



Acts Chapter 23

Theme of Acts: The Holy Spirit and the Birth of the Church

Personal Reflection

Complete this section in one sitting or little by little during the week. Begin with prayer, inviting the Holy Spirit into your time. Spending time in the Bible, studying the original intent, meaning and cultural context helps you to understand how it applies to you now.

Further Study

Complete on your own or with your small group.

Read Acts 23 Click on any Bible verse in the study to read it or use your own Bible.

Song for the week: First Things First - Consumed by Fire

<https://youtu.be/Q9ZkmMH7lpk?si=8QdmaS11ImGQKISl>

Personal Reflection

This week we continue using the methods we are learning in church. To connect the story with the people, the culture and scripture, we learn the original intent. Use your Bible to answer some of those questions. Other questions require you to use Gospel Contemplation, a practice of entering into the story to engage with it. Bringing together what we learn, we can apply it to our lives as we know that the Word of God is living and active, still used by the Holy Spirit today for us personally.

Paul had returned to Jerusalem with gifts from other churches for the church in Jerusalem. Initially, Paul and those with him were welcomed warmly. Unfortunately, the Jews from Asia who had seen the riots in Ephesus were in Jerusalem and stirred up trouble and incited a riot. The Romans intervened, which stopped the riots, and arrested Paul.

When speaking to the rioting Jews, Paul had said, “Brothers and fathers, listen now to my defense.”

Now when speaking to the Sanhedrin he said, “My brothers, I have fulfilled my duty to God in all good conscience to this day.” “Paul had another opportunity to win Israel to Jesus, and perhaps a *better* opportunity. Here he spoke to the council, with the opportunity to preach Jesus to these influential men (*Enduring Word*).”

Both times Paul began with “Brothers...” From what you have learned about Paul, why could he address them this way? How would using this term have connected him to his listeners?

Paul was being accused of violating the law by bringing a Gentile into the temple (accusation only) and with his ministry to the Gentiles. The Jews and the Sanhedrin were focused on the law (theology of works) and missed that the Torah (first five books of the Old Testament, also called the law) and the prophets were pointing the way towards the need for a Savior for all people.

The Jews believed (rightly) that they were God’s chosen people and (wrongly) that belief meant that salvation was meant only for them. Read *Genesis 12:3*, *Genesis 22:18*, and *Isaiah 49:6-7*. These

verses are from the Torah and one of the prophets. What can you point to in these verses as a defense against what Paul was being accused of?

Read *Matthew 26:57-67*. What similarities are there between what happened to Jesus and what was happening to Paul?

In *Acts 22:24-29* the Romans were going to flog Paul but stopped when they realized he was a Roman citizen as “it was legal to use the scourge to force a confession from a slave or alien but never a Roman citizen (Archeological Study Bible).” Flogging Paul would have violated Roman law.

The Sanhedrin had religious authority over the Jews. As Paul was Jewish, the commander next ordered the Sanhedrin to meet and decide what to do with Paul. After Paul’s greeting, without any questioning, the High Priest Ananias ordered those standing near Paul to strike him on the mouth. Paul said this violated the Jewish law.

Read *Deuteronomy 25:1-2*. The High Priest was to be an example of the law and uphold the law. What had the High Priest done which violated the law? Had the case been heard yet?

Paul had spoken with a High Priest before. Read *Acts 9:1-3*. What had changed for Paul since then?

It can be easy for us to support or identify with Paul. We have gotten to know him. However we are sometimes more like the Romans and Sanhedrin in this story. Have you ever condemned someone before a trial the way the Romans and Sanhedrin did with Paul?

Read *John 8:1-11*. Based on Jesus’ words and example, when someone is being accused, what are we to do?

Paul called Ananias a whitewashed wall; someone who looked pure but was corrupt underneath, and said “God will strike you.”

Ananias violated the law to appease both the Jews and the Romans. Reading in Acts we have no indication that what Paul said was prophetic; however, Ananias “was assassinated by the Jews because of his support of the Romans during the Jewish uprising (A Translator’s Handbook on The Acts of the Apostles).” Ananias’ support of the Romans can be seen in his treatment of Paul.

When the people pointed out that Paul had insulted the High Priest, Paul said he did not know this and quoted from the law (*Exodus 22:28*). How would Paul’s knowing and quoting the law have helped his case with the Sanhedrin?

Paul again addressed the Sadducees and the Pharisees as “brother” before he pleaded his case of believing in the hope of the resurrection of the dead; something the two groups disagreed upon. “Framed in these terms, he immediately gained the Pharisees as an ally, and he let *them* argue it out with the Sadducees ... Sadducees were the theological liberals of their day ... (the Pharisees) took the Bible seriously, even if they

did err greatly by *adding* the traditions of men to what they received in the Bible (*Enduring Word Commentary*).”

The debate grew violent and once again the Roman commander intervened and had Paul brought back to the barracks where Jesus appeared to Paul in a vision.

Besides on the road to Damascus, Jesus also appeared to Paul while he was in Corinth. Read *Acts 18:5-11*. What did Jesus say to Paul then? What are two ways that Jesus' words to Paul then were the same as this time?

When Paul had been in Asia, he said he wanted to go to Rome. Now he was in the barracks in Jerusalem. By his own plan, he could not get to Rome yet Jesus said Paul must testify of Him there.

If you were Paul, do you think it would be easy or hard to believe Jesus? What might have made it easy for Paul to believe Jesus?

While we do not see Jesus as Paul did, we do have the Holy Spirit living in us. Is it easy or hard for you to believe Him when He gives you a message? What might make it easier for you to trust in God's messages for you?

The morning after Jesus spoke to Paul, 40 men plotted to kill him and enlisted the help of the Sanhedrin. *Optional, read Acts 19:21*

How did plotting to kill Paul go against the law (*Deuteronomy 25:1-2*) that the Sanhedrin were to uphold?

Using Gospel Contemplation, imagine what is happening.

How might Paul's nephew have been thinking or feeling when he went first to his uncle and then to the Roman commander with what he knew?

How did God use Paul's nephew to protect Paul? How did God use the Roman commander to protect Paul's nephew and Paul?

Picture two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen all gathered to take Paul to the Governor in Caesarea. “The chief captain resolved to place Paul beyond the power of the Jews, and to protect him as a Roman citizen (Barnes' Notes on the Bible).”

Luke chose to include the letter written by the Roman commander. What was the commander's name? What was the name of the Governor?

How does including this letter - and the names of the two men - provide more proof of what Luke has written?

If someone said to you that Luke wrote Acts a long time ago and could have made it up, based on what you are learning in Acts, what are three ways you could say to refute that?

Putting it into practice:

Paul's prison time in *Acts 16:22-40* and in *Acts 23* were different. Frank said that sometimes Jesus saves us in dramatic ways and other times He quietly shows up, sits with us and says, "Take courage" which in Greek is *tharsei*. The word also means to be bold, to endure, to make up the mind.

Consider what is in front of you right now. Imagine Jesus sitting with you, saying "tharsei" to you. What do you notice in your thinking and feeling? Invite the Holy Spirit to help you be encouraged by the encouragement of *tharsei*.

On Sunday we heard "order determines the priority for your life." Spend time talking with God about a situation you are currently in. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you peace and courage in it along with wisdom. Consider journaling this prayer so that you can later look back on it and thank God for His provision. Each time this situation comes back to your mind, take it first to God. Make your relationship with Him and relying on Him your priority.

Further Study

On Sunday, Frank used the term "Jesus' abundant generosity."

Where in your life have you witnessed God's abundant generosity?

It has been argued by commentators of the Bible that the Sadducees were liberals and the Pharisees were conservatives. Both sides got some things right and some things wrong. They both wanted what was best for the Jewish people. And they both had corruption within their groups.

Today we see the same in both sides of the government; at the core both want what is best for our nation. And yet we see corruption and duplicity in both sides of the local, state and federal government. As Christians, the challenge is to be able to have conversations about ideas and policies without speaking evil about those who are in leadership, something Paul confessed to having done.

Without going into a debate for any side -What are some ways you can be an example of honoring those in authority even when you disagree with them? What are some practical ways you can have a constructive conversation with someone who's views oppose yours?

How would doing the two things above help us as Christians be a witness for Jesus to others?

The Jews are God's chosen people. Through their lineage, Jesus, our Savior, came.

Considering what is going on in Israel today, what should our response be? What can we be doing?

Pray

Spend time praying for our country as voting is coming nearer - not to influence each other, but to pray for our leaders, our system, our country's future. Also pray for Israel and those at odds with her.