

What was Paul's speech all about (vv. 1-21)? Paul needed to defend himself against the charge that he had been disloyal to his people, the Mosaic Law, and the temple (21:28). His devout Jewish audience was especially skeptical of Paul since he was a Hellenistic (Greek) Jew who fraternized with Gentiles. This is an excellent example of the Holy Spirit giving the Lord's servant the words to say on the spur of the moment, as Jesus had promised He would do (Matthew 10:16-20; Mark 13:9-11). All of Paul's speeches from here on out in Acts are defenses.¹

When Paul addressed the violent mob that had wanted to kill him, how did they respond (v. 2)? When they heard Paul speak to them in Aramaic, their mother tongue, they were pleased if not surprised that Paul could speak Aramaic as well as Greek and they quieted down and listened.....at least for the moment.

How did Paul start his speech (vv. 3-5) Addressing a Jewish audience, Paul began with his roots as a Jew, born in Tarsus, his education at the feet of the well-known Jewish teacher, Gamaliel, and his instruction in Judaism. He then gave special emphasis to his zeal as a Jew. He had persecuted the Christian faith, filling the prisons with those who believed in Jesus. The high priest and the Sanhedrin could bear witness to the thoroughness of his methods. It was from them that he received letters authorizing him to go to Damascus and bring back Christians to Jerusalem to be punished. He had been thoroughly committed to the Law and to stamping out Christianity.

Paul's point in citing his background was to show his hearers that he was just as zealous for God and his Jewish heritage as any of them were (Galatians 1:14).

How did Paul change gears at this point (vv. 6-11)? Paul next related the events of his conversion.....an experience which changed the entire direction of his life. Paul stressed that his personal encounter with God was an event that God had initiated. It was not something that Paul had sought. Jesus of Nazareth had reached out to him. It was a supernatural revelation from Jesus that accounted for the radical change in his life (9:3-19).

Who did Paul encounter next (v. 12)? Ananias. **How did Paul describe Ananias?** He was very devout by the standards of the Mosaic Law and a man who had a good reputation among his fellow Jews. The testimony of such a man was important in corroborating the account of Paul's conversion.

What was the first thing Ananias did (v. 13)? He restored Paul's sight.

What message did Ananias next convey to Paul (vv. 14-16)? Ananias stated that it was "the God of our fathers" who had ordered the events on the road to Damascus. God wanted Paul to know His will, to see the Righteous One, i.e. Jesus (v. 8), and to receive direct revelation from Him. If the Jews Paul was addressing were opposed to what had happened on the road to Damascus, they were really fighting against God.²

Also, Ananias told Paul that he would be a witness for the Lord to *all* men of what Paul had seen and heard. It is important to remember that Paul, at this point in Acts, is not the apostle to the Gentiles. He has been sent "to all men" (v. 15). This should have prepared the Jewish crowd for Paul's announcement that he had been sent to the Gentiles (Romans 11:13; Galatians 1:16). Finally, Paul was told to get up, be baptized, and wash his sins away.³

What does v. 16 NOT mean? Water baptism does NOT wash away sins. Only the blood of Christ washes away our sins (1 John 1:7). This verse has been a problem to some because it could be misunderstood to mean that water baptism washes away sins. Paul had evidently experienced regeneration on the Damascus Road, since he was persuaded by Ananias to be baptized in water several days after he had called on the Lord for salvation. The Lord had already washed Paul's sins away when he had called on the Lord. Then later Paul arose and received baptism. Faith always precedes baptism in the Bible. Baptism is a picture of God's inner work of washing away sin. It always follows salvation.

While Paul was praying in the temple, what happened (vv. 17-18)? He fell into a trance and heard the Lord telling him to get out of Jerusalem quickly, because the people would not receive his testimony concerning Christ.

What was Paul's response (vv. 19-20)? It seemed incredible to Paul that his own people would refuse to listen to him. He thought the Jews would be impressed by the radical change in his life. After all, they knew what a zealous Jew he had been, how he had imprisoned and beaten the disciples of Jesus (8:3; 9:2; 22:4-5; 26:11), and how he had even been an accomplice to the murder of Stephen⁴ (7:58; 8:1).

How did the Lord respond (v. 21)? The Lord repeated His command (9:15), "Depart, for I will send you far from here to the Gentiles."

How did the crowd respond (vv. 22-23)? Up to this point, the Jews had been listening to Paul quietly. But his mention of going to the Gentiles with the gospel aroused insane jealousy and hatred. This was equivalent to placing Gentiles on the same footing before God as Jews, and this was the height of heresy to the traditional Jewish mind.⁵ Chanting furiously in wild disorder, they cried out for Paul's life.

What was going through the commander's mind (v. 24)? When the commander saw them in their mad frenzy, he concluded that Paul must have been guilty of some very serious crime. He ordered Paul to be brought into the barracks and bound with thongs in order to be flogged so he could extract a confession from him.

What right was Paul claiming (v. 25)? Paul quietly asked the centurion if it was legal to flog a Roman citizen when he was not proven guilty of a crime....which would be a very serious offense.

How did the centurion respond (v. 26)? The centurion quickly went and told the commander that Paul was a Roman citizen.

How did the commander respond (vv. 27-28)? When this was reported to the commander, he was incredulous that Paul in his circumstances, the object of such hatred by the Jews, could be a Roman citizen.⁶

How did Paul's citizenship compare to the commander's (28)? Born citizens enjoyed greater respect than Romans who had bought their citizenship.

What impact did the disclosure of Paul's Roman citizenship have (v. 29)? They cancelled all plans to question him and the commander was alarmed when he realized the mistake he had made.

What was the commander's next step (v. 30)? The commander was obviously anxious to know for certain why Paul had been accused by the Jews. At the same time he was determined to carry out the proceedings in a legal and orderly manner. Therefore, on the day after the mob scene in Jerusalem, he had Paul taken out of prison and brought before the chief priests and the Sanhedrin.⁷

The ball was now in the Sanhedrin's court. If Paul's offenses were no big deal, the commander would release him. If the Jews charged him with some religious crime, the Sanhedrin could try him. And if they charged him with a civil offense, the Roman provincial governor would try him.

¹ Dr. Thomas L. Constable, Notes on Acts, 2022 Edition (published by <http://planobiblechapel.org/soniclight/>), 443.

² William MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 1653.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Dr. Thomas L. Constable, Notes on Acts, 2022 Edition (published by <http://planobiblechapel.org/soniclight/>), 448.

⁶ Stanley D. Toussaint, "Acts," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*: J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 419.

⁷ William MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 1654.