

## Notes for Acts - Chapter 23: "Obedience vs. Results" (Page 1 of 3)

Introduction – The key verse to the whole chapter and the Rest of the Book of Acts:

- “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." (Acts 23:11 NIV)
    - The whole chapter revolves around this verse.
    - Paul’s struggles leads up to this verse.
    - The actions that happen afterwards are based on this verse.
    - Think about Paul’s witnesses to the Jews from God’s perspective.
  - The Christian life does not primarily focus on results, it is about obedience to God.
    - “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. (Isaiah 55:8 NIV)
    - It was Paul’s great desire in life to witness to, and convert his fellow religious Jews.
    - “O Israel, my people! O my Jewish brothers! How I long for you to come to Christ. My heart is heavy within me, and I grieve bitterly day and night be-cause of you. Christ knows and the Holy Spirit knows that it is no mere pre-tense when I say that I would be willing to be forever damned if that would save you. (Romans 9:1-3, The Living Bible)
    - Paul loved his fellow Jews. He wanted so bad to win his fellow Jews to Christ. God allowed Paul to try, even though God warned Paul they would not listen (Acts 22:18).
    - Remember what was asked of Jesus: "What must we do to do the works God requires?" Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent." (John 6:28b-29 NIV)
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### A Summary of Chapter 23:

- Recap of Chapter 22:
  1. Paul spoke to a large crowd of Jews in the open court area of the Temple.
  2. Paul’s speech caused a riot.
  3. The Roman soldiers, who didn’t understand Hebrew, arrested Paul thinking he was the instigator.
  4. Paul declared his Roman citizenship, which entitled him to a fair trial.
  5. The Romans forced the Jewish leaders (i.e. The Sanhedrin) to meet so they knew what charges could be brought against Paul
  6. Chapter 23 opens with Paul giving his defense in front of the Sanhedrin.
- Chapter 23 Verses 1-10: Paul’s defense to the Jewish High Council (Sanhedrin).
  7. Verses 1-5 opens with Paul declaring his innocence. The High Priest, who history records as a wicked man, orders Paul to be struck in the face. Paul rebukes him for that act.
  8. Verses 6-10: Paul tries a different strategy. Instead of preaching the cross, He realizes the room is split between Pharisees and Sadducees. These were the 2 main political/religious parties. Paul appeals to “his Pharisee brothers”. A riot breaks out as the 2 factions argue.
- Verses 11 is Paul back in the jail cell. Jesus comes and gives Paul the encouraging message.
- Verses 12-22 is about another plan to kill Paul.
  9. 40 Jews take a vow not to eat/drink until they kill Paul.
  10. They tell the Romans to have another meeting with the Sanhedrin. They plan to ambush Paul and the soldiers and kill him.
  11. Paul’s nephew finds out about this and informs the Roman Commander.
- Verses 23-35: Paul is sent to Caesarea
  12. Paul is rescued and sent to Caesarea (20 miles away) protected by a large group of soldiers.
  13. Verses 26-30 the Roman commander wrote to Governor Felix explaining what happened.
  14. Felix met Paul at Herod’s headquarters. Chapter 24 is Paul’s hearing before Felix.

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### Verse 1-5: Paul declaring his innocence and gets physically struck for that statement.

- The High Priest ordered someone near Paul to strike him in the mouth.
  - Paul was declaring his equality with the council (“my brothers”)
  - Paul was declaring his innocence (“I have fulfilled my duty to God in all good conscience”).
- “Spiritual Warfare”. Paul is used mightily by God for evangelism.
  - Therefore Satan’s forces work *harder* to stop Paul.
  - “If you don’t believe Satan is real, try opposing him for awhile”. Chuck Missler.
- Ananias was recorded in history as a ruthless, evil High Priest.
  - In a sense, Paul’s curse on him came true. He was killed by his own people.
- After Paul was struck, he “lashes out” against the high priest. Then he apologizes. Why?
  - It is against Jewish laws and customs to speak out against God’s appointed leaders.
    - Do not blaspheme God or curse the ruler of your people.” (Exodus 22:28 NIV)
  - Paul “turned the other cheek”(Matthew 5:39).
    - “Turning the other cheek” does not mean to just “take it”. It means to point out the error without physically striking back at your opponent.
- Paul did not recognize the high priest. Here are some *possible* explanations:
  - Ananias the High Priest was not wearing his “garb”. This was an emergency meeting.
  - Paul hasn’t been in Jerusalem for 20 years. Maybe he didn’t know who he was.
  - There are hints in Paul’s letters as to having poor eyesight (See Galatians 6:11).

### Verses 6-10: Paul realizes the room is split between Pharisees and Sadducees.

- The Pharisees and the Sadducees were the two main Jewish “denominations”. There were other groups, but these two were the most dominant.
  - Pharisees are the conservatives. Modern Orthodox Judaism is based on their teaching.
  - Sadducees are the “liberals”. They did not believe in angels, the resurrection, etc.
- Paul appeals to his “fellow Pharisee’s” to believe in Jesus.
- The Pharisee’s side with Paul.
  - Not because they believe in Jesus, but because “he was a fellow Pharisee”.
- Paul realized (Chapter 24) that he made a mistake. He instigated this riot instead of preaching Jesus.
  - Paul felt like he was a disappointment to God.
  - Here is where Jesus stepped in and encouraged Paul.

### Verses 11: Paul is back in the jail cell. Jesus comes and gives Paul the encouraging message.

- During those rough times, when we think we let God down, we have to remember verses like these:
  - “because God has said, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.” (Hebrews 13:5)
  - The LORD appeared to us in the past, saying: “I have loved you with an everlasting love; (Jeremiah 31:3a, NIV)
- God *promised* that Paul would be “his witness” in Rome.
  - This means that Paul *would* get to Rome. Paul *counted* on God’s promise.
  - Paul probably thought he would be set free *so he could go to Rome*.
  - In God’s promises, we should assume *how* God is going to work.
  - The remainder of the book of Acts is how God fulfilled that promise to Paul.
- The point for us is simply to *trust* in God’s Promises.
  - The Psalmist said, “I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread. (Psalm 37:25 NIV)

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### Verses 12-22: 40 men form a conspiracy to kill Paul.

- There is so much anger at Paul, 40 men vow not to eat/drink until he is dead.
  - Jesus said, "If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also... They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the One who sent me. (John 15:20b-21, NIV)
- "Spiritual Warfare" behind the scene:
  - Satan "just learned" God's plan is for Paul to go to Rome. Satan can't read God's thoughts.
  - Satan doesn't want Paul witnessing to the "heads" of the empire.
  - Consider the possibility he was "behind" the idea to form this conspiracy.
  - During times of "attacks", remember this: "You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world." (1st John 4:4 NIV).
- Paul's nephew warns the Roman commander about the attack.
  - First thought: Paul's got a sister and a nephew? Why didn't Paul stay with them in Jerusalem?
  - Speculation is that Paul was disowned by his family when he converted. His nephew still helped. "Blood is thicker than water".
  - Paul's life was saved by the testimony of a young boy. God made it "happen" so the boy could see the Roman commander and the Roman commander would believe him.
  - God didn't stop the conspiracy. God made a way of escape.
  - Ray Steadman: "Paul was relatively safe!" ☺

### Verses 23-35: Paul is sent to Caesarea

- Paul was saved because a *large army* protected Paul against the 40 men.
  - God was working "in the background" getting his will accomplished: Paul to Rome.
  - The 40 men probably did not starve. Jewish tradition permits breaking a vow made in rash.
- Felix is the Governor who replaced Pontius Pilate.
  - This is about 25- 30 years after Jesus was crucified.
  - History records him as a ruthless, evil man.
    - Felix is recorded as the only person in Roman history to go from slave to a Governor.
    - His rash acts were known to take revenge based on how he was harshly treated as a slave.
    - We'll talk more about Felix next week as Paul addresses him in Chapter 24.
- The Roman Centurion, who we *now* know is named Claudius Lysias, writes a letter to Governor Felix explaining why this prisoner is being brought to him in Caesarea.
  - The author Luke probably got a hold of this letter and included it verbatim in Acts.
  - The Roman commander didn't know what to do with Paul. He "passed the buck" to Felix.
  - We'll see this "pass the buck" trend the next couple of chapters.
    - This is the way a lot of people view Christianity.
    - They respect Christians, but don't want to be part of it.
    - When presented the Gospel message, they "pass the buck" and get rid of the messenger.
- Paul is beginning his trip to Rome.
  - What God didn't tell Paul was that the Romans would pay all his expenses and do their best to protect him!
  - Paul stayed for a few days at the governor's mansion in Caesarea, which is a beach-town. As opposed to a jail, Paul probably had a nice room in a governor's mansion.