

Yielding to the Lord

Key Text:	Acts 23 & 24
Key Verse(s):	“And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.” (Acts 24:25)

Background to the Study

Chapter 23 can be divided into three main sections: Paul’s appearance before the Sanhedrin, which resulted in a furious dispute between the Pharisees and Sadducees (vs. 1-10); the foiled plot to kill Paul (vs. 11-24); and Paul’s safe transfer to Caesarea to appear before Felix (vs. 25-35). The “council” Paul addressed at the beginning of this chapter was the Sanhedrin, the highest Jewish judicial body in Jerusalem, which operated under the leadership of the high priest. The point of this meeting was to determine whether there were grounds to institute a legal proceeding against Paul. While the Romans respected determinations made by the Jewish council, they did not allow them to sentence a person to death without approval by the Romans. In verse 3, Paul called Ananias a “whited wall,” which was a metaphor for a hypocrite. When Paul realized the identity of the one who ordered the striking, he in effect apologized for his words (vs. 5), quoting from Exodus 22:28. In view of the uproar in the Sanhedrin and the uncertainty regarding Paul’s future, the comforting words of cheer when “the Lord stood by him” in the night (vs. 11) were accompanied by the promise that Paul would achieve his goal of witnessing for the Lord in Rome (Acts 19:21). Some historians suggest that the conspirators who banded together in a pact to kill Paul were probably from the Zealots who were later responsible for the revolt against Rome. Verse 12 states that they “bound themselves under a curse.” Taking such an oath was evidence of extreme religious fanaticism, and indicates the very real danger Paul was in. As a result of the warning delivered by Paul’s nephew, the Apostle was transferred in the darkness of night to Caesarea where he was to appear before Felix the governor.

Paul had been taken by military escort from Jerusalem to Caesarea to appear before the governor, Felix. In chapter 24, the accusations of the Jewish elders were stated, and Paul gave his defence to Felix. Tertullus, a professional prosecutor, likely had been hired by the high priest (Ananias), and paid from the coffers of the Temple. Felix was a cruel ruler, and under his leadership the Jewish rebellion became worse. Felix had been married three times; each wife was from a royal family. Paul explained to Felix that the purpose of his presence in Jerusalem was to bring alms to the Jews there. This gift had been gathered for Christian Jews from Gentile churches in the provinces of Macedonia, Achaia, Galatia, and possibly others. His purpose was to unify the Jews and Gentiles in the Church into one body, making them interdependent and appreciative of one another. Paul had been seen in the company of a Gentile before entering the Temple, and it was assumed that he had brought

this man into the Temple with him. However, even if that had been so, the Gentile, not Paul, would have been worthy of death under the Jewish Law. In Acts 24:21 Paul repeated what he stated in Acts 23:6 – that the real issue was his affirmation of the resurrection of the dead. Felix deferred, or called a temporary halt to the proceeding, until the chief captain Claudius Lysias could come. He kept Paul in prison hoping for a bribe, and when Festus came to take over, he left Paul bound to please the Jews. He failed on both accounts; he never received money from Paul, and the Jews filed a complaint against him to Rome.

Testimony from Our Day

Procrastinating when God's Spirit calls is extremely dangerous. When Jim Gilmon was young, he had rheumatic fever, and the doctor told him he would never be healthy. Jim promised God his life if He would heal him, and God did. However, Jim broke his promise. He chose to travel down a pathway of sin, but God never let him forget his prayer. One night, while under the influence of liquor, Jim was in an automobile accident. The doctors tried everything they could to restore him to consciousness with no success. Then the people at his mother's church prayed. When he regained consciousness, he promised to serve God if He would get him out of the hospital. God did His part, but once again, Jim did not. Over a year later, Jim stopped alongside the road to look at a wrecked car. A woman was in the back seat calling for help and a man was dead under the steering wheel. Jim said, "Right then it seemed God spoke out of Heaven to me and said, 'You are going to be next.' I knew I was heading the wrong way, and I did not want to die in the condition I was in. "The prayers of my parents and their Christian friends were being answered. I told myself I would go to church the next Sunday, but I did not. What conviction settled on me that night! I could not sleep. Finally I phoned my parents, and they told me to come to their home. They called the minister, and at an old davenport, I knelt to pray. I said, 'I don't know how to pray.' My dad responded, 'Ask Jesus to be merciful to you a sinner.' When I did, the Lord did not turn me away. He saved me that night. He delivered me from drinking and from the cigarette habit – things I could not stop in my own power. He changed my filthy tongue. Thank God, he made me a new creature." Jim served God until he passed away, despite his promises to God and rejected opportunities to be saved, when God mercifully continued to call after his soul, he finally did yield. What a contrast Jim's story is to that of Felix in today's text. Felix also had opportunities to surrender his heart to God. He was familiar with the Jewish laws and beliefs, and then Paul presented the Gospel to him. Felix seemed intrigued – he even trembled at Paul's words. Yet he hesitated to act. Although he did call for Paul again and again, the Bible does not record that he ever actually gave his heart to God. It is vital to respond to the call of God's Spirit. There is no promise that He will call again, so waiting for a "convenient season" could be disastrous. How much better to surrender immediately to God!

A Closer Look

Question 1	For what action did Paul rebuke the high priest Ananias? Why did he do so? Acts 23:1-5
Question 2	Acts 23 describes Paul's appearance before the Sanhedrin. His defense resulted in a furious dispute between the Pharisees and Sadducees – a conflict so uproarious that the chief captain ordered Paul to be removed from the scene, “fearing lest Paul should have been pulled in pieces of them” (verse 10). With his future in jeopardy and his life hanging in the balance, Paul no doubt needed some extra support. How did the Lord comfort and encourage the Apostle? Acts 23:11
Question 3	When we face troubling or stressful circumstances, what are some steps we can take to remind ourselves that God is with us and is in control?
Question 4	After his appearance before the Sanhedrin, the Apostle was transferred in the darkness of night to Caesarea where he was to appear before Felix, the procurator (or governor) of Judea. Chapter 24 records the accusations made against Paul before Felix, and the Apostle's response. What were the four accusations against Paul, as stated by Tertullus? (Acts 24: 5-6) What are some words you would use to describe how he made his defence, given in Acts 24:10-15?
Question 5	Felix had been governor of Judea for six years, so he undoubtedly already knew about the Christian faith. Building upon that, Paul presented to him the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and when Paul finished his defense, Felix had a “more perfect knowledge of that way” (Acts 24:22). Subsequently, Felix met with Paul again, and listened to the Apostle concerning faith in Christ. When Paul “reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come,” how did Felix respond? What parallel can you see between his response and the way many respond to the Gospel invitation in our day? Acts 24:24-25

Take Home

Just as God comforted Paul in the midst of distressing circumstances, He will provide the encouragement we need in our time of trial. In every conflict, stress, and heart-breaking circumstance, we can lean on God. He is willing and ready to give us strength, encouragement, hope, counsel, and the ability to endure whatever may be facing us. Each person has a choice to respond promptly to God's call or to postpone. How much better to choose to yield to the Lord!