

Acts of the Apostles
Luke, the beloved physician
Discussion Session 7
Chapters 21:17-23;10
Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible (pgs.)

Outline:

- I. Home missions (Acts 1-12)
 - The witness to the Jews in Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria.
 - Outstanding leader—Peter.
 - Important city—Jerusalem.
- II. Foreign missions (acts 13-28)
 - The witness to the Gentiles, to the “uttermost *parts!*”
 - Outstanding leader—Paul.
 - Important cities—Antioch, Ephesus, and Rome.

Things to do:

1. Read all of the Book of Acts.
2. Answer the questions and fill out the outline. Use your own words. Do not quote unless the questions asks for that.
3. Be able to locate on the map, the places mentioned in Acts 1-12.
4. Draw Paul’s first and second journeys on the map, and Paul’s third and fourth on the maps provided.
5. Memorize Acts 1:8, 4:12, 16:31 (Optional)
6. Make a report on the life of at least one great missionary.

Opening Prayer:

Heavenly Father, what an amazing, life-changing experience it was for Paul to be confronted on the road to Damascus by Jesus, Himself. Lord, I am so thankful that You can and will save anyone who humbly turns to you for forgiveness of sins and life everlasting. Thank You for this insight into Paul’s life, from being the most zealot of persecutors of the "followers of the Way" to being the greatest missionary for the gospel of grace. Use me, Lord, in whatever way You choose, to further Your gospel in my corner of the world. In Jesus' name, AMEN.

“And I answered, Who art thou, Lord? And he said unto me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest.”
(Acts 22:8)

Discussion Questions:

Paul's Fourth Journey, From Jerusalem to Rome
ACTS 21:18-28:31 (Part I)

I. Arrested in Jerusalem

1. What false report was given about Paul? (21:28-29) That he was teaching people to turn away or forsake their laws, and cultures, and that he has brought Greeks into the temples and defiled it.
2. How was Paul rescued? (21:31-32) The commander came in, had him bound with two chains and taken to the barracks.
3. What language did Paul use in asking the chief captain if he could speak to the people? Greek
4. What language did Paul use when he spoke to the Jew in Jerusalem? (21:4-22:2)
Aramaic
5. List a few important facts about Paul's life that are mentioned in Paul's defense before the multitude. (22:1-21) Born in Tarsus, Studied under Gamaliel, and trained in the law of the ancestors, persecuted non-Christians, Went blind on the way to Damascus while enroute to persecute a few non-believers, Regained sight from Ananias, Give the sole purpose of teaching/preaching the way of Jesus Christ- leading people to believe-be baptized, and convert, Now lives a devout life where he travels spreading the Gospel to the entire world with the guidance of Jesus Christ.

6. What did the multitude do when Paul mentioned his being sent by God to the Gentiles? ____ **They called for him to be arrested and persecuted. They started to riot.** _____
7. How did Paul escape from being scourged? (22;24-29) ____ **The commander stepped in and order his men to take Paul to the barracks. He then talked to the commander telling that he is a Roman citizen.** _____
8. On the next day when brought before the council, the Sanhedrin, what did Paul say that caused a great argument and confusion among its members? (23:6-10) ____ **"My brothers, I am a Pharisee, descended from Pharisees. I stand on trial because of the hope of the resurrection of the dead."** _____
9. What did the Lord promise Paul that night? (23:11) ____ **"Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome."** _____
10. How many were in the band that promised not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul? ____ **40 plus men** _____
11. What was their plan for killing Paul? ____ **To kill him before he arrives at the commander to give more detailed information.** _____
12. Who told the plot to Paul and later to the chief captain? (23:16) ____ **Son of Paul's sister** _____

Closing Prayer

Prayers of the People: Alexis, Uncle Dennis, youth of our world, all people in hope that they don't let commercialism outweigh the true meaning of Christmas, Anthony from work, those suffering from COVID and any other illness, those who are suffering from oppression, addiction, depression, lonely with no family for Christmas, those soldiers serving overseas and their families left behind, homeless and hungry, victims of war, a moral and upright government, those who suffer loss of any kind.

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 - Outstanding leader—Paul.
 - Important cities—Antioch, Ephesus, and Rome.
- Foreign Missions—ACTS 13-28*
Introduction to Paul’s Life

Birth:

- A. Probably born about the same time as Jesus.
- B. In Tarsus, capital of the province of Cilicia, in Asia Minor.

Family:

- A. Jews from the tribe of Benjamin. (Saul may have been named for King Saul.)
- B. Roman citizenship—Paul was free born. This citizenship meant he could never be crucified or scourged and could appeal to Rome for justice.

Education:

- A. In Tarsus he would receive the benefits of Greek culture.
Tarsus was a famous university town and commercial center.
- B. At Jerusalem under Gamaliel, he received the finest Jewish training and became an outstanding Pharisee.

Conversion:

- On the road to Damascus about 36 AD.

Trips:

- A. To Cyprus and Asia Minor.....First Journey
- B. To Europe.....Second Journey
- C. To Asia Minor and Europe (especially Ephesus)....Third Journey
- D. To Rome.....Fourth Journey

Writings:

- Thirteen or fourteen important New Testament Epistles

Imprisonments:

- A. Arrested and imprisoned in Jerusalem.
- B. Held as prisoner in Caesarea for two years.
- C. Taken to Rome where he remained in jail for two years.
- D. Temporarily released.
- E. In the Roman inner prison, he died a martyr under Nero.

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*"And I answered, Who art thou, Lord? And he said unto me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest."
(Acts 22:8)*

Acts 21:17-26: Unity Amidst Diversity:

Paul's Arrival at Jerusalem

¹⁷ When we arrived at Jerusalem, the brothers and sisters received us warmly. ¹⁸ The next day Paul and the rest of us went to see James, and all the elders were present. ¹⁹ Paul greeted them and reported in detail what God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry.

²⁰ When they heard this, they praised God. Then they said to Paul: "You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews have believed, and all of them are zealous for the law. ²¹ They have been informed that you teach all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to turn away from Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or live according to our customs. ²² What shall we do? They will certainly hear that you have come, ²³ so do what we tell you. There are four men with us who have made a vow. ²⁴ Take these men, join in their purification rites and pay their expenses, so that they can have their heads shaved. Then everyone will know there is no truth in these reports about you, but that you yourself are living in obedience to the law. ²⁵ As for the Gentile believers, we have written to them our decision that they should abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality."

²⁶ The next day Paul took the men and purified himself along with them. Then he went to the temple to give notice of the date when the days of purification would end and the offering would be made for each of them.

21:17: Paul arrives in time to celebrate Pentecost, just as he had planned. He mentions in 20:16 **the brethren received us gladly**. This was because of the much-needed offering that they brought. Also, and more importantly, the Jerusalem believers rejoiced because the Gentile converts with Paul provided visible evidence of God's work of salvation in the Roman world. This initial unofficial reception may have taken place at Mnason's house.

21:18: James. The brother of Jesus and head of the Jerusalem church, not the James, the brother of John, who had been executed by Herod. **all the elders**. The mention of elders indicates that the apostles, often away on evangelistic work, had turned over the rule of the Jerusalem church to them. It has been speculated that there were seventy elders, paralleling the Sanhedrin. Given the large size of the Jerusalem church, there probably were at least that many. God had decreed that after the apostles were gone, the church was to be ruled by elders (cf 11:30, 14:23, 17:17, 1 Tim 5:17, Titus 1:5, James 5:14, 1 Pet. 5:1, 5).

21:19: Paul's official report of his missionary work did not involve meaningless generalities; he related specific incidents from his journeys (cf 11:14). As always (cf 14:27, 15:4, 12), Paul gave all the credit and glory for his accomplishments to God.

21:20: **zealous for the law**. Some Jewish believers continued to observe the ceremonial aspects of the Mosaic Law. Unlike the Judaizers, they did not view the law as a means of salvation.

21:21: **to forsake Moses**. The Judaizers were spreading false reports that Paul was teaching Jewish believers to forsake their heritage. That Paul had not abandoned Jewish customs is evident from his

circumcision of Timothy 16:1-3) and his own taking of a Nazirite vow (18:18).

21:23: **taken a vow.** A Nazirite vow symbolizes total devotion to God.

21:24: **to be purified.** Having just returned from an extended stay in Gentile lands, Paul was considered ceremonially unclean. He, therefore, needed to undergo ritual purification before participating in (as their sponsor) in the ceremony marking the end of the four men's vows. **pay their expenses.** For the temple ceremony in which the four would shave their heads, and the sacrifices associated with that Nazirite vow. Paying those expenses for another was considered an act of piety and by doing so, Paul would give further proof that he had not forsaken his Jewish heritage. **shave their heads.** A practice commonly associated with a Nazirite vow. (Num 6:18)

21:25: James made it clear that what he was asking Paul to do by no means changed the decision of the Jerusalem Council regarding Gentiles. Since Paul was Jewish, that decision did not apply to him.

In Acts 21:17-26, Paul arrives in Jerusalem, a city marked by cultural diversity and a growing Christian community. Here, James, the brother of Jesus, plays a pivotal role in advising Paul on navigating the delicate balance between Jewish and Gentile believers. The emphasis on unity becomes apparent as Paul adheres to Jewish customs to foster harmony within the diverse Christian community.

Acts 21:27-40: Persecution and Divine Intervention:

Paul Arrested

²⁷ When the seven days were nearly over, some Jews from the province of Asia saw Paul at the temple. They stirred up the whole

crowd and seized him, ²⁸ shouting, “Fellow Israelites, help us! This is the man who teaches everyone everywhere against our people and our law and this place. And besides, he has brought Greeks into the temple and defiled this holy place.” ²⁹ (They had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with Paul and assumed that Paul had brought him into the temple.)

³⁰ The whole city was aroused, and the people came running from all directions. Seizing Paul, they dragged him from the temple, and immediately the gates were shut. ³¹ While they were trying to kill him, news reached the commander of the Roman troops that the whole city of Jerusalem was in an uproar. ³² He at once took some officers and soldiers and ran down to the crowd. When the rioters saw the commander and his soldiers, they stopped beating Paul.

³³ The commander came up and arrested him and ordered him to be bound with two chains. Then he asked who he was and what he had done. ³⁴ Some in the crowd shouted one thing and some another, and since the commander could not get at the truth because of the uproar, he ordered that Paul be taken into the barracks. ³⁵ When Paul reached the steps, the violence of the mob was so great he had to be carried by the soldiers. ³⁶ The crowd that followed kept shouting, “Get rid of him!”

Paul Speaks to the Crowd

³⁷ As the soldiers were about to take Paul into the barracks, he asked the commander, “May I say something to you?”

“Do you speak Greek?” he replied. ³⁸ “Aren’t you the Egyptian who started a revolt and led four thousand terrorists out into the wilderness some time ago?”

³⁹ Paul answered, “I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no ordinary city. Please let me speak to the people.”

⁴⁰ After receiving the commander's permission, Paul stood on the steps and motioned to the crowd. When they were all silent, he said to them in Aramaic^[a]:

21:27: seven days. The length of the purification process. Paul had to appear at the temple on the third and seventh days. The incident that follows took place on the seventh day, when the process was almost complete. **Jews from Asia.** Probably from Ephesus since they recognized Trophimus as a Gentile (v. 29), they were in Jerusalem celebrating the Feast of Pentecost.

21:28: the people, the law, and this place. Paul's enemies leveled three false charges against him. They claimed that he taught Jews to forsake their heritage—the same lie told by the Judaizers. The second charge, that Paul opposed the law, was a very dangerous one, albeit false, in this setting. Originally, Pentecost was a celebration of the firstfruits of the harvest. But by this time, it had become a celebration of Moses' receiving the law on Mount Sinai. Thus, the Jewish people were especially zealous for the law during this feast. The third charge of blaspheming or defiling the temple, had helped bring about the deaths of Jesus (Mark 14:57, 58) and Stephen (6:13). All three charges were, of course, completely false. **brought Greeks into the temple.** The Asian Jews accused Paul of having brought Trophimus past the Court of the Gentiles into the part of the temple where Gentiles were forbidden. Such a charge was absurd, for it would have entailed Paul's risking his friend's life (the Romans had granted the Jews permission to execute any Gentile who so defiled the temple.)

21:30: doors were shut. This was done by the temple guards, since Paul's death on the temple grounds would defile the temple (cf 2 Kings 11:15). They made no effort, however, to rescue the apostle from the crowd, which was intent on beating him to death.

21:31: **commander.** The tribune (Claudius Lysias 23:26) commanding the Roman cohort based in Jerusalem. He was the highest-ranking Roman official in Jerusalem (the governor's official residence was in Caesarea). **the garrison.** The 1000-man Roman occupation force. Their headquarters was Fort Antonia, located on a precipice overlooking the temple complex. From the vantage point, Roman sentries spotted the riot and informed their commander.

21:32: **soldiers and centurions.** The use of the plural "centurions" suggest Lysias took at least 200 soldiers with him, since each centurion commanded 100 men.

21:33: **two chains.** Assuming Paul to be guilty of something (since the Jews were so enraged at him.) Lysias arrested him. The tribune thought he knew who Paul was (v. 38).

21:34: **barracks.** In Fort Antonia, overlooking the temple grounds.

21:36: **Away with him!** Or, "kill him!" (these are the similar words that were shouted at Jesus in the Book of John when Jesus was falsely accused, tried, and sentenced.)

21:37: **Can you speak Greek?** Paul's use of the language of educated people started Lysias, who assumed his prisoner was an uneducated criminal.

21:38 **the Egyptians.... Stirred up a rebellion.** Lysias' question revealed who he (wrongly) assumed Paul was. The Egyptian was a false prophet who, several years earlier, had promised to drive out the Romans. Before he could do so, however, his forces were attacked and routed by Roman troops led by the governor Felix. Though several hundred of his followers were killed or captured, he managed to escape. Lysias assumed he had returned and been captured by the crowd. **assassins.** Called "sicarii" they were a terrorist group whose Jewish nationalism led them to murder Romans and Jews perceived as sympathetic to Rome. Since they often used the cover of a crowd to

stab their victims, Lysias assumed the mob had caught one of their leaders in the act.

21:39: **Tarsus.** Tarsus was an important cultural city, with a university rivaling those at Athens and Alexandria.

The narrative intensifies in Acts 21:27-40, where Paul faces severe opposition, accused of defiling the temple. This leads to a riot, reflecting the hostility towards early Christians. However, amidst the chaos, divine intervention becomes evident as a Roman commander steps in, preventing unjust harm to Paul. This episode underscores the theme of God's sovereignty and protection over His servants, even in the face of intense persecution.

Acts 22:1-23:10: Paul's Defense and Divine Sovereignty:

22 ¹“Brothers and fathers, listen now to my defense.”

² When they heard him speak to them in Aramaic, they became very quiet.

Then Paul said: ³“I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city. I studied under Gamaliel and was thoroughly trained in the law of our ancestors. I was just as zealous for God as any of you are today. ⁴I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison, ⁵as the high priest and all the Council can themselves testify. I even obtained letters from them to their associates in Damascus, and went there to bring these people as prisoners to Jerusalem to be punished.

⁶“About noon as I came near Damascus, suddenly a bright light from heaven flashed around me. ⁷I fell to the ground and heard a voice say to me, ‘Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute me?’

⁸ “‘Who are you, Lord?’ I asked.

“ ‘I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting,’ he replied. ⁹ My companions saw the light, but they did not understand the voice of him who was speaking to me.

¹⁰ “‘What shall I do, Lord?’ I asked.

“ ‘Get up,’ the Lord said, ‘and go into Damascus. There you will be told all that you have been assigned to do.’ ¹¹ My companions led me by the hand into Damascus, because the brilliance of the light had blinded me.

¹² “A man named Ananias came to see me. He was a devout observer of the law and highly respected by all the Jews living there. ¹³ He stood beside me and said, ‘Brother Saul, receive your sight!’ And at that very moment I was able to see him.

¹⁴ “Then he said: ‘The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from his mouth. ¹⁵ You will be his witness to all people of what you have seen and heard. ¹⁶ And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.’

¹⁷ “When I returned to Jerusalem and was praying at the temple, I fell into a trance ¹⁸ and saw the Lord speaking to me. ‘Quick!’ he said. ‘Leave Jerusalem immediately, because the people here will not accept your testimony about me.’

¹⁹ “‘Lord,’ I replied, ‘these people know that I went from one synagogue to another to imprison and beat those who believe in you. ²⁰ And when the blood of your martyr^[a] Stephen was shed, I stood there giving my approval and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.’

²¹ “Then the Lord said to me, ‘Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles.’ ”

Paul the Roman Citizen

²² The crowd listened to Paul until he said this. Then they raised their voices and shouted, “Rid the earth of him! He’s not fit to live!”

²³ As they were shouting and throwing off their cloaks and flinging dust into the air, ²⁴ the commander ordered that Paul be taken into the barracks. He directed that he be flogged and interrogated in order to find out why the people were shouting at him like this. ²⁵ As they stretched him out to flog him, Paul said to the centurion standing there, “Is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen who hasn’t even been found guilty?”

²⁶ When the centurion heard this, he went to the commander and reported it. “What are you going to do?” he asked. “This man is a Roman citizen.”

²⁷ The commander went to Paul and asked, “Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?”

“Yes, I am,” he answered.

²⁸ Then the commander said, “I had to pay a lot of money for my citizenship.”

“But I was born a citizen,” Paul replied.

²⁹ Those who were about to interrogate him withdrew immediately. The commander himself was alarmed when he realized that he had put Paul, a Roman citizen, in chains.

Paul Before the Sanhedrin

³⁰ The commander wanted to find out exactly why Paul was being accused by the Jews. So the next day he released him and ordered the chief priests and all the members of the Sanhedrin to assemble. Then he brought Paul and had him stand before them.

23 Paul looked straight at the Sanhedrin and said, “My brothers, I have fulfilled my duty to God in all good conscience to this day.” ² At this the high priest Ananias ordered those standing near Paul to strike him on the mouth. ³ Then Paul said to him, “God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! You sit there to judge me according to the law, yet you yourself violate the law by commanding that I be struck!”

⁴ Those who were standing near Paul said, “How dare you insult God’s high priest!”

⁵ Paul replied, “Brothers, I did not realize that he was the high priest; for it is written: ‘Do not speak evil about the ruler of your people.’^[b]”

⁶ Then Paul, knowing that some of them were Sadducees and the others Pharisees, called out in the Sanhedrin, “My brothers, I am a Pharisee, descended from Pharisees. I stand on trial because of the hope of the resurrection of the dead.” ⁷ When he said this, a dispute broke out between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. ⁸ (The Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, and that there are neither angels nor spirits, but the Pharisees believe all these things.)

⁹ There was a great uproar, and some of the teachers of the law who were Pharisees stood up and argued vigorously. “We find nothing wrong with this man,” they said. “What if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?” ¹⁰ The dispute became so violent that the commander was afraid Paul would be torn to pieces by them. He ordered the troops to go down and take him away from them by force and bring him into the barracks.

“The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, “Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome.”

Claudius Lysias conceives then the ingenious idea that a confrontation of Paul and the Sanhedrin might provide him with the facts of which Paul was being accused. When this also proves to be unproductive, the poor commander had no choice but to refer his prisoner to the governor.

Paul’s appearance before the Sanhedrin is sketched in only a few rough lines. Luke was, obviously, not an eyewitness of this event as he had been at the preceding incident. What we read is, probably, Paul’s own condensed version.

Having been a member of the Sanhedrin himself, Paul faced the court as an equal, which must be the reason why he addresses them as “my brothers.” Several decades earlier this same council had given him authority to go to Damascus to root out Christianity in that city. Now, being the first time he returned to stand before them, Paul reports to them, more or less in the same way as he had reported to the church of Antioch after his first missionary journey. Against this background we must understand the words: “I have fulfilled my duty to God in all good conscience to this day.” Paul’s appeal to his conscience infuriated his judges. In their eyes, Paul had betrayed the cause. He had done none of the things he set out to accomplish when he left for Damascus.

We may assume that Paul said more than the few words recorded for us. He must have explained his change of attitude after receiving the heavenly vision of Jesus, stating that it would have been impossible for him to continue his mission of destruction and also maintain his integrity.

Paul’s reaction indicates a loss of composure for which he had to apologize afterwards. There was no written law which forbade the

high priest's command to strike Paul. Paul, however, interpreted the answer to his defense as an indication that he could not expect a fair trial and that he was condemned before he was tried. He was certainly not treated as innocent until proven guilty.

The Pulpit Commentary, using the information from Josephus, states about the high priest Ananias, that he was: "the son of Nebedaeus, successor of Joseph the son of Camel, or Camydus [who] appears to have been actually high priest at this time. He was a violent, haughty, gluttonous, and rapacious man, and yet looked up to by the Jews. ... He had probably lately returned from Rome, having been confirmed, as it seems, in his office by Claudius, to whom Quadratus, the predecessor of Felix, has sent him as a prisoner, to answer certain charges of sedition against him. He seems to have been high priest for the unusually long period of over ten years — from A.D. 48 to A.D. 59."

Paul's reply: "Brothers, I did not realize that he was the high priest" has been the subject of much controversy among scholars.

Paul must have come to the conclusion that a fair trial was impossible to obtain. The apparent unity of the Sanhedrin was a unity of hatred, not one of principle. Earlier, opposing groups in Jewish society had found the same common ground to plot the death of the Messiah. After one of Jesus' miracles of healing on the Sabbath, Mark records: "Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus." The statement: "I stand on trial because of my hope in the resurrection of the dead" was at the same time a sincere confession of faith, which appealed to the belief of the Pharisees, and a bait to the council of judges who behaved more like a pack of hungry wolves than supreme court judges in search of justice. Paul's action was a shrewd and well-calculated risk, which immediately brought to light the real character of the judges. Barnes' Notes observes: "Whatever may be thought of the propriety of this

course, it cannot be denied that it was a masterstroke of policy, and that it evinced a profound knowledge of human nature.”

This is the only place in Scripture where we learn that Paul’s father had also been a Pharisee. Some scholars interpret this to mean that Paul had been a disciple of the Pharisees. It is true that the apostle set no specific value to the fact that he belonged to the party of the Pharisees. In his Epistle to the Philippians, he even stated: “But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.” According to his words here, however, he still considered himself to be a Pharisee as far as his conviction about the resurrection of the dead is concerned. Paul called this doctrinal statement “the hope of Israel.”

Paul does not specifically refer here to the resurrection of Christ, but the members of the Sanhedrin cannot have missed that point. In his First Epistle to the Corinthians, he explains: “But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.”

As far as the Sadducees were concerned, Paul’s proclamation was offensive in that it opposed their fundamental belief that there was no resurrection. To the Pharisees Paul proclaimed that a denial of

Christ's resurrection would endanger their convictions about the resurrection of all human beings. Immediately after Pentecost, Peter and John were imprisoned because: "the apostles were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead." For both parties, acknowledgment of Jesus' resurrection would mean a conviction of their guilt. As in the case of the other apostles, the roles were reversed in that the accused became the accuser and the judges the accused.

It is worthy of note that the apostles considered the doctrine of the resurrection to be the core of the Gospel message, something which is seldom emphasized in modern preaching. If death is the end of man's existence, life is in fact meaningless and human dignity an illusion. The hope of the resurrection is the hope of glory. Jesus Christ is our pioneer as well as our Savior. Faith in Christ gives meaning to life.

The reaction to Paul's ejaculation would have been comical if it had not been so tragic. The two parties not only began to tear into each other like fighting dogs, they also tore into the man who stood accused before them. The Roman commander found it necessary to interfere. Luke states: "The dispute became so violent that the commander was afraid Paul would be torn to pieces by them." If Claudius Lysias had ever felt any inclination to consider Judaism, he was probably cured from that moment on.

We may read in vs. 11 that Paul was depressed by the experiences of the riot and the trial. Physical exhaustion may have played a role in that also. Physical abuse takes an emotional toll. Luke states: "The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, 'Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome.'" The wording suggests that what Paul experienced was more than merely having a dream or a vision. His spirit entered into the presence of the Lord Jesus of whom he had testified, or rather, the risen Lord lifted the veil of what we call reality and showed him the sweetness of His presence. Part of the great commission Jesus gave to

His disciples is: “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”⁴⁶³ In a way, Jesus’ revelation of Himself to Paul in the prison cell in the castle of Antonia was similar to His appearance on the road to Damascus. There Jesus had identified Himself with the victims of Paul’s persecution; here He identified Himself with Paul. In the assurance of His presence and the sweet encouragement of the words: “Take courage!” the risen Lord lifted His beloved apostle out of his despondency into His glorious presence. Jesus did not send an angel to Paul to give him his new marching orders; He came Himself to convey the message. How many prison cells in this world have been lit up by similar experiences!

Acts 22:1-23:10 details Paul's defense before both the Jewish council and Roman authorities. His eloquent recounting of his conversion not only emphasizes personal transformation but also serves as a powerful testimony to God's redemptive work. The narrative showcases Paul's resilience and unwavering commitment to his calling, despite the challenges and opposition he encounters.

Closing Prayer

Prayers of the People: Martha, Billy and family, Karissa, Uncle Dennis, Uncle David, Alexis, Patrick and family, Deb, those who are suffering from oppression, addiction, depression, lonely with no family for Christmas, those soldiers serving overseas and their families left behind, homeless and hungry, victims of war, a moral and upright government, those who suffer loss of any kind.

Heavenly Father, what an amazing, life-changing experience it was for Paul to be confronted on the road to Damascus by Jesus, Himself. Lord, I am so thankful that You can and will save anyone who humbly turns to you for forgiveness of sins and life everlasting. Thank You for this insight into Paul’s life, from being the most zealot of persecutors of the "followers of the Way" to being the greatest missionary for the gospel of grace. Use me, Lord, in whatever way You choose, to further Your gospel in my corner of the world. In Jesus' name, AMEN.

“And I answered, Who art thou, Lord? And he said unto me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest.”
(Acts 22:8)