**The Tale of a Carefree Deputy**

(Acts 18:12-23)

By Pastor Ricky Kurth

A deputy sheriff pulled a car over one day, and told the driver he had failed to stop at a stop sign. The driver protested, “Bu I slowed down!” The deputy shook his head and said, “you have to *stop.* That’s why they’re called *stop signs.”* When the driver said, “It’s the same thing,” the deputy said, “No, it’s *not.”* The driver screamed, *“Yes it is!”* At that point, the deputy had had enough, and hauled the man out of the car and started *wailing* on him with his nightstick, pausing only to ask, “Now, do you want me to stop *or just slow down?”*

Speaking of deputies, here in Acts 18, the Apostle Paul is about to meet up with *a different kind* of deputy, for that’s what the ancient Greeks called their *governors.* Acts 18:12 says,

**“And when Gallio was the deputy of Achaia, the Jews made insurrection with one accord against Paul, and brought him to the judgment seat.”**

Now *Achaia* was another name for *Greece* in those days, and Gallio was the deputy of the entire area of Achaia. So these days, we would call him a *governor.* And those unsaved Jews who made this insurrection against Paul were the Jews in the Greek city of *Corinth,* where Paul had just established a church, as we saw in our last lesson.

Now the word “insurrection” *usually* refers to a mass uprising of people against *the government,* but the dictionary says it can *also* refer to *any* uprising of people *against their enemy.* And the reason these unsaved Jews were so riled up is that Paul *started* that church *right next door to their synagogue,* as we also saw in our last study. And the Gentiles in Corinth were *flocking* to this new church to get saved, *instead* of flocking to their synagogue to get saved. So those unsaved Jews were obviously *jealous* of this new church’s popularity.

So they decided to bring Paul before the deputy, because in ancient Greece governors heard court cases when Greek citizens had a grievance. There wasn’t a separation between the *executive* branch of government and the *judicial* branch of government like we have in the United States today.

And we see what the Jews *charged* Paul with in the next verse of our text, where it says they brought Paul to Gallio’s judgment seat,

**“Saying, This fellow persuadeth men to worship God contrary to the law” (Acts 18:13).**

Now here we have to ask what “law” they were talking about, the law of Moses or the law of the Roman Empire. You would *think* they meant the law of Rome because, after all, they had hauled Paul before a *Roman* deputy. And there was a precedent for leveling this charge against Paul, for just a chapter earlier in Acts the unsaved Jews in Thessalonica charged,

**“...*these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar,* saying that there is another king, *one Jesus”* (Acts 17:7).**

But if that’s what Paul was being charged with here, that’s not what Gallio understood them to be saying, as we see in the next three verses of our text:

**“And when Paul was now about to open his mouth, Gallio said unto the Jews, If it were a matter of wrong or wicked lewdness, O ye Jews, reason would that I should bear with you:**

**“But if it be a question of words and names, and of your law, look ye to it; for I will be no judge of such matters.**

**“And he drave them from the judgment seat” (Acts 18:14-16).**

Now it’s easy to understand why Gallio would have no interest in settling religious disputes among bickering churches. I mean, what do you think a judge would say *today* if our Baptist friends took *us* to court, saying, “Your honor, these grace believers worship God *without water baptism.”* As I’m sure you can imagine, the judge would refuse to hear a case like that, and would throw it out of court like Gallio did.

But when Gallio *also* aid he would be no judge of Jewish “words” and “names,” that shows they were probably charging Paul with the same thing some Jews charged *Stephen* with back in Acts 6:11,13, where they said of him,

**“We have heard him speak *blasphemous* words *against Moses,* and...blasphemous words *against...the law.”***

We know that wasn’t true of Stephen *or* of Paul. Everything Paul taught *agreed* with the law of Moses! But they probably charged him with speaking blasphemous words against the law of Moses anyway, as verse 12 seems to indicate. And when Gallio said he would be no judge of “names”—you know what *name* those unsaved Jews didn’t want to hear. The name of *Jesus!* And Gallio didn’t want to hear them argue about whether Jesus deserved to be called by the name of Messiah either, so he *drove* them from the judgment seat.

And I don’t know if you’ve ever seen a judge drive anyone from his judgment seat, but I have. Fifty years ago, I saw a traffic court judge send a man home because he came to court wearing shorts. It’s been half a century since it happened, but in my mind I can still hear him tell the man not to return to his courtroom until he was dressed more respectfully. I mean, he was *ticked off.* And Gallio was just as angry here.

And he wasn’t the only one who was upset with the Jews that day. As we read on, we see that all the people in Gallio’s courtroom were just as fed up with the Jews.

**“Then all the Greeks took Sosthenes, the chief ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment seat. And Gallio cared for none of those things” (Acts 18:17).**

All the Greek citizens in the gallery of the court that day got so mad at the Jews that they started wailing on the *leader* of the Jews. And I doubt they asked if he wanted them to stop or just slow down.

But doesn’t that seem like an *overreaction* to you? After all, all the guy did was waste the court’s time. And the Greeks were well known for their *fairness* in court, at least as far as I can remember from school. That leads me to believe that what you’re seeing here is an example of the *hatred* that men have always had for Jews down through the ages.

And Gallio must have hated them too, for he let it happen! These days if that happened in one of our courts, the judge would order the bailiffs to restrain the people in the gallery, but Gallio didn’t *care*  that they were beating on Sosthenes in his courtroom. He’s the carefree deputy I named this message after.

But we know that Sosthenes was the *new* chief ruler of the synagogue, because in our last lesson we saw something had happened to their old one. A few verses earlier, Luke wrote,

**“And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized” (Acts 18:8).**

When Paul started that church next door to the synagogue, Chief Ruler Crispus got saved, and defected to Paul’s church! So the Jews evidently *replaced* Crispus with Sosthenes a short time later. But if you know your Bible, you know that *he got saved too!* We know that because later, when Paul wrote these Corinthians a letter, he *started* that epistle by saying,

**“Paul called to be an apostle...*and Sosthenes our brother,* unto the church of God which is at Corinth...” (I Corinthians 1:1,2).**

Now that means Sosthenes didn’t just get *saved;* he became one of Paul’s coworkers in the ministry!

And do you remember how we talked in our last lesson about how *embarrassing* it was for those Jews to lose their *pastor* to the church next door? *Now* imagine how embarrassing it was when they lost *another* chief ruler to the church next door!

And it was no coincidence that they kept losing *chief rulers* to the neighboring assembly. You see, the chief ruler would usually be a man who knew the Scriptures well, right? And men like that would know what it meant when the Christians next door began *speaking in tongues.* They would know that God gave the gift of tongues to *Gentiles* for a different reason than He gave it to the *Jews* at Pentecost.

They would know that God gave the gift of tongues *to Jews* because of what the prophet Zechariah said about the kingdom of heaven on earth. He predicted that

**“...many people and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem....In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold *out of all languages of the nations*, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: *for we have heard that God is with you”* (Zechariah 8:22,23).**

In the kingdom, Gentiles of all languages are going to want to learn about God. And the only way *one* Jew with *ten* Gentiles hanging on his skirt is going to be able to *talk* to them is with the gift of tongues. That’s why, when it came time for the kingdom to come, God gave the Jews the gift of tongues, as we read in Acts 2:4, when

**“...they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, *and began to speak with other tongues...”***

God gave the Jews the gift of tongues there as a *sign* that He was about to *bless* them *with the kingdom!* But God gave the *Gentiles* the gift of tongues as a sign He was *judging* the Jews, not blessing them!

We know this to be so because of what Paul told the Corinthians when he was explaining to them why they *had* the gift of tongues. He wrote,

**“In the law it is written, *With men of other tongues* and other lips will I speak unto this people; and yet for all that will they not hear Me, saith the Lord” (I Corinthians 14:21).**

When Paul explained to those dear saints why they’d’ been given the gift of tongues in the first place, he quoted something the prophet Isaiah said in Isaiah 28:11,12:

**“For with stammering lips *and another tongue* will He speak to this people...*yet they would not hear.”***

If we can figure out what Isaiah was talking about there, we can deduce the argument that Paul made *based* on his argument to the Corinthians. And what Isaiah was talking about was how God had been speaking to the people of Israel for a very long time, telling them to repent of their *rebellion* against Him. But they *just wouldn’t listen* to Him.

So God told them, as it were, “If you don’t want to listen to me when I speak to you in *Hebrew,* I’ll speak to you in the only language you seem to understand—the language of *judgment.* I’ll let the Babylonians *conquer* you, and I’ll speak to you in the language of *the Babylonians.”*

And He did! Half the book of Daniel was written in Chaldee, the language of the Babylonians, and not Hebrew, the language of the Jews, like the rest of the Old Testament.

You see, God was acting like a *father* to His people in Israel. Every father knows that when you speak to your boy in plain English, and he puts you on the pay-no-mind list, it’s time to break out the rod or the paddle and speak to him in the only language kids understand—the language of *punishment* and *judgment.*

And that’s what God was doing here. He even allowed His people to be carried away *captives* into Babylon.

And the Babylonians *didn’t just conquer Israel.* They conquered *all* the nations! So as the Jews sat there in captivity in Babylon, they didn’t just hear the language of the *Babylonians* all around them. They *also* heard the tongues of all the nations that Babylon had conquered, for all of those conquered people were always coming and going in Babylon.

And when the Jews heard the tongues of those nations being spoken in Babylon, they knew that that was a sign *that God had judged them,* just as Isaiah predicted He would.

And when Crispus and Sosthenes heard the languages of the nations *in the Corinthian church next door,* they likewise knew that that was a sign that God had judged Israel in their day *for rejecting their King and their kingdom.*

And *that’s* why those chief rulers kept leaving the synagogue and joining Paul’s church next door. They wanted to get *away* from the people God was *judging,* and join up with the people He was *blessing.*

Now next, do you remember what happened when Paul first came to Corinth? Acts 18:1-3 tells us that

**“Paul...came to Corinth; *And found a certain Jew named Aquila... with his wife Priscilla*....And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: *for by their occupation they were tentmakers.”***

When Paul first arrived in Corinth, he got a job with a couple of tentmakers named Aquila and Priscilla. And he must have led them to the Lord while they were sitting there sewing those tents together, for as we read on we see that this dear couple decided to go *with* Paul when he left. Acts 18:18 says,

**“And Paul after this tarried there yet a good while, and then took his leave of the brethren, and sailed thence into Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila; having shorn his head in Cenchrea: for he had a vow.”**

Priscilla and Aquilla decided to go with Paul and labor with him in the ministry. They had given *him* a job, and now *he* gave *them* one serving the Lord!

But what’s all this about a vow? Well, the only vow in the Bible that’s associated with shaving your head is the *Nazarite* vow in Numbers 6. And that prompts the question of why Paul decided to take a vow that was found in the Old Testament *law,* when he was going around telling other members of the Body of Christ that they weren’t *under* the law.

And the answer is found in what he wrote to these very same Corinthians in I Corinthians 9:20,23:

**“...unto the Jews I became as a Jew, *that I might gain the Jews*...that I might by *all* means *save* some*...”***

So the reason Paul did something *so Jewish* as to take a vow found in the Jewish Bible was to try to gain the Corinthian Jews for Christ! You know. The very same Jews *who just took him to court* and *tried to sic the law on him.*

Now that’s love! I mean, would you shave your head to try to win some skinheads to the Lord, right after they tried to sic the law on *you?* I don’t think I could pull that look off as well as some men do.

But if you have an old 1917 edition of the Scofield Reference Bible, you’ll notice that Dr. Scofield put a heading over Acts 18:18 that reads:

“The author of Rom. 6:14; 2 Cor. 3:7-14; and Gal. 3:23-28 takes a Jewish vow.”

We won’t take the time to look at all those verses, but Romans 6:14 tells us members of the Body of Christ,

***“...ye are not under the law,* but under grace.”**

So why would the very same apostle who said we’re not under the law take a vow that’s found *in* the law? It’s obvious from Dr. Scofield’s note that he didn’t think Paul *should* have taken that vow.

And I can understand that, for there was a time when I thought the same thing. I thought that taking a Jewish vow was taking things a little too far when it came to becoming as a Jew to gain the Jews.

But then I remembered that Numbers 6 says that the Nazarite vow was a *voluntary* vow. That is, it wasn’t *required* by the law of Moses. That means Paul didn’t have to put himself *under* the law to take that vow.

If you think it through, how else could Paul become as a Jew to gain the Jews without putting himself under the law? If he quite eating bacon, something the law said not to eat, that would be putting himself under the law right? And if he stopped wearing clothes made of two different kinds of fabric, like the law says not to do, that too would be putting himself under the law. Only a voluntary part of the law like this vow would enable him to become as a Jew to gain the Jews without putting him under the law.

And if you’ll take the time to check out the *context* of I Corinthians 9:20,22, where Paul claimed he became as a Jew to gain the Jews, you’ll find that he was talking to the Corinthians *about what he did in Corinth.* So he had to be talking about how he had shaved his head to take the Nazarite vow while he was in Corinth to gain *the Corinthian* Jews.

But the problem with taking a Nazarite vow is that it involved *an animal sacrifice.* And that used to *really* make me think Paul goofed in taking that vow, because animal sacrifices were just types of the sacrifice of Christ, and that’s why we don’t offer them today.

But then I remembered that in the kingdom of heaven on earth, Ezekiel says that Israel’s priests are going to offer animal sacrifices *again,* even though they’ll know that those sacrifices are just types of the sacrifice of Christ. So there can’t be anything wrong with sacrifices *in and of themselves* now that Christ has died.

Now *later* in Actsw, Paul is going to try to offer *another* sacrifice, and God’s going to prevent him from doing it. So we know that *eventually* God made it clear to Paul that He didn’t want sacrifices to *continue* throughout the dispensation of grace.

But *here* God *didn’t* stop Paul from offering Him an animal. *And* we know God *honored* what Paul did in this passage, because of what happened right *after* he took this vow, in the next two verses of our text:

**“And he came to Ephesus, and left them there: but he himself entered into the synagogue, and reasoned with the Jews.**

**“When they desired him to tarry longer time with them, he consented not” (Acts 18:19,20).**

Now do you notice anything different in verse 20 there about the *reception* the Jews in Ephesus gave Paul? How many times have we seen Paul preach in a synagogue, only to have those unbelieving Jews *reject* him so *violently* that they often tried to *kill* him, or at least run him out of town. But *these* Jews heard Paul preach, and screamed for an encore! Now what do you suppose made the difference?

I would submit to you that he was warmly welcomed in the synagogue in Ephesus *because he became as a Jew to gain the Jews.* It was because of the new *chrome dome* he was sporting! When they saw that he had taken a Nazarite vow, *they were all ears,* and begged him to stay and tell them more.

But ironically, instead of staying in a synagogue where he was finally *welcomed,* Paul *left* to go and do something *else* that was very Jewish, as we see as we read on. Let’s re-read Verse 20 and follow up with verse 21:

**“When they desired him to tarry longer time with them, he consented not;**

**“But bade them farewell, saying, I must by all means keep this feast that cometh in Jerusalem: but I will return again unto you, if God will. And he sailed from Ephesus” (Acts 18:20,21).**

Now no one is sure *which* feast Paul was so eager to keep in Jerusalem, and I’ve never read any convincing suggestions as to which feast it might be that was corroborated by Scriptural evidence. But I believe Paul had his sights set on keeping the feast mentioned in John 10:22, where we are told,

**“...it was at Jerusalem *the feast of the dedication”***

This was a feast that began to be observed during the inter-testament period between Malachi and Matthew. That is, it was established during what is commonly called the 400 silent years between the close of the Old Testament and the beginning of the New Testament. Modern Jews call it Hanukkah, or the festival of lights.

And the reason I think that this is the feast Paul wanted to keep is that this *wasn’t* one of the seven feasts that Jews were *required* to attend under the law. It was a *voluntary* feast. So Paul didn’t want to keep it so he could put himself under the law. He wanted to keep it because he knew there were Jews *in Jerusalem* who’d see his cueball noggin and say, “Hey! Get a load of Baldylocks. He’s keeping the feast just like us!” *And they’d be all ears,* just like the Jews in Ephesus were when *they* saw he’d taken a Jewish vow.

But right after saying he had to leave to keep that feast in Jerusalem, it *looks* like Paul *didn’t* go to Jerusalem like he just announced he would! Verse 22 says,

**“And when he had landed at Caesarea, and gone up, and saluted the church, he went down to Antioch.”**

It looks like Paul went everywhere *but* Jerusalem here!

But here it helps to discover that Caesarea was actually the *seaport* of the city of Jerusalem. The elevation of Jerusalem was too high to allow it to have its own port, so if you were *sailing* to Jerusalem, you *had* to land at Caesarea. And hey, didn’t we just read in verse 21 of our text that Paul *was* sailing to Jerusalem from Ephesus?

So Paul *did* go to Jerusalem to keep that feast. That’s why verse 22 says he went “up” and then he went “down.” When *we* use those words, we’re talking about going *up north* and *down south.* But verse 22 says that Paul went *down* to Antioch, and Antioch was *north* of Jerusalem! So we know that the words “up” and “down” are being used differently there.

That’s because Jerusalem was what the Lord called *a city on a hill.* It was situated on a hill of 2,474 feet elevation, to be exact. That’s about half a mile high! No wonder they couldn’t have their own seaport! This is why 25 times in the Bible we read the exact phrase “up to Jerusalem,” and four times we read the phrase “down *from* Jerusalem.”

So Paul *did* go to Jerusalem—and not just to keep that feast. He *also* had to offer his hair in the fire of the animal sacrifice associated with the Nazarite vow, as per the instructions laid down in Numbers 6.

And the reason Paul decided to *sail* to Jerusalem is that Jerusalem was *1200 miles from Ephesus* where he was before embarking on that voyage. And you would think that after sailing 1200 miles to get to Jerusalem that verse 22 would say that he *stayed* awhile in Jerusalem. But it doesn’t! As you can see, he kept the feast, said hello to the 12 apostles in the church at Jerusalem, and left for Antioch. So what could possibly possess a man to sail 1200 miles, and then just stay for a feast?

I believe there was a method to Paul’s apparent madness. After he saw how the Jews in Ephesus listened attentively to his words when they saw he had taken a Jewish vow, he figured, “Why not go to a feast in Jerusalem where Jews *from around the world* could come and see my head, and know that I’d taken a vow, and then think to themselves, “That Paul’s not such a bad *egg”—*as in the egghead shape of his hairless head! And then those Jews would go home and too *the Jews in their synagogues* that Paul wasn’t such a bad egg, so that when Paul finally *arrived* in their synagogues, *they’d* know that he wasn’t such a bad egg, *and they’d listen to him like he was E. F. Hutton.*

And *that’s* why he sailed 1200 miles to keep a Jewish feast.

And the reason he stopped in *Antioch* was that Antioch was his home church, the church that had ordained him, the base of his operations, *the headquarters of the grace movement.* And Paul knew they’d have heard he took a Jewish vow, and he wanted to make sure they knew *why* he took it.

But before his hair grew back, he had one more place he wanted to show off his shaved head. The last verse of our text in Acts 18 says,

**“And after he had spent some time there, he departed, and went over all the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples.”**

Paul wanted the Jews in *Galatia* to see he’d taken that vow, because by now he’d written his epistle to the *Gentiles* in Galatia, giving them grief for going back to the law. And Paul didn’t want the *Jews* in Galatia to think that his epistle meant he had no *respect* for the law, for he obviously did. He showed all kinds of deferential respect for the law in taking the Nazarite vow, and keeping the feast of the dedication.

And there’s the final proof that he hadn’t done anything wrong in this passage, either in taking the vow or keeping the feast. If he had, he wouldn’t have *dared* to show his face in Galatia with his head still shaved from that vow, or those Gentiles would have called him on his hypocrisy. But there was no hypocrisy for them to call him on.

Finally, the words “in order” in verse 23 mean that Paul was retracing his steps, and going back to check on all the churches he established, in the order he had established them.

In conclusion, I’d like to point out one more thing about this passage. Back in Verse 21, did you notice that Paul promised he would return to Ephesus “God willing”? I know that some grace believers don’t like that phrase for some reason, but Paul uses it there, and in some other places as well. He even uses a similar phrase in one of his later epistles in Philippians, after the transition period from law to grace was over. So I don’t see the harm in using this phrase.

It reminds me of how, many years ago, I was typesetting an article for the Berean Searchlight for Pastor Stam, and at the end of one of his sentences, he put the letters “D.V.” when I asked him what that meant, he said it stood for *Deo Volente,* an old Latin term meaning *God Willing.* And I think I’ll keep using that phrase—in English, not Latin!