

Paul's Apology

Acts 22



In our last study we saw Paul ending his third missionary journey by delivering a gift from the Macedonian churches to the struggling Christian church in Jerusalem. When meeting with the Elders of the Jerusalem church Paul was told that it was being said that he taught Jews to forsake Moses. They asked him to prove his Jewishness but paying for four Jewish mens vows.

When Paul entered the temple to take part in a Jewish traditional practice, he was verbally attacked by a group of Asian Jews who were in Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost. Upon seeing the apostle in the temple, they cried out:



"Hear my defense"—the word defense is from the Greek *apologia* from which we get apologetics. It means: "a speech in defense of".

***"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."* (Acts 21:28 NASB)**

Their four-fold charge was entirely false, but it had the desired effect; the mob dragged Paul out of the temple and began beating him.

The nearby Roman guard stepped in immediately and carried Paul away from the angry crowd as they were about to beat him to death. As the Roman soldiers were carrying Paul in the fort, Paul asked to speak to the crowd. The Roman commander gave him permission to do so.

From chapter 21 on, he becomes a prisoner; and from here on out until his death, he remains a prisoner. So we see Paul from chapter 21 to the end of the book in chapter 28 as a prisoner. Now during the time of his being a prisoner, he gives six different defenses of himself, of his actions and of his attitudes. The first such defense is given here in chapter 22.

The bloodied, bruised, Paul who would have to be in great pain

***...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,* (Acts 21:40 NASB)**

***"Brethren and fathers, hear my defense which I now offer to you."* (Acts 22:1 NASB)**

Paul's opening statement is strikingly similar to the words that He heard Stephen use many years before, ***Stephen said, "Hear me, brethren and fathers!"*** ([Acts 7:2](#)).

This man they had just tried to beat to death addresses this angry crowd in a very respectful manner. Remember we closed last week by saying that Paul loved the Jewish people. Paul is fleshing out here what he preached to others. He had written to the Corinthians telling them the importance of love and he described it this way:

***Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.* (1 Corinthians 13:4-7 NASB)**

The first thing Paul says about love is that it is *patient*. This is the Greek word *makrothumeo*, this word as it is used in the NT is a word that almost on every occasion conveys the idea of *having an infinite capacity to be injured without paying back*. It is used with regard to people, not circumstances. It's having a long fuse. The loving person is able to be inconvenienced or taken advantage of by a person and yet not be upset or angry. How do you respond when mistreated by others? Are you patient?

Paul says that Love is "*not provoked*"—the Greek word used here is *paroxuno*, it means to arouse to anger and is the origin of the English word *paroxysm*, a convulsion or sudden outburst of emotion or action.

Paul's final word in this section, love "*endures all things*." This is from the Greek *hupomeno*, it is a military term that has to do with being *positioned in the middle of a violent battle; to stay under, remain, have fortitude, persevere*. Love stands against incredible opposition and still loves. Love never quits; it never gives up on anyone. It cares too much to give up.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians the importance of love and now he shows us a loving man in a very difficult situation. How do you react to hostility? Is your reaction biblical?

***"Brethren and fathers, hear my defense which I now offer to you."* (Acts 22:1 NASB)**

Paul says, "*Hear my defense*"—the word defense is from the Greek *apologia* from which we get apologetics. It means: "*a speech in defense of*". Paul is not apologizing as we may think of it, he is giving a defense.

So there he stands at the top of the stairs. The crowd halfway up the stairs and filling the entire courtyard, jammed in there. He's got chains on his hands. He's surrounded by Roman soldiers. There's blood all over his clothes from the beating, and his skin is all puffed and bruised, and the mob is now silent as he holds his hand up, and he speaks his defense, and it is a masterpiece. The basis of his defense is that all through his life to this point he had acted as a true Jew, in obedience to the God of the Jews.

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

When they realized that he was speaking in Hebrew, an even greater hush resulted.

Why did Paul speak to this crowd in the Hebrew language, when only a part of this crowd could understand this language, and all others would have no idea what was said? In the first place, it was a mark of respect for Jewish nationality which they were not prepared to expect from Paul.

Speaking to this crowd in Hebrew excluded the Hellenistic Jews, the very ones who had taken the initiative in the arrest and stoning of Stephen years before, and who had also taken the initiative in Paul's arrest now. The ability to read and speak in Hebrew set the "native Hebrew" apart from the "[Hellenistic Jew](#)." If you asked a "native Hebrew" about this he would tell you this set him above the "Hellenistic Jew."

Why address only one part of this crowd, when speaking to them in Greek would have enabled virtually all present to hear Paul's testimony? If Paul could convince these Jews, who were the dominant religious leaders in this city, the opposition of the Hellenistic Jews would fade away. The Hellenistic Jews had called upon these men, these, "men of Israel" for their aid. Without their aid, Hellenistic opposition would not have enough strength to do away with Paul.

This also kept the Roman commander and his troops from knowing what Paul was saying. Here is Paul's apology:

***"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 22:3 NASB)**

He was born in [Tarsus of Cilicia](#) where there were large numbers of respected Jews, and his family was so 'Jewish' that they arranged for him to be educated in Jerusalem.



Hence he is not against the Jewish people. He was brought up in Jerusalem. One can hardly expect the son of Diaspora Jews, returned to Jerusalem for his formative years, to be against the temple.

Educated under Gamaliel—Gamaliel was the leader of the school of Hillel, one of the two most influential parties within Pharisaism. He had been a protégé of Hillel, who was his grandfather. People called him Rabban Gamaliel. Rabban (lit. "our teacher") was a title of higher honor than rabbi (lit. "my teacher"). Gamaliel was the most respected Pharisee of his day. The **Mishnah**, a collection of commentaries on the oral laws of Israel published toward the end of the second century A.D., contains the following statement about him: "*Since Rabban Gamaliel the elder died, there has been no more reverence for the law; and purity and abstinence died out at the same time.*"

You couldn't have a better educational background than to be brought up at the feet of Gamaliel.

So here were these characters from Asia Minor saying that he is against the law, and he says, I was trained, "*strictly according to the law of our fathers.*" Now, listen to what he adds. "*Being zealous for God just as you all are today*". Do you see what he is doing here? He justifies their motives for beating him. He's basically saying, "*I know why you're beating me up. It is because you think this is pleasing to God. I used to be zealous for God just like you.*" Then he proves it by saying:

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

He tells them that he was not a person who was from the beginning in support of Christian doctrine—he tried to stomp it out. Christianity became known as the Way. It's easy to understand, isn't it? Jesus had said in the last night before His death, "*I am the Way.*"

Paul had hunted down Christians and had committed them to prison, even the women. For a Pharisee to trifle with women was zeal indeed, for to a Pharisee women were of little account. And he had sought the death penalty on many. Paul tells them, I used to do just what you are doing. I used to persecute Christians all over the place. And all because of his zeal for God.

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. (Acts 22:5 NASB)

Paul here basically says, talk to the high priest and the Sanhedrin, they can tell you about my zeal for Judaism. They gave me authority to hunt down and destroy Christians.

So his credentials as a Jew, and as a zealous Jew, were impeccable. None had been more zealous than he. **And his only desire had been to serve God.** This alone must prove his genuineness. And then something had happened which had changed the whole course of his life, he met the risen Christ.

"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, 7 and I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?' (Acts 22:6-7 NASB)

Paul's account of his conversion here is unique in several ways. First, this is the first time in Acts that Paul has given an account of his conversion. This account in chapter 22 is a "first person" ("I") account. Luke's account in chapter 9 was a "third person" ("he") account.

Blinding at noontime and being cast to the ground, picture the spiritual judgment under which the zealous Paul found himself. The reference to noon might have been intended to remind the knowledgeable among his hearers of Moses' words in Deuteronomy 28:

"The LORD will smite you with madness and with blindness and with bewilderment of heart; and you will grope at noon, as the blind man gropes in darkness, and you will not prosper in your ways; but you shall only be oppressed and robbed continually, with none to save you. (Deuteronomy 28:28-29 NASB)

This blindness at noon meant that this zealous Jew was under the curse of God as a covenant breaker. They should have recognized that they too were under the curse of God even though they were zealous for God.

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

Can you imagine all those Jews standing there listening to that? Jesus the Nazarene? They had condemned, killed and buried Jesus the Nazarene. But then there were those stories of His resurrection. Whatever else this proved, it demonstrated that Jesus was alive and in heaven and approved of by God, for here He spoke from God. It was proclaiming the living, resurrected and enthroned Lord, Jesus the Nazarene.

This was also a strong hint to the crowd. They too were persecuting Jesus when they persecuted Paul.

"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 22:9 NASB)

Now, he basically says, ***"Look, if you don't believe that this happened, you find those guys who went with me to capture those Christians and they'll tell you that it happened."***

"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 22:10 NASB)

Notice that the things that Paul is going to do are things that are ***"appointed"*** for him. ***"Tasso"*** is the same word that is used in Acts chapter 13 in verse 48, where it is said that those whom God had appointed to eternal life believed.

Paul was not considering the claims of Christ as he marched toward Damascus that day. He had not been re-reading his Bible in light of the life, death, and claimed resurrection of Jesus, to see if the ancient prophecies pointed to Jesus as Israel's Messiah. He was not unhappy with his life in Judaism, searching for another way. Rather, he was militantly defending the Jewish faith, seeking to rid it of the blight of these heretics who claimed that Jesus was the Christ.

God didn't say, ***"Oh Paul, I'd really like you to be My apostle, but I'm not going to force your will. You have to exercise your free will to choose Me!"*** There are many who say that the reason that God chose Paul, or that He chooses anyone, is that He foresees that the person will one day choose to follow Him. But to say this is to base God's sovereign election on the fallen will of man, ignoring the plain biblical truth that unless God *first* does a work of grace in our hearts, no one would ever choose Him. No one comes to Jesus unless the Father ***draws*** him:

"No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day. (John 6:44 NASB)

Paul tells them that despite his hostility to Christianity he was converted against his will. This is the testimony of a hostile witness, which, in a court of law carries greater weight than any other kind.

If you ever have any doubt about who initiates salvation, just remember the conversion of Paul. Here is a guy who was going one way when God invaded his life—and the guy didn't even enact his will, except to say, ***"Who are you, and what do I do?"*** And God is already reversing his entire life. Salvation is an act of God.

"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. 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, 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 22:11-13 NASB)

Ananias was not a marginal Jew. He was a keeper of the Law of Moses and had a good reputation in the Jewish community in Damascus. The key role Ananias played in Paul's conversion demonstrates to the audience that being a pious Jew and being a Christian convert are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

"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 22:14 NASB)

Again, the term ***"appointed"*** suggests that God has had his hand on Paul for a long, long time. As he will say in his Epistle to the Galatians, ***"From the time of his mother's womb."*** And, of course, as he says in other places, ***"From the ages past."***

Notice who appointed Paul, ***“The God of our fathers”*** Not a different God. You get the point? It's the God of Israel. It's a devout Jew. It's a zealous Pharisee. See, this whole transformation is all involving features of Judaism. This title for God is distinctly Jewish.

Ananias used the messianic title the Righteous One ([Jer 23:5-6](#); [33:15](#); [Zech 9:9](#); [Acts 3:14](#); [7:52](#)). This points to the heart of the gospel: the risen, exalted Jesus of Nazareth, whom Paul sees, is the vindicated victim of an innocent death.

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

That is what he is doing right now—witnessing to what he had seen and heard. That is of the life, sacrificial death, resurrection and enthronement of Jesus Christ as Lord and Messiah.

Now, when he says to “all men” he obviously does not mean all men without exception, but as the context makes very plain, all men without distinction. That is, both Jews and Gentiles because he has been appointed apostle of the Gentiles.

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

It's not uncommon for people to suggest this text teaches that the way we get our sins washed away is by being baptized in water. Now, if you read this passage in the original text, you will find that the word translated here ***“calling”*** is a participial in form. It's what is called *an adverbial participle* or as some grammarians refer to as a *circumstantial participle*—and then, attached to it, the nuance that appears in the text.

Now remember, we don't have punctuation makes in the original text. Let's eliminate the comma after ***“wash away thy sins.”*** An editor added that—Luke didn't put it there. So let's read it this way. ***“Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized and wash away your sin by calling on His name.”*** Now, in that case, we have the washing away of sins linked with calling on the name of the Lord. That is a personal faith, calling on the Lord. That's the way that text should be read. Baptism doesn't wash away sins. Faith does.

The most unique part of Paul's account of his conversion is to be found in verses 17-21 and nowhere else in the Scriptures.

'It happened when I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, that I fell into a trance, (Acts 22:17 NASB)

Paul remained loyal to the temple; he is praying in the temple upon his return to Jerusalem. So Paul is clearly not anti-temple.

So Paul had been fully dedicated to God from birth; he had been taught by the greatest teacher in the land; he had been humbled by the glory of the Lord; he had heard the voice of the Lord; he had seen the resurrected Lord; he would receive visions in a trance; and his experience had been confirmed by a pious and revered Jew. What more evidence did they need?

and I saw Him saying to me, 'Make haste, and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about Me.' 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.'*** 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.'*** ²¹ ***'And He said to me, 'Go! For I will send you far away to the Gentiles.'"*** (Acts 22:18-21 NASB)

It took a vision from God to make Paul responsive to the appeal of his brethren to leave Jerusalem. He was convinced that the people would listen to him, since he was “one of them” before, but the Lord told him this was not to be the case. Thus, when divinely instructed of the futility of evangelizing his peers, Paul left Jerusalem, knowing that he was being sent to the Gentiles.

In verses 18-21, Paul speaks of his vision as a dialogue, not a monologue. The first words are spoken by the Lord, interrupted, as it were by a protest from Paul. Then, after Paul's interruption, the Lord speaks again. The command to “go to the Gentiles” was linked with a parallel command to ***“Get out of Jerusalem”***. Paul was telling his peers that the time of their blessings was coming to an end due to their unbelief, and that times of blessings were coming to the Gentiles.

'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 22:22 NASB)

What happened? That a heavenly vision in the temple would send Paul to the Gentiles was an unthinkable, blasphemous notion. The crowd reacted to this "red flag" vocally, even turbulently. Raising their voices to drown Paul out, they took up again their cry "Away with him!"

Of all the things that he could have said to that audience in the temple area, the thing that he said was probably the worst thing, so far as his own safety was concerned.

He didn't have to say that, you know. But he said it. He said it because that was God's word to him. He knew what the reaction of the crowd would be but he said it anyway.

There are things that we can avoid saying, so as not to upset the people. **We can avoid talking about the Sovereignty of God or the first century second coming of Christ.** We can avoid the things that disturb people, the controversial subjects. But if we are faithful to the word of God, and if we follow the example of Paul, we do not do that. We will speak the truth of God no matter what the masses may think.

Why did they get so upset when Paul talked about taking the gospel to the Gentiles?

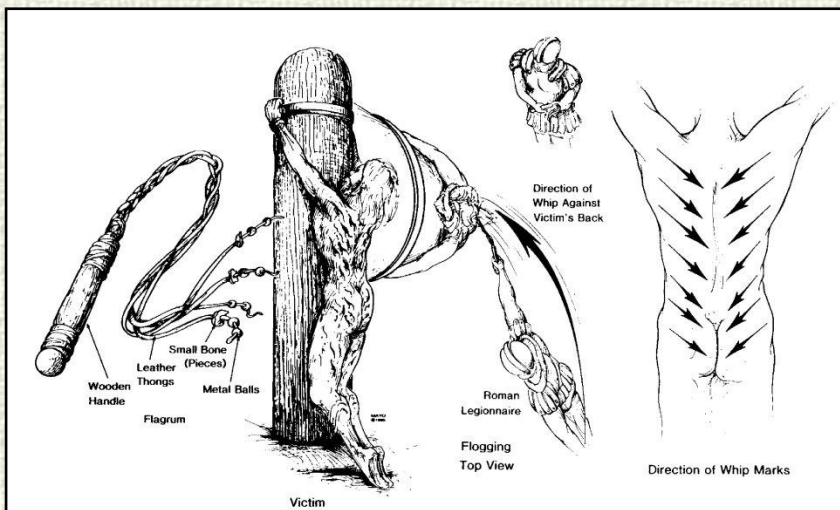
Jews had taken messages from God to the Gentiles many times in Israel's past (e.g., Jonah; the Pharisees, [Matt. 23:15](#); et al.). That revelation could not have been what infuriated Paul's audience. What upset them was that Paul was approaching Gentiles directly about the Messiah without first introducing them to Judaism and its institutions. This was equivalent to placing Gentiles on the same footing before God as Jews, and this was the height of apostasy to the traditional Jewish mind. [The city that had killed the prophets](#) and [crucified the Son of God](#) had not changed.

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

All of a sudden this quiet crowd goes nuts. These poor Romans had not understood a word that Paul has said to these people, because he has spoken in Aramaic. And when the place all of a sudden erupts he does not know what to make of it.

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 22:24 NASB)

Though Paul had been beaten five times by the Jews and felt the Roman Lictors' rods three times, this scourging would eclipse all these in its severity. In scourging, a whip of thongs studded with pieces of bone or metal, attached to a wooden handle, was applied repeatedly to the back of a person positioned on the floor, at a pillar or suspended from the ceiling. It was very possible that a person could not survive scourging. And if he did survive, he might be maimed for life.



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?" 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 22:25-26 NASB)

Paul here uses his get out of jail free card, which is his Roman citizenship.

The commander came and said to him, "Tell me, are you a Roman?" And he said, "Yes." 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 22:27-28 NASB)

For someone to claim to be a Roman citizen when they were not, was a capital crime and made them subject to summary execution. His citizenship could be proved from citizenship records, so it would be foolish for a non-Roman citizen to make such a claim. Because most citizens did not travel far from their hometown, they did not normally carry with them proof of citizenship. But a traveler such as Paul may have carried a copy of his birth registration.

During the reign of [Emperor Claudius](#) (A.D. 41-54) it was possible to obtain Roman citizenship for a high price. As the son of a Roman citizen, Paul inherited this status. Born citizens enjoyed greater respect than Romans who had bought their citizenship.

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 22:29 NASB)

Rome becomes the tool of God, not only to protect Paul and to promote the gospel which he preached, but also to chasten His disobedient people, Israel.

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. (Acts 22:30 NASB)

The commander released Paul from his chains but kept him in custody. He decided the Sanhedrin could discover why the Jews were accusing Paul since he could not figure this out. In chapter 23 we see Paul's defense before the Jewish Sanhedrin.

Having described hearing from Jesus the Nazarene from heaven, Paul will now continually proclaim the hope of the resurrection. This proclamation is found in [Acts 23:6](#); [24:15](#); [26:6-8](#). It will then be followed by a further description of the risen Jesus to Paul ([Acts 26:12-18](#)). So from his arrest in Jerusalem to his commencement of his journey to Rome, is one long proclamation of the resurrection from the dead.

This message was preached by [David B. Curtis](#) on May 2, 2010. Media #504.



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