**Paul’s Address to the Jews - Acts 21:37–22:29**

This entire section takes place only in Jerusalem, where Paul has arrived from his third missionary journey in the Mediterranean.

In chapter 21:1-36, Paul has been the victim again of another violent outburst from Jewish people, but this time in the temple in Jerusalem. Paul is saved from murder by the local commander (a ‘chiliarch’—a commander of 1000 troops) and a battalion of Roman soldiers and centurions.

Luke creates a very moving interaction between Paul and his accusers in this section.

There is a preface to the interaction where Luke shows Paul’s care in how he addresses both groups, as well as his facility with language. He then shares Paul’s speech in three different sections. Finally, Luke describes the follow up interaction between Paul and the Jews as well as Paul and the commander.

DAY ONE - The Preface to the Speech - 21:37-22:2

Luke introduces this speech section with a meaningful interaction with the commander. His name is Claudius Lysias, and he comes up again later in a letter he writes.

In v. 37, Paul is being brought into the barracks by the troops. The situation is a volatile one, but Paul is thoughtful about what to do in order to share with this large crowd of Jews. He requests of the commander that he be allowed to speak to him, and he does so in very polite language.

As they reached the top of the stairs and were about to enter the barracks, Paul asked the tribune for permission to make a request (v. 37). His language was in polite, polished Greek, and the tribune was amazed that he would speak Greek in the first place.[[1]](#footnote-2)

The commander doesn’t answer, but instead is caught off guard by Paul’s ability to speak Greek, and especially in such a polite way.

V. 38 includes the statement on why he is now confused. Apparently, per the commander, an Egyptian Jew who spoke no Greek had led a revolt of around 4000 mercenaries out into the wilderness. The Romans had scattered the armed band, but the leader was able to get away. The commander assumed the gathered crowd was about this issue. See below for a summary of these events related in the secular historian Josephus.

A false prophet from Egypt came into the country and gathered 30,000 people, whom he led through the desert to the Mount of Olives with the promise that the walls of Jerusalem would collapse (or with the promise that a conventional attack would be successful), allowing them to enter the city, defeat the Roman occupiers, and establish himself as ruler over the people; however, the Romans captured 200 and killed 400 of the Egyptian’s followers, though he himself managed to escape. The reference to the Mount of Olives suggests messianic aspirations of this Egyptian impostor (cf. Zech 14:1–5).[[2]](#footnote-3)

They engaged in a campaign of terror against members of the Jewish ruling circles who were pro-Roman. Josephus never mentions them doing any violence against the Romans. They stealthily pulled out daggers hidden in their cloaks, stabbed their victims, and melted away into the crowd.[[3]](#footnote-4)

Paul’s response in v. 39 is equally both polite and firm. He tells him he has no relation to this usurper, but is a Jew who is from Tarsus—an area in modern day Turkey. The language Paul uses is filled with affirmation about his city[[4]](#footnote-5), and is intended to communicate that Paul is no insurrectionist murderer. His formal request of begging to be allowed to speak would have added to the winsomeness of his polite appeal.

People in antiquity were judged by the importance of the place where they were born: ‘their own personal honor and dignity was in part derived from the honor rating of the place from which they came’. Tarsus was prominent in the first century because of its political, economic, and intellectual life. An inscription proclaims: ‘Tarsus, the first and greatest and most beautiful metropolis’. Paul does not make anything of his Roman citizenship until 22:25, but his claim to be a citizen of an important Hellenistic city impressed the commander enough to allow him to speak to the crowd.[[5]](#footnote-6)

It should startle us that Paul is so polite in such a volatile situation—with crowds wanting him dead, in the hands of a Roman general, waiting for resolution, he is nevertheless polite and respectful to his captors.

In v. 40, Paul is granted permission and stands on the stairs and motions with his hand to address the crowd, which he does in the Hebrew dialect (Aramaic). The stairs referenced here are to the Antonia fortress next to the temple, which housed the guard.

Paul, who just had been beaten and who just escaped with his life by the skin of his teeth, “stood” (ἑστώς) on the steps leading into the Antonia Fortress, looking out over the throngs of Jews toward the temple. Paul, bound with chains to Roman soldiers, “motioned” (κατέσεισεν) with his hand to the people, the traditional gesture of an orator, made perhaps in agony and with difficulty, but to eventual effect: a great hush (πολλὴ σιγή) ensued.[[6]](#footnote-7)

In the next two verses, Luke repeats that Paul is addressing the crowd in Hebrew. A reader may ask why the attention on language? There are a number of possible reasons.

First, Luke appears to use the languages that Paul speaks as a means of showing why he was able to move between an interaction with a Roman tribune and a bloodthirsty crowd so easily.

Second, the interactions provide helpful information about Paul’s educational and social background that Luke may have wanted to communicate.

Third, Luke’s inclusion of these two linguistic details explains how a man could be in the position of being beaten by a crowd, arrested, and still address that same crowd. Though those circumstances seem far-fetched, the language shifts explain how it would be possible. The language inclusion lends credence to the story like nothing else could!

In 22:1-2, Paul begins his appeal to them by calling them brothers and fathers, and again in v. 2, Luke mentions the language issue. Many in the crowd must have thought he was a Gentile who had somehow defiled the Temple, and were shocked into silence by his perfect Aramaic.

Paul’s mention of the familial connection with these men is important, and parallel’s Stephen’s in chapter 7. He’d been accused of desecrating the Temple and he wants to make it clear that he is a ‘good’ Jew.

In his opening words Paul addressed the crowd with the formal introduction Stephen used before the Sanhedrin, “Brothers and fathers” (v. 1; cf. 7:2). Both were making a defense and were concerned to establish their loyalty to Judaism; hence this deferential Jewish address.[[7]](#footnote-8)

The term Paul uses for defense (ἀπολογία - *apologia*) is the technical term for the legal speech given by the defense in court, though this isn’t the exact same setting. His speech doesn’t address the issue at hand—the Temple itself—but does address Paul’s faithfulness to Judaism, which was the deeper issue.

DAY ONE QUESTIONS:

1. Why do you suppose Paul took this moment to seek to address the crowd that had previously been beating him?
2. How do you see Paul using his gifts and abilities to glorify God in this situation?
3. Read Romans 9:1-5 and 10:1-3. What is Paul’s theology concerning these angry people?

DAY TWO - Paul’s Jewish Credentials - Acts 22:3-5

Paul begins his ‘defense’ with a summary of his previous way of life before meeting Christ. Much of this information is not apparent earlier in Acts, though Luke does make it clear that Paul was persecuting the church (see 9:1-2). This was a normal rhetorical device to share the facts of the case before making the argument (called the *narratio*). His background is important because his character is, in some measure, the thing being called into question.

In forensic rhetoric, the character of a person (*ethos*) is of particular importance, but “an exposition of the good qualities of a person or thing, in general or individually,”2156 called encomium, could occur in many rhetorical genres.[[8]](#footnote-9)

This section is divided into two sections. First, Paul gives his religious pedigree in v. 3. Then in vv. 4-5, he shows his zeal for God though his actions prior to coming to Christ.

His biographical statements here are crafted for his audience, just as his later statements before Agrippa will be crafted for his hearers there (26:2ff).

The language that Paul uses in v. 3 (born, reared, educated) is a traditional way of self-identification, since it links the speaker to a way of life and philosophical background. That he was born in Tarsus is already clear, but his upbringing is less evident. From this statement, it appears that he was brought up in Jerusalem.[[9]](#footnote-10)

When Paul referred to his being “brought up” in Jerusalem, the most natural meaning is that he was reared from childhood in Jerusalem, not in Tarsus, as is commonly supposed. His family must have moved to Jerusalem when he was still quite young. This ties in with the later reference to his nephew’s being in Jerusalem (23:16).[[10]](#footnote-11)

The reference to Gamaliel, a legal scholar from the school of Hillel, as his instructor and tutor is also significant. Though likely dead at this time, Gamaliel was the foremost legal scholar among the Pharisees at the time of Paul’s upbringing. It’s the equivalent of a degree from Harvard Law School.[[11]](#footnote-12)

Gamaliel was a Pharisaic teacher of the law and member of the Sanhedrin, ‘respected by all the people’ (5:34). Indeed, Gamaliel I was ‘arguably the most significant and influential Pharisaic educator in the early 1st century ad’. This phase of Paul’s education probably began some time after he turned thirteen, when he was instructed by Gamaliel ‘according to the strictness of our ancestral law’ (*kata akribeian tou patrōou nomou*; cf. 21:24; 24:14; 25:8; 26:5; 28:17).[[12]](#footnote-13)

That Paul sat ‘at his feet’ indicates not only that he received teaching according to the strictness of the ancestral law, as he says in v. 3, but also that he sat close to his feet. He must have been an excellent student. His own testimony of his life as a Pharisee in Phil 3:3-6 is helpful here for context.

He states that he was ‘zealous for God’, a phrase packed with meaning[[13]](#footnote-14), and then connects himself to them in their passion for the purity of the temple and the nation.

This ‘righteous’ zeal led Paul to make war with anything that threatened the Law and righteousness, in his estimation.

In v. 4, Paul explains his policy of persecution of the Way. This reference to Christianity in this way first occurs in Acts 9, but will be used again. The ‘Way’ is a helpful designation because the Law did not provide a way for obedience, but simply instructed the people in what they ought to do. A ‘way’ in this context is a means for change, through Christ.

Paul referred to Christianity as “the Way,” a designation that will recur throughout his defense speeches. It not only serves to link Christianity closely with Judaism but also with Christ. It was “the Way” Christ established; to persecute the Way was to persecute Christ himself (9:5; 22:8).[[14]](#footnote-15)

Again, Paul’s zeal was made clear in his willingness to put to death those who were following the Way. He felt that, in murdering these new sectarians, he was protecting the nation of Israel and the Law of Moses, in the tradition of the priest Phineas.

In v. 5, his sphere of persecution of the Way is made clear. First, the Sanhedrin could bear witness to his previous zeal. While the High Priesthood (then Caiaphas) had of course changed hands by this point, the council still would have contained many of the same members as at that time, and the history of the council, as well as Paul’s own personal story, would have been widely known.

Paul’s claims could be confirmed by the Jewish hierarchy which had given him authority for his task, and in particular to extradite Christians from *Damascus* (9:1f.). Since the high priesthood was now held by a different person (Ananias, 23:2) from the time when Paul went to Damascus (Caiaphas), Paul’s appeal will be to the collective memory of the present Sanhedrin regarding what its predecessors in office had done. It is possible that Caiaphas was still alive, though now deposed from office.[[15]](#footnote-16)

He requested, and was granted, letters from the authorities to seek out and destroy anyone who was following Christ in Damascus, a trip of about 170 miles! This shows his position among the movers and shakers of Judaism at this time.

Paul had ‘*even obtained letters*’ of authorization from their predecessors in those offices, addressed ‘*to their associates in Damascus*’. Rapske observes that ‘this portrayal of Paul the persecutor indicates something of his social standing and office’.24 He was familiar with, and had access to, the highest levels of Jewish officialdom, probably being a member of the Sanhedrin himself, enjoying their confidence and securing their permission for his activities. With their authority, but on his own initiative, Paul went to Damascus ‘*to bring these people as prisoners to Jerusalem to be punished*’. His zeal was such that he ‘persecuted this Way’ *(tautēn tēn hodon ediōxa)* wherever he could![[16]](#footnote-17)

Paul’s use of the term ‘punished’ at the end of v. 5 is important. It wasn’t simply for the purpose of correction—his intention was to bring them into a place for harsh treatment.

Paul would bring (ἄξων) the followers of Jesus back to Jerusalem where they would be punished. The term “punishment” (τιμωρηθῶσιν), used only here and in 26:11 in the New Testament, does not include the imprisonment and the interrogation but refers to the penalty after the trial, which could range from flogging with forty lashes minus one (see on 5:40) to execution.[[17]](#footnote-18)

Paul’s pedigree, according to this account, was above reproach. He was a man, like them, zealous after God’s holiness, and willing to put his own life at risk to stamp out this heresy.

DAY TWO QUESTIONS:

1. Read Phil 3:4-6. How does Paul’s testimony reflect his role in Judaism at this time?
2. What was motivating Paul’s devotion in his life prior to truly coming to know Christ? (See particularly Phil 3:7-9). Why was ‘the Way’ so repulsive to his conscience while he was under Judaism?
3. How might this sort of sin creep into our hearts? Are we in danger of this type of self-righteous legalism?

DAY THREE - Conversion - Acts 22:6-16

Paul’s story of his conversion continues with his encounter with Christ. The story of the encounter has already occurred in chapter 9, but here Paul relates his own experience of it, and particularly in light of his present audience.

A careful reading makes it clear that this section is essentially a parallel summary of chapter 9, and so it isn’t super crucial to address it in specificity at each point.

However, a few important notes should be made where differences occur.

1. We learn from this retelling that the vision occurred ‘about noon’, which Paul includes to highlight the brightness of the light in the vision. Christ’s presence is blinding, even in the noonday sun of a middle Eastern desert.
2. Paul includes the designator ‘Jesus *of Nazareth*’ in order to connect his story to the present audience. Nazareth was a backwoods location, and Jesus’s hailing from there was no honor. And yet, it was from Nazareth that the true Messiah had come.[[18]](#footnote-19)
3. Paul says his companions saw the light but did not ‘hear’ the voice of the One who spoke. This is different than 9:7 where Luke says that they heard the sound but saw no one. The solution here is that they experienced the event, just as Paul had, but did not see Christ, but merely the light, and did not hear Christ, but merely the sound. Paul hadn’t just imagined the event, but they did not experience it personally as Paul did.

Paul’s account emphasizes their seeing; the earlier account, their hearing. Both accounts make the same point. The companions were witnesses to the experience and could verify that something objective took place. It was not merely an inner experience of Paul’s psyche. On the other hand, the companions were not participants in the experience: they heard a sound but did not receive the message, saw a light but not the risen Lord. The vision itself was solely Paul’s experience.[[19]](#footnote-20)

1. Paul asks a second question of Christ which does not appear in Luke’s first account in v. 10 (What shall I do Lord?). However, the command to enter the city is stated in both accounts, with just the question eliminated in Luke’s first account. That Paul calls Jesus the Nazarene Lord in front of these Jewish unbelievers is striking![[20]](#footnote-21)

An important detail in v. 10 is helpful—the verb ‘appointed’ (τάσσω - *tasso*) is in the perfect tense. The idea is that Paul understood that the acts that he would do had already been planned, even up to this present speech, and Paul’s duty was simply to continue in it.

The final addition that Paul makes in the context is to connect what was obvious but unstated in Acts 9—that the glory of the light of Jesus is what caused him to be blind. However, he uses the same phrasing as Luke does in summarizing the event in 9 when he says he was ‘led by the hand’ into Damascus. His blindness was complete, and he is humbled to the point of needing to be led into the city.

Paul’s account of the event continues, but he does not include the three day period that Luke explains when he neither ate nor drank (Acts 9:9). This is an expected point for Paul to leave out. He must have undergone some massive reorientation in his heart during these three days, but he’s already made that clear by calling Christ ‘Lord’ in the previous verse.

In v. 12, Paul now recounts his interaction with Ananias. Because the story is told from Paul’s point of view, Ananias’s interaction with God prior to the visit is eliminated. However, Paul adds that Ananias was a righteous man, according to the standards of the Law, though he eliminates the detail that he was already a disciple of Christ.

Befitting the context of his defense before the Jews in the outer court who charge him with being disloyal to the Jewish people and the law, Paul characterizes Ananias as “a devout man” (ἀνὴρ εὐλαβής) whose piety conformed to the standard of the law (κατὰ τὸν νόμον); i.e., he was an observant Jew who followed the commandments, a fact confirmed by the entire Jewish community in Damascus among whom he had a good reputation. This description possibly suggests that Ananias was a leader in one of the local synagogues.[[21]](#footnote-22)

It is important to note that Paul does not receive his sight from a Gentile or from a fallen Jew, but from a devout man, and a leader among the people. This too adds to his defense.

In v. 13, Paul emphasizes the immediacy of his healing. Of course, Ananias’s words in that moment have been shortened since this is not the purpose of Paul’s defense, but rather the commission he is about to receive.

Paul’s commission through Ananias begins in v. 14. This account now contains a lengthened description of what the Lord had communicated to Ananias through a vision—that Paul had been appointed by God for three things: to know His will, to see Him, and to hear from Christ Himself. Ananias calls Jesus the Righteous One (3:14, 7:52)—a Messianic title that connects Jesus the Nazarene as the Messiah. That the crowd allowed him to continue is shocking.

V. 15 is a restatement of Acts 9:15, but also contains a particular link to Acts 1:8. That Paul would be a witness of what he had seen and heard indicates that Paul now functions as an apostolic witness in the same role as the apostles of Acts 2. However, the phrase ‘all men’ indicates that this role of witness would be to Jews and Gentiles—a particular difference from the previous statement.

The perfect tense of the verb “seen” (ἑώρακας), which carries the emphasis, underlines Paul’s calling as a bona fide eyewitness of the risen Lord (1 Cor 9:1; 15:8–10). As the Twelve focused their preaching on the resurrection of the crucified Jesus as Israel’s Messiah and Savior, so does Paul (cf. 13:31; 17:31).[[22]](#footnote-23)

The final statement in v. 16 is very similar to other commands to baptism. The washing away of sins is connected to calling on His name—a phrase used for the call of repentance from a heart that believes in Him.

The act of baptism (in the name of Christ, as in chapter 2), was a symbolic connection with Christ, and an act that would forever separate a Jew from their countrymen who did not know or profess Christ. Ananias’s command here is connected, therefore, to Paul’s conscious awareness that Jesus is the Messiah, made painfully clear in his encounter on the road.

The fact that Ananias starts the statement with ‘Now why do you delay?’ indicates that Paul was already aware of the office of Jesus.

Paul doesn’t include any further details, but the obvious implication is that he followed the command and became a follower of Jesus, now proven to be the Messiah. Again, it is shocking that the crowd allows Paul to continue on like this. His reference to his upbringing must have made the story more plausible.

DAY THREE QUESTIONS:

1. In your own words, harmonize this description of Paul’s conversion with what came before in Acts 9.
2. Why is Paul’s testimony of meeting Christ so powerful? How might that relate to our own experiences?
3. Think of Paul’s past life before salvation. How might God’s grace in his life produce hope and assurance in your heart for your own salvation?

DAY FOUR - Paul’s Temple Vision - Acts 22:17-22

Paul continues his story, though he must have been surprised by the lack of reaction. Nevertheless, he simply continues to recount the details of the events that have happened to him since his conversion. He does not include the detail that his life was being sought in Damascus as well, and that he had to be secreted out of the city.

However, dating his visit to Jerusalem in v. 17 is a little challenging. In order to determine the timing, we must consider Gal 1:17, where Paul explains that he first went into Arabia, and then returned again to Damascus.

Luke’s account of Paul’s conversion and postconversion activities in Acts 9 does not refer to this incident, which must have taken place after Paul’s missionary preaching in Damascus and in Arabia/Nabatea (9:20–25; Gal 1:17) during his visit to Jerusalem three years after his conversion (cf. 9:26–29; Gal 1:18), i.e., in AD 33/34.[[23]](#footnote-24)

Luke’s only indication of a significant time gap between Paul’s initial ministry in Damascus (9:20–25) and his first visit to Jerusalem as a Christian (9:26–30) is in 9:23 (‘after many days had gone by’). However, Paul himself is clear in Gal. 1:17–18 that it was ‘after three years’ that he first visited Jerusalem.[[24]](#footnote-25)

This vision is not recorded anywhere else. Nevertheless, this continues the ‘commission’ of Paul and is therefore crucial. Interestingly, Luke uses the word ‘trance’ only here and in 10:10, when Peter falls into his trance and sees the sheet vision. Additionally, in terms of Paul’s argument here, the fact that he sees a vision of God in the temple makes the accusation that he defiled the temple a bit far-fetched.

Both visions relate to departing and taking the Gospel to the Gentiles—Paul is simply the vehicle by which God’s intended plan will be accomplished. Further, this vision event is similar to the call of Isaiah in Isa 6:1-13.[[25]](#footnote-26)

In the vision in v. 18, Christ tells Paul to get out of Jerusalem quickly because they will not accept his testimony. The words testimony and Jerusalem connect the reader back to Acts 1:8 again. Paul is fulfilling the call to be a witness, but Jerusalem has already received her witness and has rejected it.

The account in Acts 9 includes the detail that the Hellenists were wanting to put Paul to death, but his friends saved him.

According to 9:26–30, Paul was disputing with Hellenists at the time, who then attempted to kill him. The believers rescued him by taking him to Caesarea and sending him off to Tarsus. But now we are told that the Lord’s command to *leave Jerusalem immediately* made Paul willing to accept the help of his friends and escape death. Without that command, he may have determined to stay and face the consequences.[[26]](#footnote-27)

Rather than immediately submit, however, Paul argues with the guidance of Christ! In v. 19 he begins to recount why his witness should be thoroughly convincing to the Jews. Of course, this is a rhetorical device in the defense to the people in the courtyard. Paul is effectively speaking to his hearers, and yet doing so in conversation with the Messiah—an important technique.

Paul’s summary of his former manner of life is very humble. He affirms that he *imprisoned* the believers, *beat* them, *stood* in *approval* at the murder of Stephen, *watched* their coats, and helped to *slay* him. He was aggressive in his persecution against the Lord’s disciples, and confesses it.

The reference to the synagogues in which the believers (οἱ πιστεύοντες) worshiped refers to Luke’s report concerning Stephen’s preaching activity in the synagogue of freedmen, of the Cyrenians, of the Alexandrians, and of those from Cilicia and Asia (6:9).[[27]](#footnote-28)

The beginning of v. 19 is emphatic—‘they themselves understand’! Paul is flabbergasted that these men didn’t obviously repent, given the clear proof of the Messianic office of Christ. He expresses this same thought

In v. 21, Paul recounts the Lord’s response to him in emphatic terms. He is ordered to leave the city. The contrast is stark. Though he had received the revelation in the temple, he now is sent away from the temple and into the far away areas to preach to the Gentiles.

More importantly, it was at that time that the same exalted Jesus also ordered him: “Go, I will send you far away to the Gentiles” (v. 21). Jerusalem, therefore, Paul says, was his intended place of witness and the temple God’s place of revelation. Nevertheless, his testimony was refused in the city, and by revelation his commission “to all men” was to have explicit reference to Gentiles who are “far away” (*makran*, lit., “far off”; cf. comments on 2:39).[[28]](#footnote-29)

It is this statement of the Gentiles that now throws the crowd back into chaos. The silence must have been stunning, but the sudden explosion with this statement in v. 22 is to be expected. Paul had been hinting at the Gentile concept, but it is made explicit, and the crowd explodes. It is sadly, of course, the fulfillment of the very thing that Paul had just mentioned!

It also was the problem Paul wrestled with in Rom 9–11. His answer there was that the obduracy of Israel was perhaps a temporary hardening to allow for the gospel to be taken to the Gentiles. In any event, the reference to the Gentiles led to an immediate fulfillment of Jesus’ warning that the people would not accept his testimony. This was certainly true of the temple crowd listening to Paul.[[29]](#footnote-30)

In effect, Paul was saying that Gentiles can be approached directly with God’s message of salvation without first being related to the nation and its institutions. This was tantamount to placing Jews and Gentiles on an equal footing before God and for Judaism was the height of apostasy indeed![[30]](#footnote-31)

The condemnation of the crowd is startling. Paul has expressed a general sense of righteousness, connected with temple life. Their accusation against him was completely groundless. Nevertheless, they cry out for his immediate murder, and even that he ought to be removed from the earth—that he does not deserve to even exist, followed by a cry for him to not be allowed to live.

The universality of the Gospel under the Way is the cause of their anger, and while the commander could have had no idea what was said, it was evident that this man was causing an uproar. The remainder of the chapter deals with their interaction.

DAY FOUR QUESTIONS:

1. What is wrong in Paul’s theology of how people get saved, based on his argument with God?
2. What caused the Jews to get angry? Are there ways that we can have a similar attitude when it comes to Christianity?
3. Read Romans 11:3-14. How does this section Paul’s defense help to highlight God’s overarching plan for the nation of Israel?

DAY FIVE - Paul Asserts His Citizenship - Acts 22:23-29

The final section of this passage brings Paul back into conversation with the commander, Claudius Lysias. He’d previously thought of Paul as an insurrectionist, but now he must have been confused about who he was. The normal means of investigating and questioning a person in ancient Rome was through scourging—using a whip to beat a prisoner in order to extract information. Paul’s interaction with him proves to be helpful for both men.

In v. 23, Paul’s mention of the Gentiles sends the Jewish crowd into a frenzy. They had previous sought to kill him, even to the point of apparently attacking the soldiers who had removed him (see 21:36) but now they explode in hateful hysterics.

The purpose of the physical response of the crowd is hard to determine. They threw off their robes and threw dust in the air in some fashion, but the text is not clear about why.

Their clamor was accompanied by wild gestures of outrage. No one is quite sure what they did with their cloaks. They either tore them as a gesture of horror at blasphemy (14:14), or they threw them off their bodies as if ready to stone Paul (cf. 7:58), or they shook them out as if trying to rid themselves of the contamination of his blasphemy, or they waved them wildly in the air to express their collective outrage. Neither is the symbolism of casting dust in the air altogether clear. It may have been a gesture of horror at perceived blasphemy, or it may have been that they hurled dust at Paul for lack of something more solid from the temple courtyard.[[31]](#footnote-32)

The overall picture is confusion, intensity, and strife.

In v. 24, attention returns to the commander, who still has no idea why the riot is occurring. He commands Paul to be brought indoors, not only for safety, but to determine who he is and what he’s doing that’s causing such commotion. Regardless, he assumes that Paul must be some kind of evil doer for the people to be in such an uproar.

According to Roman practice, he commands Paul to be scourged in order to determine the truth. This practice was brutal, but the commander is well within his rights as a Roman authority. Clearly something must be done, and it appears he cannot get the truth from the crowds or from the accused, and so he decides for torture. This section should remind us of the brutality of the Roman world.

Luke refers to the Roman practice of examining someone by scourging (*mastixin anetazein tina;* Lat. *flagrum, flagellum*). This involved whipping with leather thongs, to which rough pieces of bone or metal had been attached. The scourge was ‘a murderous instrument of torture, much more fearful than the lictors’ rods at Philippi. A slave or alien might be scourged in order to make him confess the truth (the theory being that he could not be trusted to confess it without such persuasion).[[32]](#footnote-33)

If the instrument used was the scourge (Lat. *flagellum*), that was a fearful instrument of torture, consisting of leather thongs, weighted with rough pieces of metal or bone, and attached to a stout wooden handle. If a man did not actually die under the scourge, he might well be crippled for life. Paul had been beaten with rods on three occasions (once at least at the hands of Roman lictors), and he had been sentenced five times to the disciplinary lash inflicted by Jewish synagogue authorities,36 but neither of these penalties had the murderous quality of the *flagellum*.[[33]](#footnote-34)

This, however, proves to be an error. The commander assumes that, though born in Tarsus, Paul was simply a Jew. In v. 25, Paul is being prepared for flogging[[34]](#footnote-35) and insinuates his Roman citizenship. The Greek here is very muted—Paul appears to softly assert the point. Had the centurion continued, Paul would have been willing to die here[[35]](#footnote-36). However, a Roman could not be scourged—Roman Law protected citizens from torturous methods.

It definitely was not legal to examine a Roman citizen by scourging. The Valerian and Porcian laws clearly established the illegality of such an act, and any Roman officer who transgressed this exemption would himself be guilty of a serious breach of law.[[36]](#footnote-37)

The centurion immediately stops, since this sort of legal violation would have resulted in his punishment as well as his commander’s. Instead, he informs the commander of the situation that they now face, having arrested Paul. In v. 26, the centurion informs his commander in an accusatory way—he is willing to follow the orders as they’ve been given, but wants to inform his commander that such an order is unwise.

Claudius Lysias now comes to Paul in v. 27 to determine if this is accurate information, and asks him directly if he is a Roman. Paul’s affirmation is enough for him[[37]](#footnote-38).

Lysias was the highest ranking officer in Jerusalem, commanding about 1,000 footsoldiers and 240 cavalrymen. Afraid that he might be charged for having mistreated a fellow Roman citizen, he would have hoped that if Paul turned out to be his social inferior, he might be punished only lightly or even be forgiven, if Paul should seek legal redress.[[38]](#footnote-39)

He must have been completely shocked by this information. Paul, a Jew has now spoken perfect Greek, perfect Aramaic, hails from a town of Grecian decent, and is now discovered to be a Roman citizen. We should not be ignorant of the uniqueness of Paul’s background. His background was, in a very true sense, crafted by God in order to fulfill his role as the apostle to the Gentiles. God built the man for the job.

In v. 27, the commander provides an important detail about citizenship in this day. He had purchased it at great cost. This was a common practice under Claudius[[39]](#footnote-40).

Claudius’s wife Messalina and her court favorites used the procedure as a means of enriching themselves. Cf. Dio Cassius, *History* 60.17.5–6. The tribune’s personal name Lysias indicates that he was of Greek birth. Wealth or influence (probably both) had enabled him to become not only a Roman citizen but also a superior officer in the Roman army.[[40]](#footnote-41)

Paul’s reply in v. 28 indicates that he is actually his social superior, a fact which must have absolutely shocked the commander. Paul wasn’t playing political games, but he was appealing to avoid the torture that could potentially take his life. We should assume that his time in the crowd had already left him somewhat injured—scourging would have potentially been fatal. However, Paul’s disclosure of being born a citizen put the commander in a very awkward position.

The fact that Lysias had to purchase Roman citizenship at high cost and that Paul was born a Roman citizen suggested to Lysias that even though his status as the Roman commander in Jerusalem was higher, this was true only locally—his status as a Roman citizen who had bought citizenship with money was lower than Paul’s. This fact complicated matters immensely for Lysias. He cannot only be accused of having broken the law that prohibited the binding and torture of Roman citizens, but he had abused a Roman citizen who had higher status. This realization explains the commander’s reaction to Paul’s disclosure in the next verse.[[41]](#footnote-42)

The commander is now at a loss—he is rightly afraid of Paul, who could press charges, and he has put his men in a dangerous position by ordering them to bind him without inquiring if he was a Roman citizen. He therefore stops all proceedings, and allows Paul to remain in the barracks in custody, clearly for his safety, and to determine what the charge against him was.

DAY FIVE QUESTIONS:

1. What do you notice about society during this time? Are we too quick to complain about injustice in our day? How does Paul respond to this injustice?
2. How is Paul’s behavior during this entire interchange? Why is this important, especially as a believer?
3. Paul was sovereignly crafted by God to fulfill the role that God had created for him. Is that true for you? In what ways do you see God’s sovereign hand in your life?

1. John B. Polhill, 455. — Ἑλληνιστὶ γινώσκεις is an ellipsis for Ἑλληνιστὶ γινώσκεις λαλεῖν. Εἰ ἔξεστίν μοι is very polite language. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Eckhard J. Schnabel, 897. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. David E. Garland, 230. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. “The epithet “no ordinary city” (*ouk asēmou poleōs*), by which Paul referred to Tarsus, had been used by various cities to publicize their greatness (cf. Euripides’ reference some five hundred years earlier to Athens as “no ordinary city of the Greeks” [*ouk asēmos Hellenōn polis*] in Ion 8). Paul’s use of it here reflects his pride in the city of his birth.” - Richard N. Longenecker, 524. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. David G. Peterson, 592–593. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Eckhard J. Schnabel, 898. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. John B. Polhill, 457. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Eckhard J. Schnabel, 899. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. “The set formula “born, reared, educated” (γεγεννημένος, ἀνατεθραμμένος, πεπαιδευμένος) speaks against this assumption. In the Greek writings ἀνατεθραμμένος refers to childhood upbringing, much like our term “reared.” - W. C. Van Unnik, “Tarsus or Jerusalem: The City of Paul’s Youth.” [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. John B. Polhill, 458. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. "Jacob Neusner and Bruce D. Chilton, “Paul and Gamaliel,” 208, analyze the rabbinic Gamaliel traditions and construct “components of the curriculum of studies that Paul would have followed at the feet of Gamaliel,” which included “questions of liturgy, mourning, treatment of slaves, observance of the Sabbath (travel on the Sabbath, carrying objects from one domain to another on that day), preparation of the Passover offering, preparation of food on the festival, intercalation of the calendar, matter of cleanness.” - Eckhard J. Schnabel [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. David G. Peterson, 597. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. “His description of his life as “zealous for God” (cf. Gal. 1:14; Phil. 3:5–6) employs an Old Testament phrase used of Phinehas, son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest (Num. 25:13). In righteous indignation, Phinehas impaled an Israelite man and a Midianite woman, a worshiper of Baal, while they were being amorous near the tent of meeting to turn back the wrath of God that would have fallen on the people (Num. 25:1–15). Paul had been no less zealous and no less violent in seeking to protect God’s honor and to avert catastrophe befalling the people for perceived infidelity to God.” — David E. Garland, 235. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. John B. Polhill, 458–459. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. I. Howard Marshall, 374. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. David G. Peterson, 598. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
17. Eckhard J. Schnabel, 902. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
18. It was, indeed, “Jesus of Nazareth” who confronted him, and this places his messianology in the matrix of the Jewish homeland. But it was the risen and ascended Jesus of Nazareth, the heavenly Christ, who rebuked him and turned him about spiritually; and this alone explains his new understanding of life and his new outlook on all things Jewish. - Richard N. Longenecker, 525. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
19. John B. Polhill, 459–460. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
20. Now he knew that it was Jesus, the risen Lord. Up to this point in his speech, Paul had identified closely with his Jewish listeners. In every way he had shown himself to be as Jewish as they were. Now he began to draw the line that differentiated himself from them. On the Damascus road he had seen the risen Jesus. Now he confessed Jesus as Lord. He surely wished the same for them. It was not inappropriate for a faithful Jew to confess Jesus as Lord. He was himself a living witness to that. — Ibid, 460. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
21. Eckhard J. Schnabel, 904. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
22. Ibid, 905. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
23. Eckhard J. Schnabel, 906. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
24. David G. Peterson. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
25. “In many ways Paul’s vision in the temple parallels the call of Isaiah (Isa 6:1–13). Just as with Isaiah, Paul had a vision of the Lord (for Isaiah the Lord was Yahweh). Both experienced a call, a commission. Both were told that the people would resist their message. In Isaiah’s case the prophet was told to remain in the city in the face of the resistance. Paul was told to leave.” — John B. Polhill, 462. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
26. David G. Peterson, 605. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
27. Eckhard J. Schnabel, 907. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
28. Richard N. Longenecker, 526. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
29. John B. Polhill, 463. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
30. Richard N. Longenecker, 526. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
31. John B. Polhill, 463–464 Other thoughts: “Against the background of these two passages the thought may be that the people waved their clothes in the air to rid them of the dust as a sign that they counted Paul a blasphemer and no longer a true Jew. Yet another possibility is that this action was a mild substitute for the stoning to which the crowd would have subjected Paul, had the soldiers not been present.”— I. Howard Marshall, 378. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
32. David G. Peterson, 607. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
33. F. F. Bruce, 420. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
34. Prisoners were stripped and their hands pulled tight in order to flatten the back and inflict maximum skin damage. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
35. While Paul’s self-disclosure indicates that ‘he has some confidence that his Roman citizenship may make a difference in his treatment, its manner suggests that Paul is still prepared to suffer or even die without complaint (cf. Acts 21:13) if it is disregarded’. — David G. Peterson, 608. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
36. John B. Polhill, 464. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
37. No article of apparel distinguished a Roman citizen from the rest of the people except the toga, which only Roman citizens could wear. But even at Rome the toga was unpopular because of its cumbersomeness and was worn only on state occasions. Papers validating citizenship were kept in family archives and not usually carried on one’s person. The verbal claim to Roman citizenship was accepted at face value; penalties for falsifying documents and making false claims of citizenship were exceedingly stiff—Epictetus speaks of death for such acts (*Dissertations* 3.24, 41; cf. Suetonius *Vita Claudius* 25). — Richard N. Longenecker, 528. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
38. Eckhard J. Schnabel, 923. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
39. The price paid for citizenship in the Claudian period was actually ‘the bribe given to the intermediaries in the imperial secretariat or the provincial administration who put his name on the list of candidates for enfranchisement’. The privilege, first sold at great cost, became cheapened later under Claudius, which may help to explain the commander’s response to Paul.— David G. Peterson, 609. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
40. F. F. Bruce [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
41. Eckhard J. Schnabel, 924. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)