

Notes for Acts 22

Picking up from Acts 21

Paul has traveled from Asia to Jerusalem, where he has visited James the brother of Jesus, a very well-respected member of the Way. Paul recounts his successes with the Gentiles, which causes the elders to rejoice. There is still, however, the problem of Paul's teaching that circumcision is not required for the Gentiles, and the misinformation that he has told Jews living among Gentiles to forsake Jewish customs. To address this problem, the elders recommend that Paul go through a rite of purification so everyone will know that the rumors are untrue. The elders have advised the Gentiles only to abstain from meat sacrificed to idols, what is strangled, and blood, and to abstain from fornication.

Paul goes along with this idea, but Jews from Asia stir up the crowd and seize Paul, claiming that he is teaching against the Jewish people, Jewish law, and Jerusalem, and that he has defiled the Temple by bringing Greeks into it. Paul is dragged out of the Temple to be killed, but a Roman Tribune saves Paul from the crowd by arresting him. Paul begs permission to speak "to the people," using a term that Willimon says is customarily used in Acts to refer to the Jewish people. The Tribune allows this.

Acts 22

As Acts 22 opens, Paul speaks to the crowd in Hebrew (possibly actually Aramaic) to make his defense. He begins by establishing his Jewish credentials: "brought up in [Tarsus] at the feet of Gamaliel, educated strictly according to our ancestral law, being zealous for God, just as all of you are today" (v.3).

These are strong credentials!
Gamaliel I, or Gamaliel the Elder, was considered the leading Jewish teacher of his time (first half of first century CE). "He was the grandson of the great rabbi Hillel the Elder and a high authority in the Sanhedrin in the mid-first century." ("Gamaliel," *New World Encyclopedia*).

"Hillel ... lived in Jerusalem during the time of King Herod around the beginning of the Common Era (d. 10-20 C.E.). He is one of the most important figures in Jewish history, associated with both the Mishnah and the Talmud. He was the founder of what was later known as the *Beit Hillel* ("House of Hillel"), a major and eventually dominant school of rabbinical thought."



Gamaliel I with his students, from the British Museum.
<https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Gamaliel>

“Among his teachings is the statement, ‘That which is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow. That is the whole Torah; the rest is the explanation. Now go and learn.’ ([Talmud: Shabbat 31a.](#)) ... Many scholars have noticed similarities between the sayings of Hillel and some of the teachings of Jesus, leading to speculation that Jesus was a hearer of Hillel or at least was influenced by his school.” (https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Hillel_the_Elder)

“Gamaliel is known to the Christian world as the Pharisaic leader who saved the disciples from death in a story in the Book of Acts [Acts 5:34], in which he is quoted as saying, ‘If their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men.’” (“Gamaliel,” *New World Encyclopedia*).

Verses 3-21:

Paul makes an impassioned defense to his fellow Jews, emphasizing his Jewish credentials and telling of his experience with Jesus.

We can identify four basic units within the body of the speech:

1. A description of Paul’s training as a zealous Jew (vv. 3–5)
2. Paul’s encounter with Jesus (vv. 6–11)
3. Ananias and his help (vv. 12–16)
4. Paul’s vision in the temple (vv. 17–21)

1. Note that Paul uses the present tense to describe his relationship to Judaism. “I am a Jew.” Whereas those who have beaten him are zealots for the tradition and law and order, Paul describes himself as a zealot for God (v. 3). Like them, Paul knows what it means to persecute others in the cause of religious righteousness, for this is exactly what he did to “the Way” (v. 4). By language, upbringing, and zealotry Paul has established a link with his audience. If someone does not believe him, all he has to do is to ask the chief priest and the council (v. 5).

2. Thus far, we have heard evidence that Paul was a conventional, devout believer with peerless credentials. Everything about him makes him one with his audience. Now comes an account of the reversal worked in Paul on the Damascus road. While there are many parallels between this account and that of 9:3–9, there are a couple of striking differences.

For one thing there is more talk here about light. The vision is said to have occurred “about noon,” when the sun would be most intense; so if Paul was blinded by a greater light, it must have been a great light indeed. Careful comparers of 22:9 with 9:7 notice that in the first account Paul’s companions heard a voice but saw nothing (9:7). Now Paul tells us that his companions “saw the light but did not hear the voice” (22:9). In this speech verse 9 once again calls attention to the great power of the light. It also heightens the drama of the encounter by emphasizing that though many saw the light only Paul heard what was said, particularly the words which told him what he was to do.

Luke is doing something different in this speech than he was doing in the conversion account of 9:3–9. We also note that Paul appears to be a more active participant in this recollection of the Damascus road experience. Before, Paul was struck down and had little to say but, “Who are you?” Now, Paul says that he asked, “What should I do?” Before, Paul was led by the hand. Now, Paul says that he waited for the fulfillment of Jesus’ words concerning what he is appointed to do (22:10).

3. The visit of Ananias (vv. 12–16) helps Paul to see what his commission is to be. In Acts 9 Ananias functioned mainly to underscore that the community’s old enemy had been transformed into a friend. Here, that emphasis is dropped. We are told that Ananias is pious and respects the law—someone whom Paul’s audience should respect.

Ananias’ role here is to deliver the call: “The God of our fathers appointed you to know his will, to see the Just One and to hear a voice from his mouth; for you will be a witness for him to all men of what you have seen and heard” (vv. 14–15). “God of our fathers” is the traditional way of referring to the God of Israel (e.g., Gen. 43:23; Exod. 3:13; Deut. 1:11). The God of Israel’s past has chosen Paul to be a “witness” to what is happening in the present.

4. This section puts Paul at prayer in the temple (22:17). Here is the heart of faithful Judaism and this is where Paul is placed, where Paul is delivering this speech at this moment. Verse 18 introduces the first indication of conflict between Paul and his fellow Jews. Up to this point they have been in agreement. Ironically, Paul says to the Lord that it is because of his record of persecution and zealotry that his fellow Jews should believe him (vv. 19–20). But no, the Lord has other things in mind for Paul. If he is to be faithful, he must obey the surprising commission: “I will send you far away to the Gentiles” (v. 21).

The crowd, which had listened up to this point, is sent into a rage. This is the climax of Paul’s speech and the audience knows it. Instead of the overthrow of the enemy, which we said characterized the account of Paul’s conversion in Acts 9, Acts 22 may be summarized as the call of the loyal and zealous Jew. There was a calling of Paul in Acts 9, but that call was not the driving force behind that account.

Here in Acts 22 the call of Paul by Christ is both his defense for his actions and the cause of his rejection in Jerusalem. He attempts to justify his actions by claiming that he has gone to the gentiles, not because he has forsaken Judaism but because he was trying to keep up with the movements of the God of Judaism. It is a defense—a fulfillment of Christ’s prediction that “they will not accept your testimony about me” (22:18).

(Willimon, William H. *Acts: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (pp. 166-168). Westminster John Knox Press. Kindle Edition.)

Verses 23-30 concern Paul’s interactions with the Roman soldiers. Paul has made his appeal to the crowd, and it has not been successful. Now the Roman Tribune decides to have Paul “examined by flogging” – in other words, questioned under torture – to find out why people

are angry with him. At this point, Paul decides it is time to point out that he is a Roman citizen who has not been found guilty of any offense. This puts the Roman soldiers into a tizzy as they realize that they have chained a Roman citizen and had been on the verge of flogging him. The Tribune verifies with Paul that Paul is, indeed, a Roman citizen and says that he (the Tribune) had spent a great deal of money for his citizenship. Paul replies that he had been born a citizen. This revelation that Paul is a Roman citizen puts the Roman soldiers into a bind because they cannot proceed in their usual brutal manner – and are possibly already in trouble for having put Paul in chains. To find out why Paul was being accused by the Jews, they release Paul the next day and order the chief priests and entire council to meet and take Paul to stand before the chief priests and the council.