

9055U

GOSNELL'S SPECIAL EFFORT - 1996

JAMES THE JUST

Speaker: Bro. Roger Lewis

Study5: Defender of Liberty

Reading: Acts 21:17-30

Thank you, brother chairman, and my dear brethren and sisters in the Lord Jesus Christ and my dear young people.

Well, you'll recall that in our last study, we saw James at the Jerusalem conference and we commented on the great wisdom of the apostle to the Hebrews, as he sought to bring down judgment in the matter of the controversy between brethren, on the question of whether the Gentiles ought to be circumcised or no! You'll remember that we discovered that the ruling of James on that occasion, not only brought forth scriptural evidence in favour of his conclusion, but despite that scriptural evidence, James decided in his wisdom, not to press his case. You know, the scriptural evidence that James brought forth could have been used by him to settle the matter fairly and squarely in favour of Paul, and fairly and squarely against the circumcision party and with scriptural evidence to boot! But James chose not to do that because he felt that the very unity of the ecclesia was at stake. He felt that the ecclesia needed more time for growth in spiritual things, he understood that there were many 'little ones' in the ecclesia, who did not understand the issues perfectly and were the ecclesia to be divided at that time, then many of them would be lost to the truth forever! So James' conclusion was that **forbearance was to be shown by both sides**. You'll remember that summary that we drew from his judgment in the matter in Acts 15, that forbearance was expected of the Gentiles in obeying these few requirements laid upon them, and forbearance was asked of the Jewish brethren in exacting no more. In that, we believe, that 'the wisdom that was from above, was first pure, then gentle and easy to be entreated' was the very wisdom practised by James, and the proof of that wisdom was, that the decision pleased the whole ecclesia, it says. Acts 15 is explicit, isn't it? it pleased the whole ecclesia! I think you see, that James' reasoning on the scripture was so comprehensive, that for the time, he had stunned even the circumcision party, who had no answer to his comments, particularly from Amos 9. They also concurred with the decision that was made, and opportunity was given therefore, that the ecclesia might grow a little further.

Well, that took us to AD. 53 and in our study this evening, we take up then, the next few years of history in the Jerusalem ecclesia, we take up the next 6 years of history, and we see, in fact, what happened over that course of time. Round about AD.54 (we can't

press the statement because we have no specific evidence of it) but we're going to start our study this evening, by commenting on the growing influence of the circumcision party. We're going to see how that in those intervening years, and particularly from about AD.54 onwards, that the circumcision party began to spread further and further abroad throughout the ecclesial world. This became the great group, the great controversy, the great battle that the apostle Paul had to wage elsewhere, and that James had to wage in the Jerusalem ecclesia. Then we're going to come through to AD.58 to the time when Paul wrote his epistle to the Romans, and we're going to find that even in the Roman ecclesia that that spirit of the circumcision party had already found its way. Shortly after the writing of that epistle, in fact, in the very same year AD.58, that the apostle Paul made a further visit to the Jerusalem ecclesia, his 5th visit, significant really, the number of grace and the activity on which he would be engaged on this occasion was, a very gracious one indeed. He was going to come and bring forth the offerings of grace that had come from the Gentile believers in the form of the Jerusalem poor fund, a subject that we've studied here before. In Acts 21, the basis of our study this evening, is of course, that very moment of time, when the apostle comes down to Jerusalem to present the Jerusalem poor fund; and we're going to see what happened and in particular the contact he had with James on the occasion of this visit. We're going to see how James was at the very time, dealing with controversy with the circumcision party yet again, and those things that he sought of Paul, in order that an ecclesial schism might be avoided and that there might yet be peace within the Jerusalem ecclesia.

So that, God willing, is the basis of the information that we're going to look at in the course of our study tonight. We're going to begin by looking at the way in which the circumcision party over these years, from about AD.53, 54 onwards was now gaining momentum throughout the ecclesial world. If you come to 2 Corinthians 2, for example, we're just going to look at a series of passages here that really deal with the way in which this influence was moving abroad throughout the ecclesias. 2 Corinthians 2 verses 16 and 17, 'To the one, he says, we are the savour of death unto death, and to the other the savour of life unto life; and who is sufficient for these things. For we, he says, are not as many which corrupt the Word of God, but as of sincerity as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ'. Do you see the margin there, b&s, we are not as many which deal deceitfully with the Word of God; and amongst those who had found their influence or who had extended their influence to the Corinthian ecclesia, who were dealing deceitfully with the Word of God, were those of the circumcision party. Those promoting adherence to the principles of the Law, those who wished to stress the thoroughly Jewish nature of the faith. You'll notice he says two things, first of all, they deal deceitfully and secondly, we're not as many, there were many of them, you see. Not just a few, **many now** in the ecclesial world. Take a note of that because that's a key word!

If you come over just a few pages to 2 Corinthians 11, we see a further reference to this same group that were to be found in the region of Corinth; in 2 Corinthians 11 he says similarly of this same group the following words in verse 18, 'Seeing that **many glory**

**after the flesh**, I will glory also', so not only were they handling the Word of God deceitfully, but in particular, says the apostle, they are glorying after the flesh. In what way were they glorying? Verse 22, 'Are they **Hebrews**? so am I. Are they **Israelites**? so am I. Are they **the seed of Abraham**? so am I'. Now what particular group were moving around the ecclesial world at this stage, promoting the Hebrew origin of their faith? and that they were Israelites, in fact, of the seed of Abraham, in fact, those verse 18, who gloried after the matter of fleshly descent? and the answer was the circumcision party, who were so thoroughly Jewish in their teaching and in their disposition, that this was the particular matter that they promoted wheresoever they went. How many of them were there? Verse 18, 'there were many of them' says the apostle'.

Philippians 3, now Corinth is in the region of Achaia, but Philippi is a city of Macedonia, and Philippians 3 tells us that the spirit of the circumcision party was not just to be found in the regions of Achaia, but also in the provinces of Macedonia. Philippians 3 verse 18 says, 'For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are **the enemies** of the cross of Christ'. Now who were these in Philippians 3 verse 18 that the apostle so apostatizes? enemies of the cross of Christ, he calls them. Well, amongst those that he's referring to are those that he mentions in verse 2 of this chapter; 'beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the cutters', he said. The word 'conscion' there means exactly that, 'beware of the **cutters**'; Rotherham translates it, 'beware of the mutilators of the flesh'. It's a very powerful form in the Greek, it's a reference to the circumcision party, and their insistence on this fleshly rite as a key to salvation. In verse 3 he says, 'For **we** are the circumcision which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh', says the apostle, in contrast to this group, this party, the cutters, he calls them. These are they in verse 18 of whom he says, '**many walk and they are enemies of the cross of Christ Jesus**, I tell you weeping', says the apostle Paul. If the influence of this group were to be found in all the major provinces in which the apostle laboured, we needn't be surprised to find that in a few years they were also spreading to far flung regions, even to the ecclesias of the isles.

If we come to the ecclesia in Crete, for example, in the book of Titus and Titus 1, we find that the spirit of the circumcision party reached even there. Titus 1 says reading at verse 10, 'For there are **many unruly and vain talkers** and deceivers specially they of the **circumcision**', says the apostle, 'whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake'. Now here we have a little ecclesia in a far flung isle in the middle of the Mediterranean, but the circumcision party had reached even there. 'They are many specially they of the circumcision', says the apostle.

Finally, one further reference which we won't turn up but you might like to see it here in Hebrews 12 verse 15, when the apostle says, 'Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace, lest any root of bitterness spring up troubling you, and hereby many be defiled', now you'll see how we've got some key ideas here. The stress of the apostle in these passages is, that not only was the circumcision party moving abroad, but they were

becoming a dominant influence everywhere, so you see this key word. **There are many, many, many, many of them**, all over the ecclesial world they were, and what do they do? says the apostle, this circumcision party. Well, they **corrupt the Word**, they **glory after the flesh**, they **are enemies of the cross**, they are those who **subvert whole houses**, and in your ecclesias, he says, **they will be a root of bitterness**. The apostle had first hand experience of what that was like, as did James in the Jerusalem ecclesia.

They were everywhere, b&s! He fought against them in Galatia, in Macedonia, in Achaia, they were at that time, the greatest threat to the ecclesial world, and James withstood them in the Jerusalem ecclesia also. You know, b&s, if you come to Romans 2, we come to this remarkable statement that the apostle makes in Romans 2. Now you probably know that Romans 2 is a letter that was written to an ecclesia that Paul had not yet visited, even the apostle himself had not yet got to Rome, but before Paul reached Rome, the circumcision party were already ahead of him. Paul then has this eloquent appeal against them in Romans 2 verse 17, '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 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? Verse 25, 'For circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the Law: but if thou be a breaker of the Law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision. Verse 28, 'For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God'. Whence sprang this eloquent appeal, b&s, from the apostle's mouth? but to combat a group who were already ahead of him in the ecclesial world! and the tentacles of the circumcision party reached everywhere, but their mother base was the Jerusalem ecclesia.

You know, b&s, Paul wrote Romans at a specific time, just before he was about to come back to Jerusalem. If you come back to Acts 20 (some of you might have a note of this, but if you don't, it's a good thing to put in your margin I think). In Acts 20 we're told in verse 1, 'And after the uproar was ceased, Paul called unto him the disciples and embraced them, and departed for to go into Macedonia; and when he had gone over those parts and had given them much exhortation, he came into Greece, and there abode 3 months'. It was in that 3 months that Paul wrote Romans, whilst he was in Greece which was the old name for Achaia, whilst he was there he wrote the epistle to the Romans, just as he was, as the verse says, about to sail into Syria. Now why was he about to sail into Syria? Well, he was about to return to the Holy Land and specifically he was about to visit the Jerusalem ecclesia. This particular missionary journey had come to an end, but when he returned to Jerusalem he would come bearing gifts; in fact, he would come bearing one particular gift, the crowning glory of all his labours amongst the Gentile ecclesias for the last 3 years, a collection of money

from the Gentiles for their Jewish brethren. We know, do we not, b&s, that the apostle's whole heart and soul, was in that fund? He'd given his being for that collection, it represented you see, the very antithesis of the circumcision party and all that they stood for. Oh, how much the apostle wanted to get back to Jerusalem on this occasion, and to present this fund, that in its spirit and its teaching stood for the very opposite of all that the circumcision party represented. Now we're not going to look at that tonight because that's another study, and fortunately most of you have heard it already, but you'll remember that the apostle wrote two special chapters about this Jerusalem poor fund, 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 (we're not going to turn them up, but I'm just going to summarize for you what the principle spirit of those two chapters is all about as Paul pours out his heart concerning the real reasons for the Jerusalem poor fund). He says it stands for this, now you think about these issues, b&s, and compare them with the spirit and with the tone and with the approach of the circumcision party.

Paul's teaching on the Jerusalem poor fund was that is was for what **grace could inspire rather than what Law could compel.**

- It had all to do with the ideal of gracious overflowing generosity in helping others.
- It was all about the example of selfless giving for the needs of others.
- It had to do with the principle of earnest care for the welfare of others.
- It taught the objective of mutual cooperation for the benefit of others.
- It spoke of the attitude of meticulous honesty in dealing with others.
- The poor fund represented the lesson of having a standard of careful preparation in working for others.
- It taught the spirit of sowing bountifully in labouring for others.
- Finally, the Jerusalem poor fund taught the result of enriching fellowship and glorious unity with others.

All of those things, that were wrapped up in the bags with that money, represented the very **opposite** of the spirit of the circumcision party. Oh, how the apostle wanted to take those bags to Jerusalem! how the apostle wanted to help his friend, James, in this controversy.

You know, b&s, we've all probably had experience of occasions in life where you get into a difficulty or an argument, and after it's over, you think of something **really good** that you could have said! ever had that experience? A brilliant quotation, or a marvellous reply, you think, oh! I wished I had thought of that at the right time! The apostle knew it at the right time, he had the quotations, he had the tongue, he had the brilliance, he had the logic, he had the intellect, he had the quickness of mind, and he was ready, ready to do battle with the circumcision party, and he's on his way, he's on his way to help James. You see, what he wanted to do was to soften the hearts of that group, to temper their tone, to moderate their extremism, to humble their pride, to open the door that they might talk together as brethren, and that he might lay up before them, scripture by scripture, the real basis of a man's justification before his God; the apostle's heart was set on going to Jerusalem at this time. No doubt about that!

It was a very exciting undertaking! it was one that the apostle had planned meticulously and you know, as we read the epistles that tell us about his impending visit and his intentions at that time, you just get the sense that he was absolutely buoyed up with excitement, but as the same time as he was excited, he also had **grave doubts**. I think that the principle doubt that the apostle had, was how things would go with the circumcision party when he got there! Let's have a look at Romans 15 because Romans 15 was written on the very eve of his departure. Remember that he wrote this epistle just as he was about to head off for Jerusalem. His plans were changed slightly, he was delayed a little, as it turned out, the delay was very propitious, not that the apostle would have known that at this time, but here's what he says at the time that he was about to go back to support his dear friend, James, in the lonely struggle against the circumcision party. Romans 15 verse 25, and here's what the apostle says, he says: 'Now I go unto Jerusalem to minister unto the saints. For it hath pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem. It hath pleased them verily; and their debtors they are. For if the Gentiles have been made partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister unto them in carnal things. When therefore I have performed this, and have sealed to them this fruit, I will come by you into Spain. And I am sure that, when I come unto you, I shall come in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ. Now I beseech you, brethren, (and now the apostle gets to his real worry; this is the real concern that was eating the apostle out at this time) 'for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me'.

Why did the apostle want them to agonize with him in prayer to the Father? well, he says, verse 31, 'That I may be delivered from them that do not believe in Judea; and that my service which I have for Jerusalem (as the Amplified bible says) may be graciously received by the saints'. Now do you see the margin, b&s, 'that I may be delivered from them that **do not believe**', but the margin says, 'that I might be delivered from them **that are disobedient**', the Diaglott says, '**those being disobedient**', Vine's says that this word here means, '**those who were obstinate or unpersuadable**', those that remained unconvinced is another translation; you see, I don't think he's talking about Jews outside of the ecclesia, I think he's talking about the disobedient ones, the unpersuaded ones, in the ecclesia. Paul wasn't going back to face the Jews, he was going back to face the ecclesia, and there was a group in the ecclesia, that were as yet unpersuaded, unconvinced, and he's ready to go back and to stand side by side with his boon companion, James, in order to do this thing. But he's got great fears as to how it will go!

Well, how did it go? what happened? Well Acts 21 which is our reading, let's pick up the story now and see what happens as the apostle Paul makes his way into Jerusalem and we see the circumstances that bring about his next meeting with James, and the influence that James as yet wields in the Jerusalem ecclesia. In verse 17, we're told that after finally getting to Jerusalem after a very long and arduous journey, one that was filled with many wonderful meetings however, with the brethren, the Gentile brethren, all on the way, we're told in verse 17, 'And when we were come to Jerusalem,

the brethren **received us gladly**'. So that's important to notice! the Jerusalem bible say, 'on our arrival in Jerusalem, the brethren gave us a **very warm welcome**'. So is there any difference between Paul and the leaders of the Jerusalem ecclesia? and the answer is 'none at all'; they're obviously in accord, aren't they? He received a warm welcome from the brethren of the ecclesia when he arrived, there's no problem between him and James or the other leaders of the ecclesia. Then verse 18 says, 'And the day following Paul went in with us unto James; and all the elders were present'. In the Greek, the word 'went in' (1524) is an unusual form in the Greek text, it indicates that it was a very **solemn** occasion. This was a momentous time as Paul with his retinue of brethren bearing the Jerusalem poor fund, come in before the leaders of the Jerusalem ecclesia, and who do they come in before particularly? says the record in verse 18, but James, and so clearly here, James is still very much the leader of the Jerusalem ecclesia and it is he that receives Paul and his entourage, as president of the assembly. Just notice one interesting thing in verse 18, he says, 'we went in unto James and **all the elders** were present', now do you notice that that's slightly different to Acts 15 that we saw the other night, Acts 15 says and it's not quite the same as the reception that they had in Acts 15, do you notice a difference here, now how is it changed? Acts 21 says, 'we went in unto James and all the elders were present, but Acts 15 verse 4 says, 'and when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the ecclesia, **and of the apostles** and elders', so in Acts 21 verse 18 when Paul arrives this time, James is there and so also are the elders, but there is no longer any mention of the apostles, they're gone and they've left the Jerusalem ecclesia, remember how we said that they were appointed of the Lord for a different work, to be his witnesses unto the uttermost parts of the earth. Well, it would appear from Acts 21 that they have now gone. James is waging his own battle as it were; Peter and John and all the other pillars of the ecclesia have left for other parts and for other works.

So verse 18 of Acts 21 says, 'The day following Paul went in with us unto James, and all the elders were present, And when he had **saluted** them, he declared particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry'. How did the brethren salute one another, by the way, in those days? with an holy kiss! Romans 16 verse 16 says just that, 'salute one another with an holy kiss', also mentioned in 1 Thessalonians 5 verse 26, 1 Corinthians 16 verse 20 and 2 Corinthians 13 verse 12, that was the standard form of greeting. You see, we're a lot more conservative, aren't we? in our western culture, we don't go up and embrace one another. But they did in these places; and you see, I can just imagine Paul coming in and James striding forward and James saying, 'Paul, my brother!' and they would embrace one another warmly because they were passionate men and they were dear to one another, and they greeted one another with a holy kiss; I can see James and Paul doing that in this gathering at this time. 'And when he had **saluted** them', I think that's exactly what happened, they strode forward and embraced one another, these two men who were the champions of justification by faith against the spirit of this circumcision party; it was the symbol of their brotherhood, it was the kiss of 'shalom', the kiss of 'unity', and these two brethren had that between the two of them.

So verse 19 goes on to say, when this was done, 'He (Paul) declared particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry'; did you notice the wonderful humility of Paul in these words. You see, he doesn't say, 'what things Paul had wrought', does he? he says what things **God had wrought, by his ministry**. The apostle understood that he was but an instrument for the furthering of the divine purpose; and that the objective at all times, is to do that which is **best for the truth**, which really means to do that which shall advance the Father's purpose, even in all of his preaching work amongst the Gentiles, that it really was God's work and God's ministry and not his own!

Then verse 20 says, and now we get to the interesting bits, you see, as far as James is concerned: it says 'And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord, and said unto him'. Now I want you to notice very carefully what's said here, 'when they **heard it**, they **glorified the Lord**', now obviously what we're being told here is that James and the elders were clearly delighted with Paul's report. They were genuinely in accord with his work, I think that that verse tells us that James was 100% behind Paul's labours amongst the Gentiles, and his gospel to the Gentiles. There's no disagreement here, they glorified God, then it says, (notice this) 'and they said', now the question is, who said? I know it says 'they said' but 'who said'? you see, I think it was James, I think it's James that's speaking in this particular passage; two reasons for that, first of all, verse 18 tells us that James was the leader of the assembly and therefore, the spokesman, the spokesman of the Jerusalem ecclesia, and therefore it would be most likely that he who was in charge, was he who was the spokesman for the Jerusalem brethren in this exchange. So when verse 20 says, 'they said unto Paul', I think it was James that was speaking on behalf of the Jerusalem brethren. Here's the second point! you notice that whoever it was that does speak, says in verse 25, 'As touching the Gentiles which believe, **we have written and concluded**', now what's that a reference to? that's a reference to the letter of the Jerusalem conference, isn't it? Now who wrote that letter? and the answer is why James! it came from James' own hand, so whoever the spokesman is in Acts 21, they make reference to the fact that we've written a letter about the status of the Gentile believers. The person most natural to make reference to that, of course, is James, referring to his own correspondence, you see, the word 'written'(1989) in Acts 21 verse 25, you know, that word is only found twice in the bible, and this is one of them, and the only other place that that Greek word is found is when James says in Acts 15 verse 20, 'that we trouble not the Gentiles but that we **write** unto them' says James; that's the only other time that Greek word is used throughout the whole of scripture. Just as it came out of the mouth of James in Acts 15, I think it came out of the mouth of James in Acts 21, you see, I think this is James that is speaking throughout this particular story.

So now we go back and look at verse 20 in a little more detail; so we've got a problem here, haven't we? 'when they heard it they glorified the Lord, and James says to Paul on behalf of the Jerusalem brethren, Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the Law', and we seem to have this problem that it's almost as if James' comments here have nothing to do with what Paul

has said. Remember that? Paul comes in and talks about the glory of his work amongst the Gentiles and James says, 'Very good, Paul, and they glorified the Lord; and say now, 'do you see these...'' and it's almost as if they seem to move straight to another topic, that appears to have nothing to do with what the apostle's been talking about! Well, I think the Jerusalem bible helps in the context of verse 20, (you read your bibles carefully and listen to the Jerusalem bible, notice how it just slightly changes the emphasis and I think it helps) it says, 'they gave glory to God when they heard this; but you see, brother, they said, how many thousands of Jews have now become believers; all of them staunch upholders of the Law'. Now do you see what the Jerusalem bible does? what the Jerusalem bible says in effect is that they glorified God, they were 100% happy with what the apostle was doing amongst the Gentiles, but in effect, James was saying, 'we're in accord with your work, Paul, **but we have a problem!** and it's in this ecclesia right here, right now, and we need your help because it's a bad problem!' I think that's the real context, you see, of verse 20. It's not that they wished to ignore what the apostle's done or what the apostle has said, but James has got to draw Paul's attention to a greater issue that burns more brightly at this particular moment and that was, the issue facing them in this particular ecclesia here and now.

What was the problem? Well, the problem was as verse 20 goes on to say, how many **thousands of Jews** there are which believe. You know, the word 'thousands' there is actually the word 'myriads' and the word 'myriads' actually means **tens of thousands** not thousands. Now I don't know if that's to be taken literally or not, if it was, it was a very large ecclesia; one imagines it was probably a poetic term but it's still evidence that there had been a huge influx of members into the Jerusalem ecclesia, but they had one dominant characteristic and that was this, **they are ALL zealous of the Law**. So you see, what we're being told in Acts 21 verse 20 is that the circumcision party were rapidly becoming the largest and the most dominant group within the Jerusalem ecclesia. Oh yes, James has a problem alright, you see, the ecclesia is starting to move the way of the circumcision party; they've got the numbers on their side! not only are they growing elsewhere in other parts of the ecclesial world, but their influence is greatly increasing within the Jerusalem ecclesia as well.

Verse 21 goes on to talk about the tone and the character of this party. Verse 21 says, 'And they (that is, the members of the ecclesia) are **informed** of thee, that thou teachest all the Jews'. They are informed of thee, so you see, now we've got informers in the ecclesia, how delightful! In fact, do you see that word 'informer' it's the same word translated in Luke 1 verse 4 as 'instructed', and you see, I think what we're being told here is that the members of the Jerusalem ecclesia had been systematically instructed or systematically coached in the subject of Paul's apostasy from the truth. There had almost been classes on the subject lead by a particular group within the Jerusalem ecclesia, and slanderous rumours were spread by the circumcision party about the apostle Paul and about his belief and about his practice; of course, they would never have given Paul the right of reply, they never would have given the opportunity for defence. You see, they were by nature judgmental and this particular group, not only in these days, but in any time or any generation, are those who seem somehow to impute

the worst of motives to other brethren. There's something awfully perverse about that, isn't there? it should be, shouldn't it?, b&s, in ecclesial life, no matter what difficulties we face, that we should at least impute the best of motives to our brethren, in the first instance, surely? NOT THIS GROUP! NO, their spirit is to impute the worst motive whenever they possibly can and especially if it helps to advance their particular cause. So what were they instructing the members of the ecclesia concerning? Verse 21, 'They are informed of thee, that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles, to forsake Moses', literally that means in the Greek by the way, 'apostasy from Moses', that's what this party taught concerning Paul, **he teaches apostasy from Moses** and the particular apostasy that concerned them most of all, as we read at the end of verse 21, was that they thought that Paul was saying to Jews that they **ought not to circumcise their children**, so we're back to the same old subject, aren't we? the matter of circumcision all over again. That's the issue! do you know why this is an issue here? how come this issue arises in Acts 21, well I'll tell you why! because you see, this was the key issue that had never ever been resolved at the Jerusalem conference. I think James knew that!

You see, what happened at the Jerusalem conference was, the brethren came together and they said, 'Ought the Gentiles to be circumcised?' Now you know what James' conclusion was from scripture, his conclusion in effect was, that the Gentiles come in under the dispensation of Christ (the tabernacle of David) not the Law of Moses (the tabernacle of Gibeon), therefore, they do not need to be circumcised. But the letter never says anything about circumcision, does it? it simply says that 'we command them to abstain from these necessary things, and lists 4 things that were essential for the Gentiles to perform amongst which was **not** the right of circumcision. By implication of the fact that it is not mentioned in the letter, we assume that the judgment of the conference was, and rightly so, that **circumcision was not required for the Gentiles**, which, by the way, was the very question that had brought them together in the first place. If you stop and think about it, b&s, you see, there was one issue (James had answered that, by the way) but there was one issue that James couldn't handle at the Jerusalem conference, it was just too difficult just too explosive, and that was this, but it was an obvious question really, and the question was this, 'well, if the Gentiles need not be circumcised, why should Jews? and there was no way that James could deal with that, was there? Not in that ecclesia not on that day! But it was an obvious question as a result of the decisions of the Jerusalem conference, wasn't it? Now do you see how this particular party is so quick to take it up, because I think what they did, as the result of the rulings of the conference, they said, 'Alright, okay, it may not be necessary for the Gentiles to be circumcised, **but it is still required of the Jews, because James didn't say anything about the fact that the Jews oughtn't to be circumcised, did he? therefore by implication we should;** and somehow they would make out of the Jerusalem conference decisions, a teaching that it was still binding upon the Jewish believer.

You see, what's happened with this group, is that they've actually changed their ground, a little bit at a time. I want you to have a look at this, Acts 11, let's go back to where this

little argument started. Acts 11, now you see what's happened here is that every time an issue is raised, the circumcision party move their ground a little, but they **never ever give in!** Now just see what happens here! in Acts 11 verse 1 what was the issue? 'The apostles and brethren that were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also received the Word of God. And when Peter was come up to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him, Saying, **Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised**' so what was the first flag of the circumcision party? and the answer was, '**we ought to have nothing to do with the uncircumcised Gentiles!**' That was their first line of defence, now that was breached, wasn't it? because it became apparently evident after Peter's explanation and further things that occurred, that the Gentiles obviously were going to be involved in the truth; so then they shifted their ground and said, 'alright, we might be having association with the uncircumcised or with the Gentiles, maybe they might be able to be associated with the truth, but only on the basis, well, what does Acts 15 say? It says that when they came to the conference, their ground now was, not so much that we shouldn't have anything to do with the Gentiles, but verse 5 of Acts 15, '**that it was needful to circumcise them and to command them to keep the Law of Moses**'. So now the ground of this party is, well, they might be able to come into the truth, but **they've got to conform to circumcision and the Law**, if they are to be accepted.

Then, a ruling is given on that, that in effect says, that **circumcision is not binding on the Gentiles!** So now when we come to Acts 21, the ground has changed again, isn't it? Now that they can no longer ask that the Gentiles submit to circumcision, they take one step further back and then they come in fighting again, but this time the ground of the argument is Acts 21 verse 21, '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**', and now the line of defence of the circumcision party is, well, it might not be necessary for Gentiles **but the Jews still have to be circumcised. All Jewish believers must still comply!** See how they're changing their ground? a little bit at a time but you never give in, you see, that's the key, isn't it? **DON'T EVER GIVE IN!** keep the fight going, to the bitter end if need be, that's the important thing; and who cares what happens to the ecclesia in the meantime.

So what does James suggest that Paul ought to do? Well, verse 22 says, 'What is it therefore? the multitude must needs come together: for they will hear that thou art come'. You know, if you read verse 22 and 23 even in the AV, you get a definite sense of urgency, you get a sense that James is in trouble, that James is worried about things. Let's just read it in the AV to start with, 'what is it therefore? the multitude must needs come together for they will hear that thou art come. Do this therefore, that we say to thee'. You can tell that James is worried, can't you? he's worried about what is going to happen to the ecclesia at this time; now another couple of translations with regard to the contextual meaning of these verses. The NIB version firstly, 'what shall we do? they shall certainly hear that you have come, so do what we tell you', so what James is now going to propose is a solution to help avoid an unnecessary division in the ecclesia. The Jerusalem bible says, 'what is to be done? inevitably there will be a meeting of the

whole body, since they're bound to hear that you have come; so do as we suggest!'. Oh, James, is feeling under pressure here, isn't he? you can really sense that he's feeling under pressure! I'll tell you what, b&s, what James is going to suggest that Paul does here, involved a certain measure of personal danger for Paul, and the proof of that is, that danger was realized and he was taken and he was captured.

So you stop and ask yourself the question, do you think that James would ever have asked Paul to do something that was dangerous, unless he really thought that it was important? The answer is, of course he wouldn't! he wouldn't ask Paul to do something that would put him at personal risk unless there was a matter of desperate urgency, an urgent need, and there was, you see. You see, the whole tone of the narrative of these verses suggest that James and the elders were in a difficult position. The circumcision party was now so powerful that it could force James' hand, if need be; the ecclesia was being held to ransom, they had systematically spread rumours about the apostle Paul, and now that he was here, they wouldn't hesitate **to call a special meeting of the ecclesia** (verse 22), once they knew that Paul was there, they wouldn't hesitate to call a special meeting of the ecclesia and put Paul on the mat. Oh, they'd love the chance to do that! and why should they be bothered about doing that? they'd already done it to Peter. Why shouldn't they do it to Paul? You know, all we need is 10 signatures and we can force the AB's hands! we'll call a special meeting of the ecclesia and we'll **force it through!** James knew what would happen if that special meeting were ever held, because he knew that that party had all the skill and all the eloquence and all the ability to so arouse the fervour of the people about the **purity of the truth**, and of what was at stake here, that in the confusion and in the emotion of the moment, finally someone would say, 'obviously, there's a controversy here, I'd like to raise, brother chairman, a motion that this ecclesia does conform to the Law of Moses; all those in favour? **carried!**' The ecclesia could have been lost just like that! given the fervour of the moment; James knew all that. Could have gone just like that, b&s, and he was a dedicated shepherd of his flock, he sought to avoid that if at all possible.

So this is what he says, verse 23, he says, 'Look, do this therefore that we say to thee Paul: we have four men which have a vow on them'. Now that's interesting, let's just go back to Numbers 6 for a moment because there's an interesting verse here that I think helps to explain the next part of Acts 21, the law of the Nazarite. Now Numbers 6 verse 13 says, 'this is the law of the Nazarite when the days of his separation are fulfilled; he shall be brought unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation: he shall offer his offering unto Yahweh (now just look at the schedule of offerings that a man was required to make to complete his vows). **One he lamb of the first year without blemish for a burnt offering, one ewe lamb of the first year without blemish for a sin offering, one ram without blemish for peace offerings, a basket of unleavened bread, cakes of fine flour mingled with oil, wafers of unleavened bread anointed with oil, and their meat offerings; and their drink offerings**'. You see, it was rather expensive business to complete a vow, a Nazarite vow, there was cost involved, it was part of the principle of Nazariteship.

So let's just come back to Acts 21, because I think that will help us in the next verse. Verse 23 first because there's still a couple of things about it that we need to discuss. This helps us to see the state in which this ecclesia was! First of all, it says we have 4 men which have a vow on them, so this was **a Nazarite vow**, but, b&s, this is an ecclesia, this is an ecclesia of brethren and sisters, what are they doing making Nazarite vows under the Law of Moses? do you see, how deeply entrenched this ecclesia was instilled in matters of the Law? These are **brethren of the meeting engaging in Nazarite vows**; and it does seem to be brethren of the meeting because you see what verse 23 says, 'do this therefore, that **we say to thee, we have four men**'. They were members of the ecclesia and yet such was the power of law keeping still, in this particular ecclesia, that they are engaged in the very principles of dedication to God under the Nazarite vow.

So James says, verse 24, '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'. Now the NIV helps with verse 24 when it says this, 'Take these men, join in their purification rites and pay their expenses, so that they can have their heads shaved', in other words, complete their vows. So James asks the apostle Paul to not only join with these brethren, but **to pay the costs of the offerings that would be required for the completion of their vows, thereby signifying his union with that spirit**. So that's interesting isn't it? let's just summarize where we are therefore. So the initial meetings with a limited number of the Jerusalem ecclesia, verse 17, were marked by a warm and friendly spirit; James and the elders were obviously delighted with Paul's report; they were genuinely in accord with his work, their suggestion to him however involved great personal danger to Paul and James must have been aware of this! They would truly have only proposed their plan, if there had been an urgent need, and there was; the very urgency of the message suggests that James and the elders were in an extremely difficult position; the circumcision party was in the ascendancy, verse 20, and it was now, in fact, so powerful that it could force James' hand. The ecclesia was being held to ransom, they systematically spread rumours about Paul, verse 21, and they would not hesitate to call a special meeting of the ecclesia to put him on trial, verse 22. James feared that they would divide the ecclesia and he urgently sought to avoid this if at all possible, verse 24. His position on the Gentiles and the Law was clear, verse 25, but he could not resolve Jewish relationship to the Law, not yet, not in this ecclesia, not at this time.

So what did Paul do? and the answer is verse 26 which says, **that Paul did as James had asked**, and I think that that shows that Paul appreciated James' problem, you see, and I can tell you this, I don't think that Paul would ever have cooperated in this matter, if he felt that James' attitude to the Law was fundamentally wrong. I don't think that Paul would have been associated with James' proposals here, if he thought that James' attitude to the Law was fundamentally wrong; I think that Paul acquiesces in this matter because **he understood James' dilemma**, and he urgently sought to assist in avoiding what could only be a hurtful schism in the ecclesia at this time. It must have broken

Paul's heart to comply with James' request! You see, he'd come with a **voluntary offering** from the Gentiles, to show what **grace could inspire**, and now that he's arrived, he finds himself bound to Jews in the offering of **obligatory offerings in what the Law could compel**. He must have found that very hard indeed to do, b&s, but for the sake of James and for the sake of what would best serve the interests of the truth, that's what Paul did!

I'd like you to come to Proverbs 29; there are just 2 or 3 proverbs here that are altogether, that seem to be perhaps suitable for the spirit of this episode and what James was endeavouring to do, in concert with his friend, Paul. I'm going to read from the American Standard Version which I believe, gives a better sense to these particular proverbs; it's Proverbs 29 and verse 8 to 11, and here surely is the spirit of James on this occasion! 'Scoffers set a city in a flame (that's the way it should be translated) but wise men turn away wrath'. You see, what verse 8 is saying is that there are some in the ecclesia that don't hesitate to ignite, they ignite fires, they ignite controversy; wise men, says the proverb, learn to defuse'. They're the ones that the ecclesia looks to, to help put the fire out! they're the brethren that are called upon to settle things down when others have stirred them up. Scoffers set a city in a flame, wise men turn away wrath, you see, I think that's what James was endeavouring to do on this occasion. Verse 9, 'If a wise man have a controversy with a foolish man, whether he be angry or laugh, there will be no rest'; you see, I think the lesson of verse 9 is, the foolish man here is the man who either rages with anger or laughs with scorn, either way he's impossible to reason with. He's either furious in his judgment of you or laughs to your face, in ridicule of what your standing for, but the one thing you can't do is reason with him, because he just won't listen. It doesn't matter what you do, there will be no rest, says the proverb. James was pretty much at this stage with this group in the ecclesia now, all he could do was what he thought was wisest and best, to avoid hurtful schisms. But there was almost no point now in debating with the circumcision party because you wouldn't have got anywhere, just further noise! further anger. Verse 10 says, 'The bloodthirsty hates him that is perfect: (and I think this is how this should be translated) 'and as for the upright, they seek his life'. As for the just they seek his life, and James' own position in the ecclesia was coming to that point, the dangerous point, where his leadership, his very authority was about to be threatened because of the bloodthirsty nature of those who really hated him in the ecclesia for what he stood for. Verse 11, 'A fool uttereth all his anger; but a wise man keepeth it back and stilleth it'. The AV is not right, by the way, you see what it says, 'he keepeth it in till afterwards', which sort of sounds like, that the wise man holds his emotions back and then lashes out later on, but it doesn't mean that at all. In the Hebrew it means that he keeps it back and so **stills it, he learns self control and masters his emotions**, so they never do come to the fore. 'A fool utters all his anger, but a wise man keeps it back and stilleth it', and I think that's the spirit of James in Acts 21, he thought to do that which was right, he refused to become heated or emotional in this matter. But he did need Paul's help and together they would do what they could to heal the ecclesia.

Well, b&s, were they successful? Who knows? how long could James last? did Paul get

the chance to have his dealings with the circumcision party and to lay matters before them? Well, he did! he did have opportunity to battle in a very personal and in a very direct way with the circumcision party; I think the apostle Paul was provided with a circumstance whereby he had every opportunity to lay up **the most comprehensive argument** that could ever be brought together against the spirit of the circumcision party, and Paul was given that opportunity, but it wasn't on this visit! and it wasn't in the way he thought, and it wasn't at the time he expected, and he wasn't with James when it happened. That story, b&s, and how all those circumstances were worked out, is the basis, God willing, of our next study.