

Paul taken prisoner – Acts 21: 17 – 36



After arriving back in Jerusalem, Paul found that false rumours were circulating about him. He was being accused of telling Jews who had become believers in Jesus Christ that they should abandon all the requirements of the Jewish Law. This was untrue, as whilst it had been agreed that Gentile believers should not be required to observe the Law, Paul had never suggested that Jewish believers should stop practising it. This misinformation was being spread by some Jews from Ephesus and other parts of the province of Asia who had

come to Jerusalem for the Passover. They had opposed Paul's work of evangelism in their own cities, but failed to silence him. Here in Jerusalem, however, they felt they had a better chance of success.

Paul decided to join a group of men who were going through a ritual of purification in the Temple, and to pay their expenses. This would show that he still conformed to the Law of Moses and the customs of the Jews. The period of purification was seven days. Before the week was ended, however, some of the Jews from the province of Asia came into the Temple and accused Paul publically not only of teaching Jews to abandon the Law but of defiling the Temple by bringing Gentiles into the inner court reserved for Jews alone. He was dragged out and subjected to a vicious beating.

That could have been the end of Paul's life, but the commander of the Roman troops in Jerusalem heard that a riot was taking place. Their garrison was next door to the Temple and connected with its outer court, where Gentiles were permitted to enter, by two flights of steps. The commander was thus able quickly to bring a detachment of soldiers down to the Temple and force Paul's assailants to stop manhandling him.

The commander then formally arrested Paul and had him handcuffed to two soldiers. He appears to have assumed that Paul had committed some kind of crime, but whatever he had done to infuriate the mob, he must be dealt with legally and not by riotous violence. When the commander tried to find out what Paul was supposed to have done, however, he could get no clear answer, as the accusations being hurled against him were conflicting and confused. He therefore ordered the soldiers to take him up into the fort. They had to carry Paul because the mob was so wild, and demanding that he be killed.

Battered, bruised and bleeding, Paul was taken up the steps to the Roman garrison. Years of imprisonment lay ahead of him.

A prayer for Prisons Week, which this year runs from October 11 – 17:

Lord, you offer freedom to all people. We pray for those in prison. Break the bonds of fear and isolation that exist. Support with your love prisoners and their families and friends, prison staff and all who care. Heal those who have been wounded by the actions of others, especially the victims of crime. Help us to forgive one another, to act justly, love mercy and walk humbly together with Christ in His strength and in His Spirit, now and every day. AMEN

(During Prisons Week, many Christians commit to pray for all those affected by prisons and by crime. To find out more, visit www.prisonweek.org)

- Rev John Barnett

Image: Rembrandt, St. Paul in Prison