



THE LIFE OF
PAUL

FAMILY DEVOS

Trouble in Jerusalem

Scripture: Acts 21:16-36

Memory Verse: Galatians 3:28

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

For My Family:

There are two things that you will find helpful to remember as we read today’s passage. The first is that Jerusalem (along with much of the world at the time) was under Roman rule. This meant that the Jews paid taxes to Rome, had Roman government officials in their cities, and had Roman soldiers who enforced the law.

The second thing to keep in mind is the difference between Jews and Gentiles (non-Jews). The Jews were God’s chosen people—the Israelites. They followed the law as given to them by God through Moses, and had many traditions and customs that they had followed for hundreds of years. After Jesus’ death and resurrection, some of those traditions and laws were no longer required, like the entire sacrificial system! All of that had been to point to their need for the coming Savior, the perfect Sacrifice, Jesus Christ.

This was a difficult message for the Jews to receive. Jews and Gentiles had always remained separate in all their dealings. Even in the temple, the Gentiles were forced to keep at a distance in the outer courts, while Jews could enter in. There was a literal wall that had been built forbidding the Gentiles to enter any further into the temple on pain of death! But Paul’s message to the Gentiles was that Jesus had broken the wall of separation between Jews and Gentiles. All people now had access to God through the gift of His Son, but the Jews were pressuring Gentile believers to follow Jewish traditions, spreading rumors among Jews that Paul was telling people to do away with Moses and the Law altogether.

Sometimes, even though you do everything in your power to make peace, people will still be angry with you, but that doesn’t mean we should stop pursuing peace with everyone (Hebrews 12:14). Paul was gladly received by the church at Jerusalem and told them everything God had done through his ministry to the Gentiles. He even gave them a gift from the Gentile churches and agreed to go through a Jewish custom at the temple in an effort to remove the tension between Jews and Gentiles. Rumors had been spread about him that weren’t true (maybe you know what that is like) but Paul took action to make for peace.

Sadly, we see these divisions today, even among fellow believers. We see it on the news and maybe have even experienced it ourselves. It’s really hard and very sad. As Christians, we know that there are really only two types of people in the world: believing and unbelieving. And one of the ways God shows those who are unbelieving that He is real is by bringing those who believe in Him together in love. What we have in common (Jesus) is way bigger than all of our differences, and what we have in common (Jesus) is strong enough to keep us together even when our differences try to push us apart.

Questions for Young Children:

Why didn't the Jews get along with the Gentiles?

Why didn't the Jews like Paul's message?

Who is bigger than all of our differences?

Questions for Teens and Pre-teens:

There was great tension between the Jews and the Gentiles in the early church. Do you see anything like this in the world today?

What did Paul do to try to relieve the tension among Jewish believers?

What is God's answer to the things that divide us?