

# Acts 22:1-30: Are You Going to Believe God or Your Lying Eyes?

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## I. Introduction

What drives the decisions we make? Something happens and we call on the “facts” to tell us what just happened and then what to do about it. But if our view of the facts is wrong, not only will our interpretation of what just happened be wrong, our emotional response to it will be wrong and before you know it, we’re led by anxiety, fear, rage, despair, ... and we end up making decisions based on what we thought was true, when it actually wasn’t.

## II. Acts 22:1-30: Do You Look at Life Through False Facts?

**22:1-21**, Paul was in the temple about to fulfill one of the tenets of the Mosaic Law along with four others, when he was seized by a crazed mob who believed that he was against the Jewish people, their Law, and the temple. Why? Jews from Asia, who’d come to celebrate Pentecost, recognized Paul. They knew him and saw him as a Jew who contradicted the Jewish way of life (Acts 13:26-48, note esp. 42, 48; 19:9). Therefore, they turned the massive crowd against him and as they were about to execute him the Romans rescued him. But since the commander couldn’t figure out who he was and why the mob wanted to kill him, he placed him under arrest. Before entering the barracks, Paul asked to speak to the angry mob. Given permission, he motioned with his hand, which silenced the mob. When he began to speak in Hebrew, they go even quieter.

What Paul says in his defense is brilliant and if the crowd had ears to hear, they would’ve become Christians on the spot. But they were blinded by their homicidal rage. They think that what they believe is true, but their deceived by false facts. Paul made it crystal clear that he was one of them! He would’ve been standing right there with them ready to kill this Jewish Christian, in fact, that’s what he was doing some 20yrs ago when the Lord, Himself, appeared to him. This is Paul’s history and proof that he was more zealous for God and His Law than any of those in the crowd: (1) not only is he a Jew, but from childhood he was trained in Jerusalem to be a Pharisee of the first order by the #1 Pharisee, Gamaliel (who had an unquestionable pedigree—grandson to Hillel, pioneer of one of the two schools of thought on the Mosaic Law—and was respected by everyone in Jerusalem, 5:34), (2) he knew the Law backwards and forwards and was so zealous for God and His Law that he killed and persecuted Christians, (3) the high priest and the entire Sanhedrin knows of Paul’s zeal; they gave him letters of authority to arrest Christians in Damascus and bring them back to Jerusalem for punishment. Paul did not ask to become a Christian in any way; his views of God, His Law, His temple, and his people were thoroughly Jewish in the strictest sense. And he hated Christians with an even greater homicidal rage than the one which now fueled the mob.

But something happened as he was about to enter Damascus. The God Paul worshipped with such zeal and the Messiah who would one day come to free Israel from all her enemies appeared to him in the flesh. His brightness was so powerful that it knocked him to the ground. And then Messiah began to speak and to Paul’s astonishment, the Messiah was Jesus. Paul realized that instead of serving God by persecuting Christians, he was actually persecuting Him. From this point on, Paul’s view of God, His Law, His people, His temple, salvation, and true service to God were forever changed. And none of it was Paul’s idea: what he told Gentiles about the way of salvation apart from circumcision and the Law and everything else, God the Father appointed him to say it and to receive it all from the mouth of His Son, Jesus Christ, the long-awaited Messiah.

Additionally, when Jesus appointed him to this position, he used a zealous Law-keeper like Paul named Ananias to anoint him as such, which was all the more interesting because Ananias was a Christian! And he was well-regarded not just by Christian Jews but non-Christian Jews who knew his reputation for keeping the Law. Further proof that none of this was Paul's idea to go to the Gentiles with such a contrary message to what he had learned as a Pharisee, when Paul returned to Jerusalem from Damascus he went to the temple to worship God. While there the Lord Jesus Christ appeared to him again in a vision. And He told Paul to get out of Jerusalem quickly because the Jewish folks there would not receive his testimony about the way of salvation through Jesus Christ apart from the Law. Paul tried arguing with the Lord by citing his Christian-killing credentials, thinking that the Jews would not harm someone with such a reputation for persecuting Christians including the first Christian martyr Stephen. But the Lord was right (9:29) and insisted telling Paul, "Depart, for I will send you far from here to the Gentiles." All of this was God's choice, not Paul's. The mob thinks he's blasphemed against God, His Law, His people, and His temple. But their facts were false. God told Paul who to go to and what to say to them when he got there about God, His Law, salvation, and how to serve Him.

**22:22-30**, the instant Paul said "Gentiles" the mob reverted to their homicidal rage. In their minds, Paul was not fit to live. In their minds, his mention of "Gentiles" confirmed what they'd been told about him. Instead of bringing Gentiles into conformity to Israel's God and His Law, he was driving them away from Judaism. What blasphemy! Since the mob was getting out of hand once again, the commander ordered Paul into the barracks and for him to be tortured so he could find out why this mob wanted him dead. As they were strapping Paul in he said, "Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman, and uncondemned?" As soon as the centurion heard that, he stopped everything and reported it to the commander. The commander came and asked Paul, "Tell me, are you are Roman?" Paul said, "Yes." The commander proceeds to tell Paul that he obtained his citizenship with a large sum of money. But Paul told him that he was born a Roman (you could get your citizenship by imperial decree for serving the Roman Empire, by birth to Roman citizens, or by purchase/bribe). Immediately those who were about to torture him stepped away from Paul and so did the commander. It was illegal to jail a Roman without a trial. And it was absolutely forbidden to torture a Roman citizen in any way. If you did, you would be in severe trouble. The next day, the commander released Paul, summoned the entire Sanhedrin, and set Paul before them. The commander is still trying to find out what this is all about and since this involves Israel's customs and Law, he convenes their leadership, what would be equivalent to our Supreme Court, though it's more like all three branches of government (Executive, Legislative, and Judicial) rolled up into one.

**Why did the mob want to kill Paul and why did he want to persuade them otherwise?** His heart broke for them, (Romans 9:3; 10:1-4). He knew exactly how they felt about him because that's exactly how blind he was to the truth of who God was and therefore how you were made right with Him and how you were then supposed to serve Him. This crowd thought they were doing God's work, but they were lost and when Paul was killing Christians, so was he. So he wanted to show them the truth, he wanted to set them free from the false facts they believed.

When what we believe is wrong, our emotions will get the best of us and our actions will make things worse, leaving us lost, enraged, confused, frustrated, hopeless, etc.



### III. Conclusion

*"Now it happened, as I journeyed and came near Damascus at about noon, suddenly a great light from heaven shone around me. 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.'"*