



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

Introduction

Paul's return to Jerusalem marked the end of his third missionary journey. In spite of threats against his life (Acts 20:3) and repeated warnings that imprisonment awaited him there (Acts 20:23; 21:11), Paul arrived in Jerusalem with eight Gentile believers carrying a contribution to help the poor of the Jerusalem church. God graciously provided an hospitable place to stay and a warm welcome in Jerusalem. However, it was not long before the foreboding warnings began to be realized. Asian Jews, in the city for the Feast of Pentecost, incited a riot that would have cost Paul his life if the Roman soldiers had not come to his rescue.

In this passage, Luke paints a lurid picture of the unbelieving Jews. The hardness of their hearts is revealed in their barbaric treatment of Paul and their rejection of his appeal to them. All through Acts, Luke has shown Paul going first to the Jewish synagogues with the gospel message and then turning to the Gentiles when the Jews refused to listen. The confrontation in Jerusalem brought the situation with the Jews to an ultimate climax. This is the last time Paul made an offer of the gospel to the Jews. Throughout Acts, Luke has been showing "the movement of redemptive history from the Jews to the Gentiles. In keeping with this purpose, Luke devotes considerable space to the record of Paul's last visit to Jerusalem.....because it showed the final rejection of the gospel by Jerusalem" (*The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, Moody Press).

Outline of Acts 21:18-22:30

- I. Paul's Audience 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 Adverted to the Sanhedrin - Acts 22:24-30

I. Paul's Audience the Church Leaders - Acts 21:18-25

The day after arriving in Jerusalem, Paul and the representatives of the Gentile churches met with the leaders of the Jerusalem church.

- A. Paul's report - Acts 21:18-20a

Paul shared how God had blessed his ministry to the

Gentiles and the church leaders praised God. It was probably at this time that Paul and the seven Gentile representatives (Acts 20:4) presented their offering for the Jerusalem church (Acts 24:17). This was a testimony to what God had done in the hearts of the Gentiles. The love of Christ had filled them to overflowing and they joyfully gave to their needy brothers and sisters in Jerusalem.

B. Elders' Apprehension - Acts 21:20b-22

However, the church leaders were uneasy about Paul's reputation with the many Jewish believers who were still zealous for the law and continued to cling to the old familiar customs. They had been told that Paul taught the Jews who lived among the Gentiles to abandon the law of Moses and not circumcise their sons or follow the Jewish customs. This was simply not true. Paul did not oppose Jewish Christians following their ancestral customs. His message of salvation by faith in Christ and not by works made it clear that observing the ceremonial law was not necessary (Galatians 5:2-6), but it was never prohibited.

The zealous Jews had to know the truth, so the elders devised a plan to help in their defense of Paul.

C. Elders' plan for Paul - Acts 21:22-25

If Paul showed submission to the law, it would prove to the legalistic Jewish Christians that he was not against the law, that he accepted the Jewish customs, and that he 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 Nazarite 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.

The elders wanted to make sure that Paul understood that their plan did not conflict with the earlier decision of the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15). They repeated the standing decision of that council (Acts 21:25) to confirm that his actions would in no way affect the Gentiles whose freedom from the law had been established.

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

Paul followed the advice of the elders, confirming a basic principles of his ministry, as written 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.

Some argue that Paul was being hypocritical, but to him, the Jewish religious customs were not a major issue. The Jewish Christians were free to keep the ceremonial law if they chose to do so. But the law was not to be imposed on Gentile believers as a basis for salvation. Any believer was free to keep the ceremonial law or not. It was a matter of choice as long as it was not considered a requirement for salvation. As believers we are free in Christ — free to fully follow His will as our conscience dictates.

However, freedom in Christ never includes the right to compromise the gospel and some commentators believe that is what Paul was doing in following the advice of the elders. "The same apostle who hadargued so forcefully that we are saved by Christ alone was about to go to the Jewish temple and, in the presence of the very priests who had crucified the Lord, participate in a sacrifice of an animal that was meant to be an atonement for sin. (See Numbers 6:14.) That is, he was about to turn his back on the only sufficient sacrifice of Christ" (Acts, James Montgomery Boice, Baker Books).

A. Asian Jews incite a riot - Acts 21:26-31a

Paul was in the temple fulfilling the commitment he had made when a group of unbelieving Jews from Asia spotted Paul and instigated a riot.

Some see the Jews' actions and Paul's ensuing arrest as God's intervention to keep Paul from presenting a blood sacrifice for sin. Though Paul was willing to compromise, God would not be compromised.

1. Accusations against Paul - 21:28-29

The Asian Jews stirred up the crowd by yelling that he was against the Jewish people, against the law, and against the holy temple. They claimed he had even taken a Greek into the temple. Paul had been seen in the city with Trophimus (Acts 20:4), a Gentile from Ephesus and the Jews jumped to the conclusion that he had taken Trophimus into the temple court. This would have been a defilement the temple. Gentiles were only allowed in the outer "court of the Gentiles" which was separated from the inner "court of Israel" by a low stone wall with doors. There were inscriptions on the outer walls which warned Gentiles not to enter on penalty of death.

2. All the city was disturbed - 21:30-31a

The loud accusations aroused the crowd who rushed at Paul, took hold of him, dragged him out of the temple,

and began beating him, *seeking to kill him*. Had they just been waiting for an opportunity to attack Paul? They certainly seemed eager to do so. The doors leading into the "court of Israel" were quickly shut to keep Gentiles or disorderly conduct from defiling the temple.

B. Roman officers rescue Paul - Acts 21:31b-40

Paul would surely have been killed if the commander of the Roman garrison had not acted promptly. The "garrison" was the Antonia Fortress located at the northwest corner of the temple area. Roman troops were stationed there at all times and the number was increased during Jewish feast days. Two flights of stairs leading from the outer court of the temple to the fortress made the temple area easily accessible to the Roman soldiers.

1. Immediate action by the commander - 21:31b-32

When the news of the riot reached the commander of the garrison, he *immediately* took *soldiers and centurions* into the temple area. Each centurion had one hundred soldiers under his command. Since Luke uses the plural (*centurions*) there must have been a minimum of two hundred soldiers sent to quell the riot. When the Jews saw the Roman troops, they stopped beating Paul.

2. Arrest of Paul - 21:33

Paul was taken into custody and chained to two soldiers. The commander tried to question Paul, but the noisy mob made it impossible for Paul to give his defense.

3. Confusion of the crowd - 21:34-36

It was a mob scene of total confusion. Some in the crowd were shouting one thing and some another so that the commander could not determine the truth. He decided to take Paul to the barracks (in the fortress) where he could question him privately. The troops led Paul to the stairs leading up to the Antonia Fortress. By that time, the mob was so violent the soldiers were forced to carry Paul away. The mob followed, 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.

4. Request by Paul -21:37-40

"By the time he reached the top of the steps, Paul must have presented a sorry figure - bruised, battered, begrimed, and disheveled. But, as so frequently in Acts, he is quickly in command of the situation" (The Book of the Acts, F.F. Bruce). Paul addressed the Roman commander in the Greek language, which came as a surprise to him. He had thought that Paul was an

Egyptian insurrection leader who had led a band of assassins several years earlier.

Paul assured the commander that he was not the Egyptian. He was a Jew (and therefore had a right to be in the temple) and a citizen of the reputable city of Tarsus. He earnestly desired to speak to the people.

The commander gave Paul permission to speak. Paul stood at the top of the fortress stairs and motioned to the people with his hand until they became quiet. He then began to speak to them in Hebrew (Aramaic). Speaking in the language of the Jerusalem Jews, was Paul's attempt to establish a common bond with them.

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

Paul defended himself against the accusations that he was against the Jews, the law, and the temple (Acts 21:28). He explained that he was a Jew by birth, had been trained in the law, and was zealous for the law. His conversion to Christianity had come by divine revelation and confirmed by revelation to the devout Jew, Ananias. Even after his conversion, Paul continued to honor the temple and worship there. That is where he had received the command from God to go and preach to the Gentiles.

A. Paul's commitment to the law - Acts 22:1-5

Paul explained that he was a Jew, as was his audience. He had been born in the Cilician city of Tarsus, but brought up in Jerusalem. He had been taught strictly according to the law by Gamaliel, the most highly respected rabbi of his time (See Acts 5:34.). He was a zealous defender of the law, as were his listeners. In fact, he was even more zealous than they because he had gone to extremes in persecuting the *Way* (Christians), arresting and putting to death both men and women. The high priest and the members of the Sanhedrin could confirm what he said because they had given him letters authorizing him to arrest Jewish believers in Damascus and deliver them to Jerusalem.

B. Paul's testimony - Acts 22:6-16

Paul related his conversion experience on the road to Damascus as described by Luke in Acts 9.

1. The blinding light and the voice - 22:6-8

On the way to Damascus, at mid-day, a bright light from heaven shone all around him and a voice asked, *Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?* When Paul asked who was speaking, the answer was, *I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.* It had not been the Christians Paul was persecuting, but Jesus of Nazareth.

2. The witnesses to the light - 22:9

Those who were with Paul 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 is probable that they did hear some sound, but not as a voice with discernible words.

3. The Lord's instructions to Paul - 22:10-11

Paul asked Jesus what he should do and was told to go to Damascus and wait for further instructions. Paul obeyed but had to be led by the hand because the bright light had blinded his eyes.

4. Paul's conversion is confirmed by Ananias - 22:12-16

Ananias, a devout man who observed the law and had a good reputation among the Jews, had visited Paul in Damascus. Paul stressed that Ananias was a strict Jew. He welcomed Paul into the fellowship of believers, calling him *brother*, and restored his sight. The fact that Ananias restored Paul's sight was a confirmation that the message he brought was from the Lord.

Ananias delivered God's commission for Paul. Having seen Christ (*the Just One*, also in Acts 7:52) and heard His voice, Paul was to be a witness to *all men* of what he had seen and heard. He was to show his obedience by being baptized, an outward sign of the inward change which had taken place in Paul's heart.

NOTE: Paul did not specifically say that his conversion involved actually seeing the risen Christ, however the following Scripture passages confirm that this did occur: Acts 26:16; 1 Corinthians 9:1; 15:8, Galatians 1:12.

C. Paul's commission from God - Acts 22:17-21

As a Christian, Paul continued to go to the temple when he was in Jerusalem. On one occasion he had gone there to pray. He had fallen into a trance and had a vision of the Lord instructing him to get out of Jerusalem because the Jews would not accept Paul's testimony concerning Him. Paul explained how he had resisted the command to leave. He had experienced a radical change in his life, and surely the Jews would see that it had been by the power of God. He had been the infamous persecutor who imprisoned and beat believers. He was an approving witness of Stephen's martyrdom. But now he preached the same gospel which Stephen had died for. Surely the Jews would see that the dramatic change in his life could only be by the power of God. Surely they would listen to his message.

The Lord spoke to Paul, confirming his command to leave Jerusalem and the commission to preach the

gospel. Paul related the Lord's exact words to his audience: *Depart, for I will send you far from here to the Gentiles.*

D. The mob's raging response - Acts 22:22-23

Paul's mention of his ministry to the Gentiles ignited the rage of the Jews. If he had not used the word Gentile, Paul might have been set free, but he could not keep from using it because his commission from God and the burden of his heart was to reach the Gentiles. The fatal word which Paul had avoided up to this point "fell like a spark on the inflammable mass of the mob's fanaticism" (Word Studies in the New Testament, Marvin R. Vincent). They shouted for Paul's death. They tore their clothes and threw dust in the air to express their fury and horror at the thought of God sending a Jew on a mission to the Gentiles.

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

With the mob again out of control, the Roman commander decided to take Paul into the barracks for interrogation.

A. Roman commander orders Paul to be scourged - Acts 22:24-29

The commander sought a confession from Paul by having him scourged. The Roman scourge was a cruel instrument of torture: a short, leather whip embedded with pieces of metal or bone and attached to a sturdy wooden handle. Scourging could result in permanent crippling and even death. Paul had been beaten with rods three times and received the Jewish "thirty-nine lashes" five times (2 Corinthians 11:24-25), but neither one of these delivered the devastating blows of a Roman scourge.

1. Paul reveals his Roman citizenship - 22:25-27

Roman citizenship was a precious possession. One of the benefits was exemption from being chained or scourged. As Paul was being bound in preparation for the scourging, he questioned the centurion, *Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman, and uncondemned?* The centurion knew the answer well. He responded immediately by informing the commander that Paul was a Roman citizen. The commander went directly to Paul and asked him if he were a Roman. Paul answered, *yes*.

2. Roman soldiers react - 22:28-29

The commander told Paul that he had paid a large sum of money to obtain Roman citizenship, perhaps

implying that "the privilege must have become cheap of late if such a sorry-looking figure as Paul could claim it" (The Book of the Acts, F.F. Bruce). He must have been dumbfounded when Paul quietly replied that he had been born a citizen.

Upon hearing this, the whole atmosphere of the barracks changed. The soldiers drew back and the commander was afraid. He had violated Roman law by illegally chaining Paul and ordering him to be scourged. Compare the reaction of the soldiers to that of the magistrates in Acts 16:35-39 when they discovered that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens.

B. Roman commander takes Paul before the Sanhedrin - 22:30

The commander still wanted to get to the root of the problem, so he kept Paul in protective custody. It appeared that the accusations against Paul were of a religious nature, so he decided to order a meeting of the Sanhedrin. He would let the Jewish council determine if there were grounds for legal proceedings against Paul. The very next day the chief priests and all the council convened. Paul was taken before them.

Applications

1. In a very difficult and demeaning situation, Paul remained calm and dignified. He was respectful and courteous even when he was treated unjustly. He represented His Lord and savior nobly and faultlessly, following in His steps. *For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously* (1 Peter 2:21-23, NASB) How do you react under pressure or when you are unjustly treated? How can you be more like Christ and like Paul?

2. The Jewish mob which beat Paul and called for his death were bigots. They looked down their noses at the Gentiles and despised their perceived inferiority. They could not stand the thought that God might show mercy and favor to the Gentiles. Do you feel a superiority because of your religious, racial, educational, socioeconomic, or ethnic background? Are those feelings demonstrated in your words or actions? Is your church divided along any of these lines? What can you do to show acceptance and love toward those who are different than you?

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.

b. How do some people act in a similar way today?
2. What did you learn from Paul's actions in Chapter 22 about how to act when you are unfairly treated?

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.
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?

DAY THREE: Read Acts 23:6-11.

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

b. Why did he make this statement? (verses 7 and 8)
7. a. Who spoke out in favor of Paul?

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

8. Why did the commander take Paul into custody? Underline the correct answer. (Give verse.)
He was afraid the men of the council would rip Paul to pieces.
He was sick and tired of all the religious talk.
He wanted to leave and go to lunch.
He was convinced that Paul was guilty.
9. a. Who encouraged Paul? Where was this encourager?
b. Give one reason this would encourage Paul. (See Acts 19:21.)

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. There were more than 40 of them.
 - b. They vowed not to eat or drink until Paul was dead.
 - c. They revealed their plan to the chief priests and elders.
 - d. Their plan was to bribe the commander.
 - e. Paul's nephew overheard the plan and told Paul.
11. a. Who else did Paul's nephew tell about the plan?
b. What advice did Paul's nephew give this person?
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. He had taken Paul before the Jewish council.
- Paul was a Roman. Paul was sick. 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.