

**Woodland Baptist Church**  
**May 29, 2013 - Wednesday Night in the Word**  
**Acts 21:37-22:21 Paul's Testimony in the Temple**

**1) OPENING REMARKS**

a) Following his three epic journeys Luke describes the five trials Paul had to endure.<sup>1</sup>

i) Jewish crowd at the northwest corner of the temple area (22:1)

ii) Supreme Jewish Council in Jerusalem (23:1)

iii) Caesarea before Felix (24:1)

iv) Caesarea before Festus (25:1)

v) Caesarea before King Herod Agrippa (26:1)

b) Remember the similarities between Jesus and Paul:

i) Were rejected by their own people, arrested without cause and imprisoned.

ii) Were unjustly accused and willfully misrepresented by false witnesses.

iii) Were slapped in the face in court.

iv) Were hapless victims of secret Jewish plots.

v) Heard the terrifying noise of a frenzied mob screaming 'away with him.'

vi) Were subjected to a series of five trials - Jesus by Annas, the Sanhedrin, King Herod Antipas and twice by Pilate [5]; Paul by the crowd, the Sanhedrin, King Herod Agrippa II and by the two procurators, Felix and Festus[5].<sup>2</sup>

**2) READ ACTS 21:37-22:21**

**3) Verses 37-40 - Paul's Request to Speak**

a) **37 As Paul was about to be brought into the barracks, he said to the tribune, "May I say something to you?" And he said, "Do you know Greek? 38 Are you not the Egyptian, then, who recently stirred up a revolt and led the four thousand men of the Assassins out into the wilderness?" 39 Paul replied, "I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no obscure city. I beg you, permit me to speak to the people." 40 And when he had given him permission, Paul, standing on the steps, motioned with his hand to the people. And when there was a great hush, he addressed them in the Hebrew language, saying,**

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<sup>1</sup>Stott - Commentary on Acts

<sup>2</sup>Stott - commentary on Acts

- (1) Josephus also spoke of this Egyptian. According to him, the Egyptian was a false prophet who stirred up a following of some 30,000 “dupes” (ēpatēmenōn), led them into the wilderness and from there to the Mount of Olives, where he promised that the walls of Jerusalem would fall at his command and allow them easy subjugation of the Roman force. Instead of Jerusalem’s walls falling, Felix arrived on the scene with heavy troops, killed four hundred of them, took another two hundred captive, and put the Egyptian and the rest to flight. This was just one of the many incidents of unrest and political foment Josephus related as having occurred during the tenure of Felix. The difference between Luke’s 4,000 and Josephus’s 30,000 is most likely evidence of Josephus’s tendency to give exaggerated figures.<sup>3</sup>
- (2) Sicarri terrorists - Arising in the time of Felix, they derived their name from the Latin word *sica*, meaning dagger. Their practice was to mingle in large crowds on special occasions, plunge the daggers into their pro-Roman political enemies, and then quickly disappear into the crowd. It is easy to see how Lysias might have confused Paul with these movements. He had witnessed many of them rise and fall. He naturally associated them with crowds and riots like the one surrounding Paul.<sup>4</sup>

### Paul’s Speech to the Temple Crowd

Paul’s speech before the temple crowd was primarily aimed at establishing his full commitment to Judaism. What he evidently could not accomplish through his participation in the Nazirite vow he now sought to establish by this address. Basically, the speech was his own first-person narration of the events Luke related in chap. 9:

\*his former zeal for Judaism (vv. 1–5)

\*his encounter with the risen Christ on the Damascus road (vv. 6–11)

\*the visit of Ananias (vv. 12–16)

\*The final portion of his speech is new to the Acts narrative but evidently occurred on Paul’s first visit to Jerusalem after his conversion, the visit covered by 9:26–30

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<sup>3</sup> Polhill

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

#### 4) Verses 1-5 The PRE-CHRIST Paul, the Persecutor

##### a) **“Brothers and fathers, hear the defense that I now make before you.”**

i) Paul described his address in formal language as a “defense” (apologia). His speech did not, however, address the charge that started the riot—that he had desecrated the temple. It did address the larger issue—Paul’s faithfulness to Judaism..Paul is shown to be a faithful Jew, particularly when one agrees with him that faith in the risen Christ is the true culmination of Judaism.<sup>5</sup>

ii) **2 And when they heard that he was addressing them in the Hebrew language,they became even more quiet. And he said: 3 “I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated at the feet of Gamaliel according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God as all of you are this day.**

(1) *Hebrew language...became more quiet* - the Jews that were enraged over this accusation of temple violation would have immediately been temporarily silenced when they heard the accused address them in their native tongue, especially during a time when the universal language was Greek.

(2) *I am a Jew born in Tarsus in Cilicia* - Paul was from a large city and ethnically had Jewish blood - he had every right to be in the temple courts.

(3) *Brought up in this city* - Paul indicates that he was raised in Jerusalem, so since he was a child he had been familiar with the landscape of Jerusalem, the customs of the city and most likely some of those in the temple court that day had possibly stood with him at some point, no doubt many knew him as a traitor.

(a) It underscores the point Paul wanted to make to the Jerusalem crowd: he was no Diaspora maverick but was nurtured from childhood in the holy city itself.<sup>6</sup>

(4) *Educated at the feet of Gamaliel according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers* - [Acts 5:34, Gamaliel reference] - Paul is letting his audience know that not only was he a resident of Jerusalem, but he came to Jerusalem for a very distinct purpose - theological study and not only theological study, but study from one of the greatest rabbis to ever serve in Judaism.

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<sup>5</sup> Polhill

<sup>6</sup> Polhill

(a) The Gamaliel in question here was Gamaliel I, who is referred to in several places in the rabbinic literature, though surprisingly sparsely for a man of his stature. He was the son or grandson of the famous Hillel and seemed to have been at the prime of his influence from about a.d. 25–50. Rabbinic tradition gives him the title of Nasi, or president of the high court, and has his son Simeon follow him in that role. His grandson Gamaliel II held the presidency after a.d. 90, when the court met at Jamnia. Perhaps nowhere is the esteem in which he was held better expressed than in the following statement of the Mishna: “When Rabban Gamaliel the Elder died, the glory of the Law ceased and purity and abstinence died.” For Christians he is best known through his pupil, Paul (Acts 22:3).<sup>7</sup>

(5) *being zealous for God as all of you are this day* - Paul is in a sense praising them for their zeal in this very situation because if there had truly been a purposeful defilement of the temple, it should be punished by law.

(a) Again, this is the very point Paul wanted to underscore with the Jerusalem Jews: far from being a lawbreaker, as they were now accusing him (21:21, 28), Paul’s former life had been marked by a zeal for the law that matched or exceeded their own.<sup>8</sup>

(b) **Philippians 3:4-6** - If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: 5 circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; 6 as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

**iii) 4 I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering to prison both men and women, 5 as the high priest and the whole council of elders can bear me witness. From them I received letters to the brothers, and I journeyed toward Damascus to take those also who were there and bring them in bonds to Jerusalem to be punished.**

(1) *Persecuted this Way to the death* - Paul in his zeal (the same zeal they were showing “this day”) was what caused him to persecute the followers of Jesus - the Apostles and those that followed them [Acts 8-9].

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid

<sup>8</sup> Ibid

- (a) Christianity was called the “Way” - [odos] - hodos.
- (2) *binding and delivering to prison both men and women* - Paul literally imprisoned those that followed Jesus and sometimes assisted in having them put to death [Stephen, Acts 7].
  - (a) What do you think happened to the children? [slavery? bondage?]
- (3) *The whole council of elders can bear witness* - Paul seems to indicate that many of those elders are still around are possibly even there while he is speaking to the crowd.
  - (a) *they gave me letters* - literally pieces of paper with signatures of authorization for Paul to do whatever he needed to stop the spread of “the Way.”
  - (b) *I went to Damascus...bring them in bonds to Jerusalem* - Paul got on a horse and traveled [most likely with some temple guardsmen or other form of Jewish enforcer] to Damascus to intercept and stop the spread of Christianity, for Damascus would be a “beehive” of humanity where thousands of people could be told of Christ.
  - (c) *To be punished* - once he found them, he would bind them and bring them back to Jerusalem to be judged, persecuted or possibly put to death.

#### 5) Verses 6-11 Paul MEETS the RESURRECTED Christ

- a) **6 “As I was on my way and drew near to Damascus, about noon a great light from heaven suddenly shone around me.**
  - i) *Damascus* - Capital of important city-state in Syria with close historical ties to Israel. Apparently Damascus has been occupied continuously for a longer period of time than any other city in the world and can claim to be the world's oldest city.
  - (1) Both major international highways ran through Damascus the **Via Maris** from Mesopotamia in the east through Damascus and the Jezreel Valley to the Plain of Sharon and the Mediterranean coast, then south to Egypt; and **the King's Highway** from Damascus south through Ashtaroth, Rabbath-ammon, and Bozrah to Elath on the Red Sea and to Arabia. By the same

token, Damascus saw armies march along the highways, often using Damascus as the staging area.

- ii) *At noon a great light from heaven suddenly shone around me* - the resurrected Christ confronted Paul in the daytime, so imagine how bright the light must have been - have you eyes ever been burned by looking at a bright light before?

**b) 7 And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?' 8 And I answered, 'Who are you, Lord?' And he said to me, 'I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.'**

- i) *Heard a voice saying to me - Saul, Saul why are you persecuting me* - interesting that Christ would say "me" as he was no longer on earth; he was in his resurrected state. Who was he talking about? Christ now dwelt in every believers body through the Holy Spirit, so when Paul was harming Christians and torturing them...in reality he was persecuting Christ himself.
- ii) *he answered - "who are you Lord?" ..."I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting"*

(1) *Who are you Lord?* - The great Saul of Tarsus, schooled at the feet of Gamaliel and persecutor of the Way, the great pharisee of pharisees given letters of authority by the council of elders and the priests...now calling the voice coming from the bright light..."Lord?" Paul is being broken in spirit as he the threat of death has been brought upon him by a supernatural presence.

(2) *I am Jesus of Nazareth* - Christ identified himself as the voice and tells Saul that he is persecuting the one he now calls "Lord."

**c) 9 Now those who were with me saw the light but did not understand the voice of the one who was speaking to me.**

- i) Interesting that his other men did not understand what Christ was saying; perhaps because there was a specific sheep that Christ was calling at this specific time for a specific purpose?

(1) **John 10:3** - 3 To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.

**d) 10 And I said, 'What shall I do, Lord?' And the Lord said to me, 'Rise, and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all that is appointed for you to do.'**

- i) *What shall I do Lord* - Paul who has always had all the answers and always known exactly what he was to do, now, in the face of this incredible and terrifying experience with the risen Christ....asks for help.
  - ii) *The Lord said to me, "Rise and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all that is appointed for you to do."* Key words here...WILL BE TOLD. Since when does anyone tell Paul anything? It seems that Paul does most of the telling most of his life, but now things have changed as his pride is shattered and Christ has invaded his life and forced him to see things differently through blindness.
- e) **11 And 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.**
- i) *Since I could not see because of the brightness of the light* - Christ had somehow blinded Paul through the extreme brightness of the light and caused something like "scales" to form over his eyes, so Paul was completely helpless to travel.
  - ii) *I was led by the hand...and came into Damascus* - like a scared child in the darkness, Paul was now led to the city in which he had planned to wreak havoc...now he could not even read his letters given him by the temple authorities...nor could he even admire the city as he approached it...he was allowed to keep his hearing....as he would soon meet the man appointed by God to restore his sight and baptize him into the very Way that he once tried to destroy.