

## What's the Message – Lesson 122

In today's lesson we see Paul captured in Jerusalem and turned over to the Romans for punishment.

Greetings in the name of Jesus, our Savior. Lord, we pray today that You would strengthen our trust in You, so that even when things do not seem to be going well in our lives, we would be confident that Your will is being done. Amen.

In our last lesson we left Paul just after he had arrived back in Jerusalem, carrying the monetary gifts from the Gentile congregations in Europe to the Christians in need that remained in Jerusalem. Paul had been warned several times that his life was in danger and that he would be imprisoned by the Jews there, but he was determined to carry out the mission the Lord had assigned him. As Luke tells us in Acts chapter 21, beginning with verse 17: *When we had come to Jerusalem, the brothers received us gladly. On the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present. After greeting them, he related one by one the things that God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. And when they heard it, they glorified God.*

Now our story takes a dark twist. The leaders of the church told Paul that there were many in Jerusalem who believed, erroneously, that Paul had been teaching the Gentiles not to obey the Mosaic law. They advised Paul to go through the purifying ceremony and to take four candidates with him, to show his critics that they were wrong. This ceremony was conducted in the temple, and took seven days to complete. On the seventh day, some Jews from Asia saw Paul, and stirred up the mob with false accusations that he had brought Gentiles into the restricted portion of the temple. Things quickly got ugly and out of hand as the mob attacked Paul. Then the Roman tribune came to Paul's rescue, but ended up arresting him and binding him with chains.

From here on out, the book of Acts tells of a series of plots to kill Paul, and his statements of defense before the people at the temple, before the Roman tribune of Jerusalem, before the Sanhedrin, before governor Felix, then governor Festus, and

lastly King Herod Agrippa II. Two things should be clear about this sequence. First, Paul has committed no crime deserving death.

And second, the high priest and the Sanhedrin were persistent in their attempts to have Paul killed because they hated the message of Paul that Jesus had risen from the dead.

So what are we to learn from all these events? What's the message for us?

Let us look at some of the points Paul made in the presentations of his defense. To the mob in the temple Paul began by telling them of his past history as a persecutor of the Christians, how he had received the vision of Jesus on his way to Damascus, and was then told that he was to be a witness for Jesus. As Luke reports, a witness *to everyone, of what you have seen and heard. And now, why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on His name (Acts 22:15)*. And when Paul said to the people in the temple that he was told to go to the Gentiles, the mob burst out in anger, and almost killed him.

Next, Paul was taken before the Sanhedrin. Luke tells us: *Now when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, "Brothers, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees. It is respect to the hope and the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial." And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. For the Sadducees say there is no resurrection, nor angel, nor spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all (Acts 23:6-8)*. The clamor that followed got to the point where the Roman tribune felt he had to remove Paul under the guard of his soldiers or they would have torn him to pieces.

But during his defense, Paul had witnessed to the Sanhedrin of the resurrection of Jesus. This event was followed by another plot to kill Paul, which was overheard, and the tribune had a heavy guard of soldiers take

Paul in the middle of the night to governor Felix in Caesarea. After five days, the high priest Ananias and some elders also went to Caesarea to present their case before the governor. To their dismay, Felix put off judgment of the case and had Paul retained in custody, but with freedom for friends to visit and attend to his needs. Luke tells us: *After some days Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, and he sent for Paul and heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus (Acts 24:24).* But Felix hoped to get a bribe from Paul, and sent for him often and conversed with him. This went on for two years, until he was succeeded in the governorship by Festus. Thinking this was their opportunity, the chief priest and the leaders of the Sanhedrin approached the new governor and pressed their case.

But Paul, as a Roman citizen was entitled to do, appealed his case to Caesar, and Festus responded, *“To Caesar you have appealed; to Caesar you shall go” (Acts 25:12).* But he did not act right away. It was not long before King Herod Agrippa came to visit Festus, and it was decided that Agrippa would hear Paul and advise Festus on what charges should be written against Paul for his trial in Rome. In his defense, Paul told again of his conversion on the road to Damascus, and reached his climax with these words:

*To this day I have had the help that comes from God, and so I stand here testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass: that the Christ must suffer and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, He would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles. . . . And Agrippa said to Paul, “In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?” (Acts 26:22-23, 28).*

Paul was soon turned over to a centurion, accompanied by Luke and Aristarchus of Thessalonica, and they began sailing toward Rome. A severe storm nearly ended the trip with a loss of the ship and all 276 on board, but Paul lifted their spirits telling them that all would be saved, and said: *So take heart, men, for I have faith in God that it will be exactly as I have been told (Acts 27:25).* After a difficult journey,

with several other events, they finally arrived in Rome, where Paul was allowed to stay by himself guarded by a single soldier. And a group of local leaders of the Jews came to hear Paul. *From morning till evening he expounded to them, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the Law of Moses and from the prophets. And some were convinced by what he said, but others disbelieved Acts 28:23-24).* Then Paul made this last statement: *Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen. He lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance Acts 28:28-31).*

Isn't the trust in God and the persistent effort of Paul the proper model for our own lives?

Next time we will begin our study of Unit Nine, Lessons of Guidance to the Church.