

Acts 22-23

- Paul is being held prisoner by the Roman authorities in Jerusalem
 - He is standing on the stairway between the Outer Court and the Antonia Fortress
 - He is under attack by a crowd of Jews at the Temple
 - And Paul asks permission to speak to the crowd
 - The Roman grants permission, hoping that Paul might say something to explain the situation
 - Paul begins to speak in Hebrew, which means the Romans will not be able to understand what he says
 - And at first the crowd listens

[Acts 22:1](#) ¶ “Brethren and fathers, hear my defense which I now offer to you.”

[Acts 22:2](#) ¶ And when they heard that he was addressing them in the Hebrew dialect, they became even more quiet; and he said,

[Acts 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.

[Acts 22:4](#) “I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and putting both men and women into prisons,

[Acts 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.

- Paul begins his address with respectful words, spoken in Hebrew to get their attention and hide their conversation from Roman ears
 - Here we have Paul's background story
 - He calls himself a Jew
 - Paul had come to know the Lord, but that didn't mean Paul was not a Jew
 - He was born outside Judea but came to the city as a young boy and studied under a famous rabbi

- And his training was according to the strictest traditions, the Pharisaical traditions
- Paul is arguing that he was like them, as zealous for God as they were
 - This is a natural starting point for any testimony concerning faith in the Gospel
 - It may help people understand the message if we begin by explaining we were once them ourselves
 - This is Paul's technique here
- He goes a step further to remind them that he even persecuted the Way, which was Christianity's more common title
 - He persecuted to the death, and even went outside the city to find Christians
- Paul is seeking "street cred" here so that the crowd will appreciate the significance of what Paul will say next
 - The more they understand how much Paul hated the Christians, the more astonishing it will be when they hear that he became one
 - And the more glory God will receive for the work He did to convert Paul
- This is also an important feature in any Christian testimony
 - If we minimize the extent of our sinfulness prior to faith, we diminish God's glory
 - We seem to reduce our need for salvation and thereby decrease God's grace and mercy
 - Instead, we should make clear that grace was the our only hope
- Next Paul gives the testimony we know from earlier in the Book of Acts

Acts 22:6 ¶ "But it happened that as I was on my way, approaching Damascus about noon, a very bright light suddenly flashed from heaven all around me,
Acts 22:7 and I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?'

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

Acts 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.

Acts 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.'

Acts 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.

Acts 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,

Acts 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.

Acts 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.'

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

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

- Paul's testimony of conversion begins with his encounter on the road
 - We know the outline from the earlier account and Paul only adds a few minor details
 - Interestingly, we will see yet another retelling of this story later in the book of Acts before Agrippa
 - Paul tells us that the timing was noon
 - Which means that the brightness of Christ exceeded the brightness of the noon day desert sun
 - In v.14 Paul indicates it was a privilege have been appointed to know God's will, see the Lord and hear Him speak
 - This statement gives us an appreciation for the significance of what it meant to be in the Lord's presence - then and now
 - Clearly, Paul was keen to tell his story of conversion because it was a story of God's mercy on a very sinful man
 - And if a sinful man bent on killing Christians could be arrested by God in such a dramatic way, then surely God can save anyone
 - Secondly, Paul's story validated his claims to have been entrusted with God's message of salvation
 - These were Paul's points as he delivered this testimony

- The final verse in that section has caused confusion for some, who wonder why Paul was told to wash away his sins through baptism
 - As is usually the case, the confusion lies in the translation from Greek to English
 - In this case, there are two pairings established in the text
 - First, “getting up” or rising up was paired with being baptized
 - Paul was commanded to be baptized as soon as he could get up off the ground
 - All believers are similarly commanded to move forward into baptism after faith
 - Secondly, washing away sins and calling on His name are paired
 - As Paul called on the name of the Lord, he was experiencing the washing away of his sins by faith
 - To properly reflect this sense from the Greek language, we need to restructure the sentence to emphasize these pairings
 - “Having arisen, be baptized, and wash away your sins having called on the name of the Lord.”

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

Acts 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.’

Acts 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.

Acts 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.’

Acts 22:21 “And He said to me, ‘Go! For I will send you far away to the Gentiles.’”

- Paul now tells of when he arrived in Jerusalem
 - We know from Acts 9 that Paul visited Jerusalem but Paul’s testimony here is new information concerning what happened while he was in the city
 - In Acts 9:29-30, we read that briefly that Paul was endangered by Jews and so Paul was ushered out of town for his safety

- Paul then relates how he reasoned with the Lord that these people would remember that Paul had been the one to punish the Christians
 - Paul's logic is interesting here
 - He is recounting how in his own mind he assumed that he could reason the Jews into belief
 - And he cited his own testimony and history as a powerful weapon in persuading the Jews to believe the Gospel
 - It's as if Paul is suggesting that the Lord is giving up on the Jews too easily
 - They will eventually come around to Paul's message
 - And Paul says his own personal testimony will be the clinched in making the argument
 - Also, Paul might have been suggesting that his reputation as a killer who hunted Christians might dissuade the Jews from trying to kill him
 - Then Paul gives the Lord's response to his logical argument
 - Paul says the Lord commanded that Paul leave Jerusalem and go to the Gentiles with the message of the Messiah
- Paul clearly spells out his commission to take the Gospel far and wide to the Gentiles
 - He mentioned it here probably to defend his ministry to the Jews and to explain the Jew's hatred for his message
- Paul also must have known the reaction his words would generate with the Jewish crowd

Acts 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!"

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

Acts 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.

Acts 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?"

Acts 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."

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

Acts 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."

Acts 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.

Acts 22:30 ¶ But on the next day, wishing to know for certain why he had been accused by the Jews, he released him and ordered the chief priests and all the Council to assemble, and brought Paul down and set him before them.

- After Paul's statement that the Lord intended for him to reach Gentiles with the message, they had heard enough
 - It was blaspheme to their ears
 - Surely God would never make a way available for Gentiles
 - For these Jews, this statement was proof that Paul was a liar
 - So they call for Paul to be put to death, and the rioting resumes
 - This obviously angers the Roman soldiers, who feel as though Paul has abused their grace and used it against them
 - So they decide to whop Paul until he tells them what he said
- Clearly, Paul has been orchestrating this entire situation to suit his own purposes
 - He has hidden as much as he could from the Romans hoping to gain their protection so he could safely address the Jewish audience
 - Remember, to the Jew *first*, then the Gentile
 - Paul also knew that once he had pushed the Romans' patience too far, he could then reveal his Roman citizenship
 - Thus saving himself from their whips at least in the moment
 - Roman citizens enjoyed a degree of protection under law similar to U.S. citizens today
 - They could not receive punishment without due process

- In this case, it would have been illegal to punish before trial
- And it was also illegal to scourge a Roman citizen under any circumstances
- So Paul asks his carefully worded (and timed) question
 - Paul waits until he is literally stretched out and the whip was being raised to land the first blow
 - He seems to have timed his revelation for the last possible minute so that the centurion was already in violation of Roman law
 - Paul asks is it lawful for them to whip a Roman citizen?
 - The question is rhetorical because the answer is obvious to everyone
 - And the point of Paul's question was to simply state he was a Roman citizen
 - At this the centurion stops and goes immediately to the captain asking why they are whipping a Roman citizen
 - The captain goes to Paul to challenge his statement
 - In Paul's day, a person could acquire a coveted Roman citizenship in one of three ways
 - By Imperial decree for services rendered to the Empire
 - By birth under certain criteria
 - By purchasing it, which was very expensive
 - The captain says he gained his citizenship through the purchase method
 - Implying that Paul couldn't possibly have managed the same
 - He was also implying that if Paul was prepared to lie about purchasing citizenship, the captain was ready to fact check him from personal experience

- Instead, Paul says he was born a Roman citizen, which would have been rare for anyone, much less a Jew
 - Paul's citizenship couldn't have come simply because he was born in Tarsus, as Tarsus was a free city and not a Roman colony
 - He must have been born to parents who were themselves Roman citizens by some means
- The commander is now in a pickle
 - He feels vulnerable to Paul since he put Paul in chains and threatened to whip him
 - Paul could make life difficult for this captain if his mistake was reported
 - Still, he can't let go of Paul, and probably for reasons of pride, he is determined to know what Paul said in the temple
 - So he devises another plan
 - He will let the Jews try their own
 - So he assembles the Jewish council for a hearing on the matter of Paul
 - The captain is hoping that the council will help him get to the bottom of this issue
 - The council would have consisted of mostly Sadducees with a Pharisee minority
- As the council begins to meet, Paul gets off to a bad start with the high priest

Acts 23:1 Paul, looking intently at the Council, said, "Brethren, I have lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day."

Acts 23:2 The high priest Ananias commanded those standing beside him to strike him on the mouth.

Acts 23:3 Then Paul said to him, "God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall! Do you sit to try me according to the Law, and in violation of the Law order me to be struck?"

Acts 23:4 But the bystanders said, "Do you revile God's high priest?"

Acts 23:5 And Paul said, "I was not aware, brethren, that he was high priest; for it is written, 'YOU SHALL NOT SPEAK EVIL OF A RULER OF YOUR PEOPLE.'"

- Paul's opening remark brings a swift and painful rebuke from the high priest

- Ananias commands one of the Jewish attendants standing near Paul to strike him in the mouth
 - They obviously disagree with Paul's statement
- But more than that, Ananias is a particular bad sort
 - Josephus wrote that this man was insolent, hot-tempered, profane and greedy
 - He stole the tithes that were to go to the priests
 - He conspired to instigate outbreaks of violence
 - He maintained his grip on power as high priest because of his strong pro-Rome stance
 - Eventually, he was hated by the people and killed by zealots in AD 66 after found hiding in an aqueduct
- After being struck, Paul responds in anger and indignation, calling the high priest a whitewashed wall, similar to the term Jesus used for Pharisees
 - He was declaring that the high priest was clean only on the outside
 - And Paul rightly points out that striking him was itself a violation of law, so that the one striking the supposed law breaker was the one breaking the law
- Paul cleverly points out that they violate the law when they strike him
 - And they point out that Paul had insulted the high priest?
 - This man was not truly God's high priest, since the Lord was now our high priest
 - Nevertheless, Paul gives a defense saying he was unaware that this man was the high priest and would show him respect
 - How would Paul have not known the high priest?
 - Several reasons come to mind, including Paul's long time absence from the city and the likelihood that the council was called quickly

- The high priest was probably not dressed in his garb
- Now we are treated to one of Paul's most clever manipulations of his enemies
 - He cleverly pits the Sadducees and the Pharisees against one another

Acts 23:6 ¶ But perceiving that one group were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, Paul began crying out in the Council, "Brethren, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees; I am on trial for the hope and resurrection of the dead!"

Acts 23:7 As he said this, there occurred a dissension between the Pharisees and Sadducees, and the assembly was divided.

Acts 23:8 For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor an angel, nor a spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all.

Acts 23:9 And there occurred a great uproar; and some of the scribes of the Pharisaic party stood up and began to argue heatedly, saying, "We find nothing wrong with this man; suppose a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?"

- Paul claims affiliation with the Pharisees and then proclaims that he has found himself in this position because he preaches the hope of resurrection
 - This is so clever on Paul's part because it's a true statement but one designed to turn Pharisee against Sadducee
 - As Luke explains, the Sadducees would not accept the reality of resurrection
 - The Pharisees did believe in resurrection
 - So the two groups were often at odds over the difference
 - Paul's statement pours salt in the wound between the two groups and causes the Pharisee to side with Jesus and against the other members of the council
 - Of course, what Paul said was accurate
 - He does preach the hope of resurrection of the dead through Christ
 - What the Pharisees heard instead was that the Sadducees had a hand in arresting Paul because they disagreed with this political views
 - This was the reaction Paul was counting on
 - When the Pharisees heard Paul reference resurrection, they ran to his side and declared Paul had done nothing wrong

- The Pharisees believed in the resurrection of the dead, but the Sadducees didn't
- So when Paul claimed to be persecuted for that belief, he immediately gained the Pharisees as allies and drive a wedge in the council
- The Pharisees even offer a defense on Paul's behalf, that his unbelievable claims might have been delivered to him by an angel
 - Since Sadducees didn't believe in angels either, the Pharisees were taking full advantage of the situation to embarrass the Sadducees
 - This claim fans the flames and the crowd erupts again
- Things are just about to get out of control when the Romans step in again

Acts 23:10 And as a great dissension was developing, the commander was afraid Paul would be torn to pieces by them and ordered the troops to go down and take him away from them by force, and bring him into the barracks.

Acts 23:11 ¶ But on the night immediately following, the Lord stood at his side and said, "Take courage; for as you have solemnly witnessed to My cause at Jerusalem, so you must witness at Rome also."

Acts 23:12 ¶ When it was day, the Jews formed a conspiracy and bound themselves under an oath, saying that they would neither eat nor drink until they had killed Paul.

Acts 23:13 There were more than forty who formed this plot.

Acts 23:14 They came to the chief priests and the elders and said, "We have bound ourselves under a solemn oath to taste nothing until we have killed Paul."

Acts 23:15 "Now therefore, you and the Council notify the commander to bring him down to you, as though you were going to determine his case by a more thorough investigation; and we for our part are ready to slay him before he comes near the place."

- The Romans rescue Paul from certain death and lead him away for a night in prison
 - They probably wonder what to do with him, since he causes an uproar in the city every time he is released
 - As Paul spends the night in the prison, the Lord comforts him and assures him that this is part of a plan to move him to Rome
 - The Lord's words reaffirm that Paul was right to head into Jerusalem, despite the warnings

- And now Jesus says his next mission target will be Rome
 - God has arranged it for that the Romans provide free, guarded transport for Paul to reach Rome
 - And we can see already why it was necessary for Paul to be guarded on the way, for the Jews were determined to kill him
- A group of about 40 Jews conspire to kill Paul the next day
 - They are bound by an oath, or the literal meaning of the Greek is curse
 - They say they will be subject to a curse if they do not perform the act they are planning
 - The curse is that they will not have food or drink until Paul is dead, indicating that the act must happen quickly
 - Since we know this conspiracy failed, as do all the Jewish conspiracies against Paul, what happened to these men?
 - Typically, these men would have been released from their vow by the Sanhedrin on the basis of "constraint" or the impossibility of fulfilling the vow
 - Like the rest of their dealings with the Law and tradition, the Jewish leadership would bend and ignore the rules of vows when it suited them

Acts 23:16 ¶ But the son of Paul's sister heard of their ambush, and he came and entered the barracks and told Paul.

Acts 23:17 Paul called one of the centurions to him and said, "Lead this young man to the commander, for he has something to report to him."

Acts 23:18 So he took him and led him to the commander and said, "Paul the prisoner called me to him and asked me to lead this young man to you since he has something to tell you."

Acts 23:19 The commander took him by the hand and stepping aside, began to inquire of him privately, "What is it that you have to report to me?"

Acts 23:20 And he said, "The Jews have agreed to ask you to bring Paul down tomorrow to the Council, as though they were going to inquire somewhat more thoroughly about him."

Acts 23:21 "So do not listen to them, for more than forty of them are lying in wait for him who have bound themselves under a curse not to eat or drink until they slay him; and now they are ready and waiting for the promise from you."

Acts 23:22 So the commander let the young man go, instructing him, "Tell no one that you have notified me of these things."

Acts 23:23 And he called to him two of the centurions and said, "Get two hundred soldiers ready by the third hour of the night to proceed to Caesarea, with seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen."

Acts 23:24 They were also to provide mounts to put Paul on and bring him safely to Felix the governor.

- Paul evidently had a sister living in Jerusalem, and she may have been Paul's host at times when he stayed in the city
 - Her son had become aware of this plot
 - Based on v.19, it seems he was a young boy rather than an adult
 - So it's likely that he was nearby when the plot was hatched and his presence was ignored because of his age
 - But the boy understood the seriousness of the situation and went to the jail to tell Paul
 - As a relative of Paul's the boy would have been granted access to Paul
 - We can clearly see God's hand in this circumstance
 - He is working to thwart Paul's enemies and using children to accomplish His work
 - I find moments like this in Scripture to be very very encouraging
 - They remind me that the Lord can work through everything and everyone to bring about His good purposes in our lives
 - He sends friends with a word, neighbors, even strangers
 - He places information in our path in a variety of ways
 - He reveals His will and shows us our sin from the mouth of babes
 - But we must be attentive to that work and recognize that these incidents of everyday life are, in fact, God at work
 - In this case, the need to act was obvious, but yet Paul might have easily dismissed the boy's story or assumed that God would save Paul without the need for Paul to take measures
 - But this boy's report WAS the way the Lord intended to save Paul

- So Paul act upon what he heard
- Paul sends the boy to the captain, who listens to the story and recognizes the danger
 - Sensing that the episode was quickly growing out of control, he wisely decides to get Paul out of town while he could
 - And he assembles a large contingent of 470 soldiers and leaves in the third hour of the night, or 9-10 PM
 - Felix was the governor, who resided in the provincial seat at Caesarea
 - During the time of Jesus, Pontus Pilate was governor
 - Now it's Felix, and later before Paul dies it becomes Festus
 - Ultimately, Paul is in Roman custody for nine years before he is killed

Acts 23:25 And he wrote a letter having this form:

Acts 23:26 "Claudius Lysias, to the most excellent governor Felix, greetings.

Acts 23:27 "When this man was arrested by the Jews and was about to be slain by them, I came up to them with the troops and rescued him, having learned that he was a Roman.

Acts 23:28 "And wanting to ascertain the charge for which they were accusing him, I brought him down to their Council;

Acts 23:29 and I found him to be accused over questions about their Law, but under no accusation deserving death or imprisonment.

Acts 23:30 "When I was informed that there would be a plot against the man, I sent him to you at once, also instructing his accusers to bring charges against him before you."

- To explain Paul's arrival, Claudius writes a letter to Felix
 - Felix's family has an interesting history
 - He and his brother were both famous members of Roman society
 - Having been slaves originally, they both became freemen under Claudius the Emperor
 - Felix was the emperor's childhood friend
 - In just seven years, Felix had moved from slave to procurator of Judea

- His quick rise left him ill-prepared for the responsibilities of his office
 - Historians of the time said he exercised the power of a king with the mind of a slave
- He was a man of lust, having three wives at the time, and marrying another later
- He married into a family of despots
 - One father-in-law was the man who killed the Apostle James and imprisoned Peter
- Felix himself assassinated a high priest during his reign
- The letter defends Paul and explains his transfer as a protective act on Paul's behalf
 - Since Paul was a citizen, the Roman state was obligated to protect him from the Jews
 - We notice that his greeting of Felix matches Luke's greeting of Theophilus, suggesting that Theophilus was also a Roman official
 - The Roman captain also paints his actions in the best possible light, saying he came to Paul's rescue because he knew Paul was a citizen
 - This wasn't true, but it was close enough
 - The captain also says that Paul's accusers would travel to Caesarea to make their case against Paul
 - So Felix would have the responsibility of conducting a Roman trial

[Acts 23:31](#) ¶ So the soldiers, in accordance with their orders, took Paul and brought him by night to Antipatris.

[Acts 23:32](#) But the next day, leaving the horsemen to go on with him, they returned to the barracks.

[Acts 23:33](#) When these had come to Caesarea and delivered the letter to the governor, they also presented Paul to him.

[Acts 23:34](#) When he had read it, he asked from what province he was, and when he learned that he was from Cilicia,

[Acts 23:35](#) he said, "I will give you a hearing after your accusers arrive also," giving orders for him to be kept in Herod's Praetorium.

- Paul is marched 35 miles to Antipatris, and he probably arrived sometime the next day
 - At this point, the bulk of the guard return leaving only the horsemen to escort Paul
 - At this point, they were away from the mountainous terrain and into the valleys, where it would be easier to protect Paul
 - When they arrived, Paul was delivered to the procurator
 - Felix first asks if Paul was from a region under his authority
 - Felix had authority over an area that included parts of Syria and Judea
 - Paul states he was from Cilicia, the region where Tarsus was located
 - This region did fall under Felix's jurisdiction, so he agrees to hear the case
 - He orders Paul held until the accusers arrive
- Next chapter begins the trial, with the high priest himself acting as Paul's accuser
 - And after this trial, a two-year period of imprisonment in Caesarea begins, which includes a change in procurator