

# THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

An Exposition

by

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## CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

What a scene it was! On the stairs, midway between the temple court and the fortress, stood the Apostle in chains, his person showing the effects of the beating he had received. Around him were the well-armed Roman soldiers, and below the multitude with up-turned faces, still wildly gesticulating and only becoming more silent when they heard the first words from Paul's lips in the Hebrew tongue. \*

\* The Aramaic dialect, which was then universally used among the Jews.

We find two sections in this chapter.

**I. The Address of the Apostle** (Verses 1-21).

**II. The Answer from the Mob, and Paul's Appeal to his Roman citizenship** (Verses 22-30).

### **I. The Address of the Apostle.**

It is the first address in his defence recorded in this book, and his own person and experience is the theme.

Seventeen times he uses the word "I," so that we have in his words a sketch of his life. All is well put and shows the great tact and wisdom of the Apostle. We find that the address contains three well-defined parts. He was not permitted to finish his autobiographical statements, but the mob interrupted him, as many years before Stephen's address was cut short.

#### *1. Paul's Account of himself as a Jew.*

The accusation against him was "**that he teacheth all men everywhere against the people, and the law, and this place.**" This now he tries to meet first of all by the evidence of his past Jewish life. The advice of the elders, too, finds an echo in the opening words of his speech. They had told him that he should prove to the multitude that he walked orderly, keeping the law.

**“Men, brethren, and fathers, hear ye my defence which I make now unto you. (And when they heard that he spake in the Hebrew tongue to them, they kept the more silence: and he saith,) I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day. And I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women. As also the high priest doth bear me witness, and all the estate of the elders: from whom also I received letters unto the brethren, and went to Damascus, to bring them which were there bound unto Jerusalem, for to be punished”** (Verses 1-5).

It was a very wise and tactful utterance with which he began his defense.

The crowd below which had used him so roughly and which was ready to murder him, he addressed as **“Men, brethren and fathers.”** This was bound to secure at once their attention, as well as the use of their own language. But we may see in this conciliatory opening of his address an expression of his graciousness.

The words which follow were spoken to show that he had had a true Jewish bringing up, and lived an exemplary Jewish life.

First, he gives the fact of his birth outside of the land. Many were thus born and educated away from the homeland, but he was brought up in the City of Jerusalem, thereby showing that he belonged to a very jealous class of Jews, who cared for the religion and customs of the fathers.

Furthermore, he had as teacher the great and well-known, as well as highly esteemed, Gamaliel. Gamaliel was a doctor of the Torah, the law, and a great leader of the strictest sect among the Jews, the Pharisees. So the speaker had become a Pharisee and had entered upon a life of the most scrupulous law-keeping as well as obedience to the traditions of the elders.

Next, he bears witness to his own zeal. He **“was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day.”** One can only admire the tactful courtesy of the speaker. He not only spoke of his own zeal for God, but acknowledged the same in his hearers. With these words he even declared the wild scene in which he was so prominently concerned, an expression of their zeal for God. In Romans 10:2 he had written: **“For I bear them record that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.”**

Next, he illustrates that zeal for God, which characterized his career as a Pharisee.

Like the assembled mob he had been a persecutor. But he avoids speaking of those he persecuted by name. **“I persecuted this way unto death.”** All, however, knew what he meant by the expression **“this way;”** it had for them the meaning of the new sect, which had arisen in Judaism. The same term is used by Paul in Chapter 24:14.

And how had he persecuted this new way, the believers in Jesus? Unto death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women.

It was a confession of his persecuting zeal. The same confession we read in the beginning of the Epistle to the Galatians:

**“For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews’ religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it; and profited in the Jews’ religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers”** (Galatians 1:13-14).

After he had thus briefly referred to the fact that he had been once energized by the same hatred against this way, he appealed to the ecclesiastical authorities as a witness. He referred to the letters, which so many years ago he had received, to persecute the believing Jews in Damascus, the letters which were never delivered by him. May there not have been a few among his hearers, who then remembered the young Pharisee of bygone days, Saul of Tarsus?

Then he begins a brief sketch of a second chapter in his eventful life.

## *2. The Story of his Conversion.*

The young Pharisee had disappeared suddenly from the scene, and his persecuting zeal had terminated abruptly. How then had it come about.

**“And it came to pass, that, as I made my journey, and was come nigh unto Damascus about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me. And I fell unto the ground, and heard a voice saying unto me, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And I answered, Who art thou, Lord? And he said unto me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest. And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me. And I said, What shall I do, Lord? And the Lord said unto me, Arise, and go into Damascus; and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do. And when I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of them that were with me, I came into Damascus. And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good report of all the Jews which dwelt there, came unto me, and stood, and said unto me, Brother Saul, receive thy sight. And the same hour I looked up upon him. And he said, The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know His will, and see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of His mouth. For thou shalt be His witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard. And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord”** (Verses 6-16).

The remarkable incident we have already followed in our exposition of the ninth chapter.

However, some very interesting details are added here by himself, the former account being the inspired historical record written by Luke.

First, we note that it was at noon when the wonderful vision flashed before his eyes. While in Chapter 9 we read of a light that shined from heaven about him, here he tells us that it was a great light, and in Chapter 26:13 Paul informs us that it was **“above the brightness of the sun.”**

In the eleventh verse of our chapter he speaks of it as “**glory**”; even so it was glory of the risen and ascended Son of God.

In Acts 9 we read that the voice of the Lord said to him, “**I am Jesus,**” but here a more detailed account is given by Paul, and from it we learn that the Lord had said, “**I am Jesus of Nazareth.**”

As that worthy and blessed Name was mentioned by Paul, what dark and threatening looks must have met his gaze from the up-turned faces! And from his witness they learned that this same Jesus, whom they had rejected, is the Lord, and that He lives in the Glory.

Of Ananias, Paul does not speak as a disciple at all, but he calls him “**a devout man according to the law,**” who had a good report of all the Jews in Damascus. In all this we have an evidence of the wisdom of Paul. He also avoided the word “Christ,” though all knew whom he meant when he speaks of “**that Just One.**”

Thus he briefly had described how the Lord, the rejected Jesus of Nazareth, had appeared unto him. \*

\* Some have found a difficulty in the fact that here Paul saith that his companions saw the light and heard not the voice, which spake with him. In chapter 9 the record states that they heard the voice. There is no discrepancy here. They did hear the voice, but were not able to understand the words which were spoken. They saw no one; only Paul saw the Lord.

### *3. The Divine Commission.*

He next touched upon another episode in his experience. The interesting account he gives here is not recorded in the ninth chapter.

**“And it came to pass, that, when I was come again to Jerusalem, even while I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance; and saw him saying unto me, Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy testimony concerning me. And I said, Lord, they know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on thee: and when the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him. And he said unto me, Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles”** (Verses 17-21).

Once more the Lord had appeared unto him, while praying in the temple when he was in a trance. In this same temple which stretched out before him, all this had taken place. And what an evidence to them of his sincere character that he had gone to the temple to offer up fervent prayers.

He then repeats the words the Lord had spoken to him, “**Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem, for they will not receive thy testimony concerning me.**” He himself now bound in chains, standing before the Jewish mob, was the living witness to the truth of these words. If he had but remembered those words and had followed completely the divine commission.

At that time his loving heart for his own people had prompted an answer. He told the Lord that he had a peculiar fitness to bear the testimony to his brethren in the beloved city. Did they not know that he had imprisoned and beaten those that believed in Him? When the blood of Stephen, the martyr, was shed, did he not stand by and consent unto his death, keeping the raiment of those that slew him?

It is beautiful to read these simple words of the intimate conversation Paul carried on with the Lord. And he could tell the Lord all about his sins and hatred against Himself and His own, recount once more the bitter persecutions he had practiced and the part he took in Stephen's death.

Here we have a beautiful example of a conscience which has been purged, and knows that all is right. All this Paul relates to prove to them his sincerity as well as love for his kinsmen. The last word the Lord had spoken to him at that time was a word of commission: **“Depart, for I will send thee far hence to the Gentiles.”**

The Lord had therefore called him to be the Apostle of the Gentiles. His defense was complete. He had fully demonstrated that the accusation against him was false, that he loved his people and the Lord Himself had called him to go to the Gentiles.

## **II. The Answer from the Mob and Paul's Appeal to his Roman Citizenship.**

**“And they gave him audience unto this word, and then lifted up their voices, and said, Away with such a fellow from the earth; for it is not fit that he should live. And as they cried out, and cast off their clothes, and threw dust into the air, the chief captain commanded him to be brought into the castle, and bade that he should be examined by scourging; that he might know wherefore they cried so against him. And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said unto the centurion that stood by, Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned? When the centurion heard that, he went and told the chief captain, saying, Take heed what thou doest: for this man is a Roman. Then the chief captain came, and said unto him, Tell me, art thou a Roman? He said, Yea. And the chief captain answered, With a great sum obtained I this freedom. And Paul said, But I was free-born. Then straightway they departed from him which should have examined him: and the chief captain also was afraid, after he knew that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him. On the morrow, because he would have known the certainty wherefore he was accused of the Jews, he loosed him from his bands, and commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear, and brought Paul down, and set him before them” (Verses 22-30).**

They were impatient listeners, the storm broke with the word **“Gentiles.”**

Another great tumult resulted and the many voices demanded that such a fellow should not live. It was a scene of utmost confusion. All crying, gesticulating wildly, throwing dust in the air, one of the common occurrences when Orientals get excited; they cast off their outer garments to do so.

The chief captain seems to have been ignorant of the Aramaic dialect. He gave orders that Paul be now removed into the castle itself and be examined by scourging so that he might find out why they cried so against him. The torture was to be used to make him confess.

He was led away, and everything made ready for the cruel treatment, when the prisoner spoke:

**“Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned?”**

The centurion reported this to the *chiliarch*, the chief officer, who at once appeared on the scene. When he discovered that Paul was indeed a Roman by birth, a higher type of Roman citizenship than that which the chief captain had obtained by a great sum, they left their hands off of his person, and even the *chiliarch* was afraid. It was a highly illegal act to bind a Roman. Paul escaped the awful torture.

Not a few had pointed to this as a prominent failure in the career of the Apostle. According to these critics he made a grave mistake when he pleaded his Roman citizenship; he should have been silent and taken the unjust and cruel treatment without a murmur.

If some of these harsh critics of the beloved Apostle were placed in the same condition, what would they do? As one has truly said: “It is easy to be a martyr in theory, and such are seldom martyrs in practice.”

He had a perfect right to tell the ignorant officers of the law who he was, and thus prevent a flagrant and cruel transgression of the law. And yet his conduct in Philippi was far different. Why did he not announce his Roman citizenship then? The power of the Spirit rested then upon him; it is different here. He is not acting in the liberty and peace of the Spirit, a fact which becomes more apparent in the next chapter, where we see him before the Sanhedrim.

~ end of chapter 22 ~

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