

Friends, don't get me wrong. By no means do I count myself as an expert in all of this, but I've got my eyes on the goal, where God is beckoning us onward to Jesus. I'm off and running, and I'm not turning back.

Philippians 3:13-14 The Message Bible

First Love Ministries, Inc.

Prayer Study #250

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

CHAPTER 22

Paul's Defense of Himself

1. "Brethren and fathers, hear my defense before you now."
2. And when they heard that he spoke to them in the Hebrew language, they kept all the more silent. Then he said:
3. "I am indeed a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, taught according to the strictness of our fathers' law and was zealous toward God as you all are today.
4. "I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women,
5. "as also the high priest bears me witness and all the council of the elders, from whom I also received letters to the brethren and went to Damascus to bring in chains even those who were there to Jerusalem to be punished.
6. "Now it happened, as I journeyed and came near Damascus at about noon, suddenly a great light from heaven shone around me.
7. "And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?'
8. So I answered, 'Who are You, Lord?' And He said to me, 'I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.'
9. "And those who were with me indeed saw the light and were afraid, but they did not hear the voice of Him who spoke to me.
10. "So I said, 'What shall I do, Lord?' And the Lord said to me, 'Arise, and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all things which are appointed for you to do.'
11. "And since I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of those who were with me, I came into Damascus.
12. "Then a certain Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good testimony with all the Jews who dwelt there,
13. "came to me; and he stood and said to me, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight.' And at that same hour I looked up at him.

14. "Then he said, 'The God of our fathers has chosen you that you should know His will and see the Just One and hear the voice of His mouth.'
15. 'For you will be his witness to all men of what you have seen and heard.'
16. 'And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.'
17. "Now it happened, when I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, that I was in a trance
18. "and saw Him saying to me, "Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly for they will not receive your testimony concerning Me.'
19. So I said, 'Lord, they know that in every synagogue I imprisoned and beat those who believe on You.'
20. 'And when the blood of Your martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by consenting to his death and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.'
21. "Then He said to me, 'Depart, for I will send you far from here to the Gentiles.'"
22. And they listened to him until this word, and then they raised their voices and said, "Away with such a fellow from the earth, for he is not fit to live!"
23. Then, as they cried out and tore off their clothes and threw dust into the air,

Paul was a very smart man. He first shows that he identifies with those who are accusing him. He tells them that he is a Jew, something he never forgot (2 Corinthians 11:22; Philippians 3:4-5). He was from one of the greatest university cities of the ancient world. He had studied under Gamaliel, who was considered one of the greatest teachers of the law and who had died only about five years before. And he, Paul, had been one of the most vocal adherents to the ancestral ways, even persecuting those who did not follow the Jewish law. Everyone in the audience would have agreed with Paul on all these points.

But Paul had a difference between himself and his audience. He saw Christ as the Savior of all and God as the lover of all people. His audience believed that God only loved Jews. Anyone who tried to reach out and draw non-Jews in was a blasphemer.

As Paul continues in Verse 11, he drops Ananias' name. Ananias was a man who followed the law and whom the Jews believed was a good man. We learn from Luke in Acts 9 and from Paul in Galatians 1 that this time in

Damascus was really three years, even though here it seems like he immediately left for Jerusalem.

In Acts 9 we are told that Paul left Jerusalem because he was in danger of his life from the enraged Jews. Here we are told that he left because of a vision. There is no contradiction here. The vision was warning him to leave because he would not be received. The point Paul was making is that he did not want to leave the Jews, but the Lord told him that the Jews, Paul's own people, would never listen to him, and he must go to the Gentiles.

Barclay sees Verse 14 as a summary of the Christian life: 1)To know the will of God and to obey it; 2)To see the Just One-in other words, to walk in the Presence of the risen Lord; 3)To hear the Lord's voice.

The mob was pretty calm until Paul mentions the Gentiles. The Jews did not resent so much the preaching to the Gentiles, but they were enraged that Gentiles were being offered the privileges of belief in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, without having to first go through circumcision and without having to obey all the Jewish law. They had no concept of grace. They showed their disapproval by shouting and waving their clothes and throwing dust in the air.

Paul's Defense Before the Sanhedrin

24. The commander ordered him to be brought in to the barracks and said that he should be examined under scourging, so that he might know why they shouted so against him.
25. And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said to the centurion who stood by, "Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman and uncondemned?"
26. When the centurion heard that, he went and told the commander, saying, "Take care what you do, for this man is a Roman."
27. Then the commander came and said to him, "Tell me, are you a Roman?" He said, "Yes."
28. The commander answered, "With a large sum I obtained this citizenship." And Paul said, "But I was born a citizen."
29. Then immediately those who were about to examine him withdrew from him; and the commander was also afraid after he found out that he was a Roman and because he had bound him.
30. The next day because he wanted to know for certain why he was accused by the Jews, he released him from his bonds and commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear and brought Paul down and set him before them.

The commander did not understand Aramaic so he did not have any idea what Paul said to the mob. He did understand, however, that he could not

allow a riot, and the proper way to handle this was to deal with anyone who had the potential of causing civil unrest. He decided to question Paul by scourging. This was a beating with a leather whip studded at intervals with pieces of bone and lead. Many did not survive this treatment. They found that it was an effective way of getting a confession out of someone.

Then Paul plays his trump card. He is a Roman citizen. Cicero, the Roman statesman, said this: *"It is a misdeed for a Roman citizen to be bound; it is a crime for him to be beaten; it is almost as bad as to murder a father [as] to kill him [a Roman citizen]."* Not only was Paul a Roman citizen, but he was born a Roman citizen, and he did not have to purchase his citizenship like the commander had had to do. This really shook up the commander. If he had gone through with the scourging, he could have at the least been dismissed and at the most executed. So he decides to bring Paul before the Sanhedrin in order to get to the bottom of what is really going on.

Paul was ready to die for Jesus. In fact, he had suffered this kind of punishment five times from the Jews (2nd Corinthians 11:24) He knew, however, that his work was not finished, and he wisely did not throw his life away at this point.

The Chief Priests and the Sanhedrin are commanded to appear to bring their charges against Paul.

He Was There All the Time Gary Paxton

Time after time I went searching for peace in some void.
I was trying to blame all my ills on this world I was in.
Surface relationships used me 'til I was done in.
And all the while someone was begging to free me from sin.

Never again will I look for a fake rainbow's end.
Now that I have the answer my life is just starting to rhyme.
Sharing each new day with Him is a cup of fresh wine.
And on what I missed, He's been waiting right there all the time.

CHORUS

He was there all the time.
He was there all the time.
Waiting patiently in line,
He was there all the time.