

Fact Sheet for **“A Choice”**  
**Acts 21:17-26**

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Paul had hurried to get to Jerusalem for the Passover. The city was packed with Jews from all over the Roman Empire.

ESV 17 ¶ **When we had come to Jerusalem, the brothers received us gladly.**  
The church, including the apostles

18 **On the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present.**  
Luke was there (“with us”)

James was the half-brother of Jesus, author of the book of James, and the head of the church in Jerusalem (see Acts 15).

19 **After greeting them, he related one by one the things that God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry.**

Paul gave them a full report (“one by one”).

20 **And when they heard it, they glorified God. And they said to him, "You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed. They are all zealous for the law,**  
21 **and they have been told about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or walk according to our customs.**

James and the elders of the church in Jerusalem glorified God for what He was doing among the Gentiles, but immediately followed this with a concern about the Jewish perception of Paul’s teaching.

“You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those **who have believed**. They are **all** zealous for the law”

Had Paul been teaching **Jewish believers** to forsake Moses and not walk according to Jewish customs? The Law? No. A few Jewish customs? {ἔθος (e'-thos) *habit, custom [ethics]*} Yes, but only when those customs were out of step with the gospel (see Galatians 2:11-14). Had Paul been teaching Gentile believers that they weren’t required to obey the Law of Moses? Yes, and consistent with the conclusions of the Jerusalem Council

22 **What then is to be done? They will certainly hear that you have come.**  
They had something in mind.

23 **Do therefore what we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow;**

**<sup>24</sup> take these men and purify yourself along with them and pay their expenses, so that they may shave their heads. Thus all will know that there is nothing in what they have been told about you, but that you yourself also live in observance of the law.**

“purify yourself along with them”

Paul did not have come up with this idea.

“and pay their expenses”

It would cost Paul

“so that they may shave their heads” (see Numbers 6:18) – “The four men evidently had a Nazarite vow. At the conclusion of their vow some costly sacrifices were required of each man (cf. Num. 6:13-17).”<sup>1</sup>

“Thus all will know that there is nothing in what they have been told about you, but that you yourself also live in observance of the law” (perception vs. reality). James and the Elders then referenced and affirmed the decision of the Jerusalem Council concerning Gentile believers.

**<sup>25</sup> But as for the Gentiles who have believed, we have sent a letter with our judgment that they should abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality.”**

Paul then proceeded to do what they suggested.

**<sup>26</sup> Then Paul took the men, and the next day he purified himself along with them and went into the temple, giving notice when the days of purification would be fulfilled and the offering presented for each one of them.**

There is a word that is very familiar to each of us that often comes close to being a curse word. That word is “politics”. To be sure some political activity is nasty, champions what is evil, suppresses what is good, and embraces what is false. Other political activity is very helpful, accomplishes things that wouldn’t be able to be done otherwise, and is beneficial for the common good. But there is an arena in which the word “politics” is almost always a bad word... “church politics”.

I have experienced the nasty side of church politics for sure. But there is a side of church politics that is pleasing to the Lord. Paul experienced that good side of church politics in this passage. Good church politics almost always involves a choice to give up a right or privilege that we have in Christ for the sake of others. It is other-minded thinking, and this is pleasing to the Lord. This may be a choice to actively give up something. This may be a choice to be OK with something that is not mine to decide. This may be a choice to minister in a crumpled way, because that has the best end result for others. Look at Jesus (Philippians 2:3-11).

This is the good side of church politics. The next time you are faced with an other-minded choice what will you do? What will you think? What will you feel? What will it cost? When that time comes remember, such a choice is pleasing to God.

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<sup>1</sup> Bible Knowledge Commentary, New Testament, p. 416.