

LifeWay Family Bible Series for Nov. 30: Paul demonstrated God's life-changing power_112403

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Paul demonstrated God's life-changing power

- ◆ *Acts 21:27-22:29*

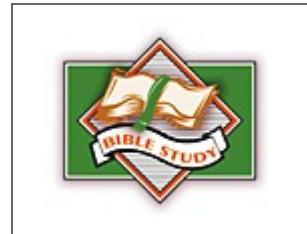
By David Jenkins

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With his third missionary journey completed, Paul faced the threat of Jewish hostility in Jerusalem. While at Caesarea, a prophet named Agabus had come from Judea to warn Paul of the danger awaiting him in Jerusalem. Those traveling with Paul (including Luke), along with fellow believers in Caesarea, pleaded with him not to continue to Jerusalem. Paul told his well-meaning friends he was convinced it was the Lord's will that he go, and he was ready to die in Jerusalem for the sake of Christ if that be God's plan. Paul was received with joy by his Christian brothers in Jerusalem. They glorified God when Paul completed his report concerning God's mighty work among the Gentiles through his ministry.

Facing Satan's fury

Even though the Jerusalem Council earlier had won liberty from the Jewish law for the Gentile believers out in the empire (Acts 15; 21:25), there were yet many thousands of Jewish believers in Judea who were still “zealous for the law” of Moses. False rumors had reached Jerusalem that Paul had urged Jewish believers to forsake Moses' law and Jewish customs. They had falsely accused Paul of bringing Trophimus, a Gentile believer from Ephesus, into the temple with him. This was considered a blasphemous act. Mob violence resulted, and news of the riot reached the captain of the Roman garrison who quickly brought his troops to quell the disturbance.



The captain, not able to extract a coherent charge from the seething mob, bound Paul and ordered him removed to their barracks in the Castle of Antonia in the northwest corner of the temple area. Paul was likely closer to losing his life than he had ever been before. Ironically, because of the impartial justice of the pagan Romans, Paul's life was saved.

Bearing witness under difficult circumstances

In the midst of the screaming, bloodthirsty mob calling for Paul's life, the soldiers struggled to get Paul safely inside their barracks in the castle. Paul, not wanting to miss a single opportunity to bear witness for Christ, made an amazing request of his captors. He asked for permission to address that furious mob of people clamoring for his life. The captain was stunned when Paul addressed him in flawless Greek. He had already decided Paul might be a certain Egyptian who, some years before, had led a

band of desperados to the Mount of Olives. He had promised that he could cause the walls of Jerusalem to fall down. The Romans intervened and arrested his followers, although the Egyptian leader escaped.

Paul quickly gave his credentials to the captain and asked to speak to the people. Permission was granted, and when Paul began to speak in the Hebrew tongue, an eerie silence fell across the mob.

Defending the faith

What happened the next few moments that day in Jerusalem was a remarkable evidence of the authority of the Holy Spirit manifested through one of God's servants. From his elevated position on the steps of the castle, Paul lifted his hand toward the crowd for attention and spoke to them in their mother tongue. "Brethren and fathers" probably was the accepted form of formal address in any assembly where both scribes and elders were present. "Brethren" also may have expressed Paul's love for his own fellow Jews, and "fathers" showed his respect for the eminent rulers of the Jews, some of whom may have been in the crowd.

Paul gave something of a biographical sketch of his life. He admitted his zeal toward God, which meant he was committed without reservation to keeping and guarding the law. He confessed he had persecuted the followers of Christ. He described the lengths to which he had gone in his acts of defiance-persecuting believers "to the death." He may have been referring to the part he played in the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:54-60). He continued the painful account of his crusade against Christ's followers by relating the turning point in his life, his encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus, his temporary blindness, and the meeting with Ananias.

At this point, Paul boldly declared how, through Ananias, God had revealed his plan for Paul's life. Three things were predominant in these divine

instructions to Paul: (1) he would know God's will because of his submission to Jesus Christ; (2) he was appointed "to see the righteous One," which fulfilled one of the requirements of apostleship and (3) he would receive God's message which he would communicate "to all men." Ananias then urged Paul to be baptized, "calling on his name." Paul complied with Jesus' command (Matthew 28:19).

His baptism was more than a formal or ceremonial act. Repentance and saving faith are clearly evident in Paul's actions. Paul had a clear concept of "the washing of regeneration" and "the renewing of the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5), which came from his own personal experience with Christ.

Questions for discussion

- ◆ How was the power of the gospel revealed in Paul's life?
- ◆ What is the most effective evidence of the power of the gospel in your life?

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