

## 76. Paul Told How the Lord Stopped Him

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn about the danger of making assumptions instead of seeking the truth. Paul had nearly been killed by a mob of Jews because someone made the assumption that Paul had brought a Gentile into the temple. The Roman commander rescued Paul from the mob. He then took him to Fort Antonia, which overlooked the temple courtyard. As they were going up the steps into the fort, Paul asked to speak to the people. In this topic and the next, we will see what Paul said to the people that day.

Acts 22:1-3 says, “‘Brethren and fathers, hear my defense before you now.’ And when they heard that he spoke to them in the Hebrew language, they kept all the more silent. Then he said: ‘I am indeed a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, taught according to the strictness of our fathers' law, and was zealous toward God as you all are today.’” Paul referred to the people gathered there that day as brethren and fathers. He asked them to hear his defense. Paul knew that many people in that crowd had no idea about his background. This was especially true, because many were there from other lands for the Feast of Pentecost. As a result, Paul began by giving them a little of the history of his personal life.

Paul chose to speak in the Modern Hebrew or Aramaic language that was common in the land of Israel in that day. When they heard that he spoke in the language that everyone living in Jerusalem spoke, they all kept silent and listened to what Paul had to say. Paul said that he was a Jew just like most of the people who were gathered there that day. He had been born in Tarsus in the Roman province of Cilicia. The Jews who lived in other countries were called the Diaspora because most of the Jews were scattered in other countries of the world. However, Paul said that he had been brought up in the city of Jerusalem. The word translated “brought up” had the thought of the forming of the mind. As a result, Paul said that he received his training or education in Jerusalem.

Paul said that he had received this training at the feet of Gamaliel. Gamaliel was the most respected Jewish rabbi of that day. Acts 5:34 says, “Then one in the council stood up, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in respect by all the people, and commanded them to put the apostles outside for a little while.” Here, we see that Gamaliel, in addition to being a Pharisee and a teacher of the law, was held in high respect by all of the people. This meant that Paul had been taught according to the strictest interpretation of the fathers’ law. The fathers’ law included both the teaching of the Old Testament and all of the rabbinic traditions that had been added by well-known rabbis through the years. This immediately showed that the charge that Paul opposed the law was certainly a false charge.

Paul also said that he was zealous toward God just as all of those who were gathered there that day. Paul had described that he was zealous toward God and the law when he had written in Galatians 1:13-14, “For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and *tried to* destroy it. And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers.” Since Galatians had been written several years earlier, there were many older Jews who

knew the background of Paul.

In fact, part of the people gathered there that day had known Paul when he was a leader in the stoning of Stephen many years earlier. Paul went on to talk about that time. Acts 22:4-6 says, “I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women, as also the high priest bears me witness, and all the council of the elders, from whom I also received letters to the brethren, and went to Damascus to bring in chains even those who were there to Jerusalem to be punished. Now it happened, as I journeyed and came near Damascus at about noon, suddenly a great light from heaven shone around me.” In addition to killing Stephen, Acts 8:3 says, “As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing *them* to prison.” Paul had arrested and put many Christians in jail in that earlier time.

Paul said that the things that he was saying could be verified by the high priest and all of the council of the elders (the Sanhedrin). It was the Sanhedrin that had given Paul letters to take to the Jews in Damascus that gave Paul permission to arrest, put in chains and bring to Jerusalem to be punished any Jews in that city who had become followers of the Way. “The Way” was the name that the Jews called the followers of Christ during that time. Paul said that he was on his way to Damascus to arrest such followers. In fact, he had almost reached the city of Damascus. Suddenly, about the middle of the day, he had been stopped by a great light that shown from heaven.

Acts 22:7-11 says, “And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” So I answered, “Who are You, Lord?” And He said to me, “I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.” And those who were with me indeed saw the light and were afraid, but they did not hear the voice of Him who spoke to me. So I said, “What shall I do, Lord?” And the Lord said to me, “Arise and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all things which are appointed for you to do.” And since I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of those who were with me, I came into Damascus.” We see that Paul described what happened after he saw that great light from heaven. He said that he fell to the ground and heard a voice.

Paul said that the voice from heaven spoke to him and said, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” Paul had really thought until that time that he was serving God by persecuting the followers of Jesus. As a result, Paul said that he asked two questions that day. The first question was, “Who are You, Lord?” Paul recognized that the voice from heaven had to be God. The word translated “Lord” means the *owner, master or ruler*. This title is used to refer to God the Father or Jesus the Son, the Messiah, a total of six hundred and sixty-seven times out of the seven hundred and forty-eight times that the word is used in the New Testament. The voice from heaven answered Paul, “I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.” Here, we see that Jesus is God and He personally identified with His followers. Jesus said that as Paul was persecuting followers of Jesus, he was actually persecuting Jesus.

Paul said that those who were traveling with him also saw the light. This light caused those who were traveling with him to be filled with great fear. However, they did not hear the voice of the

One that spoke to Paul that day. Paul said when he heard that the voice was the voice of Jesus of Nazareth whom he was persecuting, he asked a second question. That second question was, “What shall I do, Lord?” We see what was happening at that moment in Acts 9:6 where we read, “So he, trembling and astonished, said, ‘Lord, what do You want me to do?’ Then the Lord *said* to him, ‘Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.’” Here, we see that Paul had suddenly realized that Jesus is God and that he must immediately recognize Him as God.

However, Jesus also wanted Paul to recognize that the church is His body and help the church realize that Paul had become a part of that body. As a result, Jesus told him to, “Arise and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all things which are appointed for you to do.” Jesus had performed the miracle that no human could do. He had changed the heart of Paul. Now it was time for a believer to do what believers are to do and that is help a person learn how to follow Christ.

As we know from Acts 9, the Lord also had to convince Ananias to go and talk to Paul. Acts 9:15-17 says, “But the Lord said to him, ‘Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake.’ And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, ‘Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.’” In these verses, we see what Ananias was instructed what to tell Paul.

We also see that the other Christians had a part in helping Paul to learn how to follow Christ. Acts 9:18-19 says, “Immediately there fell from his eyes *something* like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized. So when he had received food, he was strengthened. Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus.” Paul had the opportunity to learn both from Ananias and also from the other disciples that were in the city of Damascus. We see how greatly his life was changed in Acts 9:20 where we read, “Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God.” Here, we see that Paul immediately began to prove to the other Jews living in Damascus that Jesus is the Son of God. We will learn more about that change in our next topic as we finish what Paul said to the Jews in Jerusalem.

We see here in Acts 22:11 that Paul also had to be led into the city of Damascus; he could no longer see because of the glory of that light. The very Jews who were going with him to arrest the Christians saw what happened to Paul, because they were the ones that had to lead him into the city. We also want to help our physical and spiritual children understand the glory of the One who saved them. Ephesians 3:20-21 says that God is able to do more in their lives than they can imagine as they see His glory. Those verses say, “Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.” May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children understand the glory of the One who saved them.