

## ~ Lesson 78 ACTS ~

## The Testimony of a Changed Man

Acts 21:33-22:5

We left off last week in the book of Acts as Paul is bound in chains in Jerusalem after almost being beat to death by the angry mob in the Temple. Today we will be looking at the remainder of chapter 21 and then his defense in chapter 22 as he addresses the angry mob of Jews. By way of review, let's start reading at verse 27 down into our text today, **Acts 21:27-33**.

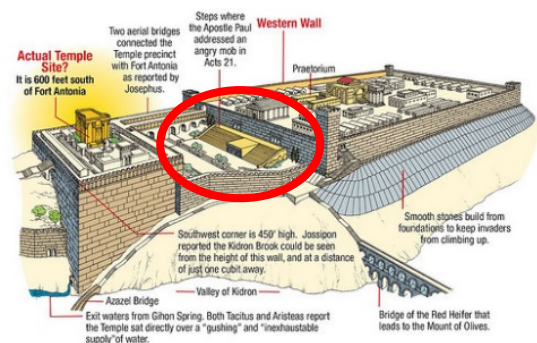
The commander, this leader of 1,000, *χιλίαρχος*, saves Paul's life by binding him with two chains, saving him from the angry mob of Jews. And the first thing this commander wants to know is, "Who are you and what have you done?" But because of the confusion of the mob, he can't get a straight answer...

**21:34) And some among the multitude cried one thing and some another. So when he could not ascertain the truth because of the tumult, he commanded him to be taken into the barracks.**

This is typical mob mentality. Remember the mob in the riot at Ephesus? Luke uses the same phrase in Acts 19:32- *Some therefore cried one thing and some another, for the assembly was confused, and most of them did not know why they had come together*. So the commander not able to ascertain the truth, he commanded him to be taken into the barracks. These barracks, *παρεμβολή*, is describing the Antonian fortress that was adjacent to the Temple built by Herod the Great in order to keep watch of the Temple courts. You can imagine the chaos of the situation so the commander just wants to get Paul away from the Temple, away from the angry crowd and into the fortress so he can figure out what is going on. The soldiers begin escorting Paul to the fortress, but the mob is following them and still trying to beat Paul...

**21:35-36) <sup>35</sup> When he reached the stairs, he had to be carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the mob. <sup>36</sup> For the multitude of the people followed after, crying out, "Away with him!"**

These stairs were outside the Temple and leading up to the fortress Antonia, but the mob is so violent, the soldiers have to carry him up the stairs. And they are following Paul crying out the same thing they said about Jesus... "Away with him." John 19:15. These Jews are so angry with Paul they want him dead. But notice Paul's response...



**21:37) Then as Paul was about to be led into the barracks, he said to the commander, "May I speak to you?"**

Paul's heart and calmness is astounding. Being beaten, arrested, yelled at, and carried away... and yet he politely asks the commander, "May I speak to you?" With the intention to preach the Gospel to the ones who want to kill him! But when Paul asks the commander to speak to him, Paul spoke in Greek which surprised the commander because he thought Paul was an Egyptian fugitive. Notice the commander's response...

**21:37-38) <sup>37</sup> ... He replied, "Can you speak Greek? <sup>38</sup> Are you not the Egyptian who some time ago stirred up a rebellion and led the four thousand assassins out into the wilderness?"**

The commander thought Paul was this Egyptian assassin who had escaped. This word "assassins" is the phrase, "ἄνδρας τῶν σικαρίων," men of the dagger. Josephus describes these men and the Egyptian in his book *Antiquities of the Jews*, book 20, chapter 8.5-6. These men of the dagger were hired assassins that would infiltrate into the Temple on feast days hiding their daggers under their cloak and murder certain assigned people. Josephus records that these assassins even murdered the Jewish high priest Jonathan while Felix was governor. He also records this Egyptian creating a revolt against Jerusalem saying that he led these assassins into the wilderness claiming he was a prophet, and at his word, the walls of Jerusalem

would fall down and they would take over the city. Felix heard about this and arrested hundreds of these men but the Egyptian had escaped.

The Jews obviously hated this Egyptian and his assassins, so the commander assumed Paul was this man, but when Paul started speaking Greek, he questioned if this was really the Egyptian. So Paul replies...

**21:39) But Paul said, “I am a Jew from Tarsus, in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean (insignificant) city; and I implore you, permit me to speak to the people.”**

Tarsus was a beautiful, wealthy city that was favored by the Roman government and its citizens. So the commander quickly realizes this was not the Egyptian, therefore the commander allows Paul to speak, hoping to understand more about this riot and this man, and he permits Paul to speak to the Jews...

**21:40) So when he had given him permission, Paul stood on the stairs and motioned with his hand to the people. And when there was a great silence, he spoke to them in the Hebrew language, saying,**

Notice Paul is still on the stairs where the soldiers had carried him. The crowd had been yelling and crying out, but Paul motions his hand and the crowd becomes quiet. This is a miracle. I believe God had something to do with this because remember the riot in Ephesus when Alexander came forward to speak and they cried out even louder, Acts 19:34. But here the crowd is quieted so that Paul can preach the Gospel. This message is directed specifically to the Jewish people to the point that Paul begins speaking in Hebrew and not Greek. The commander was hoping to gain some more understanding of who Paul was, but now he can't understand what he is saying. This was a message only for the Jews.

Paul's defense now starts in chapter 22 and goes through verse 22. But what we will learn is that Paul doesn't use this as an opportunity to defend himself, but rather he defends the Gospel and in doing so he gives his personal testimony of his conversion.

**22:1) “Brethren and fathers, hear my defense before you now.”**

Paul's defense is his testimony. He doesn't defend himself by trying to prove that he didn't bring Trophimus into the temple or that he wasn't preaching to apostatize Moses. No, he makes his defense for the Gospel. This word “defense” is *ἀπολογία*. We get the word apologetics from this word. It is not an apology for the Gospel, but literally a logical explanation from words, *ἀπο* + *λογία*, of why we believe in Jesus. Peter uses the same word in his first epistle, 1 Peter 3:15- *But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense ἀπολογία, to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear;*

Notice he doesn't quote Scripture to prove his point as he commonly did in the synagogue to prove Jesus is the Messiah. But rather Paul uses a different tactic. He gives his personal testimony of his conversion on the road to Damascus. Scripture is a great way to defend the Gospel, but Paul being led of the Spirit uses his testimony in this instance. Revelation says, *“They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony...”* Rev 12:11. Our personal testimony from darkness to light can be extremely powerful especially when its like the Apostle Paul's. A changed life cannot be argued against and this is the point Paul will make. He is going to say that I was one way and now I am completely different, and Jesus is the reason. I love the testimony of the blind man in John 9 when the Pharisees were asking him who healed him and he said (my own paraphrase), “Whether He is a sinner, I don't know, but one thing I know, I was blind and now I see, and that guy did it!” You don't have to know all the fancy doctrine, just tell your testimony and it will bring deliverance. Paul knew the Old Testament and he knew Jesus, who is the key to understanding the Scriptures, but instead of quoting Scripture, he uses his testimony explaining that he was one way but then he was changed, and Jesus is alive and He is the one who did it.

**22:2-3)** <sup>2</sup> And when they heard that he spoke to them in the Hebrew language, they kept all the more silent. Then he said: <sup>3</sup> “I am indeed a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, taught according to the strictness of our fathers’ law, and was zealous toward God as you all are today.

Paul begins with identifying with them as Jews... *to the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews*, 1 Cor 9:20. He was a Hellenistic Jew having been born in Tarsus, but he was raised as a young boy in Jerusalem at the feet of Gamaliel making him a Hebrew. Gamaliel was an esteemed teacher of the Law and the grandson of the famous Rabbi Hillel. We have seen Gamaliel earlier in the book of Acts in chapter 5 when the Apostles were arrested and brought before the Sanhedrin Council seeking to kill him. But Gamaliel took a stand against their decision to persecute the Apostles and he cautioned them that they might be fighting against God, Acts 5:33-39. So they took Gamaliel’s advice and just beat them a little, Acts 5:40-41.

Paul was extremely smart and learned in the Scriptures and was **taught according to the strictness of our fathers’ law** in the Pharisaical traditions. He describes this in **Philippians 3:4-6**. Paul was a zealous Jew thinking he was serving God by persecuting Christians, but he did this in ignorance, 1 Tim 1:13. But notice his zeal. In his zeal he persecuted Christians and now he says he **was zealous toward God**. Notice he did not say he was zealous for the Law as James was boasting, Acts 21:20, but he is zealous for God. And even after his conversion his zeal for God didn’t change, God just redirected his focus. He goes on in his testimony about his zeal for God to persecute Christians...

**22:4-5)** <sup>4</sup> I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women, <sup>5</sup> as also the high priest bears me witness, and all the council of the elders, from whom I also received letters to the brethren, and went to Damascus to bring in chains even those who were there to Jerusalem to be punished.

Paul speaks of his persecution toward the saints in many of his letters. This was something in his past that he never forgot, and it was something that continually haunted him. This is what I believe to be his thorn in the flesh, **2 Cor 12:7**. He wrote about this in five of his letters, **Gal 1:13-14**; Phil 3:5-6; **1 Cor 15:9**; **2 Cor 12:7**; **1 Tim 1:13** and again in his later defense with Herod, Acts 26:9-11. Notice how Luke describes his behavior in **Acts 9:1**. This breathing is an “in-breathing of the soul.” It was his life’s drive to destroy the Way. And he says everyone knew this to be my behavior. Many times, we see his reputation preceding him as the one who persecutes the Christians, Ananias Acts 9:13; the disciples in Jerusalem, Acts 9:26; Gal 1:22-23. There were many witnesses to his old ways, even the Sanhedrin Council can attest to his murderous behavior saying in verse 5... **also the high priest bears me witness, and all the council of the elders**. But now Paul is a changed man, and he goes on telling of his conversion on the road to Damascus...

So next week we will look at Paul’s transformation out from darkness and into the marvelous Light.