

## 29. Paul Greeted Controversy and Violence in Jerusalem: Acts 22

Acts 21 found Paul going through purification rites at the request of James and the elders, attacked by a mob, and threatened by a beating at the hands of the Roman commander. Paul appealed to the commander for permission to speak to the crowd. Having received permission, Paul spoke to the Jews in Aramaic, their common language in Acts 21:40-22:1:

40 Having received the commander's permission, Paul stood on the steps and motioned to the crowd. When they were all silent, he said to them in Aramaic: 22 "Brothers and fathers, listen now to my defense."

That Paul could speak Greek to the commander and Aramaic to the crowd attest to his broad education which equipped him for the next trying years in his life from Jerusalem to Rome. This defense is the first of Paul's dramatic defenses, which eventually lead to his appeal to Caesar and his trip to Rome, and which saved his life from being taken by the Jews.

### ***Paul's Credentials as a Jew***

Acts 22:1-5

1 "*Brothers and fathers, listen now to my defense.*"

2 *When they heard him speak to them in Aramaic, they became very quiet.*

*Then Paul said: 3 "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city. Under Gamaliel I was thoroughly trained in the law of our fathers and was just as zealous for God as any of you are today. 4 I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison, 5 as also the high priest and all the Council can testify. I even obtained letters from them to their brothers in Damascus, and went there to bring these people as prisoners to Jerusalem to be punished.*

Paul begins his defense by addressing the audience as brothers and fathers and with the plea that they listen to him. His address, plus his speaking in Aramaic, their own language, gave him an initial advantage so that they became very quiet.

Paul seeks further credibility by stating the facts of his life as a Jew—facts that many, especially those “fathers” would remember. He was a Jew born in Tarsus but educated under Gamaliel, who was described in Acts 5:34: “34 A Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, who was honored by all the people, stood up in the Sanhedrin. . . .” Paul stated that he was thoroughly trained in the law and zealous to the extent that he persecuted and arrested followers of the Way. He could claim credibility from the high priest and all the Council since they had endorsed him, providing him letters to bind Christians in Damascus and bring them to Jerusalem for punishment. One would have to say that Paul is off to a very good start in presenting his case.

### ***Paul Tells of Seeing the Lord***

Acts 22:6-11

6 "*About noon as I came near Damascus, suddenly a bright light from heaven flashed around me. 7 I fell to the ground and heard a voice say to me, 'Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute me?'*

8 "*'Who are you, Lord?'* I asked.

*"I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting," he replied. 9 My companions saw the light, but they did not understand the voice of him who was speaking to me.*

10 "What shall I do, Lord?' I asked.

"Get up,' the Lord said, 'and go into Damascus. There you will be told all that you have been assigned to do.' 11 My companions led me by the hand into Damascus, because the brilliance of the light had blinded me.

Luke's previous account of Paul's conversion appeared in Acts 9. In this present account (Acts 22), Paul raises two questions, which all men need to ask: *Who are you, Lord? And What shall I do, Lord?* Until people recognize Jesus as Lord, they cannot progress toward their repentance, confession, and baptism. The eunuch made the good confession of his faith in Acts 8:37: "Philip said, 'If you believe with all your heart, you may.' The eunuch answered, 'I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.'" On the day of Pentecost and after Peter's sermon, the listeners asked this same question. Their belief was manifest since they were cut to the heart in Acts 2:37-38:

37 When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"

38 Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.

Confronted by such belief, Paul asked what he should do. As with all converts, Paul had to hear the gospel; therefore, the Lord told him to go to Damascus where he **would be told** what to do.

### **Ananias Tells Paul What to Do to Be Saved**

Acts 22:12-16

12 "A man named Ananias came to see me. He was a devout observer of the law and highly respected by all the Jews living there. 13 He stood beside me and said, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight!' And at that very moment I was able to see him.

14 "Then he said: 'The God of our fathers has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from his mouth. 15 You will be his witness to all men of what you have seen and heard. 16 And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.'

Now Ananias was a devout observer of the law and highly respected by all the Jews—a fact adding to Paul's credibility. While Ananias was able to allow Paul to see, neither he nor the miracle on the road to Damascus could save Paul. While God had chosen Paul to know his will, to see the Righteous One, to hear words from the mouth of the Righteous One, and to be a witness to what he had seen and heard, God did not save Paul directly. With great urgency—"Now what are you waiting for?"—Ananias told Paul what to do to be saved: "Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name." *Calling* is a present participle signifying a time corresponding to the time of the main verb. In this case, there are three verbs all with the same understood *you* as subject, signifying a direct command. How does one call on the name of the Lord? Get up! Be baptized! Wash away your sins! Nothing less will do, for there is no other way to call upon the name of the Lord. From the very beginning when the gospel was preached in Acts 2 Peter quoted the prophet Joel in Acts 2:21 to show that one must call on the name of the Lord

21 And everyone who calls  
on the name of the Lord will be saved.

As a result, the hearers of his teaching were baptized. In Rom 10:12-13, Paul also cited Joel:

12 For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile — the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, 13 for, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

Just as they were required to repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38) on the day of Pentecost, Paul is required to arise and be baptized, washing away his sins. None of this should come as a surprise, since the Lord taught Nicodemus the very same thing in John 3:5: “5 Jesus answered, “I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of **water** and the **Spirit**.” Paul also taught that Christians, collectively in the church, had been washed with the water and the word in Eph 5:25-27:

25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her 26 to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with **water** through the **word**, 27 and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.

In Rom 6:3-7, Paul taught that baptism is the exact point where sin is done away:

3 Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

5 If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. 6 For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that **the body of sin might be done away** with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin— 7 because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.

[Emphasis added in these verses.]

Next, Paul turns his narrative to what happened when he returned to Jerusalem.

### ***The Lord to Send Paul to the Gentiles***

Acts 22:17-21

17 *"When I returned to Jerusalem and was praying at the temple, I fell into a trance 18 and saw the Lord speaking. 'Quick!' he said to me. 'Leave Jerusalem immediately, because they will not accept your testimony about me.'*

19 *"'Lord,' I replied, 'these men know that I went from one synagogue to another to imprison and beat those who believe in you. 20 And when the blood of your martyr Stephen was shed, I stood there giving my approval and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.' 21 "Then the Lord said to me, 'Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles.'"*

Paul picks up his narrative with the time when he returned to Jerusalem after his conversion. Apparently, he had gone in to Arabia for a time before coming to Jerusalem. He reported in Gal 1:15-17

15 But when God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, was pleased 16 to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not consult any man, 17 nor did I go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went immediately into Arabia and later returned to Damascus.

After three years, he visited Jerusalem, staying fifteen days:

18 Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Peter and stayed with him fifteen days. 19 I saw none of the other apostles — only James, the

Lord's brother. 20 I assure you before God that what I am writing you is no lie. 21 Later I went to Syria and Cilicia.

Luke also reported these same facts in his account of Paul's conversion in Acts 9:19-30. The map of Paul's early travels charts these trips.

### **The Crowd Rejects Paul Who Appeals to His Roman Citizenship**

Acts 22:22-26

22 *The crowd listened to Paul until he said this. Then they raised their voices and shouted, "Rid the earth of him! He's not fit to live!"*

23 *As they were shouting and throwing off their cloaks and flinging dust into the air, 24 the commander ordered Paul to be taken into the barracks. He directed that he be flogged and questioned in order to find out why the people were shouting at him like this. 25 As they stretched him out to flog him, Paul said to the centurion standing there, "Is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen who hasn't even been found guilty?"*

26 *When the centurion heard this, he went to the commander and reported it. "What are you going to do?" he asked. "This man is a Roman citizen."*

The flash point for the crowd of Jews seems to be Paul's declaration that the Lord was sending him to Gentiles. They literally threw a fit—shouting, throwing off their cloaks, and flinging dust in the air—we might say, "Stomped the ground."

The commander ordered that Paul be tortured to get at the truth of why they were shouting at him. As they readied to flog him, Paul raised the question of his Roman citizenship to the centurion. Later, this issue proved to save Paul's life and give him a passport to Rome. The centurion raised the issue with the commander.

Acts 22:27-29

27 *The commander went to Paul and asked, "Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?"*

*"Yes, I am," he answered.*

28 *Then the commander said, "I had to pay a big price for my citizenship."*

*"But I was born a citizen," Paul replied.*

29 *Those who were about to question him withdrew immediately. The commander himself was alarmed when he realized that he had put Paul, a Roman citizen, in chains.*

The status of Paul as a Roman citizen changes entirely the dynamics of the confrontation. The commander knew enough to understand that he had violated the law of Rome, but he still had



to deal with what might become an insurrection among the Jews. For Paul to be a citizen by birth shows that his father was a Jew who was also a Roman citizen. Now the commander orders Paul to stand before the Sanhedrin.

### ***Paul Stands Before the Sanhedrin and High Priests***

Acts 22:30

*30 The next day, since the commander wanted to find out exactly why Paul was being accused by the Jews, he released him and ordered the chief priests and all the Sanhedrin to assemble. Then he brought Paul and had him stand before them.*

The desire of the commander to know exactly what the Jews had against Paul set the stage for Paul to stand before the chief priests and all the Sanhedrin—those very people who had authorized Paul to persecute Christians in the first place. The Sanhedrin was the supreme council and tribunal of the Jews, headed by a High Priest and having religious, civil, and criminal jurisdiction (Webster's Online Dictionary). The Jews considered the origin of the Sanhedrin to be in Num 11:16: "16 The Lord said to Moses: "Bring me seventy of Israel's elders who are known to you as leaders and officials among the people. Have them come to the Tent of Meeting that they may stand there with you."

The stage is once again set for Paul to defend himself in Acts 23, this time, before the Sanhedrin.