

Teaching Plan
EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Date: February 11, 2018
Lesson Title: "The Testimony"
Lesson Passage: Acts 22:3-8,15-22

ABOUT THIS LESSON

In Jerusalem again, Paul almost dies at the hands of an angry mob in a riot instigated by Jews from Asia. After being rescued by Roman troops, he is permitted to speak to the people once again. After affirming his orthodox Jewish heritage, he recounts his Damascus road conversion experience, which culminated in his call to carry the message of Christ to the Gentiles. But when he mentioned the hated word "Gentiles," the crowd went berserk and started screaming for his death.

TEACHING/LEARNING GOALS

(1) Explain what made the mob want to kill Paul. (2) Explain why Paul exposed himself again to the very crowd that had tried to kill him.

BEGINNING THE LESSON

To begin the lesson, summarize the circumstances that gave Paul an opportunity to share his testimony with the crowd in Jerusalem: (1) Paul had barely escaped being lynched by a crowd of Jews in the Temple area, where a group of rabble-rousing Jews from Asia (probably Ephesus) had falsely accused him of bringing Gentiles into the Temple (Acts 21:27-28), a practice that was strictly forbidden by Jewish law. (2) At the last minute, Paul had been rescued by a cordon of Roman soldiers who quelled the riot by picking Paul up and carrying him away from the crowd (Acts 21:35). (3) As the soldiers carried him up the stairs leading to their barracks, Paul asked their commander for permission to speak again to the people. Astonished by Paul's command of the Greek language, the officer granted him permission (21:40).

TEACHING PROCEDURES

1. Before examining what Paul said to the crowd, pose this important question: After having been rescued from a mob who had nearly beaten him to death, why was Paul willing to risk his life by speaking to them again? Pause for responses, then offer these thoughts: (1) From the very beginning of his Christian pilgrimage, Paul knew that he was called to be an "apostle to the Gentiles" (Romans 11:13; Ephesians 3:8;), but he never lost his concern for his own people, the Jews, and he never ceased trying to win them to faith in Christ. (2) In fact, even though he was warned that going back to Jerusalem might be fatal, he insisted that he felt compelled to go there in the hope that his people might be converted to faith in Christ (see Acts 21:4, 12-14). (3) Paul's courageous attempt to reason with the angry mob was motivated by his deep desire to share the gospel with his fellow Jews.

2. *Call attention to the beginning of Paul's message:* (1) Miraculously, the crowd grew quiet as Paul stood on the stairs and beckoned for silence and spoke to them in their own Hebrew (or Aramaic) tongue, addressing them as "brothers and fathers," and asked them to listen as he explained why he should not be condemned (Acts 22:1-2). (2) Then, Paul recalled his Jewish heritage. Though born outside Palestine, he had come to Jerusalem to seek the best training available "at the feet of Gamaliel" (v. 3). (3) He had demonstrated his zeal for God by persecuting Christians (people of "the Way") as far as Damascus (22:4-5).

3. *Review Paul's account of his dramatic encounter with the risen Lord (Acts 22:6-8):* (1) What had happened to Paul as he traveled toward Damascus was completely unexpected. Until the very moment he was stopped in his tracks by "a great light from heaven" his sole purpose was to eradicate this sect of Jesus people. (2) As he approached Damascus, he was stunned by a dazzling light, brighter than the midday sun. (3) As he fell to the ground he heard a voice calling his name, "Saul, Saul," and asking, "Why are you persecuting me?" (Acts 22:7). APPLICATION: In vv. 4-6, Paul has confessed that he persecuted followers of Christ, "delivering to prison both men and women." Yet, the voice from heaven asked, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" APPLICATION: Believers in Christ are completely united with Him; what happens to them happens to Him. Galatians 3:27 refers to being "baptized into Christ." In Philippians 1:1 Paul addresses his letter to the "saints in Christ." Our union with Christ should profoundly influence the way we live.

4. *Comment on Paul's testimony concerning the consequences of his encounter with Christ on the Damascus road (Acts 22:15-21):* (1) "You will be a witness for him" (v. 15) summarizes the calling that Paul would pursue for the rest of his life. (A witness is one who testifies to what he has seen. And that is exactly what Paul was doing as he spoke to the crowd on this occasion.) (2) When he returned to Jerusalem, Paul was warned in a vision that his Jewish opponents would not receive his testimony, though they knew that he, too, had once been a persecutor of Christians and had participated in the martyrdom of Stephen (22:17-21). (3) The Lord concluded the vision by telling Paul to leave Jerusalem, for he was being sent as a witness to the Gentiles.

5. *Call attention to Acts 22:22:* Up to this point the crowd had listened quietly. But one word, "Gentiles," sent them into a mad frenzy, loudly declaring that Paul was not fit to live, thus demonstrating the power of cultural prejudice.

CLOSING THE LESSON

Recall the terrible wrongs (like the Jewish hatred of Gentiles) that have been committed on the basis of hearsay evidence (e. g., riots, witch trials, lynchings, character assassinations, political biases). Stress the duty we have as Christians to avoid prejudice (i.e., "an irrational attitude of hostility directed against an individual, a group, a race, or their supposed characteristics" (a dictionary definition).