

Acts

Part 55 – A Life-Changing Message and an Unfailing Mission

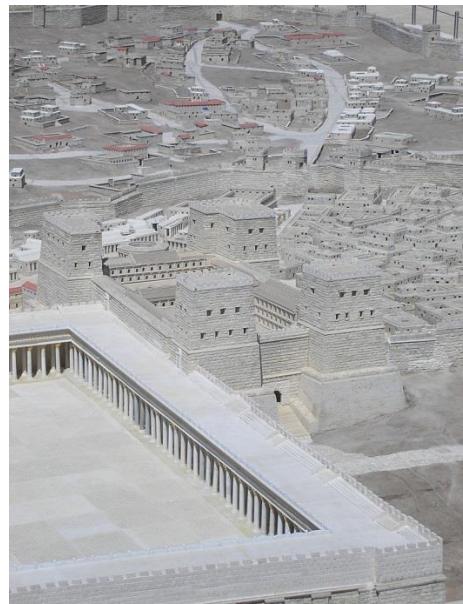
Acts 21:37-22:30

Having been rescued by Roman infantry Paul asks for and is granted permission to speak to the angry mob of his fellow Jews. Paul's goal was not so much to defend himself as to defend the gospel. He tells about the remarkable transformation in his own life from persecutor of the church to apostle of the Lord Jesus. What becomes clear is that it is not really Paul is in the crosshairs of the mob but the gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul was incidental. The gospel was the true target.

The gospel is the announcement of the forgiveness of sins, apart from the works of the law through the dying and rising of Jesus. This gospel is the offer of free and sovereign grace to whosoever believes in the Lord Jesus Christ and it was being freely offered not just to Paul's brethren according to the flesh — the Jews — but also to the Gentiles. And just as in Paul's day it is the gospel which is that which the world hates. The servants of Jesus may feel the heat of persecution. But it is only because of the gospel they believe and proclaim. And as in Paul's day God himself guarantees the power of His message and the success of His mission.

Main Idea: God can be trusted to be the power behind His gospel and the success of His mission.

Vs. 38 – Greek was the language of Egypt at this time, so the question that begins vs. 38 might well be translated, following upon vs. 37, "Surely, then, you are, or must be the Egyptian...?" Some three years before this, according to Josephus, an Egyptian appeared in Jerusalem claiming to be a prophet. He gathered a following of some 4,000. This man promised that if they marched on Jerusalem, the walls of the city would fall at his command, and they would overthrow the Roman garrison. The Roman governor sent a detachment of soldiers against the insurrection, killed a few, took some prisoners, and the Egyptian himself wisely disappeared. The Roman commander thought that Paul might be that man, just discovered by the mob.



Antonia Fortress

Vs. 39 – Paul was a Jew and a citizen. In other words, he was not an escaped terrorist likely to start a riot in the temple.

Vs. 40 – Aramaic was the common language among the Jews in Jerusalem. Many Diaspora Jews could not speak Aramaic or Hebrew.

Vs. 4 – Stephen wasn't the only martyr; cf. 26:10.

Vs. 5 – Paul presents his credentials as a loyal Jew and member of the ruling council. And, so far as the Christians were concerned, he was the leader of their persecutors.

Vs. 12 – Ananias, also a major player in this history, was a devout Jew and known to be so by the Jewish community in Damascus.

Vs. 14 – "The God of our Fathers" identifies the God who revealed himself to Paul with Yahweh, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and "the righteous one" identifies Jesus as the Messiah.

Vs. 18 – It is interesting that Paul puts this in his "defense" as it might well be thought likely to offend the Jews he is speaking to. But, it gives Paul the opportunity to explain what he said to the Lord in return, which serves once more to underline his credentials as a loyal Jew.

Vs. 21 – Paul's departure from Jerusalem, therefore, was not only for his safety's sake, but as well because God wanted to reach the Gentiles.

Vs. 22 – The speech is cut short before anything is actually said about the specific charges that were brought against him, viz. defiling the temple. But that charge was a pretext in any case.

1. Paul's Defense (21:37-22:21)

Features of Paul's speech

a. He establishes a connection with his hearers. (22: 1-5)

1. He treats them with respect
2. He speaks their language.
3. He identifies with their background.

b. He explains the reason for his transformation. (22:6-11)

Here Paul details his encounter with the risen Lord Jesus. This packs a theological punch because Paul is speaking of Jesus as matter-of-factly risen and reigning. This explains, in part, the continued violence on the part of the crowd. Remember, Paul is not speaking to Christians. He is speaking to people, some of whom were directly responsible for the execution of Jesus. And while he takes pains to connect to his hearers he never removes the essential scandal of the message they are called to believe.

c. He explains his commission. (22:12-21)

Vs. 14 – Paul points to three features of his commission:

1. He is calling men and women to be faithful to God's will – “appointed you to know his will”
2. He is to hold forth Jesus Christ – “to see the Righteous One”
3. He is to listen the voice of the risen Jesus – “to hear a voice from his mouth”

2. The Crowd's Reaction (22:22-23)

The crowd seems to have listened until Paul announced that Jesus had commissioned him to go to the Gentiles. They repeat their demand that Paul be killed. Their cultural and ethnic chauvinism had blinded them to the Covenant God had made with their father Abraham.

3. God's Provision (22:24-29)

- In this instance God rescues Paul both from the murderous mob and the Roman whips. In all his experiences Paul understood that God can be trusted to be the power behind his gospel and the guarantor of His mission's success.
- In chapters 21-23 Paul is rescued from a seemingly hopeless situation four times. This is perhaps the dominant narrative feature of the section. But those acts of deliverance were temporary. They were no guarantee that Paul would be rescued from all difficulty or even what awaited him finally in Rome. In all of our lives God will provide deliverance no matter what the circumstance. Either God will provide temporary deliverance or final deliverance. He will either provide us with escape from a particular difficulty or the grace to sustain us through it.