

# Seized and Bound

Key Verse:  
“They bound  
Him [Jesus], led  
Him away, and  
handed Him  
over to Pilate  
the Governor.

Matthew 27:2

Extra: How are good and evil seen at work here in this story?

## Level 5 lesson 33

### Read: Acts 21:27-40 and 2 Corinthians 6:3-13

The threats and warnings of danger given to Paul on his way to Jerusalem did not take long to be fulfilled! As you may remember from last lesson, it had been suggested by the local Jews that Paul assist four men with a particular ritual at the Temple. This was in association with a vow they had taken (see Acts 21:21-24). However, while he was there Paul was spotted by some Jews from the province of Asia (v27).

**A FALSE CHARGE:** These Jews were the same men who had opposed Paul so bitterly as he went from place to place throughout the province, visiting the Jewish synagogues with the Gospel message. They knew each other well. Seeing Paul in the temple, they immediately grabbed him and began shouting, “This is the man who teaches all men everywhere against our people, and our law and this place: and besides this, he has brought Greeks into the temple area, and defiled this holy place” (v28)!

To bring any Gentile into the inner temple was a very serious offence. There was even an inscription on a stone pillar there, which read: “No alien is to enter within the railing and enclosure round the temple. Whoever is caught will be responsible to himself for his death!” Obviously, for Paul to bring a foreigner into the holy place would have been very foolish; but of course he had not done so. It was a lie; a false charge!

Paul’s enemies had seen him in the city with a Greek named Trophimus, and assumed that Paul had brought him into the temple and that he may have even been on the premises at that time. However, they weren’t really interested in the truth or the real facts; any charge, however false, would suffice, if it put an end to Paul’s preaching of the gospel – and it nearly did!

**A SUDDEN RIOT:** The accusation ignited a patriotic frenzy amongst the fanatical congregation who swarmed towards Paul and dragged him out of the temple and shut the doors. Out on the street, they unleashed their fury on him, beating him mercilessly.

As Paul tried to protect himself from the blows of the bloodthirsty mob, he may well have realised that only a miracle could save him. Indeed, God had not forgotten him: even as the riot began, someone ran to the nearby castle of Antonia to inform the Chief Captain of the Roman Guard.

**A TIMELY RESCUE:** The Romans were well-known for their organisation and discipline and no doubt to Paul’s great relief, the Chief Captain arrived quickly with his soldiers. Immediately a hush fell over the crowd and the vicious beating of Paul stopped. There is little doubt the Captain’s arrival saved Paul’s life. Taking hold of Paul, dazed and bleeding by this time, he ordered Paul to be bound with two chains, and demanded to know from the crowd, “who he was and what he had done” (v33)!

The fanatical crowd could give the Captain no real explanation for their brutal behaviour, and so he ordered his soldiers to carry Paul into the Castle to question him. The crowd were thirsty for blood and followed at a distance threatening further violence and crying out, “Away with him! Away with him!” I have an idea that Paul may have felt strangely elated, indeed honoured, as he heard that cry. They were the same words hurled at his Master, Jesus Christ, at the time of His crucifixion: “Away with Him! Away with Him! Let Him be crucified!”

**A RESPECTED CITIZEN:** As Paul was being taken up the stairs of the castle, he asked the Roman Captain. “May I say something to you?” The officer was surprised. “Do you speak Greek?” he said. “Aren’t you the Egyptian who started a revolt and led 4000 terrorists out into the desert some time ago?” A very clear case of mistaken identity! “No,” replied Paul, “I am a Jew from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no ordinary city. Please let me speak to the people.” Realising his mistake and that Paul was obviously a man of integrity and some standing, the Chief Captain readily agreed. From his vantage point on the stairs, Paul stood to his feet and motioned to the angry crowd below, who were still calling for his blood. The atmosphere was electric as Paul began to speak...

[The story continues in next week’s lesson]

## QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. Who were the men who caused such an uproar in the Temple?
2. Why did they accuse Paul like this?
3. How was Paul saved from the violence of the mob?
4. What similarities do you see between the treatment given to Paul and to Jesus?
5. What do you think Paul hoped to achieve by speaking to the mob?

My Name is ..... Age .....

# On the Stairs: Paul's Defence

Key Verse:

**"A time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God."**

John 16:2

Extra: What can you find out about the privileges of Roman citizenship?

## Level 5 Lesson 34

### Read Acts 22 and 23:1-11

As Paul addressed the belligerent crowd of Jews in Hebrew, their sacred language, the effect was amazing; the huge crowd was instantly silent and listened attentively to what he said.

**MISGUIDED ZEAL:** "Brothers and fathers, listen to my defence," Paul began. "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus, but brought up in this city [Jerusalem]. Under Gamaliel, I was thoroughly trained in the law of our fathers and was just as zealous for God as any of you are today." In fact, Paul was more zealous than any of them, as he explained. "I persecuted the followers of this Way [i.e. the Christian Way] to death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison. The High Priest and elders can prove this, as I obtained letters from them authorising me to go to Damascus and arrest the disciples of Jesus in order to punish them." Like the crowd standing before him, Paul's zeal had been terribly misguided because it was without full understanding of the Scriptures.

**GRACIOUS INTERVENTION:** Next he described in vivid language, God's gracious intervention in his life, when he, the violent persecutor, was turned around, so that he now preached the faith he once tried to destroy. He recounted how some time ago, as he had approached Damascus, he was stopped literally in his tracks by a blinding light and a voice from Heaven which asked him, "Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute Me?" "Who are You Lord?" I asked, Paul told the silent crowd. The answer changed his life forever. "I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting!" Paul told how he humbly surrendered to the risen Lord and became a changed man. Following the Lord's instructions, Paul was led into Damascus to await further orders.

**THE GOSPEL FOR ALL:** In Damascus, God sent a Christian man named Ananias to Paul, who said God's purpose was to make Paul a witness to all men of what he had seen and heard. Paul later said that the Lord had told him clearly, "Go, I will send you far away to the Gentiles." At the mention of 'Gentiles' the whole crowd erupted once more, shouting, "Rid the earth of him! He's not fit to live!" In their opinion, Paul had insulted them by even suggesting that 'their' God was interested in Gentiles.

In fact, God loves all people and wants everyone to know His saving power, but the crowd would not hear of it!

**PROTECTED FROM VIOLENCE:** As the crowd again threatened to get out of control, the Captain (Commander Lysias) quickly whisked Paul out of sight, inside the castle. He intended to flog him, in order to get a confession from him about his 'crime.' However, discovering that Paul was a Roman citizen, he abandoned that idea and decided to let the Jewish Council examine him the next day. He was mystified as to Paul's crime and hoped the Council meeting would help him clear the matter up.

**BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN:** The next day, Paul addressed the Council. "My brothers, I have fulfilled my duty to God in all good conscience to this day," he began. Not many men could say that! But how could Paul say such a thing when he had been persecuting Christians? Well, he persecuted them ignorantly in unbelief; he didn't know he was doing wrong. This shows that conscience needs to be enlightened by God's Word, the Bible.

At Paul's comment, Ananias the high priest snapped, "Strike him on the mouth!" Indignantly, Paul responded, "God will smite you, you whitewashed wall [i.e. hypocrite]!" Ananias deserved the rebuke because he was judging Paul according to the law; yet he violated the law by commanding that Paul be hit on the mouth.

**DECLARING HIS MISSION:** Paul knew that some of the men were Pharisees [who believed in the resurrection] and some were Sadducees [who did not]. So he called out in a loud voice, "My brothers, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee. I stand on trial because of my hope in the resurrection of the dead." At this, a great argument broke out between the two factions and became so violent that the Commander took Paul back to the castle for safety. But he still didn't know what crime Paul had done!

The following night as Paul lay in his cell, the Lord appeared to Paul and said, "Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome" (v11)!

## QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. How did Paul treat the Christians before he became one himself?
2. Why do you think Paul used his own life story, rather than preaching?
3. Why do you think the word "Gentiles" made the crowd so angry?
4. What do you think of Paul rebuking the High Priest?
5. How could Paul have had a good conscience when he persecuted the Christians?

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# Paul Before the Council

Key Verse:

**“The wicked plot against the righteous and gnash their teeth at them.”**

Psalm 37:12

Extra: What are some good ways to encourage those who need it?

Level 5 Lesson 35

## Read Acts 23:12-35 and James 1

**A WICKED PLOT:** Following the debacle of the council meeting, some of the Jews decided to ‘take the law into their own hands’ once more. Forty of these fanatical men hatched a wicked plot, taking an oath not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul. In their misguided religious fervour, they even felt they would be doing God a service. Of course, such a thing is **never** pleasing to God under any circumstances. It is simply murder, which God forbids! And seeing the Lord had assured Paul that he would, “also testify in Rome,” these forty men were in for a hard time. In fact, unless they broke their oath they were going to starve to death!

Having made their plan and telling it to the High Priest and other elders, they asked them to request of Commander Lysias a second meeting with Paul. They were to pretend that a couple of matters needed to be cleared up concerning his case, and then they would be able to explain Paul’s offences to Lysias. It could be assumed that the Commander would consent, seeing he wanted to get the facts. On the way from the Castle to the Council Chamber, the forty men would wait in ambush ready to spring on Paul and assassinate him.

**A TIMELY WARNING:** Well it was certainly a very devious and cunning plot, but it didn’t work. God was not finished with Paul yet! Paul had a nephew living in Jerusalem, and somehow in God’s marvellous and encouraging provision, he heard of this plot. “Blood” they say, “is thicker than water” and although he may or may not have agreed with Paul, he wanted to save his Uncle’s life. So Paul got a surprise visit from him in the Roman barracks, where he urgently passed on the serious news.

Upon hearing of the Jews plot, Paul sent the boy to Commander Lysias, who took him by the arm into his private apartment and asked, “What is it you want to tell me?” The brave young boy told the Commander about the plot and pleaded with him not to consent to the Jew’s request. Lysias dismissed the lad, telling him to keep the matter secret, and to his credit, took the matter seriously.

He immediately prepared to transfer Paul to another place of safety. He called two centurions, ordered them to get ready a small army of 470 men, which included ordinary foot soldiers, horsemen and spear-men. They were to provide Paul with horses to ride on, and to take him safely, under this armed escort, to Felix the Governor at Caesarea, 70 miles distant.

**A HASTY ESCAPE:** While the centurions were carrying out instructions, Lysias sat down and wrote a typical Roman soldier’s letter to his superior in Caesarea (v26-30). In this letter he first sent greetings to the Governor, then told him about Paul and how he had rescued him from the Council. He spoke favourably of Paul, stating that he could find nothing in the charges laid against him worthy of death or imprisonment. In other words, he saw no reason why Paul should not be set free. However, he added, the Jews were out to kill Paul, so he was sending him to Felix after giving his accusers orders to make their accusations before Felix.

A couple of points in his letter are not quite factual, and were obviously meant to cast Lysias in a favourable light with Felix his superior. For instance, Lysias didn’t know Paul was a Roman when he first rescued him, and he conveniently omitted to tell the Governor about his proposing to scourge a Roman citizen! However, in the main, Lysias did a good job and treated Paul fairly. Well, God definitely used Lysias to save Paul, which must have encouraged him.

The expedition set off under cover of darkness, leaving Jerusalem around 9 o’clock at night to travel 30 miles to the town of Antipatris, where they spent the rest of the night. In the morning, the whole group continued on their way, eventually reaching Caesarea where Paul and the letter were delivered to Felix the Governor. Having read the letter, Felix then inquired as to what province the prisoner belonged, and was told Cilicia. He then closed the interview, saying to Paul, “I will hear your case when your accusers get here.” In the meantime he commanded that Paul be kept under guard in Herod’s palace. I wonder how hungry those forty men were feeling?!!!

## QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. Why were some so determined to kill Paul?

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2. How is the Key Verse true in the world today?

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3. How did God encourage Paul through this trial?

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4. How did God bring deliverance to Paul?

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5. What favourable things did Lysias write in his letter about Paul?

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# Paul Before Felix

Read Acts 24 and Mark 6:14-19

Key Verse:

**“Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgement.”**

Hebrews 9:27

Extra: Why do people turn away from God?

Level 5 Lesson 36

**FALSE CHARGES:** No doubt the conspirators in the plot to kill Paul were very angry to discover their plan had been thwarted and that Paul had disappeared! They soon learned from Lysias that they were expected to go down to Caesarea and make their accusations against Paul there, before Felix the Roman Governor.

On the day of the trial, the Jews arrived with a legal orator named Tertullus, who used all his legal skill and oratorical powers to build a case against Paul. He began with a good dose of plain old ‘flattery’, addressing the Governor as “most excellent Felix” and complimenting him on the long period of peace the nation had enjoyed under his reign and his “foresight” which had led to “reforms in this nation.” All of which he claimed to acknowledge with “profound gratitude.” What a grovelling hypocrite! In actual fact, Felix was a bad man, incapable as a ruler and guilty of ruthless crimes, which Tertullus was well aware of.

Next, he tried to blacken Paul’s character, claiming him to be a “troublemaker,” a “ringleader of the Nazarene sect,” who had stirred up riots among Jews and even “tried to desecrate the temple.” Of course, there was a major weakness in all his charges against Paul; none of them could be proven. Paul was quick to point this out in his reply (v13).

**THE REAL ISSUE:** What a difference we find in Paul’s manner as he takes the stand to defend himself. No hypocritical flattery of Felix, but simply an acknowledgement of his experience and ability to understand the matters at issue. Having shown the charges against him to be baseless, Paul then queried whether his accusers actually had another agenda! Did they have another complaint against him which was the real cause of their hatred, but with which a Roman Court would not concern itself?

They did; and Paul mentions it in verse 14. The trouble was about “The Way” - as the new Christian faith was known then. The Jews called Christianity a “heresy,” and a mere opinion of Paul and the disciples, and a departure from traditional Jewish religion. Paul said no such thing. In fact, he declared that “the Way” of Jesus involved worshipping God and believing all things which were written in the Law and the prophets.

He then went on to query why the Jews from Asia, who had caused his arrest in the temple, were not present to accuse him! “What’s more,” said Paul, “let them say what crime I am guilty of!” He pointed out that it was really, as he had claimed before the Council, “concerning the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you today.”

**CASE ADJOURNED:** This matter did not interest Felix, and seemingly unimpressed by the poor case against Paul, he adjourned the Court, promising to re-open the case when Lysias the Commander came down from Jerusalem, which as far as we know, he never did. Felix, bad as he was, certainly appeared to have been able to appreciate that Paul was an honest and sincere man, while Tertullus and Paul’s other accusers were clearly otherwise. This is reflected in Felix’s treatment of Paul, who was placed in the care of a centurion, and given ample liberty and permission for his friends to visit him.

**A SOLEMN CHALLENGE:** A few days later we read that Felix, and his Jewish wife Drusilla, sent for Paul to hear him concerning the “faith in Christ Jesus.” Once again Paul faced the Roman Governor. This time though, in a very real sense, it was Felix and Drusilla in the dock and Paul as it were examining them! After all, “The Word of God is living and powerful... sharper than any two-edged sword... piercing to the very thoughts and intents of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12).

And so it proved, as Paul faithfully shared the Gospel with them. Clearly convicted of his sinfulness, Felix sadly put the matter off. “That’s enough for now,” he finally said, “When I find it convenient, I will send for you again!” Felix called for Paul repeatedly after that; not to discuss the way of salvation, but rather, to obtain a healthy bribe from him in exchange for his freedom. Felix rejected the gospel and the conviction of the Holy Spirit upon his heart.

Friend, there is a coming “day of judgement.” Don’t be like Felix and ignore God’s voice when He brings that same conviction to your heart! Believe Christ as your Saviour and ask for forgiveness of sins through faith in His name. Then go on to serve and honour Him, and one day you’ll hear, “Well done, good and faithful servant!”

## QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. What was the weak point in the Jew’s case against Paul?

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2. What was the real cause of their hatred?

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3. Why was Paul’s second audience with Felix different from the first?

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4. What was Felix’s response when Paul shared the Gospel with him?

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5. How do **we** receive forgiveness of sin?

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