

PAUL'S DEFENSE TO THE CROWD

Acts 21:37 - 22:29

STRUCTURE

Key-person: Paul

Key-location: Jerusalem

Key-repetitions:

- Paul spoke different languages: Greek to the Roman commander (Ac 21:37); Hebrew to the Jewish crowd (Ac 22:2).
- Paul's Jewish credentials: born a Jew (Ac 22:3); studied the Mosaic Law under Gamaliel (Ac 22:3); was zealous for God and persecuted the followers of this Way of Christ (Ac 22:3-4).
- God spoke to Paul: on the road to Damascus (Ac 22:5-10); in the temple at Jerusalem (Ac 22:17-21).
- Saul (Paul) persecuted Christians: persecuted the followers of this Way (Ac 22:4); arrested believers (Ac 22:4); obtained letters from the high priest to arrest believers in Damascus (Ac 22:5); entered synagogues to imprison and beat believers (Ac 22:19); supported the killing of Stephen (Ac 22:20).

Key-attitudes:

- Crowd's hatred of Paul.
- Paul's desire to defend himself.
- Roman commander's cruelty.
- Soldiers' alarm when they realized Paul was a Roman citizen.

Initial-situation:

Paul finished his third missionary journey by traveling to Jerusalem. Jews from Asia falsely accused Paul of bringing non-Jews into the temple area. People seized Paul, dragged him from the temple, and began to beat him. The Roman commander took officers and ran down to the crowd. The commander arrested Paul while the crowd kept shouting, "Kill him!"

Initial-problem:

Soldiers were about to take Paul into the barracks when Paul asked the commander, "Please let me speak to the people."

Final-situation:

The commander was alarmed when he realized that he had put Paul, a Roman citizen, in chains.

BIBLE STORY

The Roman commander of Jerusalem rescued Paul from the mob that was trying to kill him outside the temple courtyards. Soldiers were about to take Paul into the barracks when Paul spoke Greek and asked the commander, "Please let me speak to the people." The commander gave Paul permission to speak to the crowd (Ac 21:37-40).

Paul stood on the steps and motioned to the crowd. He spoke to them in the Jewish language, "Brothers and fathers, listen now to my defense."

The crowd heard Paul speak to them in the Jewish language and became quiet.

Paul said, "I'm a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city. I studied the Law of our fathers under Gamaliel, and was as zealous for God as any of you are today. I persecuted the followers of the Way of Christ and some were killed. The high priest and Sanhedrin Council can testify that I arrested both men and women, and threw them into prison. I obtained letters from them to go to Damascus, and to bring these people as prisoners to Jerusalem.

"About noon, I neared Damascus. Suddenly, a bright light from heaven flashed around me. I fell to the ground and heard a voice, 'Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute me?'

"I asked, 'Who are you, Lord?'

"The voice replied, 'I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you're persecuting.'

"I asked, 'What shall I do, Lord?'

"The Lord said, 'Get up, and go into Damascus. There you will be told what you have been assigned to do.' The brilliant light blinded me. So my companions led me by the hand into Damascus.

"A man named Ananias came and told me, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight!' At that very moment I was able to see him.

"Then Ananias said, 'The God of our ancestors chose you to know his will, to see the Righteous One, and to hear words from him. You will be his witness to all men of what you have seen and heard. Get up, be baptized, and wash your sins away, trusting in him to save you.'

"Later, I returned to Jerusalem. I was praying at the temple when I saw a vision and heard the Lord speak to me, 'Quick! Leave Jerusalem! The people won't accept your testimony about me.'

"I replied, 'Lord, they know that I went from one synagogue to another to imprison and beat those who believe in you. I supported the killing of your martyr Stephen. I guarded the clothes of those who were killing him.'

"The Lord told me, 'Go! I'll send you far away to the non-Jews'" (Ac 22:1-21).

The crowd listened to Paul until he said this. The crowd shouted, "Kill him! He's not fit to live!" Then the mob yelled and threw dirt into the air.

The commander ordered Paul to be taken into the barracks, and to be whipped and questioned. The commander wanted to find out why the people were yelling at Paul. Roman officers stretched Paul out to beat him. Paul asked the centurion Roman officer, "Is it legal for you to beat a Roman citizen who hasn't even been found guilty?"

The centurion reported to the commander and asked, "What are you doing? This man is a Roman citizen."

The soldiers who were about to question Paul withdrew immediately. The commander was alarmed when he realized that he had put Paul, a Roman citizen, in chains (Ac 22:22-29).

GENERIC DIALOGUE QUESTIONS

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. What catches your attention in the story? | 5. How did the characters face their problems? |
| 2. Is there anything in the story that is hard to understand? | 6. How have you faced similar problems? |
| 3. Who are the main characters in the story? | 7. Is there someone in the story who is similar to you or who is different from you? |
| 4. What problems did the characters face? | 8. What does the story tell about God? |

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What did Paul say to the hostile crowd?
2. How did Paul's faith in Jesus redirect his life?
3. How has your faith in Jesus redirected your life?
4. Why did Paul's reference to the non-Jews increase the anger of the crowd?
5. Paul used his personal testimony to address the crowd. When have you found your personal story helpful to others?
6. How did Paul defend his rights when the commander ordered Paul to be beaten?
7. How did it help Paul to have the privilege of being a Roman citizen?
8. How do some Christians today experience hostility because of their serving God?

LIFE-LESSONS

1. **To minister effectively to a people group, use their heart language.** Paul spoke Greek to the Roman officials (Ac 21:37) and spoke the Jewish language to the Jewish crowd (Ac 22:1).
2. **The person who is evangelizing should establish a common point of contact with his listeners.** In speaking to the Jewish crowd, Paul acknowledged that he experienced the same zealous desire to kill Christians as his listeners were experiencing with their desire to kill him. He acknowledged that they were zealous for God, just as he had been zealous for God (Ac 22:3).
3. **When a Christian suffers accusations because he is a follower of Jesus, one of his best defenses is to give his own testimony.** Paul defended himself to the crowd by giving his testimony of how he became a follower of Jesus on the road to Damascus (Ac 22:1-21). Paul also gave his testimony before King Agrippa (Ac 26:1-23).

4. **When people close a door, preventing a Christian from serving God, God will open a new door for the Christian to serve him.** Paul told the crowd that he had a vision in the temple, and the Lord told him that the Jewish people would not accept his testimony about Jesus. Therefore, the Lord Jesus was sending Paul to non-Jews (Ac 22:17-22). One of Luke's themes in Acts was Jesus sent Paul to the non-Jews, because the Jews would not believe him. (See Acts 13:46-48; 18:6; 28:25-28.)
5. **Racial prejudice creates barriers which hinder people from hearing the gospel.** The crowd listened to Paul share his testimony. However, when Paul stated that God sent him to the non-Jews, they angrily demanded for Paul to be killed (Ac 22:21-22). Paul's mention of his commission to non-Jews struck at the heart of Jewish racial prejudice and nationalism.
6. **Christians are entitled to demand their civil rights.** It was against the Roman law to whip a Roman citizen. When Paul was whipped in Philippi, he insisted on a retraction from the Roman authorities (Ac 16:35-39). When the Roman commander in Jerusalem ordered Paul to be whipped, Paul questioned the legality of their whipping him, a Roman citizen (Ac 22:25).

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Monologue Drama:

Ask for volunteers to tell the story from the viewpoint of different participants in the story:

- A Jewish believer in Jesus who was still committed to Jewish customs, and believed the rumors that Paul had turned against his Jewish heritage.
- A patriotic Jew who hated all Christians and hated Paul even more, because he preached to non-Jews.
- A Roman soldier who helped rescue and arrest Paul.