



# CAPITOL COMMISSION<sup>®</sup>

## “May I Speak?” – Paul the Persecutor

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**Acts 21:37-22:5** *Then as Paul was about to be led into the barracks, he said to the commander, “May I speak to you?” He replied, “Can you speak Greek? 38) Are you not the Egyptian who some time ago stirred up a rebellion and led the four thousand assassins out into the wilderness?” 39) But Paul said, “I am a Jew from Tarsus, in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city; and I implore you, permit me to speak to the people.” 40) So when he had given permission, Paul stood on the stairs and motioned with his hand to the people. And when there was a great silence, he spoke to them in the Hebrew language, saying, 22:1) “Brethren and Fathers, hear my defense before you now.” 2) And when they heard that he spoke to them in the Hebrew language, they kept all the more silent. Then he said, 3) “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 zealous toward God as you all are today. 4) I persecuted this way to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women, 5) 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.” (NKJV)*

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THERE IS MENTION MADE OF WOMEN, THAT IT MAY BETTER APPEAR HOW DESIROUS HE WAS TO SHED BLOOD, WHO HAD NO RESPECT OF SEX WHOM EVEN ARMED ENEMIES ARE WONT TO SPARE IN THE HEAT OF WAR. THEREFORE, HE SETTETH FORTH BEFORE US A FIERCE AND CRUEL BEAST WHO HAD NOT ONLY LIBERTY GIVEN HIM TO RAGE, BUT HAD ALSO HIS POWER INCREASED TO DEVOUR AND DESTROY GODLY MEN, AS IF A MADMAN HAD PUT A SWORD IN HIS HAND. JOHN CALVIN

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Why does Paul want to speak to the commander? What had the Egyptian done that made the commander think he was Paul? For what reason did Paul want to address the people who had just beat him up and were shouting for his execution? Why did they listen so intently? Did Paul identify with them? Had Paul been even more zealous than they were?

#### FOCUS ON FUTURE BIBLE STUDIES:

- FEBRUARY 6: ACTS 22:6-16 *PAUL’S SALVATION EXPERIENCE*
- FEBRUARY 13: ACTS 22:17-22 *ANCIENT RACISM: DEATH FOR MINISTERING TO GENTILES!*

Paul was being beat to death by the violent mob in the temple for the false accusations that he “*teaches all men everywhere against the people, the law and this place*” and that he had “*brought Greeks into the temple*” and “*defiled this holy place*” (Acts 21:27). The commander with his centurions leading at least 200 soldiers had been swift enough to save Paul’s life and was shocked to hear his question.

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“BEFORE HIM STOOD PAUL, HIS HAIR MATTED FROM THE BLOOD AND GASHES ON HIS FACE, BRUISED AND BEATEN. THE COMMANDER WAS SURPRISED THAT PAUL SPOKE GREEK.” R. C. SPROUL

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### BIBLE STUDIES

THURSDAY @ 6:30AM – PRAYER MEETING – GAB 3<sup>RD</sup> FLOOR ROOM 300B

THURSDAY @ 7:00AM – BIBLE STUDY – GAB 3<sup>RD</sup> FLOOR ROOM 300B

# Virginia

## “May I Speak?” – Paul the Persecutor

### I. A SUSPECTED TERRORIST ACTS 21:37-38

The commander, because of the fury of the mob crying out “*Away with him!*” in their desire to see Paul killed, thinks that he has captured a prime suspect who had escaped capture for the last three years. He expects that Paul is probably that sly Egyptian terrorist who had assumed the title of a prophet and had led 4000 assassins to Jerusalem in order to overthrow Rome and set up his own kingdom in Israel. These assassins would mingle with the crowds and with their short curved daggers concealed in the folds of their robes. They would quietly kill those Jews who sided with Rome. The Governor, Felix, had swiftly subdued the rebels by killing 400 and taking 200 hostage, but their Egyptian leader escaped and was never heard from again. The commander knew that Paul was not that Egyptian when he spoke to the people.

Paul’s first words are with utmost respect for them, ignoring the fact that they have just tried to kill him, “*Brethren and Fathers,*” the same as Stephen had begun his defense to the Sanhedrin (Acts 7:2). His next words overthrow the false charge that he opposed the Jewish people. He stated emphatically “*I am a Jew!*” His credentials proved that he was not anti-Jewish. Though not born in Jerusalem he was “*brought up in this city.*” Even more, he could not be against the law, having learned “*at the feet of Gamaliel, taught according to the strictness of our father’s law, and zealous toward God as you all are today.*” If that did not overthrow the accusations, his next words of confession would undoubtedly do so.

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“HE HAD BEEN THE CHRISTIANS’ MOST FEARED PERSECUTOR FROM STEPHEN’S MARTYRDOM UNTIL HIS CONVERSION. HIS REPUTATION AS A PERSECUTOR OF CHRISTIANS WAS WELL KNOWN.”

JOHN MACARTHUR

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“AS THE SOLDIERS WERE STRUGGLING TOWARDS THE STEPS TO REACH THE SANCTUARY OF THEIR OWN BARRACKS PAUL MADE AN AMAZING REQUEST. HE ASKED THE CAPTAIN TO BE ALLOWED TO ADDRESS THE FURIOUS MOB. HERE INDEED IS COURAGE AND HERE IS PAUL EXERCISING HIS CONSISTENT POLICY OF LOOKING THE MOB IN THE FACE.” WILLIAM BARCLAY

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### II. A STRATEGIC TACTIC ACTS 21:39-22:3

Paul’s goal was to tell his people about Jesus Christ who had transformed his life from being a murderous persecutor to a loving, gentle Apostle, but he had to get permission from the commander. Providentially, with the commander close enough to hear, he asks for permission to speak to him. After informing him that he is a Jew from Tarsus, the capital of Cilicia, Paul requests permission to speak to the people. When granted, Paul gestures with his chained hand to speak, bringing an immediate hush to the crowd. Then he speaks to the people in Hebrew, both proving that he is not the Egyptian and silencing the surprised mob by hearing him

### III. A SEVERE TRANSGRESSION ACTS 22:4-5

Paul, formerly named Saul, had gone door to door in Jerusalem as he “*made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison*” (Acts 8:3). Whole subdivisions would have been evacuated by the Christians fleeing from Saul’s capture, resulting in sudden execution. “*Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word*” (Acts 8:4). As the Gospel spread, bloodthirsty Saul zealously followed, seeking to annihilate the church. He had even been able to acquire letters from the “*high priests*” and “*all the council of the elders*” to the foreign capital, Damascus “*to bring in chains even those who were there to Jerusalem to be punished.*” Paul was letting them know that he not only identified with his persecutors, he had far exceeded them! But he met the Risen Lord and his life radically changed!

#### Questions to Ponder:

- 1) Has there been a time when you met the Risen Lord, and obeyed His Word, so that your life has been changed?
- 2) Is it possible to think that you are doing good while going directly against God and the truth of His Word?
- 3) Are you zealous in religion and yet you do not know for sure that you are going to heaven?