

Acts 21:37-22:31

Introduction

Despite the life-threatening beating from which he had just been rescued, Paul was unwilling to give up his attempt to vindicate the gospel in the eyes of his Jewish kinsmen. (**Acts 21:37-40a**).

For the next several chapters in the book of Acts, Paul offers his defense in various venues, adapting his presentations to the varying backgrounds of his Jewish and Gentile audiences (**24:10; 25:8, 26: 1-2**).

Summary

In Acts 21:37-22:21, Paul gives his defense by means of an autobiographical account of his early training in Judaism and violent opposition to the Christian Way, of his life-changing meeting with the risen Lord near Damascus, and of a subsequent vision given to him in the very temple that he was accused of defiling.

1. God's Zealot vv. 21:40-22:5

Standing on the steps of the fortress, Paul motioned with his hand to the people and when there was a great hush, he addressed the crowd.

Paul's early life showed his affinity for everything that his hearers held dear.

His training in their ancestral law had been rigorous.

His zeal for Torah and for tradition was unsurpassed among his hearers, exhibiting itself especially in his violent persecution of Jesus' followers.

Paul even summoned the high priest and the Sanhedrin's body of elders as witnesses to confirm his former zeal for the defense of Judaism by eradicating the threat posed by faith in Jesus.

2. Chosen Witness vv. 22:6-16

It was about noon, as they approached Damascus, that a bright light from heaven suddenly surrounded Paul and his companions.

Paul's companions observed the objective reality of the vision, although its specific content was revealed only to him. They heard the sound but did not understand the voice of the divine Speaker who addressed him (**Acts 9:7; 22:9**).

In persecuting Christian believers, Paul had persecuted the Way, but his aggression was more personal: he was persecuting the One whose radiant glory was so

overpowering that he could only be called 'Lord'. Jesus the Lord so identifies with his people that he counts our sufferings as his own (**Luke 10:16, Matt. 25:41-45**). Yet through Christ's amazing grace, Paul was not consumed by God's wrath but commissioned to God's work.

Through Ananias, Paul received insight into his new mission. He brought a word from the God of our fathers (**Acts 22:14**). This phrase stresses that Paul still serves the God who redeemed his ancestors and claimed them by his covenant.

Once Paul discovered that his pursuit of self-achieved righteousness had made him God's enemy, he gladly confessed his dependence on the righteousness of God, which comes not from failed law keeping but through faith in Christ (Phil.3:9). Paul also heard words from the mouth of Jesus, and was responsible for delivering the message of God's saving purpose to all races and classes of people.

3. Christ's Ambassador to the Gentiles vv. 22:17-37

Paul's defense continued with his description of a vision, not previously mentioned in Acts, that he had received after his return from Damascus to Jerusalem. It occurred while he was praying in the temple -- another piece of evidence refuting the charge that Paul had abandoned the law and scorned or defiled the holy place (**21:28-29**).

The Lord Jesus called Paul to leave Jerusalem right away. He protested at first against his marching orders, but the Lord overruled his servant's concerns (**Acts 21:20**). He revealed to Paul that the far away people to whom Christ's reconciling peace must be proclaimed are not just dispersed Jews, but also the Gentiles from all the peoples of the earth (**Eph 2: 17-18**)

Who but the Father of our Lord Jesus could turn his ancient people's hardness into blessing for the nations, grafting us wild branches into the root of his covenant mercy (**Rom. 11:17-24**)?

He can also graft natural branches broken off in unbelief.

Israelites, such as Saul of Tarsus, are grafted back into Jesus, the life-giving root of David (**Rev. 22:16**).

For that harvest of the gospel among both Gentiles and Jews we should pray and bear witness.