

Pastor Jeremy M. Thomas
Fredericksburg Bible Church
107 East Austin
Fredericksburg, Texas 78624
830-997-8834 jthomas@fbgbible.org

A0937 – September 13, 2009 – Acts 22:22-23:11 – Paul Before The Sanhedrin

Alright, we're studying the Book of Acts and we're in chapter 22. The theme of Acts is transition. There are eight transitions bridging the Gospels to the Epistles. And by definition transitions aren't normal. So we are learning history in the Book of Acts not doctrine. You can illustrate certain doctrines but you can't build it from the Book of Acts because if you try to build, for example, the doctrine of water baptism and Spirit baptism, Acts 8 contradicts Acts 9 which contradicts Acts 10. That's not to say there are errors in the Bible. That's to say that they were in a period of transition. If you want to build doctrine turn to the Epistles. The Epistles define the norm for the Church. So the Book of Acts describes the transitions that occurred between the Gospels and the Epistles. In Acts 22 the transition most prominent we see is Christianity transitioning from a movement inside of Judaism to a movement outside of Judaism. Christianity is moving into its own, it's separating out and that division becomes very clear today. The second prominent transition in Acts 22-23 is the geographical shift from Jerusalem to Rome. Early Acts begins with the gospel in Jerusalem and now an event in Paul's life has set in motion a chain of events that ultimately lead to Rome. This movement is all providential by the Holy Spirit of course, but occurs under the auspices of the Jews rejection of Paul and the Roman Military. And so in chapter 21-22 we see Paul caught in one of the more violent moments in his life. This man suffers but the lesson is God works all things together for good.

In Acts 21, verse 30 Paul has been attacked by his own countrymen under false charges that he took a Gentile into the inner courts of the Temple. Of course, he hadn't done so but this is the accusation. It was led by the Jews of Asia who hated Paul and so when they saw Paul roaming the streets of

Jerusalem with the Gentile Trophimus, who they also knew from Asia, and then later they saw Paul in the Temple they said, well then, Paul must have taken this Gentile into the Temple. That logic doesn't hold but you want to observe this because this is how the Satanic program works see. If you get on Satan's bad side they're going to get you come hell or high water. Someway, some how, with an argument that looks good on the surface they're going to get you and here they get Paul with a big fat lie, they get everyone agitated. It's the mob mentality. And all you have to do to shake people up is learn how to get comfortable telling big lies. The greatest disturbers of history, men like Hitler, who manipulated massive numbers of people, were always big fat liars. So all you have to do to get a whole lot of people following you is to have the guts to tell big lies, not little bitty one's, everyone tells those, but the big ones you think no one would believe. Those are the one's people will believe. Why? Because no one would tell a lie that big. So they start with a big fat lie and then come thousands of Jews against Paul. Why he took a Gentile into the Temple? Never even stop to check the facts, just attack the guy and start beating him to death. It's the mob mentality and it's satanically driven. Paul almost lost his life and he would have had it not been for the Roman sentry up on that tower. That sentry was on watch and he transmitted the message up through the chain of command very rapidly so that the Roman commander could get 200-300 soldiers down in that court immediately and squash the rebellion. It is one of the finest examples of the proper operation of the fourth divine institution: human government. Christians forget that human government was instituted by God. Human government did not originate with man. Human government originated with God. God put the sword in man's hand so it's a valid institution. You can cry that it's corrupt and of course it is, man is corrupt, but nevertheless God did give it to man to suppress our corrupt tendencies and to this effect it has been successful, it has prolonged God's grace toward the human race. And so human government was given for the purpose of serving and protecting a nation's citizenry within certain divinely appointed national boundaries and in this case God knew centuries in advance that His institution would protect Paul from this mob. The Roman military was an excellent example of how this institution is supposed to function.

Now, after they rescue Paul from the mob they lock him to two soldiers and begin taking him to the Antonia Fortress on the NW corner of the Temple Mount but as they're dragging Paul up the steps into that Fortress Paul asks

the commander if he can speak to the crowd. And that's what we studied two weeks ago when Paul gave his credentials, his conversion and his commission to the Gentiles. And it was that concluding word in v 21, it had to come. Paul had up till v 21 avoided the word Gentiles, but then he says quote "the fatal word," and far from calming them down it sparked a new riot.¹ Conclusion? Nothing has changed in the fundamental thinking of his Jewish audience; they still think according to the framework of 1st century Judaism and consider Paul a renegade Jew.

*So watch v 22, **They listened to him up to this statement**, now literally it says they listened to him up to this "word," not **statement** but logos, "word." It was one word that set off this frenzy of v 22, and it's the word **Gentiles**. Now they don't get upset just whenever they hear the word **Gentile**, they were constantly trying to convert **Gentiles** to Judaism. But what triggers the anger is that Paul was teaching that Gentiles didn't have to come through the system of Judaism, they could be justified apart from circumcision, apart from the Law of Moses and that angered them. And, of course, they'd heard that Paul had taken the Gentile Trophimus into the inner courts and this really angers them and Luke describes how this ignited an explosion. **And then they raised their voices and said, "Away with such a fellow from the earth, for he should not be allowed to live!"** ²³**And as they were crying out and throwing off their cloaks and tossing dust into the air**, and this is chaos, this is rage right out in that court and they're demanding the blood of Paul. We want this guy executed and we want him executed now. Does that sound familiar? Where have we heard it before? In the Gospels with Jesus. And what they're saying in the original text at the close of v 22, the phrase **allowed to live**, the verb is imperfect, meaning "This guy is long overdue. What is this guy still doing on earth? He should have been executed decades ago." And so the whole thing has blown out of control.*

Now we come to v 24, **the commander ordered him to be brought into the barracks**, he's going to bring the situation under control, and this is another commendation to this commander. He very straightway says get **into the barracks**. And you have to marvel at the situation because here's the Roman Empire and the Roman Empire if known for anything it was known for law and order. Yet who is the originator of law and order? The God of the Jewish mob. So now we have a very peculiar situation in that the very people who received the law from God on Mt Sinai are in chaos and the soldiers of the pagan Roman Empire are insistent that law and order will rule. And so what Luke is saying in the argument is look at the rebellion of the Jewish

people. Here we are nearing the end of Acts and their rebellion is just as fierce as it was decades ago when Jesus offered Himself to the nation. Nothing has changed. They were offered the kingdom by their Messiah and they rejected and now in Acts they have had the re-offer of the kingdom by the Messiah's apostles and they reject it. So the kingdom offer is phasing out and we are nearing the fifth degree of divine discipline on the nation Israel, The discipline will come by way of the Roman army. The very army that protects Paul is going to destroy the Jews and scatter them to the four winds.

So Paul is brought into the barracks of the Antonia and the commander says **examine him by scourging**. Now this is interrogation by torture. Still the commander doesn't have a clue as to why they're so mad at Paul because everything Paul said to the Jews was in Aramaic, and the commander doesn't speak Aramaic, so with two riots this guy's caused he wants to find out. And the means; **scourging**. Paul's having a rough day. He's already been beaten by the mob, now he's going to be scourged. And this isn't like anything else Paul has received. Paul was a tough man, Paul was beaten with the rods of the Roman lictors on three different occasions (2 Cor 11:25), one we saw in Acts 16:22 at Philippi. He was also disciplined by the Jewish authorities on five different occasions (2 Cor 11:24). But none of these lashings were as murderous as the Roman scourge described here. This is the same thing they did to Jesus in the Gospels. What they're going to do is they're going to stretch Paul out, usually they tied you to a pole or pillar and stripped your shirt off down to your waist so you're back was bare, arms extended. Then they took the scourge which was an instrument with a handle about 10 inches long with three strands of leather of different lengths and embedded in these were rough pieces of metal or bone. And then they'd take the scourge and whip across your back and it didn't just get your back; they often wrapped around your body onto your chest and ripped out flesh and sometimes people lost their eyes. And the Romans didn't have any laws like the Jews, 40-1, it went on and on and on until the lictor said stop. It caused extreme loss of blood and most people died from the scourging and if you didn't die you'd be crippled for life.ⁱⁱ So it's very clear what's happening here. Paul, you give me the information or I'll kill you.

Now if you've ever played monopoly you know of the 'get out of jail free' card. No one takes that card quite seriously but if you were in Paul's situation you'd be pulling any card you could. And here Paul's going to play his card

but not right away, he's going to let the game go on for awhile, he's going to get all stretched out and then at the last minute he's going to play his card.

So watch, v 25, **But when they stretched him out with thongs, Paul said to the centurion who was standing by, "Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman and uncondemned?"** Now that's last minute theatrics and the air with which he says it is, now by the way, **is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman and uncondemned.** Actually Paul plays two cards here and in the Greek he says this with full confidence. Paul knows the law and Paul knows if he plays his cards they can't touch him. So Paul says what are you going to do? A) I've got a get out of scourging free card. I'm a **Roman** citizen and B) on top of that I'm **uncondemned**, you haven't given me a trial. So if you whip me I'm going to have your badge and you're going to be the one getting whipped. It was a very, very serious thing to scourge a Roman citizen and you can tell from the text they took Paul very seriously because you don't just go around saying I'm a Roman citizen in Rome because if it turned out you weren't you were executed. So this is a serious matter.

Verse 26, **When the centurion heard this, he went to the commander and told him, saying, "What are you about to do?"** And in the Greek text this is a sharp warning. This is a lower ranked soldier in the army coming right up to his superior officer and saying, "Hello, do you have a clue what you're doing?" **"For this man is a Roman."** You're seriously out of order and if hadn't warned the commander it would have ended both their careers.

So v 27, **The commander came and said to him,** literally, "You, a Roman!" In other words, I don't believe it. **And he said, "Yes."** And now it becomes a contest to see who has the best credentials. See, there were three ways you could acquire citizenship in Rome. You could be born a Roman because your father was a Roman citizen, you could have been granted citizenship by Imperial decree because of some service for the Roman Empire or you could have purchased it for a price. Here's the history behind this situation, which shows, by the way, the tremendous historical accuracy of Luke. Since the 19th century the liberal scholars have attacked Luke time and again on this historical detail and that historical detail and then come the archaeologists and they gather more and more data, they discover more and more inscriptions, they do more and more historical research and every time they

come back saying Luke has been right all along. And here it is again, a tiny historical detail that shows Luke is right on.

The commander here is obviously bragging that he got his **citizenship with a large sum of money**. And we infer historically that he must have gotten it during the reign of Claudius because it was during his reign that his wife Messalina and her court sold citizenship for a very steep price so they could line their pockets. Very shortly after Claudius you could buy citizenship very cheaply and so obviously those who paid a lot of money for citizenship looked down upon those who got it cheaply and the commander thinks Paul is one of those types, a Johnny-come-lately el cheapo, second rate citizen. But Paul said **I was actually born a citizen**. I'm not some second rate citizen, my descendants were Romans and therefore you, Roman commander, are the Johnny-come-lately, not me. My Roman citizenship traces back generations. We don't know how many generations but scholars suggest about a hundred years earlier Paul's grandfather acquired citizenship by imperial decree for some service rendered. But in any case Paul did not get his citizenship cheaply and this exchange shows the tremendous historical accuracy of Luke because it was only during this period that the Roman commander could have purchased Roman citizenship for a large sum of money and at the same time assumed that Paul had gotten his cheaply as of late.

And when they heard this, v 29, **those who were about to examine him immediately let go of him; and the commander also was afraid when he found out that he was a Roman, and because he had put him in chains**. Oh yeah, they let go of him and oh yeah, this put fear in the commander because he had strung up a Roman citizen and was about to scourge him. If they'd gone through with it they would have been severely punished. Roman Law said that all Roman citizens had to be given a fair trial and only on very rare occurrences could they scourge a guilty Roman. And so when they heard Paul was a Roman the Greek says literally, they stood off from him at once. Paul was untouchable.

So, v 30, the commander still hasn't figured out why Paul caused a riot so he calls on the Sanhedrin. Verse 30, **But on the next day, wishing to know for certain why he had been accused by the Jews, he released him and ordered the chief priests and all the Council to assemble, and brought Paul down and set him before them**. Now the Sanhedrin was a

group of ruling Jews, and the commander doesn't know what's going on but he wants to find out because if this is Jewish matter that needs to be handled under Jewish law then that's one thing. They could hold the trial. But if it was an issue of Roman law then that's another thing, He would have to hold the trial. So he takes him down to the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin was a group of 72 wealthy Jews, most of them were Sadducees but some of them were Pharisees, so they were a split group, theologically speaking, and they resided outside this gate called Kiponus to the west of the Temple Mount. This was the wealthy district, mostly aristocratic Jews, most of them of the priestly caste; they lived in large homes along this slope. We have archaeological remains of one of these homes called beit Katros, it's about 6,500 square feet (if that gives you an idea of how rich these people were), it has multiple levels, and the floors are mosaics. This was a very expensive house that we think the priestly family Kathros lived in, it was destroyed in AD70, and houses like this lined this area near the Temple Mount because the priests needed quick access to the Temple Mount so they lived just over this bridge. The bridge crossed the Tyropoeon Valley, translated the "valley of the cheesemakers" and if you go to Israel today any tour guide worth his salt will explain these contours in the land. Today most of the valley has been filled in but then it was much deeper and they had to have a bridge constructed to cross over and so they would come across the bridge and make their way through a secret passageway onto the Temple Mount and then to the Chamber of Hewn Stone.ⁱⁱⁱ That's where they normally met. Some scholars think it was on the SE corner, others think it was on the north side directly in sight of the Antonia fortress, but in either case this meeting probably was not held in the chamber but out in the outer court and the commander probably sat up on the wall of the Antonia and listened to the dispute with his soldiers on ready alert. So Paul was brought down out of the Antonia Fortress and out into this court for interrogation. That's some of the background for Paul's speech which we'll follow in the text.

Acts 23:1 begins the address to the Sanhedrin. Paul starts out claiming, **"Brethren, I have lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day."** Now he's not claiming there that he's 100% perfect. What he's saying is that when God clarified an issue to me, by and large I followed it; it's been a general rule of my life to be obedient to the known will of God. But if Paul is obedient to the known will of God and he's going out to the Gentiles and proclaiming to them they can be justified before

God without going through Judaism which says Gentiles cannot get right with God without coming through Judaism then we have a problem. Either Paul is right and Judaism is wrong or Paul is wrong and Judaism is right and Paul ought not be going off to the Gentiles. So Paul by this statement that he kept a **perfectly good conscience** is saying that the whole institution of Judaism is off track under the high priest. You guys are way out of line.

Acts 23:2 **The high priest Ananias commanded those standing beside him to strike him on the mouth.** Now that's a nice way of handling a discussion, if you can't answer the man just beat him up. Ananias was a jerk and a thief at the same time. He was one of the most corrupt high priests that ever existed in the city of Jerusalem. He ruled for twelve years and eventually came to his doom, as Paul prophesies in verse 3. He met his doom through an assassination plot in the year 66; finally the Jews couldn't take him any longer, he was just a horrible man. He used to steal all the money that came in for for the priests and keep it for himself. He stole so much money that some of the priests starved to death.^{iv} He had Roman sympathies so the nationalist Jews didn't like Ananias much and they knocked him off.

So he's the guy that ordered somebody to smack Paul in the mouth during the middle of this trial, and so Paul, please notice in verse 3, responds. Now I love this response because like the Lord Jesus Christ, Paul did not turn the other cheek. Most Christians will take that little episode of the Sermon on the Mount and they say Christians ought to turn the other cheek, and by that they mean lay down and be a doormat, but they don't understand the content of the Sermon of the Mount. All the examples Jesus gives in the Sermon on the Mount are figures of speech because that was what communicated to those people. He also said if you look at a woman with lust rip your eyeball out and I don't see any Christians obeying that. In another place He says cut off your hand if you steal a candy bar. He doesn't mean literally cut your hand off. He's using that to get a point across. And it's the same with turn the other cheek. It's a figure of speech. And the reason we can say this and not be at all arbitrary in our interpretation is because we just look at Jesus. Did He turn the other cheek at His trial? He did not. He challenged; He challenged the court authorities as to whether they were having a lawful trial or not (John 18:23) and so you have Paul doing the same thing here.

Verse 3, Then Paul said to him, **God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall! Do you sit to try me according to the Law, and in violation of the Law order me to be struck?** That's his answer; a lovely pietistic response to a violation of law in the court, **God is going to strike you**, which is a prophecy God fulfilled through the Zealots who assassinated him. And the phrase **whitewashed wall** was a slang term at the time for a hypocrite. The idea of whitewashing something was to make something that had death in it look pretty on the outside. And so you'd have whitewashed tombs all beautiful but with dead bones inside and so it was a very appropriate description of hypocrisy; they were wealthy and well-dressed but on the inside they were spiritually dead, gross and corrupt, just like the bones in those tombs. You can wear all the nice clothes you want but your violation of the law Ananias reveals your inner corruption. The argument being in the larger context that the Romans were more law abiding than the Jews at this time.

⁴But the bystanders said, "Do you revile God's high priest?" ⁵And Paul said, "I was not aware, brethren, that he was high priest; for it is written, 'You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.'" v 5 gives a lot of commentators trouble. I just take it that Paul is using sarcasm. Paul knew who Ananias was. But Paul didn't recognize Ananias as high priest. Who did Paul recognize as high priest? The Lord Jesus Christ. The resurrected Christ. I don't recognize this Ananias' fraud. The real high priest is the Lord Jesus Christ who sits at the right hand of the Father on high. And so I take his statement to be in effect that I would never speak evil of Him. And obviously Ananias wasn't acting like a high priest anyway. He's corrupt, he violated the law, and he hasn't given Paul a trial. So that's the kind of thing going on in v 5.

And now, by the end of v 5, since the Sanhedrin has both Pharisees and Sadducees on it, the Sadducees were on the high priests side, they were the dominant ruling sect at the time, and so you can imagine by this time the Sadducees are not liking Paul one bit. So at this point Paul pulls a political maneuver. Some Christians get bent about political maneuvers. So I want you to see this because Paul pulls a very shrewd political maneuver at this point to get himself out of a jam. So watch how he does it. He's lost all votes with the party of the Sadducees so he's going to salvage some votes by siding with the party of the Pharisees on a theological issue.

Verse 6, **But perceiving that one group were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, Paul began crying out in the Council, “Brethren, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees; I am on trial for the hope and resurrection of the dead!”** ⁷As he said this, there occurred a **dissension between the Pharisees and Sadducees, and the assembly was divided.** ⁸For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor an angel, nor a spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all.

Now what Paul said there in v 6, is exactly what you would say to get these two groups in a big fight. Quite frankly I don't think Paul appreciated being on trial in front of a bunch of Jewish cronies. It was a waste of his time and he'd much rather stand trial in front of the Romans so he pulls this stunt. He divides and conquers. How he did it was use the theology of these two parties, there were some big differences, you can see them listed right in verse 8. Sadducees did not believe in **resurrection, angels** or **spirits**, we'd say they were materialists of the day, the naturalists, but the Pharisees did believe in all of them, they were the supernaturalists of the day. As an interesting side note who does Jesus interact with primarily in the gospels? The Pharisees, it's always Jesus vs the Pharisees and only here and there does he get into it with the Sadducees. Now in the book of Acts who do the apostles primarily interact with? The Sadducees. Why? Because of v 6. What were the apostles proclaiming? The resurrection. The resurrection hadn't occurred in the Gospels. By the book of Acts it had. So with the resurrection the antagonism shifts from Pharisees to Sadducees.

Now what Paul did here was pragmatic. Pragmatism just means it works, it's not a Christian philosophy but it is a philosophy a Christian can use with unbelievers because it registers with them. Now where did Paul learn the philosophy of pragmatism? Who trained Paul in Jerusalem? Rabban Gamaliel. So turn to Acts 5:30. Here it's Peter and the apostles, v 29, and what's the issue v 30? The resurrection. So the issue is exactly the same, in v 33 the Sadducees get all bent out of shape because they don't believe in resurrection but who butts into the conversation in v 34? “A Pharisee named Gamaliel,” Gamaliel does believe in the resurrection. He's “a teacher of the Law,” he was Paul's teacher, well “respected by all the people,” in other words here's a man who carries political weight and he has some theological agreement with these guys so in v 35 he starts giving a solution to the problem. And basically the solution is guys, we've seen this kind of a thing

before, one guy comes along, he gets a following, the guy dies and the whole thing falls apart. So let's just back off, don't do anything, let's just watch and see how this thing plays out. God controls history and if God wants these guys to be successful there's nothing we can do about it so let's just wait and see. Now here we are again, this time Acts 23, Paul sees Pharisees on the Council so he pulls a theological punch, he brings up the resurrection. And that gets him political points with the Pharisees. They agree with Paul on the doctrine of resurrection, they disagree on other points but they hold that in common. So Paul simply is doing what his theology professor Gamaliel did in Acts 5. It works like a charm.

V 9, And there occurred a great uproar; and some of the scribes of the Pharisaic party stood up and began to argue heatedly, saying, "We find nothing wrong with this man; suppose a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?" So Paul won all the Pharisee votes and none of the Sadducee votes but at least he's off Scott Free. These guys are now going at it with one another and the whole thing descends into chaos and in vv 10-11 we come to the conclusion of the whole thing.

¹⁰And as a great dissension was developing, the commander was afraid Paul would be torn to pieces by them and ordered the troops to go down and take him away from them by force, and bring him into the barracks. Again it's the Romans protecting the Jews attacking. So the Roman commander is up here watching the whole thing from the Antonia and once again a riot begins and just like an excellent officer he does exactly what a minister of the state should do. He brings law and order to the situation. Down here is a citizen of Rome, also a Christian, and he's in danger so I command my troops to go down and take him away **by force**. Law and order protects, when it's operating properly, it protects the innocent until they've been given a fair trial. Paul hasn't had a fair trial and so this commander exemplifies perfect command. Get him out of there.

Now verse 11, **But on the night immediately following, the Lord stood at his side and said, "Take courage; for as you have solemnly witnessed to My cause at Jerusalem, so you must witness at Rome also."** And that simply is a re-affirmation of the sovereign plan of God. Paul, I know you're a prisoner now, but I'm going to get you to **Rome**. I have hand-picked you personally to be my witness at **Rome**. So you don't worry, there's

going to be a lot of trials, you're going to stand before Felix and Festus and Agrippa, you're going to be imprisoned for years, you're going to be in a shipwreck, it's going to be a long and hard road, but I'm going to get you there. I wrote Acts 1:8 and the gospel is going to go to **Rome** and you are the one to take it so **take courage!** I work all things together for good. And that's the message you want to take away from the Book of Acts. God has a plan and God's plan is marching forward and nothing is going to stop it. God has a plan for the church and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. There will be trials, there will be sufferings but in the end God's program word will come to pass. His promises are true yesterday, today and forever.

ⁱ A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Vol.V c1932, Vol.VI c1933 by Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, 1997), Ac 22:21.

ⁱⁱ cf <http://www.bible-history.com/past/flagrum.html>

ⁱⁱⁱ A.T. Robertson thought they met in the Antonia Fortress but 23:10 indicates that they did not.

^{iv} Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, xx.ix.2

[Back To The Top](#)

Copyright (c) Fredericksburg Bible Church 2009