

## Men's Group 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2013

### Acts 21.18 – 23 end

Tonight we meet at 830 pm after the prayer meeting. We will consider Paul's eventful stay in Jerusalem in Spring of 56 or 57 AD. It's not complicated and we can go through fairly quickly.

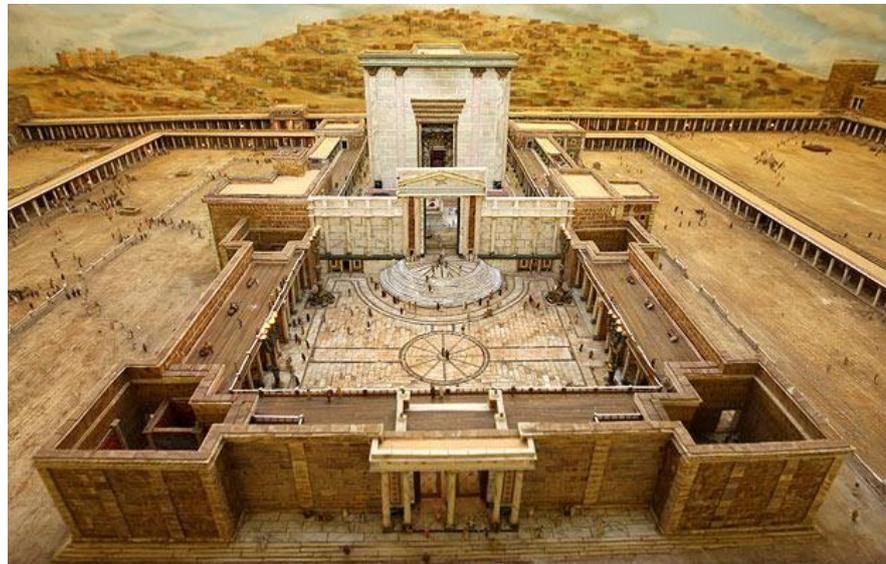
#### Act 21.18

This episode has always been controversial.

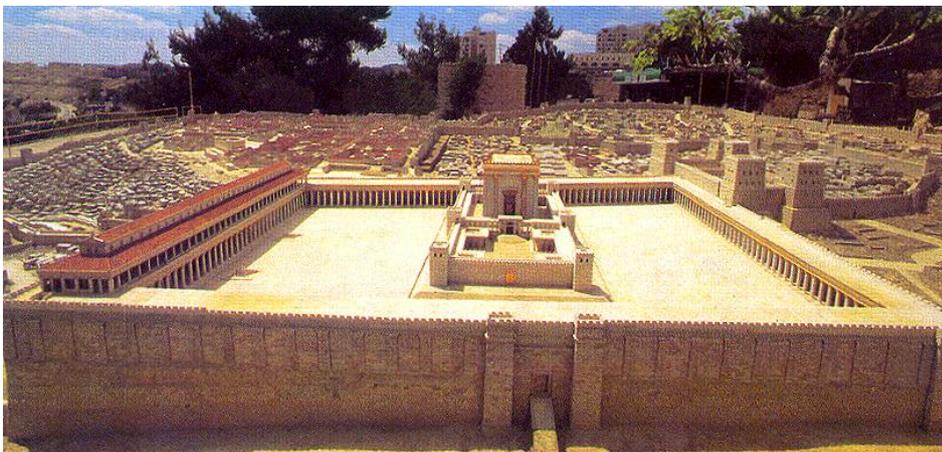
**THE VOW** was probably a Nazirite vow. This would involve abstaining from alcohol for a fixed period of time. For the duration of the vow you were not allowed to cut your hair, and at the end of the specified period your head would be shaved and the hair offered as a burnt offering to God.

Some people have accused Paul of inconsistency here. He was certainly against circumcision etc. for Gentile believers. For Jews he seems to have been more relaxed. You could argue that the Nazirite vow is not about justification in many ways may be no bad thing.

This picture is a model of the Jerusalem Temple as it may have been then. You can see that in addition to the 'holy' areas of the Holy of Holies and the inner court, there's also a vast outer court surrounded by a colonnade. In the outer court people could and did just 'mill around' so it probably functioned as a sort of forum or agora. This would be probably the commercial area, including the money-changers etc. that Jesus found so offensive.



The Fortress Antonia—the Roman military barracks where Paul will shortly be taken—is at top right. This fortress looked down on the Temple area and allowed the Romans to control what went on there.

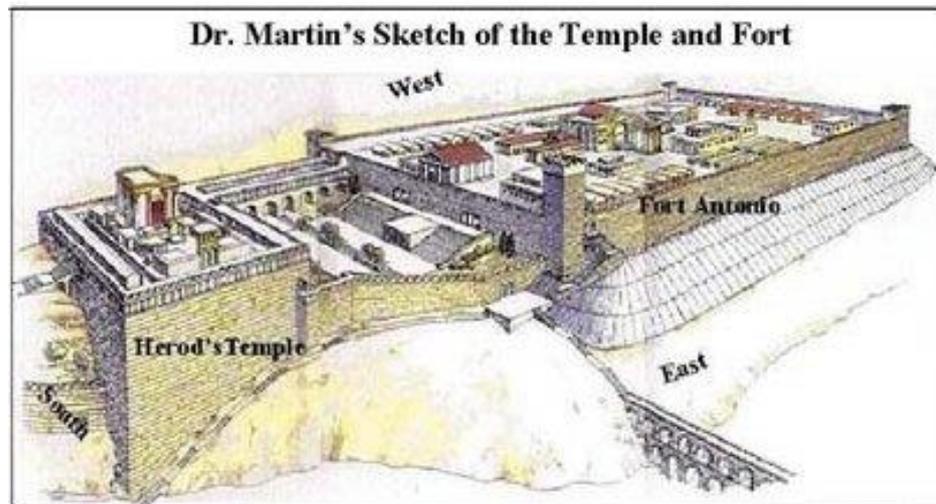


A second, slightly different reconstruction in which the Fortress Antonia is better seen.

The final view is from a recent and controversial book by Ernest Martin (2000) proposing an entirely different structure with a much larger Fortress Antonia. This is highly contentious, not least because, if true, it would mean that the Wailing Wall—the wall immediately below the word “West” in the picture—is not part of the temple Mount at all, but actually a wall of the Roman Fortress Antonia!

At this point, of course, reason gives way to emotion and politics.

(This would place the Moslem Dome of the Rock not on the Temple Mount at all, but in the middle of the Fortress Antonia.)



## Acts 22

On Martin's reconstruction, Paul would have stood to make his speech on the broad flight of steps right in the middle of his picture, leading down from the fortress.

What is remarkable about this incident is the way in which Paul uses every possible opportunity to turn even his adversities into a chance to preach the gospel and get the message out.

Extraordinary!

## Acts 23

The Sanhedrin was a council of (probably) 23 senior Jewish political and religious leaders who met every day in the Hall of Hewn Stones (precise location controversial). It was, below the Romans, the most powerful decision-making body in the kingdom. Interestingly the name for this most Jewish of institutions is actually Greek—*sunedrion* meaning to sit down together.

What gets Paul out of his tight situation is probably the fact of his being a Roman citizen. Roman Citizens were under a completely different legal code from the rest of the population. This would have meant that the Roman commander couldn't just stand aside and watch him being torn to pieces by the crowd, but had to ensure his safety.

For this reason he decides to ship Paul out to Caesarea and dump the problem on Felix (*Antonius Felix, Procurator of Judaea AD 52 – 58/59*) who of course resided in Caesarea, the Roman capital on the coast.

Chapter 24 tells us that Paul was in prison in Caesarea for the last 2 years of Felix's procuratorship. The events in these chapters are generally placed in May/June AD 57. AD 56 is less popular.