

Bible Study

Acts Chapter 22

PAUL'S JERUSALEM SERMON

A. The sermon to the crowd in Jerusalem.

1. (Acts 22:1-2) Paul begins his message to the mob.

“Brethren and fathers, hear my defense before you now.” And when they heard that he spoke to them in the Hebrew language, they kept all the more silent. Then he said:

a. **Brethren and fathers, hear:** Paul began his great defense before the Jews the same way Stephen did: *Men and brethren and fathers, listen.* (Acts 7:2)

i. “Paul gave a magnificent defense. He actually used the word ‘defense’ (Acts 22:1). In Greek it is the word *apologia*, from which we get our word ‘apology.’ It refers to a formal defense of one’s past life or actions.”

b. **They kept all the more silent:** Once the wild crowd heard Paul address them in Hebrew (Aramaic), they became quiet and ready to listen.

i. At the end of the previous chapter, Paul's audience for this sermon had just tried to kill him, thinking that he had profaned the temple by sneaking a Gentile in past the Court of the Gentiles.

2. (Acts 22:3) Paul tells of his Jewish upbringing and background.

“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.”

a. **I am indeed a Jew:** Paul spoke as a Jew unto Jews. He was careful to lay the common ground between them. With this, Paul began telling the story of his life before Jesus Christ and then his conversion.

i. Luke told the story of Paul's conversion in [Acts 9](#). After that, Paul told the story in some way at least four more times in the New Testament, each with its own intention.

- [Acts 22](#): Telling the story to persuade the Jews.
- [Acts 26](#): Telling the story to persuade the Gentiles.
- [Philippians 3](#): Telling the story for theological understanding.
- [1 Timothy 1](#): Telling the story to give encouragement.

b. **Born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel:** Paul noted that though he was **born** outside of the Promised Land, he was **brought up** in Jerusalem, and **at the feet of Gamaliel**, one of the most prestigious rabbis of the day ([Acts 5:34](#)).

c. **Taught according to the strictness of our father's law, and was zealous toward God:** As Paul stated in another place, he was a *Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee* ([Philippians 3:5](#)). To the smallest detail, Paul kept the law as understood by the spiritual elite of his day.

d. **Zealous toward God as you all are today:** It's as if Paul searched for the nicest thing he could say about a mob that had just tried to murder him. "Well, I can say that you are **zealous toward God.**"

3. ([Acts 22:4-5](#)) Paul tells how he persecuted Christians.

"I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women, 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."

a. **I persecuted this Way to the death:** This was evidence of the zeal mentioned in the previous line. Paul was so energetic as a persecutor that he, in some cases, was responsible for the death of some followers of Jesus. Paul communicated to the crowd, “You tried to kill me, but I succeeded in killing many.” This had to be surprising news to many in the crowd.

b. **Binding and delivering into prisons both men and women:** Paul didn’t kill every Christian he met; some were simply bound and imprisoned. But he was unsparing, persecuting **women** as well as **men**.

c. **The high priest bears me witness, and all the council of the elders, from whom I received letters:** Paul did his work of persecution with the official approval of the religious leaders.

d. **Went to Damascus to bring in chains even those who were there:** Paul was energetic enough to carry on his campaign of persecution beyond Judea, into Syria and the city of Damascus.

i. The message is clear: “I understand why you have attacked me. I was once an attacker also. I understand where you are coming from.” Paul had been a Christian for more than twenty years but could still relate to those who were not Christians.

4. (Acts 22:6-11) Paul describes his supernatural experience on the way to Damascus.

“Now it happened, as I journeyed and came near Damascus at about noon, suddenly a great light from heaven shone around me. And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’ So, I answered, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ And He said to me, ‘I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.’ And those who were with me indeed saw the light and were afraid, but they did not hear the voice of Him who spoke to me. So, I said, ‘What shall I do, Lord?’ And the Lord said to me, ‘Arise and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all things which are appointed for you to do.’ And since I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of those who were with me, I came into Damascus.”

a. **Suddenly a great light from heaven shone around me:** Paul was a determined persecutor of Christians and Jesus until this heavenly light shone on him. It is as if Paul said: “I was just like you all, until I had an encounter with Jesus. Jesus met me and my life was dramatically changed.”

b. **I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting:** Paul also came to understand he was persecuting Jesus Himself, the shining Lord of glory, brighter than the noonday sun. He didn't really know who he was persecuting until this.

c. **And since I could not see for the glory of that light:** The brightness of that light made Paul blind. In persecuting Jesus he was spiritually blind, and then he was also physically blind — and had to be humbly **led by the hand** into the city of Damascus.

5. (Acts 22:12-16) Paul describes his response to the supernatural experience in Damascus.

“Then a certain Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good testimony with all the Jews who dwelt *there*, came to me; and he stood and said to me, ‘Brother Saul, receive your sight.’ And at that same hour I looked up at him. Then he said, ‘The God of our fathers has chosen you that you should know His will, and see the Just One, and hear the voice of His mouth. For you will be His witness to all men of what you have seen and heard. And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.’”

a. **Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good testimony with all the Jews:** Paul noted that it was **Ananias**, a man with credentials as a good Jew who received him into the Christian family.

b. **The God of our fathers has chosen you that you should know His will:** In Paul's speech, we see that both he and Ananias both simply acted like good Jews. They did not resist God nor deny their heritage.

i. Paul wanted them to know that he *still* served the God of his fathers. He had not rejected Judaism. Instead, many in Judaism had rejected God as revealed in Jesus Christ.

c. **The God of our fathers has chosen you that you should know His will, and see the Just One, and hear the voice of His mouth:** Acts 22:14 is a wonderful capsule of the duty of every one before God: To **know His will**, to **see the Just One** (Jesus), and to **hear the voice of His mouth** (His word).

6. **(Acts 22:17-18) Jesus speaks to Paul in a trance at the temple in Jerusalem.**

“Now it happened, when I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, that I was in a trance and saw Him saying to me, ‘Make

haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, for they will not receive your testimony concerning Me.”

a. **When I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple:**

Paul told them about something that happened about 20 years before, when he had been a follower of Jesus for 2 or 3 years. Even though he had been a Christian for a few years, yet he still came to Jerusalem to pray in the **temple**. He wanted the crowd to know that even though he trusted in Jesus, he was not against all Jewish ceremonies and rituals.

b. **I was in a trance and saw Him saying to me:** Paul had an impressive vision of Jesus while in the temple; yet he never referred to this vision in his letters and seems to only mention it now out of necessity. Paul's Christian life was founded on God's truth, not spiritual experiences, and he didn't even like to talk a lot about his spiritual experiences.

c. **Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, for they will not receive your testimony concerning Me:** This word from Jesus probably was a surprise to Paul. With good reason, he probably thought of himself as the *perfect* one to bring the gospel to his fellow

Jews. Nevertheless, Jesus gave him this warning, even telling him to **make haste**.

7. (Acts 22:19-20) Paul answers Jesus

“So I said, ‘Lord, they know that in every synagogue I imprisoned and beat those who believe on You. And when the blood of Your martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by consenting to his death, and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.’”

a. **Lord, they know that in every synagogue I imprisoned and beat those who believe on You:** This was Paul’s gentle objection to the warning Jesus just gave him in his vision. Paul’s idea is, “Lord, they will listen to me. They know I used to persecute Christians, so my story will be powerful and persuasive to them.”

b. **And when the blood of Your martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by consenting to his death:** Paul thought his early, energetic persecution of the church gave him *more* credibility with the Jewish people who were against Christianity. He tried to explain to Jesus why he should really stay in Jerusalem and work to tell the Jewish people about Jesus.

8. (Acts 22:21) Jesus replies to Paul's response.

“Then He said to me, ‘Depart, for I will send you far from here to the Gentiles.’”

a. **Then He said to me, “Depart”**: Jesus didn't agree with Paul's response. Jesus knew that it was not Paul's time and place to preach to the Jewish people the way Paul wanted to. Instead, for his own safety, 20 years before this, Jesus told Paul to simply **depart** from Jerusalem.

b. **For I will send you far from here to the Gentiles**: When Paul was touched by God in Damascus, he was told then of his call to preach to the Gentiles (Acts 9:15), so the words from Jesus to him in the temple at Jerusalem were not new. However, we can see that in his first visit to Jerusalem after his conversion, it would have been easy for Paul to care so much for the conversion of Israel that he would want to concentrate on that — that's why Jesus gave him the reminder in the temple.

i. Paul made it clear that it wasn't *his* idea to preach to the Gentiles; this was God's plan, not his. He hoped it also explained to the

crowd why he seemed so friendly to the Gentiles: Paul was simply obeying Jesus and His word to him.

9. (Acts 22:22-23) The crowd riots in response to Paul's message.

And they listened to him until this word, and *then* they raised their voices and said, "Away with such a *fellow* from the earth, for he is not fit to live!" Then, as they cried out and tore off *their* clothes and threw dust into the air.

a. **And they listened to him until this word:** The crowd that had tried to kill Paul, and had then listened intently to his whole sermon, erupted into rage over the saying of **one word**. That **one word** was "*Gentiles*." (Acts 22:21) This Jewish mob was outraged at the thought that God's salvation could be given freely to believing Gentiles.

i. The mob listened carefully up to this point. In their minds, they didn't mind this talk about Jesus, but they could not stand the idea that God might save Jews and Gentiles alike and in the same way.

iii. The message of Jesus — that both Paul and the New Testament preached — is this: You may come to God just as you are — Jew, Gentile, foreigner, high, low, rich, or poor — but *you must come to Him through Jesus Christ*.

iii. These Jews of that day did not have a problem with Gentiles becoming Jews. But they were incredibly offended at the thought of Gentiles becoming Christians *just as* Jews became Christians, because it implied that Jews and Gentiles were equal, having to come to God on the same terms.

b. **Away with such a fellow from the earth, for he is not fit to live!** This outraged, violent response was over one word: *Gentiles*.

i. In [Acts 22](#), the Jewish mob expressed their hatred of others through violent rage. Others express their hatred of the perishing through indifference. We may not riot like what the mob in this chapter did, but we may say much the same thing by our inaction.

B. Paul in Roman custody.

1. ([Acts 22:24](#)) The commander demands an explanation of the riot.

The commander ordered him to be brought into the barracks, and said that he should be examined under scourging, so that he might know why they shouted so against him.

a. **The commander ordered him to be brought into the barracks:** It must have been a strange sight for the Roman **commander**. He saw Paul passionately address this huge crowd in a language he didn't

know. He saw the crowd in rapt attention, until suddenly, they erupted into a riot.

i. But when it was explained to him, he must have thought it absurd and offensive: All this rioting springing out of the hatred of Gentiles, people just like the commander himself.

ii. From now until the end of the Book of Acts, Paul will be in Roman custody. As far as this book is concerned, this was the end of his time as a free man, though not the end of his witness or his usefulness to God and God's people.

b. **Examined under scourging**: It is suggested that Paul be beaten with a **scourge**. This was quite different from being beaten with a rod or a normal whip (which Paul had experienced, [2 Corinthians 11:24-25](#)). Men often died or were crippled for life after a **scourging**.

i. "This was not the normal Jewish flogging, which was bad enough, but the dreaded Roman flagellum. It was a beating so severe that in some cases it resulted in the death of the victim."

c. **He should be examined under scourging**: This was brutal, yet customary in that time — but only upon people who were *not* Roman citizens.

2. (Acts 22:25-26) Paul reveals his Roman citizenship.

And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said to the centurion who stood by, “Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman, and uncondemned?” When the centurion heard *that*, he went and told the commander, saying, “Take care what you do, for this man is a Roman.”

a. **As they bound him with thongs:** Paul had his hands tied with leather straps so his hands joined around a wooden pole and his back was totally exposed. He was ready for a brutal beating, one that would not stop until he confessed to the crimes he was suspected of.

b. **Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman, and uncondemned?** At that moment Paul announced his Roman citizenship.

c. **Take care what you do, for this man is a Roman:** When this became known, the reaction was immediate. It was a serious violation of Roman rights wrong to even *bind* a Roman citizen without due process, and they had *already* violated Paul’s rights by binding him in Acts 21:33.

3. (Acts 22:27-29) The commander questions Paul about his citizenship.

Then the commander came and said to him, “Tell me, are you a Roman?” He said, “Yes.” The commander answered, “With a large sum I obtained this citizenship.” And Paul said, “But I was born a citizen.” Then immediately those who were about to examine him withdrew from him; and the commander was also afraid after he found out that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him.

a. **Tell me, are you a Roman?** The penalty for lying about one’s Roman citizenship was significant. It wasn’t the kind of thing people commonly lied about, so the commander could simply ask Paul directly.

i. “The verbal claim to Roman citizenship was accepted at face value; penalties for falsifying documents and making false claims of citizenship were exceedingly stiff — Epictetus speaks of death for such acts.”

b. **With a large sum I obtained this citizenship:** Because of all the commotion and the beating Paul had received, he probably looked terrible. The commander wondered how someone who looked like this could purchase his citizenship.

i. “Something of this sort may have been in the tribune’s mind as he said, *it cost me a very large sum of money to obtain Roman citizenship* — the implication being that the privilege must have become cheap of late if such a sorry-looking figure as Paul could claim it.”

ii. According to Stott, Roman citizenship could not be bought for a fee, only for a bribe. Normally, only right or reward granted it. “The point was not that the tribune doubted Paul’s claim, but rather he was implying that anybody could become a citizen these days!”
(Marshall)

c. **But I was born a citizen:** Paul’s parents (or grandparents) must have been awarded the rights of citizenship for some good done on behalf of Rome.

i. “How the citizenship was acquired by Paul’s father or grandfather we have no means of knowing, but analogy would suggest that it was for valuable services rendered to a Roman general or administrator in the southeastern area of Asia Minor.”

ii. Paul was an extremely rare individual. It was uncommon to find such an educated, intelligent, devout Jew who was also a Roman

citizen. God would use this unique background to use Paul in a special way, even as he wants to use *your* unique background to use you in a special way.

d. **The commander was also afraid after he found out that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him:** Knowing what he now knew about Paul, the commander was very concerned for his own sake.

4. **(Acts 22:30) The Roman commander arranges a hearing of the charges against Paul before the Jewish council (the Sanhedrin). The next day, because he wanted to know for certain why he was accused by the Jews, he released him from *his* bonds, and commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear and brought Paul down and set him before them.**

a. **He wanted to know for certain why he was accused:** Luke presents the Roman commander as a fair and upstanding man. Though he did not know the details of the dispute between Paul and the religious leaders, he seemed to work hard towards a fair resolution.

i. The Roman commander “must have thought that once he had a concrete accusation he would be able to decide what to do.”

b. **And commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear, and brought Paul down and set him before them:** Paul received what he probably thought of as a dramatic second chance. The opportunity to preach to the mob on the temple mount ended in another riot, but he would speak before the Sanhedrin (**their council**) the next day.

i. The Sanhedrin was the Jewish congress or parliament. Paul would be given the opportunity to speak before the group that he was once a member of. [Acts 26:10](#) clearly says that Paul had a *vote* — usually, that would be used as a member of the Sanhedrin.

ii. Paul would logically think this was the opportunity of a lifetime, to preach to those he loved so much and knew so well.

iii. God had revealed a plan to Paul right at his conversion. Paul *was a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake* ([Acts 9:15-16](#)). Paul knew the general plan; but just like us, he didn't know how it would all work out. He had to trust God, just like every believer.