

BIGGER THAN YOU

Lesson 22 Encountering Worldly Politics

Acts 23:12-35; 24:1-27; 25:1-27 and 26:1-32

Scholars say Paul spent 10-14 years traveling, preaching, and nurturing the churches he planted in the Gentile world before he was arrested in Jerusalem in 58 A.D. Four chapters of Acts tell the story of how Paul was handed from one political authority to another for more than two years. Finally, he escaped from the Jews who were determined to kill him, by appealing his case to Caesar. In this lesson, we see the man of God standing tall in contrast to political powers who struggle to know what to do with him.

Read Acts 23:12-35 – The Plot of the Jews

1. In their desperation to rid the world of Paul, 40 Jewish men took an oath.
 - a. What was their vow?
 - b. What was their plan for keeping the vow?
2. Paul's nephew heard of the plot and informed the Roman commander. The commander made a plan to put Paul out of the reach of those who were plotting to kill him by sending him from Jerusalem to Caesarea.
 - a. What type of troops and how many did he call in as a military escort for Paul?
 - b. To whom did he write a letter? Summarize its content.
 - c. Why did the commander take responsibility for Paul (verse 27)?
 - d. Paul was held under guard, not in a prison, but in Herod's palace. What was supposed to happen next?

Read Acts 24:1-27 – Paul Before Governor Felix

3. Five days after Paul arrived in Caesarea, the high priest Ananias, some elders, and a lawyer arrived to appear before Felix to bring charges against Paul. Of what did they accuse him (verses 5-8)?
4. Paul was invited to answer the charges and Felix made a ruling.
 - a. What legal points did Paul make about their charges (verses 12-13, 18-19)?
 - b. As usual, Paul took this opportunity to speak about his Lord. In verses 14-16 and 21, what does he say about The Way of Jesus?
 - c. What was Felix's ruling and provision for Paul (verses 22-23)?
5. For the next two years Paul remained, waiting for Felix to act (verses 24-27).
 - a. When Felix called for Paul to appear before him and his wife, what did Paul talk about?
 - b. Of what was Felix afraid?
 - c. Why did Felix call for Paul frequently?
 - d. When Felix left the governor's office to be succeeded by Festus, why did he leave Paul as a prisoner?
 - e. The basis for Felix's decisions was simply political. What did he fail to consider?
 - f. Have you ever been in a situation where those in authority over you made decisions based only upon that which would serve their own advantage, with no consideration of what is right or wrong? What are the challenges for a Christian in this situation? What do you do? Discuss.

- g. Meanwhile, how hungry do you think the Jews were getting who vowed to kill Paul in Acts 23:12-14? What was their problem?

Read Acts 25:1-12 – Paul Before Governor Festus

6. Within three days of taking office, Festus tried to return Paul's case to Jerusalem for trial.
- What was Festus's motive (verse 9)?
 - What was Paul's countermove (verse 11)?

Read Acts 25:13-27 – Paul Brought Before King Agrippa

7. Agrippa and his wife Bernice were both of the lineage of the Herods who were notorious Jewish kings who collaborated with the Romans. Agrippa's jurisdiction was in the northern province of Galilee.
- What did Festus say the Jews had charged Paul with (verses 18-19)?
 - What kind of occasion did Agrippa and Bernice make it (verse 23)?
 - What was Governor Festus hoping to get from the hearing (verse 26)?

Read Acts 26:1-32 – Paul Presents His Defense to Agrippa

8. Paul gives his credentials as a Jewish teacher of the Law; then, he claims that he is on trial because of one particular teaching. What was this one teaching (verse 8)?
9. Paul tells how he himself had been a persecutor of the followers of Jesus of Nazareth. (Nazareth was in Agrippa's jurisdiction.) And he tells the story of what changed him.
- In this recounting of the testimony of his conversion, Paul tells what the Risen Lord spoke to him. Summarize the message from the Lord to Paul.
 - Paul continues to tell how he had obeyed the vision he had seen on the road to Damascus, by preaching repentance in Damascus, Jerusalem, and to the Gentile world, with God's help. Paul said that his message was nothing more than had been prophesied in the Old Testament about the Messiah, the Christ. What particular words caused Festus to interrupt the hearing?
 - What did Festus say when he interrupted Paul?
 - Paul redirected his remarks to Agrippa and pressed him on his faith (verse 27). What was Agrippa's response?
 - As a result of the hearing, what conclusion did Festus and King Agrippa come to (verses 30-31)?

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10. If Paul was frustrated at his arrest and long, seemingly unjust wait in Caesarea, Luke does not mention it. God had told Paul he would give his testimony in Rome (Acts 23:11), but Paul did not know he would go as a prisoner. Have you thought you were being inconvenienced, even prevented from doing God's will, only to discover that God was working his will on your behalf through the very situations that were bothering you? Share your stories.

11. In these chapters we have seen Paul a prisoner of the political system, but the power seemingly lay with him. How could that be? For some enlightenment on this issue, research the following.
- What motives drove Paul's Jewish enemies? (Acts 13:45; 17:5; 18:13; 22:21-22; 24:5-6)
 - What motives drove the political authorities? (Acts 24:26-27; 25:9)
 - What motives drove Paul? (Acts 20:24; Rom. 15:20; Phil. 1:20-21; 3:7-12)
 - What were God's purposes? (Acts 1:8; 13:47; 23:11; 26:16-18)
 - Paul said, "I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me." What motives drive your own life? In what ways have you aligned the purpose of your life with God's?

You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

Acts 1:8