

A Study of the Acts of the Apostles
Week Twenty-Nine
Acts 23:9-24:4

Day One

9 There was a great uproar, and some of the teachers of the law who were Pharisees stood up and argued vigorously. "We find nothing wrong with this man," they said. "What if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?" 10 The dispute became so violent that the commander was afraid Paul would be torn to pieces by them. He ordered the troops to go down and take him away from them by force and bring him into the barracks. 11 The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, "Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome." 12 The next morning the Jews formed a conspiracy and bound themselves with an oath not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul.

v. 9 – The Pharisees seized that moment to attack the doctrine of the Sadducees, which neither believed in angels or the resurrection. So the Pharisees were willing in this case to align with Paul when it agreed with their theology. But notice the fervor with which the Jews debated this issue. They were passionate for they created a “great uproar” and they “argued vigorously.” I think it is better to be passionate, even for the wrong cause, than to be moderate about the right cause. Why do I say this? Because I believe this is what Jesus meant when He said,

I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm — neither hot nor cold — I am about to spit you out of my mouth (Revelation 3:15-16).

Are you lukewarm, cold or hot for Jesus' sake? You can't be somewhat committed for the cause of Christ. Do you support missions? Do you reach out to others with the gospel?

v. 10 – The meeting got so out of hand that the commander, who obviously had some battle experience, became frightened and ordered Paul back to the barracks. Religious fervor is a powerful force that motivates people to do violent things:

"Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved (Matthew 10:21-23).

All too often I have wanted to be loved and respected, but that may be inconsistent with following Jesus.

v. 11 – Here is another instance of the Lord appearing to Paul to direct him in regards to his purpose. He told Paul not to fear, which tells me he was afraid. It's not wrong to be afraid; you can't let your fear affect what you need to do or cloud your judgment. Then

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The Lord reminded Paul that he was on a course heading to Rome, because his purpose was to preach to the Gentiles. God is always ready to encourage you where your purpose is concerned. He is not ready to encourage you when you are lazy.

v. 12 – Again we see the zeal of the religious spirit. I would imagine these men died of starvation, unless they broke their vow, because they were unable to kill Paul. Their conspiracy was futile, for God had other plans. Don't ever worry about the plans of other people against you.

No weapon forged against you will prevail, and you will refute every tongue that accuses you. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and this is their vindication from me," declares the LORD (Isaiah 54:17).

This doesn't mean that weapons won't be formed—they will. But they won't prosper.

Day Two

13 More than forty men were involved in this plot. 14 They went to the chief priests and elders and said, "We have taken a solemn oath not to eat anything until we have killed Paul. 15 Now then, you and the Sanhedrin petition the commander to bring him before you on the pretext of wanting more accurate information about his case. We are ready to kill him before he gets here." 16 But when the son of Paul's sister heard of this plot, he went into the barracks and told Paul.

v. 13 – Forty men were aligned against Paul. But Paul had God on his side. God with you always constitutes a majority, regardless of how many are against you. You can see why Paul was so adamant against these so-called Jews in his later writings. They were agents of Satan, regardless of their ethnic heritage.

Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the LORD and against his Anointed One. "Let us break their chains," they say, "and throw off their fetters." The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them. Then he rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath, saying, "I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill" (Psalm 2:1-6).

v. 14 – These murderers felt confident enough to share their plan with the "spiritual leaders" and to enlist their involvement and support.

I know your afflictions and your poverty — yet you are rich! I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan (Revelation 2:9).

These leaders were the leaders of Satan's synagogue, given over to evil, thinking they were doing God a favor by plotting to murder an innocent man. **Do you see why Jesus wept over Jerusalem? Do you see why God tore the city apart stone by stone? There was nothing romantic about these Jews being God's people. They were**

scoundrels who opposed God's work to preserve their own interests. If anyone deserved to die, it wasn't Paul—it was these so-called leaders!

v. 15 – Isn't lying against the commandments? Yet they were ready to lie and to deceive the Roman commander, so they could get their hands on God. They felt they were above the Law in this case because it required extreme measures to protect God's interests. What was wrong with these men? They needed Jesus! Jesus is the only way. There aren't many ways to God. If there were, then these men would have been on one of those ways. They were zealous, knew the Bible and sacrificed regularly. But they were wicked men, who had a veneer of religious and holiness. **Do you believe that Jesus is the only way to the Father? On that issue, there can be no room for compromise. If this isn't true, then Jesus is a liar:**

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6-7).

v. 16 – Paul's nephew came to the rescue. Notice that God used a young man to undo the plans of the powerful Jewish leaders. God is powerful and in control. Paul would die a martyr's death, but in the place, the time and at the hands of the one God selected. God is in control. Do you believe that? If so, why are you afraid and uptight? Jesus understood this as we see from His own life and testimony:

At this they tried to seize him, but no one laid a hand on him, because his time had not yet come (John 7:30).

It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father (John 13:1).

What could you accomplish for God for the remainder of your days if you put your confidence in Him and pressed through your fears?

Day Three

17 Then Paul called one of the centurions and said, "Take this young man to the commander; he has something to tell him." 18 So he took him to the commander. The centurion said, "Paul, the prisoner, sent for me and asked me to bring this young man to you because he has something to tell you." 19 The commander took the young man by the hand, drew him aside and asked, "What is it you want to tell me?"

v. 17 – Notice that Paul trusted the Lord, but he still sent his nephew to the commander to report what he knew. Paul never confronted danger unless there was no other option. It is not cowardly to run from danger, nor is it foolhardy to face it. You do what you can to avoid danger, but if you must face it, then you do so trusting in God's protection and grace. It is comforting to know that

My times are in your hands; deliver me from my enemies and from those who pursue me (Psalm 31:15).

Do you believe that? How does that fact impact your life and decisions? Have you truly given your life to the Lord?

v. 18 – Just think what would have happened if this young man hadn't been paying attention to what was going on around him. What if he had been hesitant to act on what he had heard? The conspirators may have been successful in killing Paul! **Are you aware of what's going on around you? Are you aware of what you are thinking and the assumptions that may be holding you back, keeping you captive in wrong thinking?** William Bridges wrote in *The Way of Transition*:

But until we let go of them [wrong ways of thinking], we are held in an enchantment. Like Sleeping Beauty, we are unaware of what is really going on around us. At first that unawareness may protect us, but one day it begins to close us down, to put us into a sleep, to wall us off from life. If we are lucky, a transition comes along to wake us up. If we are unlucky, we sleep through the rest of our lives.

Are you awake or sleeping through your life? Often a crisis comes to wake us up. We can either see that crisis as an interruption or as a friend.

v. 19 – I give this commander a lot of credit. He could have ignored this young man, saying he was too busy or that this boy was too young for a commander to meet with. But the commander was good at what he did, and he protected Paul at every juncture. It is ironic that Rome afforded Paul the protection that Judaism and the Law could not.

Are you good at what you do? Do you pursue excellence in your work and life in general? If not, then I urge you to get to place of work where you can pursue excellence. You can only do that where you are happy and fulfilled. If you are doing what you do for the money only, then you are a hireling and will emotionally flee at the sight of any trouble or difficulty. This commander displayed excellence as a soldier and God used him to protect one of his choice servants. **Can God choose you to carry out a special task, or would he bypass you in favor of someone more diligent or capable?**

Day Four

20 He said: "The Jews have agreed to ask you to bring Paul before the Sanhedrin tomorrow on the pretext of wanting more accurate information about him. 21 Don't give in to them, because more than forty of them are waiting in ambush for him. They have taken an oath not to eat or drink until they have killed him. They are ready now, waiting for your consent to their request." 22 The commander dismissed the young man and cautioned him, "Don't tell anyone that you have reported this to me." 23 Then he called two of his centurions and ordered them, "Get ready a detachment of two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen to go to Caesarea at nine tonight. 24 Provide mounts for Paul so that he may be taken safely to Governor Felix."

vs. 20&21 – The commander would have immediately known that the young man was correct since there was no way he could have known that the Sanhedrin had asked for another meeting with Paul. The young man was clear and direct with the commander.

When I do team building and training, I have two favorite phrases. One is, “All of us are smarter than one of us.” Too often leaders think they must or do have all the answers. But that is a fallacy.

For waging war you need guidance, and for victory many advisers (Proverbs 24:6).

My second statement is, “But all of us aren’t as smart as we need to be.” You must work to expand your team to include more people, more perspectives and insight if you are going to face new challenges and opportunities. And some of those team members need to be people who aren’t like you and who don’t think like you—men, women, a variety of ethnic groups, the experienced, the inexperienced and young people. This young person saved the day. It wasn’t the power of Rome’s army that got this information; it was a common boy who happened to be in the right place at the right time.

Is your work or ministry team diverse enough to solve new problems? Does your work or ministry even have a team? If not, then start today to build an effective team and keep on building and expanding.

v. 22 – Now the young man had to trust the integrity of the commander, for he could have been bribed by the Sanhedrin, thus ignoring the boy’s warning so that he could help deliver Paul. But this commander was a good man doing his job and the information was safe with him. Are you a good man or woman? Can you be trusted? God doesn’t promote potential, He promotes faithful people who have proved and developed their potential.

vs. 23&24 – Wow! The commander assembled 470 men to escort Paul to Caesarea! This commander was taking no chances, which is a trait of a good leader. He left nothing to chance and was involved in the planning details. But then he delegated and allowed his centurions to carry out the plan. The more I read about this leader, the more I like him. I think I will develop a case study on this commander for an upcoming business forum in which I am involved.

The word of God is so rich. There is so much to see, study and learn. I was just praying this morning, “Lord, show me wonderful things from Your word,” and then I see this commander in a whole new light. Thank you, Lord, for answering my prayer. Thank you for opening my eyes. Now do it again, Lord!

The commander was sending Paul to Caesarea for safety and to move him to a place that could better judge his situation. It’s important to know your limitations in leadership. This commander wasn’t a politician; he was a soldier and was unskilled in handling a case as complex as Paul’s. So he passed the case on so he could continue with what he

did well. This man was a good man. I hope he met Jesus at some point as a reward for his good work!

Day Five

25 He wrote a letter as follows: 26 Claudius Lysias, To His Excellency, Governor Felix: Greetings. 27 This man was seized by the Jews and they were about to kill him, but I came with my troops and rescued him, for I had learned that he is a Roman citizen. 28 I wanted to know why they were accusing him, so I brought him to their Sanhedrin. 29 I found that the accusation had to do with questions about their law, but there was no charge against him that deserved death or imprisonment. 30 When I was informed of a plot to be carried out against the man, I sent him to you at once. I also ordered his accusers to present to you their case against him.

vs. 25&26 – We now discover two names of men who were part of this unfolding drama that God used to direct Paul to Rome. The commander that I have been admiring was named Claudius Lysias. The governor's name was Felix. The commander treated Paul well; the governor did not. We see the military man operated in relative integrity. We see that the governor did not. And that was undoubtedly the condition of the Roman Empire and its governing bodies—some good men, some bad. That is probably the condition of every governing body in existence today. It is only when the good outnumber the bad that any effective government can take place.

It is interesting that some soldiers approached John the Baptist and he didn't tell them to get out of the military. He did, however, tell them that they needed to behave properly:

Then some soldiers asked him, "And what should we do?" He replied, "Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely — be content with your pay" (Luke 3:14).

The commander obviously followed these directives; the governor did not.

v. 27 – This isn't quite true, as the commander adjusted the truth to make himself look good. He didn't rescue Paul because he was a Roman citizen. He rescued him because he carried out his duties well. But we will grant the commander this one slip, for otherwise he performed admirably. We should never expect perfection from any manager or leader. There are no perfect people.

I wonder how Luke obtained a copy of this letter?

vs. 28-30 – The commander gave an accurate summary and proceeded properly. This closes the book, so to speak, on our picture of Claudius Lysias. All in all, he was a good soldier. **What about you? Are you a good soldier, so to speak? Do you carry out your job with excellence? Do you treat people well and fairly? Later Paul was to write, urging believers concerning their life's work:**

Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for his wrong, and there is no favoritism (Colossians 3:22-25).

Day Six

31 So the soldiers, carrying out their orders, took Paul with them during the night and brought him as far as Antipatris. 32 The next day they let the cavalry go on with him, while they returned to the barracks. 33 When the cavalry arrived in Caesarea, they delivered the letter to the governor and handed Paul over to him. 34 The governor read the letter and asked what province he was from. Learning that he was from Cilicia, 35 he said, "I will hear your case when your accusers get here." Then he ordered that Paul be kept under guard in Herod's palace.

v. 31&32 – When the contingent saw that there was no attack or danger, they dismissed the foot soldiers. Only the cavalry went on to Caesarea. I have been to Caesarea on many occasions. It is a beautiful seaside town, a port that was the gateway to the Mediterranean from Palestine. Paul was to spend a few years at this site, waiting the decision of Rome concerning his alleged crimes. We don't have much information about how he spent his time, but it must have been hard for this traveling evangelist and apostle to stay in one place that long and not be doing something.

How do you handle “down time?” A period like this can be very useful to help you refocus and develop new things and initiatives in your life and development. But a down time can be hard since we can be so addicted to action. A few years ago, I left a ministry position to start the company I have today. And the first year was hard. The phone didn't ring nearly as much, I wasn't needed like I had been, and money was tight. Yet it was during that year that I started The Monday Memo and these Bible studies. Now I am busy again, and I thank God for that “down time.”

If you aren't in a down time now, you may be one day. When that happens, don't be in a hurry to bring it to an end. Use that time wisely and see it as a season of life that is as important as the productive, busy times.

There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven: a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot, a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build, a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance, a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to refrain, a time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away, a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak, a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace (Ecclesiastes 3:1-8).

What time is it for you? What is the main emphasis of this season in your life?

Day Seven

24:1 Five days later the high priest Ananias went down to Caesarea with some of the elders and a lawyer named Tertullus, and they brought their charges against Paul before the governor. 2 When Paul was called in, Tertullus presented his case before Felix: "We have enjoyed a long period of peace under you, and your foresight has brought about reforms in this nation. 3 Everywhere and in every way, most excellent Felix, we acknowledge this with profound gratitude. 4 But in order not to weary you further, I would request that you be kind enough to hear us briefly.

v. 1 – The Jews complied with the commander’s orders and came to Caesarea to press their case against Paul. They came with their lawyer, so even the New Testament era had to deal with attorneys! It appears that Tertullus was a Roman and perhaps a Jewish convert.

vs. 2-4 – Tertullus told part of the truth where Felix was concerned. Felix had been a strong governor where law and order was concerned. He had put down the rebellion led by the Egyptian that the commander mentioned, and had rid the land of the criminals who roamed the territory. But Josephus, the Jewish historian, tells us that Felix was a bad governor and a bad man. Eventually the Jews brought charges to Nero against him and he was recalled, although his brother in the Roman court seems to have saved his life.

So the righteous Paul found himself on trial before unrighteous Felix, accused of misdeeds by the unrighteous Sanhedrin with their unrighteous attorney. It was Paul against the world, or so it seemed. But it was really Paul and God against the world, and that, of course, made it an unfair battle—in Paul’s favor!

Someone once said that you plus God always constitute a majority! Paul was alone but he wasn’t alone. He had God on his side. And of course Paul penned the famous words:

What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? (Romans 8:31).

I had a pastor tell me once that when it seems like everyone is against you, not to believe it. He went on to say that most people don’t care! And that’s true. Things are never as bad as they seem, especially if God is for you. And there has never been anyone who did anything for God who did not, at some point, have to stand alone for God. That may be part of the “down time” I mentioned above.

In my down time of a few years ago, I had to stand alone. Few of my friends supported what I was doing. Many misunderstood and voice their disapproval, urging others to avoid me since I wasn’t in a “good place.” But I was in a good place—I was with God! I’m not claiming that I was perfect or did everything correctly. But God ordained that

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season in my life and I was following His lead, which led me to trouble with many of my friends. Today, I am still standing—and I have many new friends.

What season are you in? Do you know? Are you trusting God in it? What are you doing to take advantage of this season, even if it's a painful one? Are you growing? Keeping a journal? From my own experience, I urge you to squeeze every benefit from this difficult time that you can. For it will end, and you will be immersed in a new season of opportunities. Follow Paul's lead, submit to this difficult time and watch God change the times and seasons in your favor. Amen!