

Acts 21:20—24 Paul's Jewish vow

The Accusation

- The Jews had heard that Paul was teaching the Jews living in all the nations to forsake Moses (the Law) and not to circumcise their children.
- Paul had written Romans only one year previous saying they were not under Law but under grace.
 - Romans 6:14** For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace.
 - Romans 7:4** Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, so that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God.
- According to Galatians 3:19 (written approximately five years previous) the Law was a temporary arrangement that was to be done away with when Christ died.
 - Galatians 3:19** Why the Law then? It was added because of transgressions, having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator, until the seed would come to whom the promise had been made.
- All those who have been baptized into Christ are one in Christ. There is no distinction between Jew or Gentile for those in the Body of Christ.
 - Galatians 3:26—28** ²⁶For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. ²⁷For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.
- In light of the above, how could Paul go back and put himself under the Law. How could he say that he did not tell the Jews to turn away from the Mosaic Law and circumcision when his writings seem to say otherwise?

Paul putting himself under Law

- To prove he was not teaching the Jews to turn their backs on Law Paul was asked to take part in the rite of purification and paying for the expenses of the four men who took a Nazarite vow (Num. 6:13-21).
- By performing this Jewish rite Paul was indeed following the Law and demonstrating his innocence to his fellow Jews before God.
- This observance of the Law was for the benefit of the Jews and had nothing to do with Paul's salvation. There were a number of things done for the Jews or because of the Jews:
 - Paul circumcised Timothy because of the Jews. (Acts 16:1—3)
 - The Gentiles were not to eat meat offered to idols, and abstain from blood and things strangled - because of the Jews (Acts 15:29; 21:25).
 - God gave Gentiles the sign gifts because of the Jews (1 Corinthians 1:22; 14:22).
- Notice that Timothy (a Jew) was circumcised but Titus (a Gentile) was not circumcised.
 - This was proof that the Gentiles were not to be put under the Law (see Acts 15). It also seems to bear out a principle that Paul followed—when trying to reach the Jews, become a Jew.

The Dispensational Solution

- We are still in a state of flux as God is in the process of cutting off Israel (they will be fully cut off by the end of Acts) and revealing the full Mystery to Paul. Since God's dealing with Israel and His plan for the Church, the Body of Christ are still running concurrently at this time in Acts, we will see things happening then that will not happen now.
- We can see an example of the commingling of the two programs in Galatians 2.
 - Peter and Paul were in Antioch with a group of believing Jews and Gentiles.

- When The Jerusalem church sent some representatives to Antioch to see what was going on, Peter decided to pull away from the Gentiles so as not to be criticized by the church leaders.
- By doing so, he trampled on the work of Paul who had been preaching (by the direct revelation of Jesus Christ) that there is now no distinction between Jews and Gentiles as far as salvation is concerned.

It is thus plain that by the time of Peter's visit to Antioch he knew and believed in justification by faith apart from the works of the Law. It is also evident that by this time Peter believed in the equality of Gentiles with the Jews. But as long as the temple stood in Jerusalem, the Law of Moses was the political law of Israel as well, and as Jewish citizens the Jewish believers were obligated to obey the Law. The first command for the Jews to forsake the Mosaic Law is found in Hebrews 13:13, "Let us go forth, therefore, unto him outside the camp, bearing his reproach." Charles F. Baker *Understanding Galatians and the Law* Page 24.

- The Law contains political, social and moral elements that had governed Israel for about 1,500 years. Every area of their lives were governed by what was written in the Law. God in His mercy gave them time to adjust to the idea of getting along without the Mosaic Law.
- A distinction needs to be made for those who were basing their righteousness on the works of the Law and those who based their righteousness on faith in Jesus Christ. Outwardly both would appear to be doing the same thing by their obedience to the Law but inwardly only one would be a true believer. The only way a person could be justified by the Law would be by complete obedience to the Law.

Romans 2:13 for it is not the hearers of the Law who are just before God, but the doers of the Law will be justified.

- Unfortunately, it is impossible for a man to completely obey the Law so instead of the justification coming from obedience to the Law, it now comes through Jesus Christ for Jew and Gentile alike. Paul make it very clear that this new way of righteousness does not in any way nullify the Law.

Romans 3:28—31 ²⁸For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law. ²⁹Or is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, ³⁰since indeed God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith is one. ³¹Do we then nullify the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law.

- The believers in Acts 21 put their faith in their Messiah and in obedience would obey the Law.
- In conclusion, Paul would condemn the Jew who would try to justify himself through the Law. The Jew who put his faith in Jesus Christ would be called to obey the Law but with the understanding that following the Law was not related to salvation. When Paul went to Jerusalem to celebrate Pentecost, he did so in obedience to the Law. When he took the vow, he was following the instructions set forth in the Law. Jesus told the Disciples to obey the Law (Matthew 23:2—3) but nowhere are they told to forsake the Law until Hebrews is written so that by the time of the destruction of the Temple, the Jews would have put the Law of Moses behind them.

Acts 21:27—22:30 Paul Arrested

- While in the temple celebrating Pentecost, Jews from Asia came and laid hands on Paul and accused him of speaking against the Jews, the Law and desecrating the temple with Gentiles. They riled up the whole city.
- He was dragged out of the temple with the intent to kill him (remember Stephen?). As they were beating him the commander of the Roman cohort came with his soldiers and put Paul in chains and questioned him.
- As Paul was being brought to the barracks to get away from the mob, Paul spoke in Greek to the commander and asked if he could speak to the crowd. The commander thought he was an Egyptian who led a revolt earlier so when Paul spoke to him in Greek, he realized it was not the Egyptian and allowed him to speak to the crowd.
- Paul spoke to the crowd in Hebrew. They became very quiet and he gave them his Jewish credentials. He also told them how he was converted.
- As soon as he told them that God told him that he would be going to the Gentiles, chaos broke out.

- The commander brought Paul into the barracks and was going to examine him by scourging but Paul told them he was a Roman citizen. He was immediately released but needed to be questioned the next day to see why he had caused all this commotion.

Acts 23:1—10 Paul before the council

- Paul went before the Jewish council which included Pharisees, Sadducees, Elders and the High Priest. This is the equivalent of standing before our Supreme Court.
- When Paul said he was a Pharisee they started to argue heatedly among themselves because the Pharisees believed in a resurrection and the Sadducees did not.
- Because of the ruckus, the Commander rescued Paul and took him to the barracks.
- That night the Lord came to him, stood by His side and encouraged him. He was to be a witness in Jerusalem and in Rome. God was in all these events.

Acts 23:12—35 Paul is transferred to Caesarea

- Because of a plot against Paul by the Jews, the commander brought him to Caesarea with 200 soldiers, 200 spearmen and 70 horsemen.
- He would have the opportunity to go before Felix, the governor of Judea to defend himself from the Jews wishing him dead.

Acts 24:1—27 Paul before Felix

- The accusing Jews have their say before Felix then Paul gives his defense.
- Felix held Paul for two years hoping to get some of the collection money. They talked a number of times over the two-year time period until Felix was called to Rome and Festus took control.
- Festus didn't want to stir things up so he kept Paul in prison.

Key verse:

Acts 24:24 But some days later Felix arrived with Drusilla, his wife who was a Jewess, and sent for Paul and heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus.

- This was Paul's mission. He was sent by God to go before the Gentiles, kings and the sons of Israel (Acts 9:15). God gave Felix two years of personal evangelism by Paul.

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