

## Acts 22:1-22:29 ~ Teacher's Lesson Paul's Defense Testimony

**Review:** At the end of his third missionary journey, Paul went to Jerusalem with a love offering from the Greek churches. While in the temple, unbelieving Jews saw Paul and rioted. This caused the local Roman garrison to intervene to keep the peace, arresting Paul in the process. Momentarily safe, Paul then turned and spoke to the crowd from behind a wall of soldiers.

**Introduction:** Paul stood accused of both desecrating the temple. Today we are going to consider Paul's defense, which is his conversion testimony: how he came to believe in Jesus. It is common, when training a person how to give his salvation testimony, to organize it into three parts: his life before Christ, how he came to Christ, and his life changed after Christ. This is exactly how Paul presented his testimony to the crowd. It is good for every believer to spend time preparing his own salvation testimony. In fact, Paul's testimony was so important that Luke presented three times, in detail, in Acts!

\***Read:** 22:1. "Defense" (22:1) is from *apologia*, which had the technical sense of a defense speech.<sup>1</sup> The Greek preposition *apo* means "off" or "away from" and *logia* has to do with talking; an apology is to talk off or away the charges made against you.

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\*\*\*\***What did Paul say show his faithfulness to his Jewish heritage (22:2-5)?** *Rhetorical.* He spoke **1)** in Hebrew, **2)** told of his education in Jerusalem under Gamaliel,<sup>2</sup> an education that was according to strict obedience to the Law, **3)** stated that he was just as zealous for God as they were, **4)** revealed how he formerly was against Way, **5)** called the high priest and elders to bear witness of these facts, 22:5.

**1. Why did Paul want to show his faithfulness to his Jewish heritage (22:1-5)?** It was part of his *apologia* in that it showed that he was not one who would desecrate the temple, as charged.

**Application:** If possible, find common ground with the person you want to witness to (past sinful habits, hobbies, profession, military, school, music, etc.); establish rapport. You want his attention and sympathy.

•**Hebrew (22:1)**—Paul spoke in the Hebrew language.<sup>3</sup> This immediately hushed the crowd.

**Example:** Imagine the reaction of an Irish nationalist, expecting to be addressed by someone in English, who unexpectedly speaks in the Celtic vernacular. This would, at least temporarily, result in a gesture of good will.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Johnson, 387.

<sup>2</sup> Gamaliel was a respected member of the Sanhedrin and represented the more open-minded wing of the Pharisees (*New Bible Dictionary*, 404).

<sup>3</sup> The local dialect was Aramaic (Johnson, 386), not to be confused with Arabic.

<sup>4</sup> Bruce, 439.

- Gamaliel (22:3a)**—A respected member of the Sanhedrin and represented the more open-minded wing of the Pharisees (*New Bible Dictionary*, 404). It would like saying, “I studied physics under Albert Einstein.”
- Zealous (22:3)**—Paul said that both he and his hearers were “zealous” for God. The problem is that it was zeal without knowledge. Speaking of the Jews, Paul said:

ESV **Romans 10:2** . . . they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.

This misguided zeal led them to try to kill Paul, and earlier led Paul to persecute and kill Christians.<sup>5</sup>

- 2. Why was Christianity called the Way (22:4)?** See *John 14:6*. It was probably because Jesus declared:

ESV **John 14:6** . . . I am the way . . . No one comes to the Father except through me.

Paul may have referred to Christianity as “the Way” because that is one of the earliest designations for it and how it would have been known to his audience.

**According to 22:5, what reason did Paul give for getting involved with the high priest and the elders?** It was go get letters authorizing Paul to go to Damascus, arrest the believers there, and bring them back to Jerusalem for punishment.

- 3. Why did Paul want to mention his connection with the high priest and the elders (22:5)?** This shows his past opposition to the Gospel.

**Motive:** Paul evidently felt that if his audience was convinced of his former sincerity as a persecutor of the church, they would be willing to consider the sincerity his new perspective as one who believed in Jesus.<sup>6</sup>

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**\*\*\*\*What changed Paul from prosecutor to proselyte (22:6-11)?** *Rhetorical.* Jesus supernaturally appeared to Paul on the road to Damascus.

- 4. Why is it noteworthy that the great light shone at noon (22:6)?** It is a tremendous light that can shine brighter than the noon-day sun!

**How did Saul answer the question of 22:7?** Saul answered the question with another question.

**Joke:** *Why do Jews always answer a question with a question? Why not!*

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<sup>5</sup> Kistemaker, 781.

<sup>6</sup> Johnson, 390.

**5. Why did Saul ask who was speaking (22:8)?** He needed to know who it was he was persecuting. He really didn't know. Paul evidently never dreamed that the one speaking to him could have been Jesus, since he was dead and gone.

•**Lord (2:8,10)**—"Lord" here is merely a title of respect, which is how it was used most of the time. However, in Judaism it was also used as a substitute for Jehovah (in the LXX).

**6. Jesus had already resurrected and ascended into heaven. In what sense was Saul persecuting Jesus (22:8)?** See *Matthew 25:40*. Those who persecute the church are also persecuting Jesus. He takes it personally!

ESV **Matthew 25:40** . . . as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.

**What did the men traveling with Saul see and hear (22:9)?** They saw the light and heard the sound of the voice, but could not understand what was being said.<sup>7</sup>

**What physical impact did the bright light have on Saul (22:11)?** He was temporarily blinded. Similar things happened to electricians who see a hi-voltage arc.

**7. Why were those traveling with Paul not blinded, and why did they not understand what Jesus said (22:9)?** They were not elected by Jesus to know the Truth.

ESV **Matthew 11:25** [Jesus]: "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children . . ."

ESV **Romans 11:7-8** Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened, as it is written, "God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that would not see and ears that would not hear . . ."

**8. How was your salvation experience different from Paul's (22:6-11)? Did you see a bright light? Were you blinded? Did Jesus audibly speak to you?**

**Application:** You may not realize it, but your conversion was no less supernatural than Paul's. It may not have been as dramatic, but it was just as much a divine work of God. Apart from God's intervention, there is no hope for any of us. Jesus told Nicodemus that he needed to be born again; how much control do babies have over deciding to be born? When Nicodemus pressed Jesus and asked how to be born again, Jesus then helpfully said it was like the wind (over which one has no control).

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<sup>7</sup> There is a seeming contradiction in the KJV when comparing 22:9 to 9:7. The Greek *akouo* is used in both places and can mean either to hear or to understand (Thayer, #191). Luke used it in the sense of hearing in 9:7 and in the sense of understanding in 22:9. The men with Paul did indeed hear the voice (9:7) but they did not understand what Jesus said (22:9). The Greek *phoné* is also used in both 9:7 and 22:9, and can mean either sound or voice. Again, those with Paul heard a voice but since they did not understand, it was more of a sound to them. Later translations remove the apparent discrepancy.

ESV **John 3:7-9** Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?"

The evidence of being born again is that you believe in Jesus. Regeneration precedes faith.

**Paul's Testimony:** Paul asserted that he came to believe in Jesus, not because the believers in Damascus persuaded him to believe, but because Jesus appeared to him.<sup>8</sup>

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\*\*\*\***What commission did God give Saul through Ananias (22:12-16)?** *Rhetorical.* Through Ananias, God let it be known that He had chosen Saul to be His witness, 22:14-15.

**9. In 22:12, why did Paul point out that Ananias was a devout man according to the law and that he was well spoken of by all the Jews in Damascus?** *Compare 21:21, 28.* It was part of his *apologia*. They are angry at Paul for being against the Law, so he wanted to bring to the witness stand someone who was known for following the Law. Paul conveniently neglected to mention that Ananias was also a follower of Jesus!

**10. How did God prove to Paul that Ananias carried a legitimate message from God (22:13)?** Paul knew that something supernatural had happened on the road to Damascus. Using Ananias to remove the blindness showed that Ananias was legitimately associated with Jesus and had the authority to deliver God's message to Paul.

•**Righteous One (22:14)**—Ananias referred to Jesus as "the righteous One", an Old Testament Messianic title popular with the prophets.<sup>9</sup>

**11. Based on 22:16, what does water baptism have to do with believing in Jesus?** *See Romans 10:13.* Water baptism is closely associated with initially believing in Jesus and having one's sins forgiven. It is connected with "calling on his name" (for salvation). Baptism has been said to be the first act of obedience for a new Christian. It is an initiation rite into the new covenant community.

ESV **Romans 10:13** . . . everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

**Application:** If you believe in Jesus but have not been baptized, you are living in disobedience! Further, the apostolic example is to baptize only believers—infant baptism is foreign to the pages of the New Testament. Get your baptism on the right side of your salvation.

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<sup>8</sup> Kistemaker, 785.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 789.

**12. Why did Ananias say that baptism would wash away Paul's sins (22:16)?** See *Romans 4:1-12, 1 Corinthians 1:14-17*. Water baptism symbolizes the washing away of our sins. Humanly speaking, what washes away your sins is calling on his name (22:16b). The commentator Simon Kistemaker translates this, "be baptized and wash away you sins by calling on his name".<sup>10</sup> The baptism that actually does wash away our sins is Holy Spirit baptism, Romans 4. Water baptism is the outward sign of an inward act.

**False Gospel:** To teach that one must be water baptized to be saved is a false Gospel. I heard a teacher on the local Catholic radio station say that it was not enough to simply believe in Jesus—one also needed to be baptized by the Catholic Church in order to be saved. He said that God authorized the Catholic Church to grant salvation through baptism. He further stated that a person can assurance of salvation, not simply because he believes, but because he was baptized by the Catholic Church. This is a taking baptism too far and is not far different from saying that one must be circumcised to be saved.

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**\*\*\*\*After leaving Damascus. Paul returned to Jerusalem, but he didn't stay there. Why not (22:17-21)?** *Rhetorical.* Jesus told Paul via a trance to leave Jerusalem and go far away to the Gentiles.<sup>11</sup> Jesus had a job for Paul to do and was protecting him; Jesus knew the dangers lurking in Jerusalem and thus told Paul to leave.<sup>12</sup>

**Defense:** Paul let it be known that he went to the temple to pray and got a divine revelation there, an implicit rebuttal of the charges against him. That he prayed there shows his long-standing devotion to Judaism, and that he viewed the temple as a place of prayer.

**13. Why did Paul say this (22:19-20) to Jesus?** Paul wanted to stay in Jerusalem and witness to the Jews. He was in essence trying to convince Jesus to let him stay there.

**14. What argument did Paul use when Jesus told him to leave (22:19-20)?** Paul felt that since everyone knew of his persecution of the church, they would now consider his new-found understanding of Jesus.

**Application:** It is OK to reason with God. The Bible records many other prayers where a person sees God as someone who can be persuaded. *When you pray, do you just ask, or do you offer the Lord reasons why He should grant your request?*

**Example:** Israel sinned grievously at Mount Sinai. God flatly declared to Moses that God was going to wipe out Israel and start all over again with Moses, who would be like a new Abraham. Moses heard what God said, didn't like it, and set out to change God's mind. You mean you can change God's mind? Right; or at least Moses thought so. Then Moses began to reason

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<sup>10</sup> Kistemaker, 790.

<sup>11</sup> "Trance" (22:17) is from *ekstasis* (basis for "ecstasy"); *ek* means out of and *stasis* means to stand.

<sup>12</sup> Kistemaker, 792.

with God, giving God reasons why He should not kill the whole nation and start over with Moses.<sup>13</sup> Look what happened:

**NAS Exodus 32:14** So the LORD changed His mind about the harm which He said He would do to His people.

**Paul Lost:** In this case, the answer was no. Jesus repeated His command for Paul to leave, 22:21.

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**\*\*\*\*How were the words of Jesus (22:18) proved correct (22:22-29)?** *Rhetorical.* As Jesus had warned, they did not accept Paul's testimony about Jesus—quite the contrary: they wanted Paul dead.

**15. What statement did Paul make that enraged them (22:22)?** *See 22:21.* It evidently was the bit about the Gentiles. The Jews wanted to see Gentiles convert to Judaism. However, they were upset over the idea that devout Gentiles did not have to obey the Law of Moses. The truth is that Gentiles do not have to pass through the gates of Judaism to come to Jehovah.

**Why did the tribune order that Paul be flogged (22:24)?** He wanted to extract from Paul, under torture, what Paul had done to enrage them. It was a brutal process that very often was fatal.<sup>14</sup>

**16. How did Paul escape the flogging (22:25-29)?** Realizing his life was in mortal danger, Paul made it known that he was a Roman citizen. As such, it was illegal to bind and flog him without due process.

**17. Why did the tribune comment that his citizenship had cost him a lot of money (22:28)?** It may have been sarcasm along the lines of, "They'll let just anybody become a citizen these days."<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, he may have said it to show that, to him, citizen was extremely important.<sup>16</sup> He may also have said it to prompt Paul to reveal how he got his citizenship. As it turned out, Paul was born a citizen.

**Application:** Use the government to protect you when you can.

**Consequences:** Paul's appeal to his Roman citizenship saved him from a flogging and put him under the protection of the Roman Empire. However, it also made him a captive to its judicial process, and the rest of Acts will reveal.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Sermon by Bruce Wilkinson delivered at First Baptist Church Atlanta in the late 1970s.

<sup>14</sup> Kistemaker, 798.

<sup>15</sup> Marshall, 379.

<sup>16</sup> Kistemaker, 799.

<sup>17</sup> Johnson, 394

## So What?

**18. Why did Luke bother to repeat—in detail—the account of Paul’s conversion (9:1-19, 22:1-21)?** From a literary perspective, Luke obviously considered it very important. It makes the point that Paul was divinely commissioned to take the Gospel to the Gentiles. This was an important truth since the church was initially made up of Jewish believers who were at first slow to accept Gentiles. Also, Paul was a prime witness of the resurrection, upon whose creditability as great deal rests.<sup>18</sup> One of the strongest evidences for the truth of Christianity is Paul’s conversion.

**19. Paul used his personal testimony to present the Gospel. How could you do the same with your testimony?** The purpose of preparing one’s testimony is evangelism, not to give a history lesson. Be sure to state the Gospel message that you came to understand and accept.

**20. God used the Roman government to protect Paul. The longer Paul lived, the more people he could reach with the Gospel. According to 1 Timothy 2:1-2, how should we pray regarding governments?**

ESV **1 Timothy 2:1-2** . . . I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.

\*\*\*\* = ask this question before reading the text aloud. Doing so will cause focus.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 393