

## Overcoming the Tendency to Blame God (for Our Choices) – Part 2 Acts 21

### Introduction:

1. Have you ever noticed how we love to blame others when things fall apart? Did you know that this human characteristic goes all the way back to the Garden of Eden?
  - When God confronted Adam about his sinful choices, Adam basically blamed Eve, and even God! – “...*the woman **thou** gavest to be with me, **she** gave me of the tree...*”
  - Eve blamed the serpent – “...*the **serpent** beguiled me, and I did eat.*”
2. Do you think God ever gets blamed for bad things today? It happens all of the time. When problems and bad circumstances enter people’s lives, they will turn and look toward the heavens to lay blame at God’s feet.
3. God is not the author of sin, death, confusion, and evil. God is a good and gracious God. Problems enter our lives for many reasons, one of which is choices that we make.
  - As Adam worked the fields with sweat pouring off of his head, he could think back to the perfect environment of Eden, and the fact that it was his own choice that led to this. It wasn’t, “God, why are you doing this to me?” It was **Adam’s** choices, not God’s.
  - As Eve would also work and toil alongside her husband, and experience pain in child-bearing, she could think back to her own choices that she had made.
4. Here in our text, the apostle Paul is bound with two chains by the chief captain in Jerusalem (vs. 33). This would end Paul’s public ministry as a free man.
  - No longer would Paul have the liberty to decide where he would go and preach the gospel. He was now in the hands of the Roman government.
5. Paul had entered the temple, and the Jews from Asia (who hated Paul) tried the same method as they did in Ephesus (vs. 27-29). A mob scene commenced (vs. 30-31) and the Roman officials came to Paul’s rescue, but they arrested him in the process (vs. 32-36).
6. How could this happen? The greatest apostle in the New Testament was mobbed, arrested, jailed, and eventually executed. A person might ask, “Why would God do this to Paul?”
7. Isn’t it sad that we look to blame God? God did not do anything to Paul! Paul brought all of this on himself. Paul made a series of choices that led to all of these problems.
8. People must understand that choices always have consequences. There are several lessons we can learn from Paul’s mistakes. How can you make godly choices in your life?

## **First, by determining to follow God's instructions and warnings**

### **Second, by refusing to give heed to bad counsel**

1. Have you ever had a person give you advice or counsel, and when you acted upon it everything blew up in your face? That is exactly what happened to Paul here in our text.
2. Paul arrived at Jerusalem and initially met with some of his fellow believers. vs. 17
3. The next day Paul met with James (the leader of the church at Jerusalem) and all the elders from the church. Paul gave them a detailed report of his missionary work among the Gentiles. vs. 18-19
4. The elders outwardly appeared happy with Paul's report, but they immediately changed the subject and approached Paul with a perceived problem.
  - They said, "There are lots of Jews in Jerusalem who believe, and they are also zealous of the Old Testament. They've heard rumors about you and how that you teach people to forsake the Mosaic Law. When they hear you are in town, they will be real angry." vs. 20-22
5. Based on this perceived problem, the elders gave Paul some very unwise counsel.
  - Four men in the congregation were taking a Nazarite, Old Testament vow. vs. 23
  - They counseled Paul to participate with them in the vow and pay for their expenses (vs. 24). This would require at least three animals per person (15 animals – very expensive).
  - Of course, instead of inducing Paul into this, they should have been defending Paul, his doctrine, and conduct.
6. This whole thing had a foul smell to it. They seemed to be ready for Paul and had this whole thing planned prior to his arrival.
7. But here in our text, it is decision time for Paul. Is Paul going to follow the counsel of these elders in an attempt to pacify some of these Jews?
8. Remember, this is the same Paul who had taught the sufficiency of Christ's work and our liberation from the Old Testament law system. Acts 13:39; Galatians 2:19, 3:25; Romans 4:9-11, 7:6
9. Now, the elders at Jerusalem were urging Paul to finance and offer bloody animal sacrifices to prove that he was a faithful observer of the law system. What was the right thing for Paul to do? I think we all know the answer to that, don't we?
10. But Paul followed the terrible and unbiblical advice of these elders (vs. 26), and it resulted in Paul being beaten and arrested, and his public ministry ended.
  - Paul did not have to do this. He could have dropped off the offering he had collected from the Gentile churches and split town. He could have said, "Thanks, but no thanks. I'm out of here and heading back out to my fruitful Gentile ministry. You guys can reach the Jews." Galatians 2:9
11. Why did Paul follow the bad counsel of the elders at Jerusalem? vs. 18-26

**A. He never acknowledged God in this matter.**

- There is no record that he ever sought God's counsel. Of course he should have gone immediately to God about this matter.
- Did you know that God desires to be your counselor? There is no matter too big or small for you to bring to God. He has given you His Word and complete access into His presence to talk to Him in prayer.
- Your pastor, friend, neighbor, co-worker, or fellow church member does not have all the answers. God, through His Word, can fully equip you to make wise and expedient decisions. 2 Timothy 3:16-17
- God should not be your last resort, but your first resource.

**B. He went to the wrong place for counsel.**

- Paul heeded the advice of these Jerusalem elders quickly and completely. They did not have Paul's best interests at heart. They did not know him personally and love him.
- Yet when Paul's godly co-laborers and godly prophets tried to offer him counsel, he spurned it and refused to listen. 21:4, 10-12
- Their counsel was given by God's Spirit, but this is never said of the Jerusalem elder's counsel.
- So many times believers go to the wrong places for counsel, and it leads to very bad decisions. Teens go to their friends, married couples go to lost marriage counselors (or their parents), pregnant girls go to abortion counseling clinics, kids are getting counsel and advice from TV talk shows or Web sites, adults go Facebook, etc.
- In a secondary sense, teens and young people are being counseled by the music they listen to, the movies they watch, the Web sites they frequent, the chat rooms they are involved in – and parents are oblivious.
- All of this leads to very bad decision-making, which leads to disastrous and damaging consequences. And then people will say, "Why is God doing this to me?"
- It wasn't God's fault that Paul followed bad counsel. Paul made that decision to ignore wise counsel and follow bad counsel. Likewise, we make decisions regarding who we will listen to. Proverbs 14:12, 12:15; Ephesians 5:3-6
  - Paul said, "*Let no man deceive you with vain words...*" In other words, Satan will have people that will counsel you to do these things, and tell you that it is okay, and there is nothing wrong with it at all. Paul warned that we'd better not listen to them.

**C. He did not test their counsel by the Word of God.**

- If he would have done this, he would have known that their advice was wrong.
- If a person gives you counsel, always scrutinize it carefully and see if it coincides with God's Word. If it doesn't, then simply disregard it. Psalm 119:24; Proverbs 1:10

- This is why it is so crucial that you know God's Word and study it. It can keep you from taking bad counsel and making some really bad decisions in your life.
12. I wonder how many times God has been blamed for adverse circumstances in people's lives when they simply followed bad counsel and made bad choices.
  13. We must accept accountability for our decisions and the counsel we follow in our lives.