

Facing Opposition

1. What conflicts do you have in your life simply because you are a Christian?

As a former Pharisee, Paul knew perhaps better than anyone what a radical message he was proclaiming. There was no comfortable ground; Jews rejected Jesus, and pagans resented the effect Christianity had on their idol worship. Paul was bound for trouble as long as he remained true to preaching Jesus Christ, crucified and raised from the dead.

Bow in Prayer: “O God, help us to seek for our lives the single-mindedness that we see in Paul.”

The Setting in Jerusalem

Well over a million Jews from Israel and every corner of the Roman Empire were gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate Pentecost (Acts 20:16). The city was teeming with Jewish pilgrims, many of whom had arrived weeks before the holiday and would stay weeks afterward to worship in the Temple, peruse the holy city's wealth of shops, or otherwise take in the splendid magnificence of the holy city. Paul would have routinely continued to frequent the Temple courts during the remainder of his purification period, joining the lingering holiday crowd.

Read Acts 21:17-26 from several translations. Review the sections “Travels” and Trials” on the Chart of Acts. Take a moment to reflect on the major transition that is developing in Paul's life.

2. Describe the initial encounter between Paul, James, and the elders of the Jerusalem church (verses 17-20a).

No mention is made of the gift from the Gentile churches to the poor in Judea, but this was certainly delivered at some point. Such a gift must have helped greatly to create a bond of love and unity between the Gentile churches and the church in Jerusalem.

What Paul hoped to be the high point of his visit to Jerusalem was quickly overshadowed by the controversy brewing about him and his attitude toward the Jewish law.

3. What tension and misunderstanding among the Jewish believers in Jerusalem were the elders anxious to correct?

4. What visible solution did they suggest?

It is not clear why the elders restated the Jerusalem Council ruling in verse 25. Perhaps it was given to assure Paul that they were not changing the ruling or adding anything to what had been decided years earlier. (See Acts 15:19-21.)

5. How does Paul demonstrate his desire to be at one with the Jewish Christians ?

6. Give an example of how you might need to compromise on a nonessential of the faith for the purpose of unity with your Christian brothers and sisters.

Read aloud Luke's account of what happened next from Acts 21:27-39. Try to imagine what this would have been like for you if you were Paul.

7. Why do you think the Asian Jews were the instigators of the riot at the temple? (Recall Acts 19:8-10.)

8. What highly inflammatory accusations were made against the apostle (21:28-29)?

9. Describe the scene that follows (verses 30-36).

10. In what way is the prophecy of Agabus fulfilled? (See Acts 21:10-11.)

“One cannot help but notice the irony of God’s ordained messenger to bring light to the Gentiles now being shut out of the most holy place of Judaism—the place where God mediated His grace to His people for centuries. In Paul’s view as well as Luke’s the temple is no longer the place to receive God’s grace; God’s grace is now supremely manifested and available in the Lord Jesus Christ.”-Arnold

11. a. Why would Paul wish to delay his exit and speak to the crowd who had just tried to kill him (21:39)? (Consider Romans 9:1-5.)

b. Could you have done this? Why or why not?

Thoughtfully *read* Acts 21:40-22:30.

12. Why did Paul speak to the crowd in the Hebrew or Aramaic language when only a part of the crowd could understand this language?

For the first time Paul had the opportunity to tell the story of his conversion to the radical Jews, who for so long heard about Paul and had built up this mass hatred toward him. Paul's moment had come and he was ready!

13. In deliberate fashion he answered the charges of his critics and highlighted personal facts that would build his credibility with them. From Acts 22:1-21 list the key points that Paul emphasized in his address.

For the audience in the temple court, this must have been a mind-numbing, heart-stopping moment! Paul's very own countrymen had condemned Jesus and had collaborated with Rome in His crucifixion. Paul himself, as everyone knew, had launched a personal campaign to persecute the followers of Jesus. And now here was Paul, "a real Jew if there ever was one . . . a member of the Pharisees," standing on the steps of the Antonia Fortress, claiming that he had undeniably encountered Jesus on the road to Damascus. This was nothing short of stunning!

14. Explain why Paul's statement in Acts 22:21 was so explosive.

Stop and Think: Given his own history, Paul must have realized that the word "Gentile" would send the crowd into a frenzy. But he did not minimize or avoid declaring the truth. *Do you see this unwavering commitment to the truth in today's Christian culture? In your own life?*

The commander had never been able to figure out why the mob was so intent on killing this man. Once inside the barracks, he determined to learn the facts.

15. What method of interrogation was the Roman official going to use on Paul (verses 23-24)?

16. How does Roman law and justice come to Paul's aid (verses 25-29)?

17. Still determined to learn what Paul was being accused of, what action did the commander take the next day (verse 30)?

Summary: In our passage this week we have witnessed the final rejection of the Gospel by the Jerusalem Jews. Never again would Paul return to Jerusalem for worship or witness. By rejecting the message and the messenger of salvation, the Jews sealed the city's doom (Luke 21:6, 20). The day was coming when Jerusalem would not only be abandoned by God, but devastated by Rome.

18. ***Read*** the handout "Similarities between Jesus and Paul." Spend some time contemplating our suffering Savior. *In practical terms what does it mean to share in "the fellowship of His suffering?" In what ways do you need to grow in this area of your Christian life?*

Similarities Between Jesus and Paul

Acts 21:17-22:30 – Lesson 19

There are many similarities between Jesus and Paul as shown in Acts chapters 21 and 22. In a way that is unique, Paul really did know *the fellowship of His sufferings* (Philippians 3:10).

- Like Jesus, Paul was opposed by hostile Jews who plotted against his life.
- Like Jesus, Paul had followers who tried to discourage him from going to Jerusalem.
- Like Jesus, Paul declared his readiness to lay down his life.
- Like Jesus, Paul was determined to complete his ministry and not be deflected from it.
- Like Jesus, Paul expressed his abandonment to the will of God.
- Like Jesus, Paul came to Jerusalem to *give* something.
- Like Jesus, Paul was unjustly arrested on the basis of false accusation.
- Like Jesus, Paul alone is arrested, none of the other followers of Jesus.
- Like Jesus, Paul heard the mob crying out *Away with him!*
- Like Jesus, the Roman officer handling Paul's case did not know his true identity.

- David Guzik