

December 11  
Acts 22-24

Hello everybody and welcome to another edition of Project 4:4 accelerators. My name is Lisa Ashton and I am bringing December 11 reading to you today covering Acts 22-24.

So once again we see Paul create quite a stir among the people. I think today's reading would have made for a couple great movie scenes don't you? We have an angry mob, an arrest, beating...we have soldiers involved, dissension among religious leaders, a night time escape...the tension is building and we know Paul is going to finally be put on trial in front of the government officials.

I want to cover 2 main questions from our reading today:

1. What was up with Paul's 7 day ceremonial purification in the temple?
2. Why did the Sanhedrin split after Paul's comment?

We started off our reading today with Paul arriving in Jerusalem. Scripture says that he was received warmly and the brothers were praising God for the great work being done among the Gentiles. We know from a later verse in Acts 24:17 that Paul had presented the Gentile offerings to the believers as well. Now in thinking that James and the believers were Jewish, this was very gracious on their part to celebrate the Gentile conversions and to accept the Gentile offering.

At the same time, however, they present a problem to Paul. A rumor has been spreading that Paul no longer followed Moses...that he didn't adhere to the law. In other words, as a Jewish believer, Paul wasn't continuing to follow Jewish cultural practices. Remember now that he is in Jerusalem, THE HOLY CITY - The place where you follow the law. Given this conflict his friends say, "What are we going to do about this?" So they devise this plan. Since there were four guys who took a Nazirite vow (a vow described in the OT in Numbers 6) they suggested that he join them for purification. This way, his act would send a message to the Jewish community that he, Paul, still adhered to the law. Now, at first, I wondered, "Dude, Paul, what are you doing? You shouldn't agree to that! You have been liberated from the law! Stay your ground!" But I think this is a classic example of what Paul writes in I Corinthians 9:20-23 - from the NLT.

<sup>19</sup>Even though I am a free man with no master, I have become a slave to all people to bring many to Christ. <sup>20</sup>When I was with the Jews, I lived like a Jew to bring the Jews to Christ. When I was with those who follow the Jewish law, I too lived under that law. Even though I am not subject to the law, I did this so I could bring to Christ those who are under the law. <sup>21</sup>When I am with the Gentiles who do not follow the Jewish law, [\[a\]](#) I too live apart from that law so I can bring them to Christ. But I do not ignore the law of God; I obey the law of Christ.

<sup>22</sup>When I am with those who are weak, I share their weakness, for I want to bring the weak to Christ. Yes, I try to find common ground with everyone, doing everything I can to save some. <sup>23</sup>I do everything to spread the Good News and share in its blessings.

I believe Paul went along with this request so as to not be a hindrance to the Gospel message. He wasn't compromising doctrine or morality of the Gospel but more making a concession in regards to tradition or practice. He is not subject to the law, but he participated in the purification as to not be a hindrance. Paul demonstrated a gracious spirit in the same way that James and the Jewish brothers demonstrated a gracious spirit to celebrate the Gentile mission.

Reading this piece of the story makes me wonder if there are places in my life where it is ok to make concessions in terms of religious tradition or practice, so as to not be a barrier to others encountering Christ. I can think of a few. Can you?

On to question number 2. What was the deal with the Sanhedrin splitting?

Paul has now been put on trial for the uproar he has created in the city. He spilled his story about his conversion and the minute he said he was to take God's message to the Gentiles the Jews went ballistic. Here Paul stands before the Sanhedrin and guess what...he creates chaos and dissension in this venue too.

To understand more about this, you need to know that the Sanhedrin, made up of the Pharisees and Sadducees, have significant differences. Paul was able to exploit those differences to cause division between the two parties and ensure that they would not agree, on this day at least, to execute him. So what were the differences?

The Pharisees were well respected by the people who believed that their love for the law somehow made them holier than other people. From our earlier readings we have seen their fanatical commitment to keeping the law and to the rigid observance of all religious ritual.

The Sadducees were drawn largely from the rich, who, though they were few in numbers, managed to control the resources of the land, so that they held a great deal of control over society. They were the dominant party in the Sanhedrin before whom Paul finds himself standing here. Most of the chief priests - including Ananias - were Sadducees. They thought of themselves as being more conservative than even the Pharisees - not because they tried to keep the law as strictly as the Pharisees did - but because they only recognized the five books of the Pentateuch or Torah (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy) as authoritative. That is why other Old Testament ideas, such as the belief in resurrection, angels and demons, were rejected by them.

In knowing this about the two parties, all Paul needed to do was think up something they were divided over - the resurrection. And since the resurrection is central to being a follower of Jesus he yells, *"I am a Pharisee and I stand on trial because of my hope in the resurrection of the dead!"*

When Paul shouted that it was his belief in the resurrection that was on trial, chaos erupted. Had he finished this thought, and said it was because he believed in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, then the Sanhedrin would probably have been united once again, but Paul still thought of himself as a Pharisee, so he cast his defense in

Pharisaic terms and concepts. It looks very much like Paul was following the advice of Jesus here, to *"be as wise as a serpent and as gentle as a dove."* His clever defense by dividing the rival parties in the Sanhedrin perhaps saved his life that day.

We have to wrap up for today but did you notice that beautiful scene where the Lord stands near Paul in the barracks and encourages him. The Lord said, *'Take courage; as you have testified about Me in Jerusalem so you must also testify in Rome.'*" This was right before we learn that the Jews formed a conspiracy to kill him. Isn't it ironic that the religious leaders and the Jews are the ones who keep going after to Paul to destroy him and then the Romans are continually coming to his protection? The Lord has his hand on Paul and as Paul continually is obedient despite persecution, God shows up with affirming presence.

Perhaps God is telling you to take courage today. Be faithful; be obedient in what he has called you to do. Want to give a shout out to John Soper again as we have been using some of his summaries for these accelerators. Thanks John. Well listeners, have a good one and I'll see you one last time, tomorrow!