

## Thoughts on Acts Twenty-Two

When I read Luke's account of these proceedings now, retired after years of hiring people, I begin to see Paul's speech not as a pure defense but as a resume of who he is, his education, and his accomplishments. Paul starts with his early life and training: a Jew by birth, a free-born Roman citizen of Tarsus, educated in Jerusalem by the best Pharisee teacher, Gamaliel, who taught the strictest way to follow the Law. Paul explains how he used that training: Zealous toward God, persecuted Christians and the Way, putting men and women in prison, and even securing their death. Who can attest to these things: The High Priest and council members from whom he received letters authorizing his actions.

Paul continued his resume by describing how he met the resurrected Jesus as he traveled to Damascus to carry out the council's orders (Ac 22:6-11). As he neared Damascus, the travelers were surrounded by a light brighter than the noonday sun (Acts 22:6), (9:3). Paul fell to the ground and heard a voice. Most versions quote the voice as saying, *"Saul, why do you persecute me?"* Some newer versions give, *"why are you so cruel to me?"* The Greek word *diōkō* means to drive away. It includes various forms of harassment, making trouble for, molesting, mistreating, and persecuting to force a person or group away. Paul asks who can control the light and speak to him in such a way. The response changed Saul and his ambitions in life to a belief that Jesus was alive and the very one he had looked for. Most churches that teach the Bible say that at the point of believing that Jesus is the Christ, Saul was saved from his sins. But Jesus did not say, *"Saul, the slate is clean. Go on your way, sinless."* Jesus did say, *"Get up and go on into Damascus, and there you will be told of all that has been appointed for you to do"* (Acts 22:10). Saul's resume changed dramatically.

In Damascus, Saul waited three days to be told what to do. That is a long time to consider that most of your efforts and work have been in vain. We are often involved with work that consumes our time, seeming to be of high priority at the time. But years later, we learn it was not as important as it had appeared. Too often, people find themselves so deeply involved in one thing that they have no time for anything else. Saul was driven to destroy the name of Jesus of Nazareth. It was his one objective until he met Jesus, and a man named Ananias was sent to him. Ananias needed a little persuasion to go to Saul, who had been sent to arrest him and all in Damascus that *"called on Jesus' name."* But being persuaded by his Lord, Ananias went to Saul (Acts 9:10-14).

Saul begins describing the new man he has become by introducing the teacher sent to him as Ananias, *"a devout man according to the law, having a good testimony with all the Jews who dwelt there"* (Acts 22:12). Saul had been blinded when the light surrounded him but received his sight again as Ananias touched him. Ananias told him that the God of our Fathers wanted Saul to know His will, see the Just One, and hear His voice. And then came the statement of the work God had planned for Saul. *"You will be His witness to all men of what you have seen and heard"* (Acts 22:15). Finally, Ananias then directed Saul to *"Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord"* (Acts 22:12-16 NKJV). The hearing, repenting, and believing portions had already been accomplished. Saul needed only the baptism to wash his sins away, for they had not been taken away until the burial and coming out of the water had been accomplished.

Paul included other instances when Jesus appeared to him, leading him onward in his role as Apostle of Christ. *"It happened when I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, that I fell*

*into a trance, and I saw Him saying to me, 'Make haste, and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about Me' (Acts 22:17-18). He was considered an enemy by the council. He pleaded with Jesus, "They themselves understand that in one synagogue after another I used to imprison and beat those who believed in You. 'And when the blood of Your witness Stephen was being shed, I also was standing by approving, and watching out for the coats of those who were slaying him" (Acts 22:19-20). Even with the Jewish threat, Jesus told Paul to go to the Gentiles (Acts 22:21).*

The commander of the Roman garrison tried unsuccessfully to put Paul into a category of troublemakers. He thought that maybe Paul was the Egyptian who stirred up a revolt earlier (Acts 21:39). But that does not fit the accusations of the Jews or the person in his custody. Paul was saved from flogging to force a confession by declaring his Roman citizenship. This commander, two governors, and one king of Israel worried over the charges against Paul for over two years.