

**THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES**  
**NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP STUDY**

Part 23 - Chapters 22 and 23

At a first reading of Acts you may wonder why Paul's conversion is described on three occasions, in chapters 9, 22 and 26. We can learn a great deal from his three testimonies, first to Luke, then to a Jewish crowd, then to King Herod Agrippa. By telling the story three times we discover a lot more about Paul and God's dealing with him. At the same time there are vital lessons about the place of testimony in Christian witness.

Notice how courteously Paul addressed the Jewish crowd even though only a few minutes before they had been trying to murder him (22:1). He was careful to use their dialect of Aramaic though it was probably not his mother tongue (22:2). He described his orthodox Jewish background and from it explained how he could identify with their zeal to protect God's name (22:3). While exercising that zeal in pursuit of Christians, God intervened in his own life (22:4-6). His description of the light and the voice would be familiar to Jews who knew the Old Testament and how God had revealed Himself to people in the past. He went on to relate how step by step Jesus revealed Himself as God and how he responded (22:7-11). Again he emphasised Ananias' Jewish credentials and how he was simply an instrument of God (22:12,13). He told the Jews far more of Ananias' words than he told Luke in chapter 9 to underline God's call to him through Ananias (22:14,15). Ananias' call to 'wash away his sins' tells us clearly that it was only here in Damascus that Saul was actually converted. The Jewish crowd who remembered and respected John the Baptist's ministry would identify with this way of describing his conversion (22:16).

Referring presumably to his visit to Jerusalem in Acts 9:26 Paul emphasised that it was in the temple that God spoke to him as He had spoken to His prophets in the Old Testament (22:17). Until the very last phrase, by being 'all things to all men...to the Jews I became as a Jew' (1 Corinthians 9:20,22), Paul held the crowd's attention and was able to communicate his message very clearly. Almost certainly in the long term it would have resulted in the conversion of some. However the mention of the Gentiles (22:21) brought a violent reaction. There is so much we can learn from this story about the most effective way to reach people. Our attitude, language and content with which they can identify are all vital. For this reason our testimony should be very individual and personal for each situation.

Mob emotion ended rational discussion, (22:22,23) as it did with Stephen in Acts 7:54,57. Roman justice was rough but better than nothing. Scourging was done with leather thongs in which were set pieces of bone. Flesh would be ripped off and the resulting blood loss could in itself cause death. Here it was about to be used, not as a punishment as it had been with Jesus (Matthew 27:26), but as a means of extracting information, of obtaining a confession under torture. In our modern legal systems such things are forbidden as an abuse of human rights, although similar practices are widespread in dictatorships. Even Roman law recognised that this was an inferior system and protected its own citizens from such inhuman treatment.

Roman citizenship was a privilege within the empire. At first it was confined only to the free men of the city of Rome; later it included those of Italy. Later still, it could be purchased by the wealthy (like a peerage) but was also conferred on selected groups who had been especially useful to the emperor. The Jewish community in Tarsus seems to have been one such favoured group. Eventually it was applied to all citizens of the empire in an attempt to retain their loyalty - but then it lost its value as a means of manipulating people (22:24-29).

Paul's use of his Roman citizenship protected him from scourging but it led into a prolonged legal battle which would extend over the next four years at least, and would bring him before two Roman governors (24 and 25) one king, (26) and at least one emperor (25:11; 27:1; 2 Timothy 4:16) and finally to execution. It was certainly not the easy way out!

The Roman commander frightened by the realisation of the trouble he had nearly brought upon himself, now bent over backwards to follow the letter of the law and follow due legal process (22:30). This opened yet another door of opportunity for witness for Paul.

23:1 Q.1 How can we reconcile verse 1 with Acts 22:4 and 1 Timothy 1:15? What was Paul teaching the Jewish council? Was he defending himself?

23:2 Q.2 What similarity is there here to the trial of Jesus (John 18:22)? What does this illegal action by the High Priest tell us about his state of mind?

23:3 Q.3 Was Paul acting according to Jesus' teaching in Matthew 5:39? What Biblical principle guided Paul's response (2 Timothy 3:16; 4:2)? How was his answer an application of Matthew 23:27? What does the Old Testament law teach about the proper trial process (Leviticus 19:15, Deuteronomy 25:1-3)?

23:4,5 Q.4 Did Paul not know Ananias was the High Priest? What was he really trying to tell those present (Hebrews 3:1, 4:14, 5:10)?

23:6-9 Q.5 Was Paul just stirring up trouble to divert the Jewish council from his own situation? Did he not regard his background as a Pharisee as rubbish (Phil.3:4-8)? Why did he now use it? Is there a reason for us also to point out the areas of conflict between those who unite to oppose the gospel? Could this be an example of being 'as shrewd as serpents' (Matthew 10:16)?

23:11 Q.6 As on a previous occasion the Lord gave Paul a glimpse of the future (18:9) and courage to persevere in a difficult course of action. How and why might he do the same for us?

23:12-15 Q.7 What insight does this story give us into the fanaticism and hypocrisy that religion may inspire? If such people were really serving God, what kind of God would He be?

23:16-22 Q.8 When Paul heard of the plot against his life, through his nephew, what action did he take? What does this story tell us about how we too can make the system work for us?

23:23-30 Q.9 Warning of the plot spurred the commander into drastic action to make sure his Roman prisoner was safe and off his hands as fast as possible. How did he address the governor? What clue does this give us as to Theophilus' status in the empire (Luke 1:3; Acts 1:1)? In what respect was Claudius Lysias' letter slightly off the truth?

23:31-35 Q.10 Paul was safely transferred to Caesarea and the custody of the governor, Felix. How do you suppose Paul felt to be back as a prisoner in Caesarea where only a few weeks earlier he had been enjoying fellowship with the church, some of whom had warned him not to go to Jerusalem?