

Abounding Grace Christian Church

The Acts of the Holy Spirit through the Church – Part 67

I. Exposition of Chapter Twenty Two – Paul’s Defense before the Jews.

A. Verses 1-3 – Paul informs them of his Background.

1. **Verse 1** – “**Brethren and fathers, hear my defense before you now.**” – The term “**brethren**” here would be referring to his fellow Jews and the word “**fathers**” is a reference to the Jewish religious leaders.
2. “**...hear my defense...**” – The word “**defense**” is the word we get the word “**apologetics**” from (*apologia*). Though our word “**apologize**”, meaning “**I’m sorry**” came from this word, it originally meant “**to give an answer or speech in defense of oneself. A plea, defense before a tribunal or elsewhere.**”¹ So, it means practically the opposite. Instead of meaning, “**I’m sorry, I was wrong**”, it means, “**I’m right and I’ll prove it.**”
3. **Verse 2** – When they heard Paul speaking in a Hebrew dialect (Aramaic), it got the people’s attention. This seemed to both surprise and calm the people. Paul was showing them that he was one of them.
4. **Verse 3** – Here Paul basically shares his credentials.
 - a. “**I am indeed a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia...**” – Most of the mob didn’t even know who Paul was. They were just stirred up by others to participate in the riot. Some were apparently under the impression that he was anti-Jew because they accused him of being against the Mosaic law. So he begins by stating, “**I am indeed a Jew...**” He goes on to say he was born in “**...Tarsus of Cilicia...**” Tarsus was not an “**insignificant city**” (21:39), but was well respected and considered to be a great intellectual center known for its superior education.² One thing is quite certain, Paul was a very intelligent and educated person.
 - b. “**...brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel...**” – From this, it seems to indicate that Paul spent much of his young life in Jerusalem. The famous rabbi Gamaliel was mentioned before in Acts 5:34, where, as a Pharisee and “**teacher of the law**” stood up and warned the other religious leaders to be careful in their dealings with Peter and the other apostles. Regarding this verse, Grant Osborne writes:

“By the time he was thirteen, but also possibly earlier, he was sent to Jerusalem to study under the grandson of Hillel and leading rabbi of his day, Gamaliel (see 5:34). To be given such a privilege means he was precocious and gifted, and he certainly distinguished himself over the next several years there. It is safe to say he was one of the leading young rabbinic minds of his day.”³

- c. “**...taught according to the strictness of our fathers’ law...**” – By saying this, they probably were getting the idea that he had been a rabbi and Pharisee, educated by the best in the teachings of the law. **Note: “...circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee;” – Philippians 3:5.**
- d. “**...and was zealous toward God as you all are today.**” – Paul, again attempts to show that he understands and can relate to their zeal. This goes along with what Paul wrote to the Galatians:

“For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it. And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers.” – Galatians 1:13-14.

B. Verses 4-21 – Paul shares his Testimony. It’s worth noting that this is one of 5 or 6 times in which Paul gives his personal testimony regarding his conversion -Acts 9, Acts 22, Acts 26, Philippians 3, I Timothy 1, and some would say in Galatians 1.

1. Verses 4-5 – Paul elaborates about his zeal for the Law.

- a. **Verse 4** – “**I persecuted the Way to the death...**” – Again, we know that the Church is called “**the Way**” several times in the book of Acts (9:2; 19:9, 23; 24:14). Dr. Bob Utley comments:

¹Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary*, (AMG Publishers; Revised edition, 1993)

²Jean-François Racine, “Tarsus,” ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

³Grant R. Osborne, *Acts: Verse by Verse*, Osborne New Testament Commentaries (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019), 393.

“This was the earliest name for the Christian Church (cf. 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 28:14, 22). It refers to (1) Jesus as ‘the Way’ (cf. John 14:6) and (2) biblical faith as a lifestyle (cf. Deut. 5:32–33; 31:29; Ps. 27:11; Isa. 35:8).”⁴

1) The word “persecuted” means; **“to systematically organize a program to oppress and harass people”⁵** The phrase “...to the death...” indicates that Paul was involved with putting Christians to death. He guarded the coats of those who stoned Stephen (Acts 7:58; 8:1).

2) **“...delivering into prisons both men and women.”** – He was responsible for putting some in prison. Maybe some ended up released but others were put to death after imprisonment. Uteley notes: **The fact that Paul did this to women really shows the intensity of his persecutions.⁶**

b. **Verse 5** – Paul states that there are witnesses to his zeal and persecution of believers in order to make his case. Dr. Stanley Horton asserts:

“The high priest was a witness to this (cf. 9:1–2; probably Caiaphas, who was now dead and replaced by Ananias [see 23:2], but his records were available), as were ‘all the Council’ (the elders of the Sanhedrin). From them he received letters to the Jews of Damascus and went there to bring the believers in chains ‘to Jerusalem to be punished.”⁷

2. **Verses 6-7 – Paul’s original encounter with Jesus. (Paul’s conversion to Christ took place around 25 years prior – Keener⁸).**

a. **Verse 6** – **“...suddenly a great light from heaven shone around me...”** – Luke records this event in 9:3. Dr. Warren Weirsbe writes some powerful insights:

“When the heavenly light was at its brightest (noon), the satanic darkness in Paul’s heart was at its deepest, for he was out to arrest all the Christians he could find. But God, in His grace, ‘arrested’ Paul with a great light from heaven. The sinner is in darkness until God’s light shines upon him (2 Cor. 4). Paul saw and heard the glorified Christ, trusted Him, and was saved.”⁹

b. **Verse 7** – **“And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’”** – Luke records this in 9:4. A lesson to be learned from this is that when Christians are persecuted, Jesus takes it personal. Grant Osborne writes:

“When the Shekinah hit him full force, he ‘fell to the ground and heard a voice.’ Who knows how many times he had told his story? The message is the same in all three, and what Jesus said was imprinted on Paul’s mind: ‘Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute me?’ Needless to say, these words turned his world upside down, in one fell swoop telling him he had been totally wrong about what his severe persecution was doing. He thought he was destroying the enemies of God, when in reality he was battling against the Son of God himself.¹⁰

c. **Verse 8** – **Paul asks Jesus who He is and Jesus reveals Himself to Paul. Paul calls Jesus “Lord”.** When you think about this, before Paul’s encounter with Christ, he thought the rumors about Jesus’ resurrection to be false. But now, by giving his testimony, he is affirming to all who will listen, that Jesus is alive!

d. **Verse 9** – Paul states here that the others with him saw the light but did not hear the voice. This seems to contradict Luke as it’s recorded in 9:7. Always remember, when Scripture seems to contradict itself, it’s our understanding that’s lacking, not a contradiction. The idea is that though they heard a noise, they were not able to distinguish what was being said.

e. Paul went from darkness to light, from religion to a relationship with the Living God, from bondage to freedom, and from being a persecutor of Christ to a follower of Christ.

“Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.” – II Timothy 3:12

⁴Robert James Uteley, *Luke the Historian: The Book of Acts*, vol. Volume 3B, Study Guide Commentary Series (Marshall, TX: Bible Lessons International, 2003), 248.

⁵Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 498.

⁶Uteley, 248.

⁷Stanley M. Horton, *Acts: A Logion Press Commentary* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 2001), 358-359.

⁸Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1993), 537.

⁹Warren W. Wiersbe, *Wiersbe’s Expository Outlines on the New Testament* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1992), 340.

¹⁰Osborne, 395.

“Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed *are you*, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified.” - I Peter 4:12-14.