Doctrine on the Matter**

Paul taught extensively on matters involving other believers who were of tender heart, yet whose conscience had not yet matured.

⇒ **THE BELIEVER WHO FELT HE COULD NOT EAT MEAT.** This had to do with eating meat that had been offered to idols, and was later sold in the "shambles," or "meat market"<sup>NASB</sup> (1 Cor 10:25). "But meat commendeth us not to God: for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse.

*But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak. For if any man see thee which hast knowledge sit at meat in the idol's temple, shall not the conscience of him which is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols"*

*made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some . . . Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved" (1 Cor 9:22; 10:33). Paul did not become an idolater in order to reach idolaters, or a glutton to*

**This by no means sanctioned the maintenance of a flawed view, but was the means through which any erroneous conclusion would be seen for what it was. Paul alluded to this principle after testifying of his own commitment to the Lord.**

(1 Cor 8:8-10). This involved people who had a tender conscience toward God, yet was immature in their understanding. A similar line of teaching is found in Romans 14:1-9.

⇒ **THE BELIEVER WHO HAD NOT YET SEEN THERE IS ONLY ONE GOD.** As difficult as it may be to believe, there were some early believers who had been converted from heathen idolatry. They had not yet seen that there really is only one God. Hence, when they beheld the conduct of believers who ate meat that had been offered to idols, they were driven to the conclusion that they were gods of the heathen. Thus Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "As concerning therefore the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice unto idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one. For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many, and lords many,) But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him. **Howbeit there is not in every man that knowledge:** for some with conscience of the idol unto this hour eat it as a thing offered unto an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled" (1 Cor 8:4-7).

⇒ **BECOMING ALL THINGS TO ALL MEN.** A text that has been often misrepresented has to do with Paul becoming all things to all men. "To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: **I am**

**reach gluttons.** He is speaking of those who had commitment to God, yet who were juvenile and immature in their understanding. In his accommodation to such people, he violated neither his conscience nor any word from God. He operated in the legitimate domain of liberty, doing so out of a concern for the eternal welfare of those who saw him. He did not take upon himself the appearance of a sinner to reach sinners.

⇒ **LET EACH BELIEVER BE FULLY PERSUADED IN THEIR OWN MIND. THE LORD WOULD THEN BRING THEM FORWARD TO MATURITY.** Those who maintain a good conscience before the Lord, not violating what they perceive to be right, and always living with a mind to please the Lord, will be given greater light where it is needed. This is why Paul admonished those with differing views to be "Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind" (Rom 14:5). This by no means sanctioned the maintenance of a flawed view, but was the means through which any erroneous conclusion would be seen for what it was. Paul alluded to this principle after testifying of his own commitment to the Lord (Phil 3:14). He sensed that the implications of a total commitment to the Lord had not yet registered on the minds of some. After hearing of the manner in which Paul lived, they might conclude that they were incapable of such devotion, and perhaps may not have been accepted by the Lord. Thus he reasoned, "Let us therefore, as many as be perfect" [mature<sup>NIV</sup>], "be thus minded: and if in

*any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you*" (Phil 3:15). **That is, as they lived up to their level of understanding, God would bring them to see what Paul had said, and therefore they would follow his example.** This is a marvelous principle to be perceived.

⇒ The flaw in much contemporary reasoning is found in the notion that ignorance can be perpetual with impunity – that continuing to be at variance with the truth is somehow a tolerable thing before the Lord. However, this is not at all the truth, as any informed disciple knows.

⇒ Life in Christ Jesus is the kind that grows, matures, and brings forth fruit (Rom 7:4; Eph 4:15; 1 Pet 5:10; 2 Pet 3:18). **No manner of life that fails to move in this direction is the expression of true spiritual life.** With these things in mind, let must hear how James counsels Paul.

## THEY WILL HEAR

**“<sup>22</sup> What is it therefore? the multitude must needs come together: for they will hear that thou art come.”** Other versions read, *“must certainly meet, for they will hear that you have come,”*<sup>NKJV</sup> *“they will certainly hear that you have come,”*<sup>NIV</sup> *“they have heard that thou hast arrived here,”*<sup>MRD</sup> *“The Jewish believers here will learn that you have come,”*<sup>IE</sup> and *“A multitude will come together, for they will surely hear that you have arrived.”*<sup>AMPLIFIED</sup>

The “they” of reference are tens of thousands of believers, not a handful of religiously elite leaders.

in Jerusalem. They knew about him, and had heard things said about him, as James had already affirmed. Now, I cannot conceive of such a thing happening in the United States of America, or even in some of its cities that are noted for being Christian centers – such as Joplin Missouri. I am persuaded that if Paul himself turned up in our city, it is questionable that he would receive a fair hearing. This is largely because his writings are not familiar to the Christian masses. Further, he would probably not travel with a musical group to draw the attention of the people. It is what Paul TAUGHT that intrigued the people, and he was noted for

letters, but to be with him personally. They had heard that he taught certain things, and wanted to know if this was the truth.

I feel compelled to say a few words about the religious climate of our time. **It has been created by religious leaders,** and it is not a commendable one. There is not only a prevailing canopy of spiritual ignorance over the people, but a dominate disinterest in the things of God. That is the reason for the popularity of self-help books, workshops, and various programs. It is what has given license to the thirst for religious entertainment and the hunger for religious careers. **All of this has taken place during the watch of those who are perceived as religious leaders.** They have not taught in a manner that brought the people to maintain a preference for the Word of God. The people have not been addressed in such a manner as to promote a hunger and a thirst for righteousness. The leaders have come too low in their attempt to reach the people, and are now maintaining a perspective that accommodates itself to the zone of this present evil world. Paul is neither well known nor popular in the modern church. His writings are generally treated as though they were worthless, and can contribute nothing to the fath of God’s people.

All of this is to be seen in stark contrast with the church of the book of Acts. **I can only conclude that this is because a different message is being preached these days** – a message that is not producing genuine fruit unto God.

**Immediately we see the caliber of people to which James refers. These were by no means casual disciples. They were appropriately described as “believers,” and had come together to honor the Lord.**

Immediately we see the caliber of people to which James refers. These were by no means casual disciples. They were appropriately described as “believers,” and had come together to honor the Lord. As in the first Pentecost following Christ’s enthronement, there were no doubt Jews from around the world gathered together. Such a phenomenon is not at all common in our country.

James also states that they had already, or would soon, hear of Paul’s arrival

what he said.

Notice how critical news traveled in the Christian community. Paul – a man who, “in presence” was “lowly among” the people (2 Cor 10:1), was perceived as someone worthy of seeing face-to-face. Those who had seen him, and among whom he had labored, declared that *“his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible,”* even though his letters were admittedly “weighty” (2 Cor 10:10). However the thousands of believers in Jerusalem did not come to read Paul’s

## DO THEREFORE THIS THAT WE SAY TO THEE

**“<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.”**

We are now exposed to some

spiritual reasoning. On the surface, it will appear to contradict the truth of the Gospel, but this is not the case. This is an example of lawful adaptation to the sincere and devoted, yet immature, hearts of believers. **Guided only by the principle of Law, this passage cannot be properly understood.** In fact, it will generate confusion in the hearts of the unlearned. We must, however, remember that we are being exposed to the thinking and reaction of two of the most seasoned saints of all time: James and Paul. Following the exaltation of Jesus, there is no record of either of these men being reproved for thinking or acting improperly. This cannot even be said of Peter, against whom only a single infraction is recorded following the inauguration of the New Covenant (Gal 2:11-14).

#### DO THIS

*“Do therefore this that we say to thee . . .”* Other versions read, *“do what we tell you,”* <sup>NKJV</sup> *“follow our advice,”* <sup>GWN</sup> *“So this is what we suggest that you should do,”* <sup>NJB</sup> *“We advise you to do this,”* <sup>IE</sup> *“Now you must do just what we tell you,”* <sup>WILLIAMS</sup> and *“Now why not follow this suggestion of ours?”* <sup>PHILLIPS</sup>

There is a confidence reflected in this counsel that indicates it was Divine direction. Some of the versions reflect this perspective: i.e. *“Do what we tell you,”* <sup>NKJV</sup> and *“You must do just what we tell you.”* <sup>WILLIAMS</sup> Others leave a question in our minds as to whether or not this was heavenly direction, or human advice: *“this is what we suggest,”* <sup>NJB</sup> and *“why not follow this suggestion of ours.”* <sup>PHILLIPS</sup>

The language, both in the Greek and in the English, does not lend itself to the thought that this was simply an idea that should be weighed by Paul. As used here, the word *“do”* means *“to make . . . to produce,”* <sup>THAYER</sup> and *“accomplish.”* <sup>FRIBERG</sup> The word *“this”* refers to the action they had set before Paul, and the word *“say”* means *“command, direct . . . point out with words.”* <sup>GINGRICH</sup> There are varying views on this text. Some see it as an unnecessary compromise. Others see it as confirmation that the truth of the Gospel was not comprehended by either James or Paul at the time of this text. I do not choose to see the text that way, although I am not willing to be factious about the matter. I am proceeding with the persuasion that this was actually the Lord directing Paul through the word of other members of the body of Christ.

#### WE HAVE FOUR MEN

*“ . . . We have four men . . .”* Other versions read, *“There are four men with us,”* <sup>NIV</sup> and *“with us are four men.”* <sup>AMPLIFIED</sup> That is, these were four Christian men – men who were identified with the church in Jerusalem, and were walking in accord with conduct associated with being distinguished as a disciple of Christ. These were Jews according to the flesh, but had embraced the Gospel and the Christ of the Gospel.

#### WHICH HAVE A VOW

*“ . . . which have a vow on them . . .”* Other versions read, *“who have taken a vow,”* <sup>NKJV</sup> *“who are under a vow,”* <sup>NASB</sup> *“who have made a vow,”* <sup>NIV</sup> *“who have taken an oath,”* <sup>BBE</sup> *“who have obligated themselves with a vow,”* <sup>CSB</sup> *“who have made a vow to God,”* <sup>GWN</sup> and *“who have vowed to purify themselves.”* <sup>MRD</sup>

**Here is a matter with which the Western Christian world is not at all familiar.** Some would perceive this as totally unnecessary, and even out of order. The making of vows, however, is not strange in Scripture. It is something that was specifically addressed unto the Law.

**Jacob** made a vow to God after he had dreamed of a ladder set up on the earth that reached into heaven, with angels ascending and descending upon it. At that time God Almighty was seen standing above the ladder, reaffirming the Abrahamic covenant, and assuring Jacob that it would be fulfilled through him. He also promised to keep Jacob in all the places he went (Gen 28:12-15). Jacob then **“vowed a vow,”** *saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father’s house in peace; then shall the LORD be my God: and this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God’s house: and of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee”* (Gen 28:20-22). Later, God recognized that very vow in a special appearance to Jacob: **“I am the God of Bethel, where thou anointedst the pillar, and where thou vowedst a vow unto Me: now arise, get thee out from this land, and return unto the land of thy kindred”** (Gen 31:13).

The Law recognized the making of vows to the Lord (Lev 7:16; 22:18,21,23; 23:38; 27:2; Num 6:2-21; 15:3,8; Num 29:39; 30:2-5,7-9,11-14; Deut 12:6,11,17,26; 23:18,21,22).

Hannah made a vow to the Lord (1 Sam 1:11 (as well as her husband Elkanah (1 Sam 1:21). David also made vows (Psa 22:25; 61:5,6; 66:13; 116:14,18).

Solomon spoke of making a vow to the Lord, and the seriousness of it (Eccl 5:4). Malachi spoke of corrupted vows (Mal 1:14).

At one time, prior to this occasion, Paul himself had taken a vow (Acts 18:18).

Vows were entirely a voluntary matter, but were to be taken seriously when made to the Lord. Scriptures make such statements as, *“thou shalt pay thy vows”* (Job 22:27), *“I will pay my vows”* (Psa 22:25; *“pay thy vows”* (Psa 50:14); *“Thy vows are upon me, O God”* (Psa 56:12); *“I will pay Thee my vows”* (Psa 66:13).

The mindset with which vows were made perceived an obligation to the Lord, and the individuals were willing to extend themselves in the service of God, even formalizing their commitment. This was done on a voluntary basis, but with an acute awareness of God Himself and the necessity of serving Him. We know from Scripture that God also takes vows seriously.

#### PURIFY THYSELF WITH THEM

*“ . . . Them take, and purify thyself with them . . .”* Other versions read, *“be purified with them,”* <sup>NKJV</sup> *“join in their purification rites,”* <sup>NIV</sup> *“make yourself clean with them,”* <sup>BBE</sup> *“sanctify thyself with them,”* <sup>DOUAY</sup> *“go through the purification ceremony with them,”* <sup>GWN</sup> and *“Go with them to the Temple and join them in the purification ceremony.”* <sup>NLT</sup>

Later, Paul will refer to his involvement in the purification ceremony (Acts 24:18).

This vow is generally considered to

**The mindset with which vows were made perceived an obligation to the Lord, and the individuals were willing to extend themselves in the service of God, even formalizing their commitment.**

be the Nazarite vow that was outlined in the sixth chapter of Numbers. It was possible for this vow to apply to one's entire lifetime, as was commanded concerning Samson "from the womb to the day of his death" (Judges 13:5-7). His mother was under the vow until she gave birth to Samson (Judges 13:3-4,7). As with Samson's mother, there were shorter durations of this vow, during which the individual was separated "unto the Lord" (Num 6:2).

Indications are that John the Baptist was a Nazarite all of his life (Lk 1:15). It is also the considered opinion of many scholars that Jesus was a life-long Nazarite, and that this is the point of him being called a "Nazarene" (Matt 2:23). If this reasoning is correct, Jesus would never have imbibed wine or any form of strong drink.

- ⇨ Throughout the vow, the hair could not be cut, but the hair must be permitted to grow long (Num 6:5).
- ⇨ All of the days of the vow, the person could not go near a dead body (Num 6:6).
- ⇨ Even if his own father, mother, brother, or sister died, the person could not come near their dead body (Num 6:7).
- ⇨ Throughout the period the person was consecrated completely to the Lord (Num 6:8).
- ⇨ If someone died suddenly in the presence of the one under the vow, the person was defiled, and was required to shave his head on the seventh day following (Num 6:9).

(Num 6:13-14).

- ⇨ The priest would take these and offer the appropriate offerings to the Lord (Num 6:16-17).
- ⇨ The Nazarite would then shave his head at the door of the tabernacle, and put the hair in the fire which was under the peace offering (Num 6:18).
- ⇨ The priest would then take a boiled shoulder of the ram, and a cake and a wafer from the basket, placing them in the hands of the Nazarite (Num 6:19).
- ⇨ Then the priest would wave these before the Lord, and they became his (Num 6:20a).
- ⇨ After this, the Nazarite could drink wine (Num 6:20b).

Some additional considerations will be addressed in verse twenty-six.

#### The Lesson Being Taught

The law was a "schoolmaster." It introduced men to the concept of living unto God, and of the absolute need of devotion and consistency in the matter of serving Him. No person could take the Law seriously and be casual or halfhearted toward God.

Take this matter of making a vow unto the Lord – not a vow having to do with mundane matters, but one that involved giving oneself wholly to the Lord without distraction. How can anyone read the requirements for this vow and conclude that giving oneself to the Lord was something requiring little effort? What would possibly lead a person to think that a vow was not to be taken seriously. Breaking it was equated to sinning – even if it was inadvertent, like someone dropping dead in the presence of the one who had taken the vow.

**My point is that the Jews had been raised to think of God differently than everyone else in the world.** These Jewish believers had taken a vow in the most sober state of mind and holy rectitude. Some may argue that such a vow was not necessary, and that they were slaves to the Law. But that is not what our text says. These men were operating within the framework of a good conscience, not out of a sense of unwanted compulsion.

James would not ask Paul to accommodate himself to Jews who lacked a

**The time of a Nazarite vow was apparently a period during which the one making the vow gave himself wholly to the Lord and His service, as was required for the priests. In a nutshell, it involved being separated from the mundane and devoted wholly to the Lord throughout the duration of the vow.**

**The time of a Nazarite vow was apparently a period during which the one making the vow gave himself wholly to the Lord and His service, as was required for the priests.** In a nutshell, it involved being separated from the mundane and devoted wholly to the Lord throughout the duration of the vow. **The following was required under the Law.**

- ⇨ Separation from all wine and strong drink (Num 6:3a).
- ⇨ Nothing that was fermented could be ingested (Num 6:3b).
- ⇨ Grape juice could not be ingested (Num 6:3c).
- ⇨ Neither grapes nor raisins could be eaten (Num 6:6d).
- ⇨ Nothing from the grapevine could be eaten, from the seeds to the skins (Num 6:4).

- ⇨ On the eighth day, two birds were to be brought to the priest at the door of the tabernacle, or later, at the Temple (Num 6:10).
- ⇨ The priest would offer one bird for a sin offering, and the other for a burnt offering, to "make an atonement for him, for that he sinned" by being in the presence of a dead body (Num 6:11).
- ⇨ The person must dedicate himself to the Lord for the period of separation by bringing a year-old lamb for guilt offering. The previous days did not count "because he became defiled during his separation." <sup>NIV</sup> (Num 6:12).
- ⇨ If the vow was completed, the person was to be brought to the door of the tabernacle of the congregagion. There he would offer one male lamb of the first year, one ewe lamb of the first year, and one ram for a peace offering, a basket of unleavend bread mingled with oil, and wafers spread with oil

sober mind, or were contentious. These were devoted men, and therefore James gave his counsel.

**BE AT CHARGES FOR THEM**

“ . . . and be at charges with them, that they may shave their heads . . . ” Other versions read “pay their expenses,”<sup>NKJV</sup> “pay for the shaving of their heads,”<sup>NRSV</sup> “make the necessary payment for them,”<sup>BBE</sup> and “pay their expenses [for the temple offering].”<sup>AMPLIFIED</sup>

The expenses involved the offerings that were to be brought at the completion of the vow. In this case, and under the Law, four men would have required eight lambs, four rams, and four baskets of unleavened bread and wafers. Paul, then, took care of the expenses associated with those requirements. He did not primarily make offerings for himself, but paid for the offerings of the others.

**Some Are Troubled by this Passage**

Some have felt there was unwarranted compromise revealed here – that James and the elders were out of order in their counsel. Others feel that Paul did not yet understand the truth concerning liberty from the Law, and thus acquiesced to this bad counsel. However, Luke gives no hint of the impropriety of thinking in such a manner. **Newness of life is not merely subjecting to a new code of conduct. It rather involves the possession of eternal life, and life is something that advances, or grows.** An infant is not considered partially dead because they are not yet mature, and these believing Jews were not considered to be in error because they were observing some of the Jewish customs.

There were occasions when Paul would take care not to offend sincere Jews. There were other times when he would **not** submit to their whims for a single hour. Timothy and Titus are cases in point. Timothy had not been circumcised, although his mother was a Jewess. However, his father was not. Because of sincere Jews in that vicinity, Paul circumcised Timothy in order that they not be offended (Acts 16:3). Yet, when the Jews sought to compel Titus to be circumcised, Paul refused to do so (Gal 2:3). **The difference in the two cases was the spiritual status of the people to whom Paul responded.** One group was honest and good in heart, the other was factious

The nature of the liberty we have in Christ Jesus also ought to be noted. **We**

**are never free to be immoral in order to attract the immoral.** Too, it is never in order to engage in sacrifices to false gods in order to influence idolaters.

Only those with spiritual understanding can react as James, the elders, and Paul did in this matter. This is not a realm where novices and those with little or no understanding are to traffic. Further, this is not something that can be adapted to every-day life. The occasion is special, the people were not ordinary, the ones giving the advice were advanced in the Lord, and Paul was certainly not a novice. This was not something he did every day, nor was it intended to establish a fixed pattern of conduct. Further, only those involved in the dissemination of the Word of God will even confront such a circumstance.

**ALL MAY KNOW**

“ . . . and all may know that those things, whereof they were informed concerning thee, are nothing . . . ” Other versions read, “there is nothing to the things they have been told about you,”<sup>NASB</sup> “there is no truth in these reports,”<sup>NIV</sup> and “the statements made about you are not true.”<sup>BBE</sup>

Notice, the purpose was not to directly influence the four men involved in this incident. It was rather to confirm to the

Law,”<sup>NIV</sup> “observe and guard the Law,”<sup>NRSV</sup> “live in observance of the Law,”<sup>RSV</sup> “put yourself under rule, and keep the Law,”<sup>BBE</sup> “are careful about observing the Law,”<sup>CSB</sup> “you carefully follow Moses teachings,”<sup>GWN</sup> and “you yourself live in conformity with the Law.”<sup>NET</sup>

We must not forget the purpose of this action. It was to deal with a slanderous assessment of Paul’s ministry. That is why James and the elders gave this counsel. **It was not so that Paul might be noted for upholding the Law, but so that it might be clear to all that he was not attacking the Law, or condemning the people who used some of its ceremonies to confirm their dedication to the Lord.** The desire to the brethren was that Paul might be perceived correctly, and not incorrectly.

Elsewhere, Paul condemned believing Jews who were living in contradiction of the Law – a practice he by no means condoned. “Behold, thou art called a Jew, and retest in the law, and makest thy boast of God, and knowest His will, and approvest the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law; and art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of

**This is the kind of assessment James, the elders, and Paul are seeking to avoid. In Romans, it had to do with the reaction of the Gentiles to Christian Jews who themselves were living in contradiction of the Law they professed to be following, In our text, the issue is believing Jews who have heard that this was the manner in which Paul lived – a word that was wholly false.**

great mass of Jews that Paul was not a mere reactionary. Like Jesus, he did not come to destroy the Law. His purpose was not to sever men from the Law, but to unite them to Christ. **It was in that marvelous unity that the insufficiency of a ceremonial religion would be made clear.** That is, it is in Divine light that they would “see light” (Psa 36:9).

**YOU WALK ORDERLY AND KEEP THE LAW**

“ . . . but that thou thyself also walkest orderly, and keepest the law.” Other versions read, “are living in obedience to the

babes, which hast the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law. Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal? Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege? Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God? For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you, as it is written” (Rom 2:17-24).

This is the kind of assessment

James, the elders, and Paul are seeking to avoid. In Romans, it had to do with the reaction of the Gentiles to Christian Jews who themselves were living in contradiction of the Law they professed to be following. In our text, the issue is believing Jews who have heard that this was the manner in which Paul lived – a word that was wholly false.

Who does not know the impact of a preacher and teacher who opposes sin vigorously, then falls into sin himself? This has happened multiple times in our generation – nationally known ministers being found committing immorality. The whole matter is generally treated too lightly.

### **The Righteousness of the Law Fulfilled**

Paul makes a salient statement concerning the righteousness of the Law in the eighth chapter of Romans. He declares the impotence of the Law to effect righteousness within men, and the effectiveness of the New Covenant in the realization of that righteousness. *“For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: **That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit**”* (Rom 8:3-4).

*LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might”* (Deut 6:5), and *“thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself: I am the LORD”* (Lev 19:18) – Mk 12:30-31. This is what is fulfilled in those who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. In fulfilling this righteousness, all of the commandments are duly fulfilled as well, for they all hang upon their summation.

The reason for this circumstance is that God created man for Himself, and in order to fellowship with Himself. However, God is holy, and cannot fellowship with those who are unholy. Therefore, the Law was not a Divine accommodation to men, addressing them on the low level of flesh and blood. **Rather, it imposed upon them a higher order of things that did not allow for self-centeredness and the gratification that goes with that condition.**

**James and the elders themselves knew the real manner of Paul's life. Otherwise they would not have given this counsel. Paul, on the other hand, was aware of the liberty he had in Christ Jesus. He knew the extent of that liberty, and was willing to use it to bring about a proper assessment of his ministry.**

Through the atoning death of Christ, in which God *“condemned sin in the flesh”* (Rom 8:3), it was ended as a **means** to righteousness. As it is written, *“For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth”* (Rom 10:4) – that is, as a means to righteousness. Now men are *“made righteous”* (Rom 5:19) apart from the Law, as it is imputed to them upon the basis of their faith. Thus it is written that *“now the righteousness of God without the Law is manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the prophets”* (Rom 3:31).

James and the elders themselves knew the real manner of Paul's life. Otherwise they would not have given this counsel. Paul, on the other hand, was aware of the liberty he had in Christ Jesus. He knew the extent of that liberty, and was willing to use it to bring about a proper assessment of his ministry. However, he would not submit to factious notions and the binding of ceremonial religion upon him for a single moment (Gal 2:5).

Although the propensities to sin remain in us, being resident in *“the old man,”* through the Spirit we are now equal to their challenge. After all, *“the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good”* (Rom 7:12). It is also *“spiritual”* (Rom 7:14). By this, I understand Paul to mean that the Law speaks of a higher order of things – an order that is in perfect accord with the very nature of God. Although it was addressed to men, it was loftier than man, and required men to do what was beyond their ability. The term *“the righteousness of the law”* is not speaking of the detailed commandments of the Law, which were, for the time being, the established means to righteousness. But they were not the righteousness itself. *“The righteousness of the law”* is the summation of the law, encapsulated in the two great commandments: *“And thou shalt love the*

The death of Christ was the precise point at which the sin of the world was judged and taken away. When we are baptized into that death (Rom 6:2,4), so far as the Law is concerned, we are dead, for our sins were justly and completely removed. We became, in fact, *“dead to the Law”* (Rom 7:4) – and the Law has no power over a dead man, much as a dead husband has no more authority over a living wife (Rom 7:1-4).

It ought to be apparent that all of this can be lived out only by those who are mature in Christ Jesus, and possess *“all wisdom and spiritual understanding”* (Col 1:9). Others should stand back from this subject, refusing to speculate about it. The church does not need additional opinions on this subject.

Knowing this condition, Paul will be able to respond to the suggestion of James and the elders with a good conscience, and without violating the Law, or the spirit of life in Christ Jesus.

## **AS TOUCHING THE GENTILES WHICH BELIEVE**

*“<sup>25</sup> As touching the Gentiles which believe, we have written and concluded that they observe no such thing, save only that they keep*

*themselves from things offered to idols, and from blood, and from strangled, and from fornication.”*

Notice the care James takes in explaining this situation to Paul. He will make clear that what they have advised him to do is not a matter of doctrine. It was not

something that they preached universally, nor was it something they were binding upon Paul and others. This occasion was unique, and called for a godly assessment and considerate conduct. Further, it was not a circumstance that permitted the truth to be disdained, the Law to be disobeyed, or the Gospel to be distorted. These are considerations that are forfeited when men pick up the sectarian banner.

**TOUCHING THE GENTILES WHICH BELIEVE**

*“As touching the Gentiles which believe...”* Other versions read, *“concerning the Gentiles who believe,”* <sup>NKJV</sup> *“as for the Gentile believers,”* <sup>NIV</sup> and *“as to the Gentiles who have the faith.”* <sup>BBE</sup>

Here is another confirmation of the necessity of wisdom in executing the will of the Lord. **Those who can only operate according to a list of rules or procedures will not be able to function properly in the body of Christ.** While there are certain procedures involved in living unto the Lord, they are not of a worldly order. The following are examples of such procedures.

⇒ **THE PROCEDURE IN APPROACHING THE LORD.** *“Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.”* (Heb 4:16).

⇒ **THE PROCEDURE INVOLVED IN DRAWING NEAR TO THE LORD.** *“Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water”* (Heb 10:22).

⇒ **THE PROCEDURE INVOLVED IN RUNNING THE RACE SET BEFORE US.** *“Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God”* (Heb 12:1-2).

**The difference in these procedures is found in their requirement for thought and discernment.** Normally, procedures are an end of themselves.

In this text there is, from one point

of view, a procedure being advocated. It involved Paul identifying himself with four men, going into the Temple with them, and being responsible for the expenses associated with the completion of their vow. Yet, strictly speaking, this was not a fixed procedure – that is, it was not something that applied to all believers, particularly Gentile believers. They required a different approach.

**WE HAVE WRITTEN AND CONCLUDED**

*“... we have written and concluded that they observe no such thing...”* Other versions read, *“written and decided that they should observe no such thing,”* <sup>NKJV</sup> *“written to them our decision,”* <sup>NIV</sup> *“sent a letter with our judgment,”* <sup>NRSV</sup> *“written, deciding that they should observe no such thing,”* <sup>DOUAY</sup> *“written and determined that they should observe no*

*ye well”* (Acts 15:24-29).

The point of the letter was that the Gentiles were not obligated to be circumcised, or to keep any other portion of the ceremonial law. That, of course, is the precise point that James is making in this text. By omitting the words *“that they observe no such thing,”* the translators have obscured this perspective, as though the reason for writing to the Gentile churches was to alert them do their duty. But that was not at all the purpose for the writing. Rather, it was to alert them to their freedom from the ceremonies bound by the Law.

**ONLY THAT THEY**

*“... save only that they keep themselves from things offered to idols, and from blood, and from strangled, and from*

**James establishes that their counsel to Paul was not intended to convey the thought that this is what they were teaching in their doctrine. It was rather an accommodation to the Jews who were zealous for the Law – not out of a sense of mere tradition, but in all good conscience toward God.**

*such thing,”* <sup>GENEVA</sup> *“written and concluded that they observe no such thing,”* <sup>PNT/TNT</sup> and *“written, having given judgment, that they observe no such thing.”* <sup>YLT</sup>

As you can see, later versions omit the phrase *“that they observe no such thing.”* This is a play on the words *“save only,”* which are translated from the Greek expression *ἐὶ μὴ* which means *“except,”* or *“but.”* <sup>STRONG'S</sup> The idea is that the Mosaic ordinances were not binding on the Gentiles, EXCEPT for the proscriptions that are mentioned. The letter, as recorded in the fifteenth chapter of Acts reads like this: *“Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no such commandment . . . For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare*

*fornication.”*

The freedom of the Gentiles from the ceremonial law had these exceptions – eating meant offered to idols, eating blood, eating things that were strangled, and committing fornication. James establishes that their counsel to Paul was not intended to convey the thought that this is what they were teaching in their doctrine. It was rather an accommodation to the Jews who were zealous for the Law – not out of a sense of mere tradition, but in all good conscience toward God.

**Men are not to tamper with the conscience of those who are sincerely serving the Lord** – even though they may be doing things that technically belonged to the Old Covenant – with some exceptions, such as observing the day of atonement (Lev 16).

This text also confirms the Jews who believed were Christians – followers of Christ. They were not *“devout Jews”* in the same sense as those who were present when

Peter preached on the day of Pentecost. Those Jews were not referred to as believers until they had, in fact, believed on the Lord Jesus Christ.

ordinary sense of the term i.e. a moral infraction of the Law. It is understood that the “sin offering” presented during the completion of the vow was not for any

**This was not sin in the ordinary sense of the term i.e. a moral infraction of the Law. It is understood that the “sin offering” presented during the completion of the vow was not for any specific transgression, but for unconscious sins committed during the time of separation. This is referred to as a “sin through ignorance”**

### The Sacrifices for Sin

Some might point out that the sacrifices associated with the completion of a vow included “a sin offering” (Num 6:11,14,16). In case a person died suddenly in the presence of the one who had made a vow, the sin offering was to “make an atonement for him, by that he sinned by the dead” (Num 6:11) – that is, he was near a dead body, which was forbidden for one under the Nazarite vow. This was not sin in the

specific transgression, but for unconscious sins committed during the time of separation. This is referred to as a “sin through ignorance” (Lev 4:2,13,27; 5:15; Num 15:27). **Owing to the fact that there are other prophetic considerations, I will deal more with this matter in an exposition of the 26<sup>th</sup> verse.**

When the book of Hebrews addressed the ineffectiveness of sacrifices

made for sin, it referred to the day of atonement – annual sacrifices: “For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered **year by year continually** make the comers thereunto perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins. But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins” (Heb 10:4). The guidelines for that day contained the words “make an atonement” no less than twelve times (Lev 16:6,10,11,16,17, 18,24,30,33,34), and “make atonement” once (Lev 16:27).

While I do not wish to make an unwarranted issue of this matter, it helps to account for Paul’s willingness to pay for the expenses associated with the vow of these four men. The sacrifices, technically speaking, were not for sin itself, but were associated exclusively with the the vow that was made to serve the Lord.

## PAUL PURIFIES HIMSELF

**“ 26 Then Paul took the men, and the next day purifying himself with them entered into the temple, to signify the accomplishment of the days of purification, until that an offering should be offered for every one of them.”**

Paul acquiesces to the words of James and the elders. **He had been living by faith and walking in the Spirit, and was therefore able to quickly assess and discern what the word they delivered.** This is one of the benefits of living “unto Him” who died for us and rose again (2 Cor 5:15). Some people are confused when they are given godly counsel or advice. But it is only because they have not been living by faith. The closer one is to the world, and the more absorbed in worldly matters they become, the less able they are to process spiritual wisdom.

### PAUL TOOK THE MAN, PURIFYING HIMSELF WITH THEM

“Then Paul took the men, and the next day purifying himself with them. . .” Other versions read, “purifying himself along with them,”<sup>NASB</sup> “having purified himself,”

<sup>NRSV</sup> “making himself clean with them,”<sup>BBE</sup> “went through the purification ceremony with them,”<sup>GWN</sup> “was purified with them,”<sup>MRD</sup> “went with the men to the Temple for the ceremony,”<sup>LIVING</sup> and “[he went through the rites of] purifying himself along with them.”<sup>AMPLIFIED</sup>

Here Paul lives out what he said of himself: “And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law” (1 Cor 9:20). **This kind of action cannot be satisfactorily explained to those who approach the New Covenant as though it was of the same order as the Old Covenant.** The liberty that is realized in Christ Jesus is not freedom from the flesh, to follow its impulses and yield to its demands. It is rather a liberty to move about in the heavenly realms, and to act in consideration of the weaker brethren while not treating inferior ways of serving the Lord as though they were compulsory or forever tolerable.

Paul knew that there was nothing inherently wrong with making a vow to devote oneself to the Lord in a uniquely

exclusive way for a limited period of time. Some might contend that this is how we are to live all of the time – and this is true, for we are to do whatever we do for the glory of God (Col 3:17). However, there are also special times, when we retreat from lawful involvements in order to give ourselves more fully to the Lord.

### An Example of This Principle

In fact, this is the principle that is exhibited in fasting. Paul once admonished the married, “Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, **that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency**” (1 Cor 7:5). **This is the only doctrinal statement made concerning fasting in Acts through Revelation.**

Examples of fasting recorded in the book of Acts include the following:

- ⇨ Cornelius praying and fasting, during which time the angel of the Lord directed him (Acts 10:30).
- ⇨ The brethren in the church at Antioch

fasting, during which time the Holy Spirit called for the separation of Barnabas and Saul for a special work (Acts 13:2-3),

⇒ Paul and Barnabas fasted when they ordained elders in every church (Acts 14:23).

In the Gospels, fasting is mentioned seven times.

⇒ After He was baptized, Jesus fasted for forty days and forty nights (Matt 4:2).

⇒ Jesus taught his disciples concerning how to conduct themselves when they fasted (Matt 6:16-18).

⇒ Jesus told His disciples that the children did not fast when the Bridegroom was with them (Matt 9:14-15; Mk 2:18-20; Lk 5:34-35).

⇒ Jesus said that some demons could be expelled only “by prayer and fasting” (Matt 17:21; Mk 9:29).

⇒ Anna served God in the Temple with fastings and prayers (Lk 2:37).

⇒ The disciples of John fasted often (Lk 5:33).

⇒ Jesus spoke of a Pharisee that boasted he fasted “twice in the week” (Lk 18:12).

**It is inconceivable that an official doctrine concerning fasting could be developed from these texts, or that fasting could be set forth as a regular part of life in Christ.** However, many modern teachers have sought to do precisely this.

**Conclusion**

My point here is that giving a special period of time to the Lord, during which no other mundane things would occupy the attention of the individual, is lawful, but not compulsory. It was not the ordinary course of life, but was a means of adjusting one’s focus while forbidding the person to be distracted by lawful, but lesser, things.

This was the circumstance of the four men who were under a vow to God. Paul joined them by purifying himself in the same manner – i.e. setting himself apart for some exclusive involvement with the Lord. We do

not know the duration of this purification, or the involvements contained in it. **However, the motive behind it all was to confirm that Paul was not a mere reactionary against the Jewish manner of life.** I gather that during this time he made an extended effort to ensure that this conclusion would be reached by those of honest and good hearts.

**TO SIGNIFY THE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF THE DAYS OF PURIFICATION**

“ . . . entered into the temple to signify the accomplishment of the days of purification . . .” Other versions read, “to announce the expiration of the days of purification, at which time an offering should be made for each one of them,”<sup>NKJV</sup> “giving notice of the completion of the days of purification, until the sacrifice was offered for each one of them,”<sup>NASB</sup> “making public the completion of the days of purification when the sacrifice would be made for each of them,”<sup>NRSV</sup> “declaring the fulfillment of the days of purification, until the offering was offered for every one of them,”<sup>ASV</sup> “giving out the statement that the days necessary for making them clean were complete, till the offering was made for every one of them,”<sup>BBE</sup> “he went into the temple courtyard to announce the time when the purification would be over and the sacrifice would be offered for each of them,”<sup>GWN</sup> and “to give notice when the days of purification (the ending of each vow) would be fulfilled and the usual offering could be presented on behalf of each of them.”<sup>AMPLIFIED</sup>

of signifying the accomplishment of the days of purification.

One can only imagine the impact that would be registered upon those who make vows to the Lord if they were made public where Christians gather.

**UNTIL AN OFFERING**

“ . . . until that an offering should be offered for every one of them.” Other versions read, “at which time an offering should be made,”<sup>NKJV</sup> “until the sacrifice was offered,”<sup>NASB</sup> “and the offering would be made,”<sup>NIV</sup> “when the sacrifice would be made,”<sup>NRSV</sup> “the presentation of the offering,”<sup>MRD</sup> “and the offering would be made,”<sup>NIB</sup> “the offering would be presented,”<sup>NJB</sup> “an offering would be offered,”<sup>PNT/TNT</sup> “till the offering was offered,”<sup>YLT</sup> “an offering would be given,”<sup>IE</sup> and “the usual offering could be presented.”<sup>AMPLIFIED</sup>

The word used here is “offering,” and is distinguished from “sacrifice.” The Greek word for “offering” is προσφέρθη, whereas the word for “sacrifice” is θυσίαν. Both words are nouns. The first (“offering”), as used in our text, is defined as, “an offering, bloody or not.”<sup>THAYER</sup> Most of the time this word if used in the New Covenant Scriptures, it does not have to do with bloody sacrifices (Acts 24:17; Rom 15:16; Eph 5:2). It is also used to depict the sacrifices under the Law (Heb 10:5,8,18), and the offering of the body of Christ (Heb 10:10,14).

The second (“sacrifice”) means “a victim.”<sup>THAYER</sup> This most generally has to do

**Daniel was given to see the death of Christ and its significance. Although it is wrapped in some language that is attended with some difficulty, certain essential matters are clearly stated.**

**While the making of the vow was a personal thing, it was not a private matter.** There was a kind of announcement of the vow itself, and when it would be brought to completion. From a practical point of view, this would alert the priest concerning the offerings to be made at that time. It would also be the time when Paul would make clear that he was going to underwrite the expenses associated with that ceremony. That is what is covered in the idea

with offering something that was alive to God. The offering involved the taking of the life, or the shedding of blood (Matt 9:13; 12:7; Acts 7:41,42; 1 Cor 10:18; Eph 5:2; Heb 5:1; 7:27; 8:3; 9:9,23,26; 10:1,5,8,10,11,12,26; 11:4). Sometimes it is also used to depict the offering up of our lives to the Lord (Rom 12:1; Phil 1:27; 4:18; Heb 13:15,16; 1 Pet 2:5).

**Daniel’s Prophecy**

There is a prophecy declared by Daniel that bears upon this situation. It serves to remove some barriers that make an understanding of the verse difficult.

Daniel was given to see the death of Christ and its significance. Although it is wrapped in some language that is attended with some difficulty, certain essential matters are clearly stated.

- ⇒ The Messiah would “*finish the transgression*,” inducing an era where the people would no longer live their lives in a state of sinfulness (9:24a).
- ⇒ During His time, the Messiah would “*make an end of sins*” (9:24b); i.e. take them away.
- ⇒ He would “*make reconciliation for iniquity*” (9:24c).
- ⇒ He would “*bring in everlasting righteousness*” (9:24d).
- ⇒ He would put the “*seal*” of completion

### The Cessation of the Sacrifice

It is this last item – causing the sacrifice and oblation to cease – that is of particular relevance to this text. I understand Daniel’s prophecy to mean that Christ’s death officially invalidated all animal sacrifices, and that with the passing of time, the practice would cease. Because these sacrifices were associated with the Temple, when the Temple was destroyed, all of the ceremonies tied to it also went away. The priesthood passed, the altar, and the sacrifices. They have not been practiced from that time (70 AD). The invalidation of the sacrifices was confirmed at that time.

In addition to this, there is no evidence that they existed after Christ’s death. In all of the New Covenant Scriptures, there is only one particular animal sacrifice mentioned. It was when Joseph and Mary came to the Temple to dedicate the infant Jesus. At that time they brought a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons (Lk 2:24). Prior to Christ’s death, we assume some were offering sacrifices, for animals were

**There are no examples of anyone offering animal sacrifices to God in the book of Acts. The only text that offers any possibility of such a thing is the one we are presently considering – and nothing specific is said about animal sacrifices in it.**

upon “*the vision and prophecy*,” validating them by fulfilling what they made known (9:24e).

- ⇒ He would “*anoint the most Holy*” [place], allowing for the entrance of the people (9:24f).
- ⇒ The main purpose for the maintenance of Jerusalem was in order for the presence of the Messiah, Jesus Christ (9:25).
- ⇒ The Messiah would be “*cut off*,” or die, but not because of any transgression of His own (9:26).
- ⇒ **He would cause the cessation of the sacrifice and oblation (9:27).**

being sold in the Temple for that purpose (John 2:14,15; Matt 21:12). Some also told Jesus of some Galileans “*whose blood Pilate mingled with their sacrifices*” (Lk 13:1). However, the details of such sacrifices are not provided.

There are no examples of anyone offering animal sacrifices to God in the book of Acts. The only text that offers any possibility of such a thing is the one we are presently considering – and nothing specific is said about animal sacrifices in it.

How likely is it that Christian Jews would offer animal sacrifices under such circumstances? How likely is it that they would be ignorant of Daniel’s prophecy, or not be aware of the oblation of animal

sacrifices? Although the Temple is mentioned twenty-five times in the book of Acts, there is not a single reference to any bloody sacrifice being offered in it (2:46; 3:1,2,3,8,10; 4:1; 5:20,21,24,25,42; 19:27; 21:26,27,28,29,30; 22:17; 24:6,12,18; 25:8; 26:21).

**I therefore conclude that Paul could be at charges for the offerings associated with the making of a vow, and do so without any violation of his conscience.** The only kind of offering that would violate the redemption that is in Christ Jesus is a bloody offering, and there is no evidence that any such offering was made.

### Four Views in the Christian Community

There are a number of differing views concerning this passage. Here are four of them. With the possible exception of the last one, the others are not worthy of comment.

- ⇒ Some suggest the event never happened; it is alleged that Luke fabricated the incident in order to show that Paul was a law-abiding Jew.
- ⇒ Others argue that the apostle was sincere in yielding to this procedure; he simply did not fully understand at this point that the law had been abrogated.
- ⇒ Many allege that Paul, in a moment of weakness, knowingly sinned, yielding to the pressure.
- ⇒ Some contend that the apostle’s actions were a matter of expediency in a unique time-period when certain elements of the Mosaic system (particularly civil/ceremonial) gradually were passing away.

The following is a statement of the case from the author of New Testament Notes: “We cannot be certain that the advice was just right, or that Paul did just right to comply, but these grand men acted according to their knowledge, and the record of Acts portrays both the shortcomings and the perfection of its great worthies. Concerning this advice of James and compliance of Paul, Pres. Milligan says: ‘Three different views have been taken: (1) that Paul in this case acted ignorantly, not being aware of the fact that the law of Moses was no longer binding; (2) that, like Peter, he acted from fear of the Jewish brethren (Gal 2:11); (3) that he acted in conformity with the law of Christian benevolence which requires us to respect even the weaknesses and prejudices of our brethren, so far as this can be done without in any way neglecting the requirements of the Gospel.’”

**WHEN THE SEVEN DAYS WERE ENDED**

*“ 27 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, 28 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.”*

**SEVEN DAYS WERE ALMOST ENDED**

*“And when the seven days were almost ended . . .”* Other versions read, *“the seven days were nearly over,”* NIV *“the seven days were almost over,”* NRSV and *“When the seven days were drawing to a close.”* AMPLIFIED

This pertains to the announcement made by Paul, when *“he went to the Temple to give notice of the date when the days of purification would end”* (21:26). Apparently seven days were announced, during which the ones who made the vows would be made even more alert concerning their determination. Also, depending on the nature of the vow, the eyes of the people would be upon them. Apparently the men and Paul went to the Temple every day during this period. No doubt they were praying and engaging in solemnities that made for a sober mind and more keenly focused their attention on what they had vowed.

**THE JEWS FROM ASIA**

*“ . . .the Jews which were of Asia, when they saw him in the temple, stirred up all the people, and laid hands on him . . .”*

**There was a public nature to religion that was cultured in Judaism.** While every conscientious person attended to private matters relating to himself and God, there was a public nature to religious life that was woven throughout the fabric of Jewish life. The Law fostered communal religion, with frequent gatherings. The activities in the Temple and the synagogues confirm this to be the case. Also, the multitudes that went out to hear John, and to see and hear Jesus reflect this kind of culture. This carried over into the church, as the believers were continually together in both the Temple and various homes (Acts 1:4,6,14; 2:1,6,44,46; 4:24; 5:12; 12:12; 14:27; 15:30; 20:7-8; 21:22).

**The Christians were not the only ones in the Temple.** There were also some Jews from Asia who were opponents of Paul. They had no doubt come to observe the feast. Now they see Paul in the Temple – something they probably did not expect to see. Immediately they begin to stir up the people, agitating those who had come to the *“house of prayer”* (Isa 56:7; Matt 21:13). Other versions read, *“stirred up the whole crowd,”* NKJV *“set all the crowd in a tumult,”* DARBY and *“incited all the rabble.”* AMPLIFIED

Finally, in a display of fleshly animosity they *“laid hands”* on Paul. Other versions read, *“seized him,”* NIV *“grabbed him.”* BBE This was an act of violence, the people forcefully taking hold of Paul as though he was a common criminal.

**THE CHARGES AGAINST PAUL**

*“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.”*

*I know Him: and if I should say, I know him not, I shall be a liar like unto you: but I know him, and keep his saying”* (John 8:55).

**Teaches Against the Jews**

*“ . . . teaches all men everywhere against the people”* [the Jews]. It is true that, like Jesus and Stephen, Paul had spoken against some of the Jews. Jesus said, *“The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here”* (Mat 12:41). Stephen said to the Sanhedrin, *“Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye”* (Acts 7:51).

Paul had also upbraided certain Jews. *“It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles”* (Acts 13:46). And again, *“Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from*

**These Jews from Asia, however, poured lies out of their mouth, falsely charging Paul, who carried in his heart a great burden for them. However, Satan so blinds the hearts of sinners that they cannot recognize the only people on the face of the earth who have their genuine interest in heart.**

**Help!**

Other versions read, *“Come to our aid,”* NASB *“help us,”* NIV and *“Help! Help!”* LIVING Judging from their cries, you would have thought they were trying to wrestle Samson to the ground. This was a man whose bodily presence was *“weak”* (2 Cor 10:10). He apparently bore no outward resemblance to the mighty warrior that he was within. **However, even these Jews from Asia knew there was a sense in which he was a formidable opponent.**

One thing that is confirmed by this whole incident, the opponents of the Gospel have the undeniable characteristic of lying – like their father the devil who *“is a liar”* (John 8:44). This is a trait of those who do not know the Father, as affirmed by Jesus Himself: *“Yet ye have not known Him; but*

*henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles”* (Acts 18:6).

**However, none of these rebukes was owing to the people being Jews.** It was their unbelief that prompted such words to be spoken. Far from speaking against the Jews, Paul testified *“That I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh”* (Rom 9:2-3).

These Jews from Asia, however, poured lies out of their mouth, falsely charging Paul, who carried in his heart a great burden for them. However, Satan so blinds the hearts of sinners that they cannot recognize the only people on the face of the earth who have their genuine interest in

heart.

**Teaches Against the Law**

*“ . . . teaches all men everywhere against . . . the Law.”*

This too is an utterly false charge. In fact, Paul was in the very act of fulfilling a vow according to the Law. This is the very man who said of the Law, *“by the Law is the knowledge of sin”* (Rom 3:20); *“the Law is holy, and the commandment holy, just, and good”* (Rom 7:12); and *“the Law is spiritual”* (Rom 7:14). With his mind, he served the Law of God (Rom 7:25), and taught that in Christ *“the righteousness of the Law”* is fulfilled (Rom 8:4). However, again they lied, thinking nothing of it, though they could not cite a syllable in which Paul had defamed the

Law. That is how blind they were.

**Teaches Against the Temple**

*“ . . . teaches all men everywhere against . . . this place”* [the Temple]. Paul was in the Temple, and had been for several days – **yet he had spoken no word against the Temple.** It is true that he had reminded the Athenians that God *“dwelleth not in Temples made with hands”* (Acts 17:24). However, Solomon said the same thing (1 Kgs 8:27; 2 Chron 6:18). Isaiah declared the same (Isa 66:1). However, none of those lying Jews had charged those ancients with speaking against the Temple.

**Polluted the Temple**

*“ . . . and further brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath polluted this*

*holy place.”* Here is a vague reference to a word spoken by God through Jeremiah. *“The adversary hath spread out his hand upon all her pleasant things: for she hath seen that the heathen entered into her sanctuary, whom thou didst command that they should not enter into thy congregation”* (Lam 1:10). The general commandment was given through Moses, *“An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of the LORD; even to their tenth generation shall they not enter into the congregation of the LORD for ever”* (Deut 23:3; Neh 13:1). Ezekiel referred to the same proscription (Ezek 44:7).

**We will find, however, that these men had not properly assessed the situation.**

**THEY HAD SEEN PAUL WITH TROPHIMUS**

*“<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.)”*

Those who foment trouble, agitating sacred surroundings, and opposing the people of God, are always loose in their speech. They do not speak in accord with the facts of the case, and are quick to assume things that are not true. That, course, is a characteristic of the devil himself, as confirmed in the case of Job (Job 1:9-11; 2:4-5). **Those who employ such tactics make known that they are being controlled by Satan.**

**THEY HAD SEEN HIM BEFORE**

Trophimus was from Asia, in which Ephesus was located, and had joined Paul after he had left Macedonia (Acts 20:4). He had tarried with others in Troas, awaiting the arrival of Paul from Philippi (Acts 20:5). Paul had joined them in Troas where they remained for seven days (Acts 20:6). He had continued with Paul when he went to Miletus, from whence he called the elders at the church in Ephesus (Acts 20:14-17). He then continued with Paul to Coos, Rhodes, Patara, Phenicia, Tyre, Ptolemais, and Caesarea, from whence they had departed to Jerusalem (Acts 21:1-17). **This is quite a commentary on this man, whom we assume was relatively young.**

We also see in this text the

**THEY SUPPOSED**

*“ . . . whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.”* Other versions read, *“and assumed that Paul had brought him into the temple area,”* NIV and *“and they supposed that he had brought the man into the temple [into the inner court forbidden to Gentiles].”* <sup>AMPLIFIED</sup>

The text does not say that Paul brought Trophimus into the Temple – particularly in regards to being associated with the four Jews who had taken a vow. Notice how they did not make a special note of Paul’s identity with those men, even though he had publically declared the time their vow would be completed. Instead, they assumed that Paul had brought Trophimus into the Temple.

Now they agitate the people, who were devout Jews observing a feast of the Lord. They were presently in the Temple, conscious of the Lord to some degree, when they hear these shouting Jews from Asia, warning them that someone has defiled the Temple area.

**It is enough to say at this point that those who stir up strife have no good in mind.** That is why reason why the Lord especially hates the one who *“sows discord among brethren”* (Prov 6:19). James taught that the existence of strife is the result of wisdom that is *“earthly, sensual, devilish”* (James 3:14-15).

**We also see in this text the vigilance of the Jews in keeping their eye upon Paul. This is the city of Jerusalem, and the believing Jews alone numbered in the tens of thousands (21:20). It is good to aim at being more diligent for the Lord than His enemies are against Him and His people.**

*“For they had seen before with him in the city Trophimus an Ephesian . . .”* Other versions read, *“For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city.”* <sup>NKJV</sup>

vigilance of the Jews in keeping their eye upon Paul. This is the city of Jerusalem, and the believing Jews alone numbered in the tens of thousands (21:20). It is good to aim at being more diligent for the Lord than His enemies are against Him and His people.



## CONCLUSION

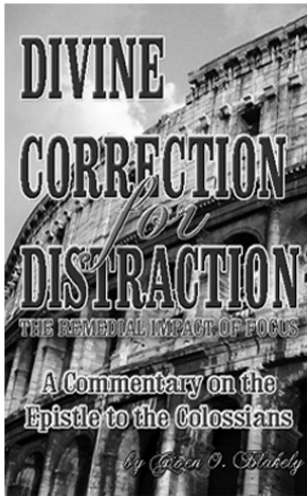
Thus the stage is set for Paul's voyage to Rome. It will take some time for him to actually arrive there, but this single event commenced his total withdrawal from Jerusalem and Israel in order to the fulfillment of him preaching the Gospel in Rome. This whole matter will ultimately

consummate in his martyrdom.

All of this will be worked together for the good of Paul, and for the good of believers in later generations as well. These experiences were not pleasant, to be sure, but they were right in the heart of the will of

God. May the Lord deliver us from naive notions about what is involved in serving the Lord! Those who would partake of the life of Christ, must also partake of His sufferings. This is done by measure, and in strict accord with the place in which the members have been placed in the body of Christ.

**Our next Hungry Saints Meeting will be held on Friday, 12/4/09. We will continue our current series of lessons on the book of Acts. The Eighty-eighth lesson will cover verses 31 through 40 of the twenty-first chapter: "WHEN ALL JERUSALEM WAS IN AN UPROAR." After being seen in the Temple, a tumult breaks out against Paul. A captain of the military force heard of the uprising, came, and arrested Paul, binding him in chains and asking who he was and what he had done. Paul eventually asked to speak to the people, and was given leave to do so. He chose to speak to them in Hebrew, their native tongue. Our meeting will begin at 7:00 P.M. You are invited to bring your family and friends for fellowship around the Word of God. Refreshments are served afterward, with a time of extended fellowship for everyone.**



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*The Blakely Family: Given, June, Benjamin, and Eva*

*406 South Sergeant Street, Joplin, MO 64801*

Telephone: (417) 782-3063, Email: Given (GivenB@aol.com) June: (JuneE01@aol.com)

ADAH's Webpage: <http://wotruth.com/adah.htm> -- EVA's Webpage: <http://wotruth.com/Eva.htm>

Benjamin (Bensvison@aol.com), Eva (Evablakely@aol.com)

Adah Hutchcraft ([adahhutchcraft@hotmail.com](mailto:adahhutchcraft@hotmail.com)), Jason Hutchcraft ([hutchcraftj@hotmail.com](mailto:hutchcraftj@hotmail.com))

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