

### Paul's Arrest and Public Defense in Jerusalem Acts 21:18 - 22:30

#### Introduction

Paul's third missionary journey ends with his return to Jerusalem. Paul arrived in Jerusalem with eight Gentile believers carrying a donation to help the Jerusalem church. None of the warnings about being put into prison (Acts 20:23; 21:11) had stopped him from coming. God provided a place to stay and a warm welcome in Jerusalem. However, it was not long before trouble began. Jews from Asia were visiting Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost. Many of them started a riot that would have killed Paul if the Roman soldiers had not come to his rescue.

#### Outline of Acts 21:18-22:30

- I. Paul and the Church Leaders  
- Acts 21:18-25
- II. Paul's Arrest - Acts 21:26-40
- III. Paul's Appeal to the Jewish Mob  
- Acts 22:1-23
- IV. Paul's Case Handed to the Sanhedrin  
- Acts 22:24-30

#### I. Paul and the Church Leaders - Acts 21:18-25

The day after Paul arrived in Jerusalem, he met with the leaders of the Jerusalem church. He shared how God had blessed the ministry to the Gentiles, and the church leaders praised God. However, they were nervous about Paul's **reputation**. Rumors had spread that Paul taught the Jews living in Gentile areas to give up the law of Moses, not circumcise their sons, and not follow the Jewish customs. This was simply not true. Paul did not **oppose** Jewish Christians following their Jewish customs. His message was always that man was saved by faith in Christ and not by works. Keeping the Jewish laws was not necessary (Galatians 5:2-6), but it was never forbidden.

Many of the Christian Jews living in Jerusalem had heard these rumors and needed to know

the truth about Paul. So, the elders came up with a plan to defend Paul. If Paul showed himself keeping the law, it would prove that he was not against the law. It would also show he accepted the Jewish customs and was a law-abiding Jew. The elders wanted Paul to join in the purification rites and pay the expenses for the required sacrifices of four men who had taken a vow (Numbers 6:1-21). This was a common practice and if Paul went along with the plan, he would show that the accusations against him were untrue and that he supported those who loved the law.

This plan did not go against the earlier decision of the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15). The elders repeated their decision from that council meeting (Acts 21:25) by saying that Paul's actions would not affect the Gentiles. The freedom from the law had been established for the Gentiles and the Jew, even though many Jews were not ready to let go of their familiar traditions.

#### II. Paul's Arrest - Acts 21:26-40

Paul followed the advice of the elders. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 9:20, *To the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law.* Paul did what was necessary to win souls to Christ.

Many Christians as well as non-Christians argue that Paul was being **hypocritical**, but that is simply not true. He had practiced Jewish religious customs his whole life. The only thing that changed was his understanding of those customs. Before he was a Christian, he believed that he would be saved by following the Jewish customs. But now, he knew that he was saved by God's grace and nothing else. Making this vow would mean praying, fasting, and worshipping God. Surely Paul was happy to do that! This decision is much like Paul's

decision to have Timothy circumcised (Acts 16:3).

While Paul was in the temple for the vow he had made, a group of unbelieving Jews from Asia spotted him and started a riot. The Jews stirred up the crowd by yelling that Paul was against the Jewish people, against the law, and against the holy temple. They falsely claimed he had even taken a Greek into the temple. This would have been a **defilement** of the temple because Gentiles were only allowed in the outer court. The inner "court of Israel" was separated by a low stone wall with doors. There were writings on the outer walls warning Gentiles not to enter on penalty of death.

The crowd rushed at Paul, dragged him out of the temple, and began beating him, *seeking to kill him*. There was no proof, and this crowd was willing to commit murder based on accusations!

Paul would have been killed if the commander of the Roman garrison had not acted quickly. The "garrison" was the Antonia Fortress located at the northwest corner of the temple area. Roman troops were stationed there at all times. During Jewish feast days, the number of troops was increased. There were two flights of stairs leading from the outer court of the temple to the fortress which made it easy for the Roman soldiers to get to the temple quickly.

The commander came into the temple area with *soldiers and centurions*. Each centurion had one hundred soldiers under his command, so there was a minimum of two hundred soldiers sent to stop the riot. When the Jews saw the Roman troops, they stopped beating Paul. He was taken into custody and chained to two soldiers. The commander tried to question Paul, but it was total confusion. People in the crowd were shouting different things, and the commander could not get to the truth. He decided to take Paul to the barracks (in the fortress) where he could question him alone. The troops took Paul to the stairs and

were forced to carry him because the crowd had become so violent. They followed Paul yelling *away with him!* Just as the crowds of Jerusalem had called for the death of their Messiah twenty-seven years earlier (John 19:15), they now called for the death of Paul.

But, Paul was not ready to leave the crowd. He spoke to the Roman commander in the Greek language, asking to speak to the people. The commander was surprised because he had mistaken Paul for an Egyptian rebellion leader. Paul explained that he was a Jew (and therefore had a right to be in the temple) and a citizen of the well known city of Tarsus.

The commander gave Paul permission to speak. As he stood at the top of the fortress stairs, he motioned to the people with his hand until they became quiet. He then began to speak to them in Hebrew (Aramaic) because he was trying to help them relate to him.

### III. Paul's Appeal to the Mob - Acts 22:1-23

First, Paul explained that he was not against the Jews because he was a Jew himself. He had been born in the city of Tarsus, but raised in Jerusalem. There he had been taught the law by Gamaliel, the most respected rabbi of the time (See Acts 5:34.). Second, Paul called himself a zealous defender of the law. In fact, he had persecuted, arrested, and even put to death men and women who followed the *Way* (Christians). The high priest and the members of the Sanhedrin were his witnesses because they had given him letters with permission for him to arrest Jewish believers in Damascus and deliver them to Jerusalem.

Then, Paul gave his testimony to the crowd. He told them about his experience on the road to Damascus as described by Luke in Acts 9. He described the bright light and the words that Jesus spoke to him. His companions also saw the light but did not hear the voice speaking to him. (Since Luke's account in Acts 9:7 says that they heard the voice, it probably means that they heard some sound, but could

not figure out what words were said.) Jesus had directed Paul to go to Damascus to wait for further instructions. Paul said that he obeyed but had to be led by the hand because the bright light had blinded his eyes.

Paul went on to say that Ananias had visited him there. Ananias was a devout Jew who observed the law and had a good reputation among the Jews. He had welcomed Paul by calling him *brother* and had restored his sight. Paul was baptized and returned to Jerusalem. It was there, in the temple, that he received orders from the Lord to leave Jerusalem because the Jews would not accept his testimony. Then Paul told the Jews the exact words the Lord had said to him: *Depart, for I will send you far from here to the Gentiles.* When Paul mentioned the Gentiles, the Jews became furious. They shouted for Paul's death saying he was *not fit to live*.

### III. Paul's Case Handed to the Sanhedrin - Acts 22:24-30

Because the crowd was out of control again, the Roman commander decided to take Paul into the barracks for questioning. He hoped that he could get a confession from Paul by having him scourged. The Roman scourge was a cruel instrument of torture: a short, leather whip with pieces of metal or bone in the leather and attached to a sturdy wooden handle. Scourging left some crippled for life and some died. Paul had been beaten with rods three times and received the Jewish "thirty-nine lashes" five times (2 Corinthians 11:24-25), but neither of these were as devastating as a Roman scourge.

Fortunately for Paul, Roman citizenship was a precious possession. One of the benefits was that a Roman citizen could not be chained or scourged. As the centurion was tying up Paul to be scourged, he asked, *Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman, and uncondemned?* The centurion knew the answer to this. He immediately informed the commander that Paul was a Roman citizen.

The commander went directly to Paul and asked him if it were true. Paul answered, *yes*. The commander told Paul that he had paid a large sum of money to obtain Roman citizenship himself. Imagine how shocked the commander must have been when Paul quietly replied that he had been born a citizen.

Everything changed when Paul revealed his Roman citizenship. The soldiers drew back and the commander was afraid. He had broken the Roman law by illegally chaining Paul and ordering him to be scourged.

The commander still wanted to figure out what the problem was, so he kept Paul in protective custody. It seemed that the problem was a religious one, so he decided to order a meeting of the Sanhedrin. He would let the Jewish council figure out if there needed to be charges brought up against Paul. The very next day the chief priests and all the council came together, and Paul was taken before them. †

#### Prayer

Pray for courage! Ask God to use His Holy Spirit to help you speak boldly for what is right and true.

#### Memory Verse

Acts 22:16 *And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.*

#### Vocabulary

**reputation** - commonly held opinion about a person's character

**oppose** - to be resistant to; to be in conflict with

**hypocritical** - practicing falseness; professing beliefs one does not hold

**defilement** - corruption of the pureness or excellence of something

**Questions for Acts Lesson 18**

All questions are based on the New King James Version of the Bible.

**DAY ONE: Review last weeks lesson and notes.**

1. a. In Paul's speech to the angry crowd of Jews, what statement caused them to respond with rage? Explain why.

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- b. How do some people act in a similar way today?

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2. What did you learn from Paul's actions in Chapter 22 about how to act when you are unfairly treated?

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**DAY TWO: Read Acts 23:1-5.**

3. a. What did Paul tell the council about how he had lived his life?

- b. ? (Thought Question) How is it possible to live *in all good conscience before God*? See Hebrews 9:14 and 10:22 for help.

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4. The high priest responded to Paul's words by (Circle the correct statement.)

spitting on Paul

swearing at Paul

calling Paul a liar

giving an order for Paul to be struck on the mouth

5. a. What did Paul call the high priest?

- b. Why did Paul say that God would strike the high priest?

- c. What did Paul find out that he did not know before? How did he respond?

- d. What can you learn from this?

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**DAY THREE: Read Acts 23:6-11.**

6. a. What did Paul say was the reason he was being judged? (verse 6)

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b. Why did he make this statement? (verses 7 and 8)

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7. a. Who spoke out in favor of Paul?

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b. Who would they be fighting against if they continued to be against Paul? Give verse. \_\_\_\_\_

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8. Why did the commander take Paul into custody? Underline the correct answer. (Give verse.)

vs. \_\_\_\_\_ He was afraid the men of the council would rip Paul to pieces.

vs. \_\_\_\_\_ He was sick and tired of all the religious talk.

vs. \_\_\_\_\_ He wanted to leave and go to lunch.

vs. \_\_\_\_\_ He was convinced that Paul was guilty.

9. a. Who encouraged Paul? Where was this encourager?

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b. Give one reason this would encourage Paul. (See Acts 19:21.)

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**DAY FOUR: Read Acts 23:12-24.**

10. The following statements are about the Jews who took an oath to kill Paul. Mark each either T (true) or F (false). For the false statements, give the correct answer and the verse where it is found.

a. ( T or F ) There were more than 40 of them. vs. \_\_\_\_\_

b. ( T or F ) They vowed not to eat or drink until Paul was dead. vs. \_\_\_\_\_

c. ( T or F ) They revealed their plan to the chief priests and elders. vs. \_\_\_\_\_

d. ( T or F ) Their plan was to bribe the commander. vs. \_\_\_\_\_

e. ( T or F ) Paul's nephew overheard the plan and told Paul. vs. \_\_\_\_\_

11. a. Who else did Paul's nephew tell about the plan?

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b. What advice did Paul's nephew give this person?

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12. Fill in the blanks about the commander's response.

- a. He told the young man, "Tell \_\_\_\_\_ that you have revealed these things to me."
- b. He called for \_\_\_\_\_ centurions.
- c. He ordered them to prepare \_\_\_\_\_ soldiers, \_\_\_\_\_ horsemen, and \_\_\_\_\_ spearmen to go to \_\_\_\_\_.
- d. He ordered Paul to be taken safely to \_\_\_\_\_.

**DAY FIVE: Read Acts 23:25-35.**

13. a. What was the Roman commander's name?

\_\_\_\_\_

b. To whom did he write a letter?

\_\_\_\_\_

14. Circle the facts below which the commander revealed in his letter.

He had rescued Paul from the Jews.      Paul was sick.

He had taken Paul before the Jewish council.

Paul was a Roman.      The Jews wanted to kill Paul.

Paul was a religious fanatic.

15. After Felix met Paul and read the letter, what did he decide to do?

\_\_\_\_\_

16. What is your opinion of the Roman commander? Give facts to support your opinion.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



**VOCABULARY FOR ACTS LESSON 18**

*"The more words you know, the more clearly and powerfully you will think...  
and the more ideas you will invite into your mind."*

— Wilfred Funk

**DAY ONE: Write the definition of the vocabulary word.**

**reputation** - \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**oppose** - \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**hypocritical** - \_\_\_\_\_

**defilement** - \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**DAY TWO: Write three sentences using three different vocabulary words from this lesson.**

1. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**DAY THREE: Circle the word's synonym(s).** (Synonym is a word/phrase that means the same thing.)

**reputation** - ..... opinion ..... esteem ..... character

**oppose** - ..... argue ..... assist ..... attack

**hypocritical** ..... phony ..... deceitful ..... sincere

**defilement** ..... cleaning ..... corruption ..... contamination

**DAY FOUR: Match the word to its meaning.****hypocritical**

commonly held opinion about a person's character

**defilement**

to be resistance to; to be in conflict with

**reputation**

practicing falseness; professing beliefs one does not hold

**oppose**

corruption of the pureness or excellence of something

**DAY FIVE: Review previous vocabulary word(s).**

**Across**

4. changing loyalty frequently

5. keeping the system of rules and procedures set by a religion

6. eagerness or strong desire

8. did not approve; disagreed

**Down**

1. disapprove; find fault with someone or something

2. of false gods

3. going against the law

7. resistance or hostile action



# ANSWER KEY

## Across

- 4. changing loyalty frequently **FICKLE**
- 5. keeping the system of rules and procedures set by a religion **CEREMONIAL**
- 6. eagerness or strong desire **ZEAL**
- 8. did not approve; disagreed **PROTESTED**

## Down

- 1. disapprove; find fault with someone or something **CRITICIZED**
- 2. of false gods **PAGAN**
- 3. going against the law **ILLEGALLY**
- 7. resistance or hostile **OPPOSITION**