

21:27 –36 - The Riot and Paul's Arrest at the Temple

21:27 When the seven days were almost over, the Jews from Asia, upon seeing him in the temple, began to stir up all the crowd and laid hands on him,

21:28 crying out, "Men of Israel, come to our aid! This is the man who preaches to all men everywhere against our people and the Law and this place; and besides he has even brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place."

21:29 For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with him, and they supposed that Paul had brought him into the temple.

21:30 Then all the city was provoked, and the people rushed together, and taking hold of Paul they dragged him out of the temple, and immediately the doors were shut.

James had asked Paul to take a vow with other Jews at the temple in order to demonstrate that he was not opposed to Judaism (21:20-26). However, Paul's attempt to complete his vows placed him in an extremely dangerous situation. Cleansing for the vow would be required at the temple on the third and seventh day. The seventh day is now in view (21:27); Jews in the temple who had come from Asia (probably from Ephesus) recognized Paul and stirred up a crowd against him.

The first charge they made against him was that Paul taught against the law and the temple. The charge is similar to that which was made against Stephen in Acts 6:11–14. The second charge they made was that he brought Greeks into the temple area and defiled it. They believed this to be the case because they recognized Trophimus, the Ephesian, in the city with him, and supposed that Paul had brought him into the temple.

There were four courts in the temple precinct that were arranged concentrically with each court becoming more exclusive the closer to the center it became. The outer court was for the Gentiles, next came the court of the women, then the court of the men, followed by the court of the priests, and finally the Holy of Holies, which was only entered once a year by the High Priest. The Gentiles were only allowed in the court of the Gentiles, not in the main temple area. 4½ ft. tall stone markers inscribed in Greek and Latin were in the outer court that told foreigners they were prohibited from entering the sanctuary, punishable by death.

Seeing Paul with a Gentile earlier proved to the onlookers that Paul did not care about following the law, even though their conclusions were erroneous.

These false accusations parallel the life of Christ; both Paul and Jesus had baseless accusations leveled against them. This also happened to Stephen in Acts 6. What we see in the life of the early believers is that Christians are people who follow in the Lord's steps.

Outraged, they dragged Paul out of the temple and into a common area where a Roman officer stops to

deal with the situation. As Block observes, "this is the last scene dealing with the temple in Acts. It pictures rejection of the one bringing God's message" (Block, 652).

21:31 While they were seeking to kill him, a report came up to the commander of the Roman cohort that all Jerusalem was in confusion.

21:32 At once he took along some soldiers and centurions and ran down to them; and when they saw the commander and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul.

21:33 Then the commander came up and took hold of him, and ordered him to be bound with two chains; and he began asking who he was and what he had done.

The Fortress of Antonia was near the northwest corner of the temple, located outside of any area that was considered sacred, yet in a position where the Romans could keep an eye on things taking place within the temple area. The crowd immediately drew the attention of those in the fortress who vigilantly watched for public disorder, resulting in the Roman commander quickly gathering some soldiers and rushing into the mob to find out what the commotion was all about. As soon as the commanders and the soldiers were seen, the crowd stopped beating Paul. The commander didn't come to save Paul, but to stop a potential riot.

21:34 But among the crowd some were shouting one thing and some another, and when he could not find out the facts because of the uproar, he ordered him to be brought into the barracks.

21:35 When he got to the stairs, he was carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the mob;

21:36 for the multitude of the people kept following them, shouting, "Away with him!"

Every attempt to determine what had happened is obscured by the confusion of the crowd. Thus, the commander arrested Paul, bound him with chains, and returned to the barracks bringing Paul with him. The people followed along crying out, "Away with him!"

The prophecies about Paul have begun to come true, yet Paul is more concerned with a proper representation of the gospel than his own freedom or life. At the same time, he will use what is available to him to defend himself.

Earlier, it had been mentioned that in Acts 20:1 to 21:16 there was a deliberate attempt by Luke to record Paul's final trip to Jerusalem in such a way that it paralleled Jesus' final trip to Jerusalem (see my notes on Acts 18:24-21:16 - Paul's Third Missionary Journey, part 3). The riot and arrest of Paul at the Temple in Acts 21:27-36 is an example of this. This section begins with false accusations and lies being leveled against Paul by the people and ends with the crowds shouting, "Away with him!" Paul's life is laid upon the pattern of Jesus' life (Lk. 23:1-18), and is sublimely showing that the way of faith is the way of the cross.

21:37-22:29 - Paul Defends Himself

21:37 As Paul was about to be brought into the barracks, he said to the commander, "May I say something to you?" And he said, "Do you know Greek?"

21:38 "Then you are not the Egyptian who some time ago stirred up a revolt and led the four thousand men of the Assassins out into the wilderness?"

21:39 But Paul said, "I am a Jew of Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no insignificant city; and I beg you, allow me to speak to the people."

Paul asked if he could speak to the commander who was amazed that he could speak Greek. However, since Greek was not spoken much in Israel, but was spoken widely in Egypt (it was the lingua franca of the day), the commander immediately wondered if Paul was an Egyptian who had led a revolt three years earlier. The question in Greek expects an affirmative answer from Paul. (NOTE: The NASB [above] reads like the commander is affirming that Paul is not the Egyptian. The ESV is preferred: "Are you not the Egyptian, then, who recently stirred up a revolt . . . ?").

Josephus, the Jewish historian, refers to this individual as "an Egyptian false-prophet" who had attracted numerous (30,000) followers in the time of Felix. The Egyptian had said he would bring down the walls of Jerusalem at the command of his voice, and that he and those with him would overpower the Romans. However, when the Romans attacked him as he approached the Mount of Olives, 400 of his followers died and 200 were captured; he escaped and was never seen again. The commander wondered if Paul was the Egyptian who had re-surfaced.

Paul immediately corrected him and said he was a Jew from Tarsus. He then asked if he might be allowed to speak to the people. His request was granted; perhaps the commander was thinking that Paul could calm the crowd if they understood he was not who they thought him to be.

21:40 When he had given him permission, Paul, standing on the stairs, motioned to the people with his hand; and when there was a great hush, he spoke to them in the Hebrew dialect, saying,

22:1 "Brethren and fathers, hear my defense which I now offer to you."

22:2 And when they heard that he was addressing them in the Hebrew dialect, they became even more quiet; and he said,

Paul immediately switched from Greek to Aramaic, addressing the crowd in their mother tongue. When they heard him they instantly quieted.

22:3 "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated under Gamaliel, strictly according to the law of our fathers, being zealous for God just as you all are today.

22:4 "I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and putting both men and women into prisons,

22:5 as also the high priest and all the Council of the elders can testify. From them I also received letters to the brethren, and started off for Damascus in order to bring even those who were there to Jerusalem as prisoners to be punished.

In verses 3-5 Paul gives his autobiography, but one must be careful to see that the dominant theme in this passage is not a focus on Paul, but is a focus on God.

Paul tailors his testimony to the crowd he is addressing. The crowd's complaint was that Paul taught everyone everywhere that he was against the law and the temple. Thus, Paul began by stressing his loyalty to his Jewish origins and faith. He began with his roots. He was born in Tarsus and was educated under the respected teacher Gamaliel. He was trained as a Pharisee which addresses the charge that he had no regard for the law. Paul even pointed out that he was more zealous than the people in the crowd were who were accusing him, for he persecuted the church, even receiving letters from the High Priest and the Council of Elders that granted him permission to bring Christians to Jerusalem as prisoners to be punished or put to death.

22:6 "But it happened that as I was on my way, approaching Damascus about noontime, a very bright light suddenly flashed from heaven all around me,

22:7 and I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?'

22:8 "And I answered, 'Who are You, Lord?' And He said to me, 'I am Jesus the Nazarene, whom you are persecuting.'

22:9 "And those who were with me saw the light, to be sure, but did not understand the voice of the One who was speaking to me.

22:10 "And I said, 'What shall I do, Lord?' And the Lord said to me, 'Get up and go on into Damascus, and there you will be told of all that has been appointed for you to do.'

22:11 "But since I could not see because of the brightness of that light, I was led by the hand by those who were with me and came into Damascus.

Next, Paul recounted how he met Jesus on the road to Damascus.

As he was traveling to Damascus, a very bright light appeared. Considering that it was noon, the brightest time of the day, for the heavenly light to appear bright it had to be intense - brighter than the midday sun. The fact that the light came from heaven suggests that Paul was alluding to the glory of God. The light was so bright that Paul was blinded by it, demonstrating that he had not simply had a vision in his mind.

Those who were present with Paul on the road heard no voice, but saw the bright light. According to Acts 9:7 they did hear a sound, but now we learn that they did not hear it as a voice. These people could also testify that the event had really happened.

It should be pointed out that Paul makes it clear that he wasn't considering believing in Jesus, nor was he seeking Jesus in any way when these things happened; it was just the opposite. He assumed by

persecuting the church he was being faithful to his Jewishness and was a defender of the truth of God. It wasn't Paul's actions, but the act of God that forced him to see differently.

22:12 "A certain Ananias, a man who was devout by the standard of the Law, and well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there,

22:13 came to me, and standing near said to me, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight!' And at that very time I looked up at him.

22:14 "And he said, 'The God of our fathers has appointed you to know His will and to see the Righteous One and to hear an utterance from His mouth.

22:15 'For you will be a witness for Him to all men of what you have seen and heard.

22:16 'Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name.'

In verses 13 and 14 Paul moves to the role of Ananias, a man well-spoken of by the Jews, and a devout man according to the law. It was through him that the Lord restored Paul's sight.

In verse 14 Paul says that God is the one who appointed him "to know His will and to see the Righteous One and to hear an utterance from His mouth"; in other words, Paul's calling came directly from God.

By calling Jesus the Righteous One Paul points to Christ's "exalted position and to the vindication of his innocence that Luke 23 highlighted" (Block, 661).

God's command to Paul was to be a witness and to testify about what he had heard and seen. He was then instructed to be baptized, so that his sins could be washed away by calling upon the name of Jesus.

As Stein says, "'wash away your sins,' suggests that there is not just a temporal but a causal relationship between baptism and the forgiveness of sins" (Stein, *Believers Baptism*, 52). Although one would *not* say that baptism saves people, baptism and faith are so closely connected to each other in time that they are spoken of as a single event.

22:17 "It happened when I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, that I fell into a trance,

22:18 and I saw Him saying to me, 'Make haste, and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about Me.'

Paul then left Damascus and went to the temple, again showing his practice of following the law. While he was in the temple praying, the Lord appeared to him in a vision and told him to leave Jerusalem quickly because the people there would not accept his testimony about Christ. This incident was not mentioned in Acts 9. In Acts 9:29–30, it was the believers in Jerusalem who had uncovered a plot to take Paul's life. Evidently, Paul was prepared to leave with them when they came to take him away to Tarsus.

22:19 "And I said, 'Lord, they themselves understand that in one synagogue after another I used to imprison and beat those who believed in You.

22:20 'And when the blood of Your witness Stephen was being shed, I also was standing by approving, and watching out for the coats of those who were slaying him.'

22:21 "And He said to me, 'Go! For I will send you far away to the Gentiles.'"

Paul initially assumed his testimony would be credible since many knew that he had persecuted the church and had witnessed the martyrdom of Stephen in Acts 9. Christ's response was that he was to leave because mission awaited him in Gentile lands.

The point of Paul's testimony is to demonstrate that the God of Abraham, the God of Paul's accusers, is the one who directed him. It was God who had revealed the Son to Paul; it was God who had appointed Paul to testify of the Messiah; it was God who had sent Paul to the Gentiles. Paul had not abandoned the God of Israel; he was following Him. He had not abandoned the Jewish traditions: he was proclaiming their fulfillment. His faith in Christ was the natural outcome of being a Jew. Jesus, the Messiah, the descendant of the tribe of Judah, the One born in the line of David, the One predicted by the prophets, the One who has been vindicated by God through the resurrection and in His exultation is the One whom Paul was proclaiming.

22:22 They listened to him up to this statement, and then they raised their voices and said, "Away with such a fellow from the earth, for he should not be allowed to live!"

22:23 And as they were crying out and throwing off their cloaks and tossing dust into the air,

22:24 the commander ordered him to be brought into the barracks, stating that he should be examined by scourging so that he might find out the reason why they were shouting against him that way.

Paul's comments did little to convince the crowd; in fact, they responded by shouting that Paul does not deserve to live. The meaning behind throwing off their clothes is unknown. Throwing dust is a sign of grieving over what has been said, suggesting that they heard something blasphemous.

The Romans had heard all that they wanted to hear, and ordered that Paul be taken away and whipped in order to uncover the truth about why the crowds were so hostile toward Paul.

22:25 But when they stretched him out with thongs, Paul said to the centurion who was standing by, "Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman and uncondemned?"

22:26 When the centurion heard this, he went to the commander and told him, saying, "What are you about to do? For this man is a Roman."

22:27 The commander came and said to him, "Tell me, are you a Roman?" And he said, "Yes."

22:28 The commander answered, "I acquired this citizenship with a large sum of money." And Paul said, "But I was actually born a citizen."

22:29 Therefore those who were about to examine him immediately let go of him; and the commander also was afraid when he found out that he was a Roman, and because he had put him in chains.

It was illegal to beat a Roman citizen, so when Paul was about to be scourged he asked about their actions considering that he had not yet had a trial. Paul's comment is immediately reported to avoid violating Paul's rights as a Roman citizen.

Witherington notes that Paul probably waited to reveal his Roman citizenship until he was in a setting where the Jews were not present, since it was his Gentile-like behavior that the Jews objected to.

"We see in the opposition to Paul a traditionalism that ends up distorting the genuine tradition. Part of Paul's defense is that he is defending hopes the Jews have held for a long time. His claim is that the faith he possesses is the natural outcome of genuine Jewish tradition, not the distortion of it that has come to deny the messianic hope that God has confirmed through Jesus's resurrection. One danger of a longtime practice or belief that has established itself as a tradition is that it can undercut the faith it is supposed to support. The unwillingness of Paul's opponents to consider how God's recent activity relates to God's promise and program has made them unwilling and unable to respond to a hope designed for them. This is tradition gone bad. It creates blindness and stubbornness, a deadly combination (Block, 665).