

SUNDAY SCHOOL MATERIALS FOR ADULTS

LESSON 7



SOME JEWS VOW TO KILL PAUL

Scripture Text: Acts 23:12-35

After a night that brought him much encouragement from a visit from Jesus, Paul, a prisoner in the castle in Jerusalem, awoke to a day when he needed that encouragement. Through all of his trials, Paul obtained his strength from the presence of Jesus. Now at the beginning of years of imprisonment and hardship, Jesus had given added strength to meet the need.

The extreme to which anger drove Paul's enemies is a cause for wonder and concern. This was more than anger. It was hatred. Its roots went deep into the history we have been studying through the past lessons. It began in love for God's Law. As love cooled, it turned into worship of empty forms, and the Spirit of God was not there.

MEMORY VERSE: *Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night; nor for the arrow that flieth by day.*

—*Psalm 91:5*

DAILY READINGS:

Mon.—**Matthew 26:36-46** The flesh is weak.

Tue.—**1 Peter 2:1-12** Good works glorify God.

Wed.—**Matthew 5:13-20** Christ came to fulfil the Law.

Thu.—**Romans 10:1-13** Faith joins both Jews and Gentiles.

Fri.—**Psalm 91** The security of the godly.

Devotional Reading: Matthew 23:13-39 Jesus' lament over Jerusalem.

Bound Under a Curse

Acts 23:12-15 The next day after Paul's hearing before the council, more than forty Jews **bound themselves under a curse** to kill Paul. Their feeling was so strong that they vowed to neither eat nor drink until it was done. The plan was to ask the chief captain to bring Paul for questioning, then to seize him as he was being brought. They took the chief priests and elders into the secret, asking them to go to the chief captain. In this we see again the depths to which these religious leaders had fallen. They had been put in trust of God's work, but had betrayed it by crucifying Jesus and now sought to kill His Apostle.

Why would Paul's enemies be so determined to kill him as to bind themselves under a curse to neither eat nor drink until it was done? Why was the feeling so fierce as to require soldiers to remove Paul from their midst? Why had they become mad men and would have pulled Paul in pieces? This was more than anger. It was deep hatred. Its roots went back deep into the history of Israel. It began in sincere love for God's Law. As love cooled, loyalty remained. Then sin crept in, and loyalty turned to holding to empty forms, and God was not in this. This condition opened the door to the devil. Soon they were building the kingdom of Satan and tearing down God's. They were blindly doing it in the name of religion, at least, in part, thinking they were serving God. A fallen religion is more wicked than indifference to or lack of religion. A little cooling of our love for God may finally lead to the most horrible sins. Much persecution from that time until now has likewise been done in the name of religion. Satan is a deceiver. Salvation builds up Christ and tears down the flesh. Religion builds up the flesh and tears down Christ.

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Paul's Nephew Brings a Warning

Acts 23:16-22 News of the wicked plan leaked out. **Paul's sister's son heard of it.** He brought word to Paul who sent him to the chief captain. In deep interest and great secrecy, the chief captain listened. He did not want to be a part of this plot—an illegal lynching.

Paul Is Sent to Caesarea

Acts 23:23-35 The chief captain, Claudius Lysias, ordered a strong guard made ready to take Paul to Caesarea, where lived Felix, the Roman governor of Palestine, and where the Roman garrison had headquarters. The angry Jews could hardly reach Paul there. He sent Paul to Felix and wrote a letter briefly describing the case. He stated his belief that Paul was guilty of nothing worthy of death or imprisonment. He had commanded Paul's accusers to appear before Felix to bring their charges. The large company—two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen, two hundred spearmen, Paul and the animals on which he was to ride—started at nine o'clock at night and traveled from Jerusalem to Antipatris. This brought them half way to Caesarea. Here the greater part of the guard turned back to Jerusalem, leaving the horsemen to take Paul on to Caesarea. Felix read the letter and placed Paul in Herod's judgment hall to await the coming of his accusers.

The Reason for Paul's Suffering

Paul had nothing but love for these people. All his motives were right. But he had to suffer. Why? It was not punishment. It was not injustice. God had not forgotten him. God had told him at the time of his conversion that he must suffer great things for Jesus' name. The Lord was watching through it all, adding encouragement in his times of need. Sufferings come because this is a world where sin is. We can see sin and the suffering it causes all around us. Satan is the prince of this world. God's people are strangers traveling to the heavenly country. If they receive the treatment of strangers, it is no wonder. God takes these ugly afflictions and through them beautifies His saints. In **Deuteronomy 8:2** we learn that God uses hardships **to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldst keep his commandments, or no.** God will never allow us to be tempted above what we are able to bear with His help (**1 Corinthians 10:13**). When trials come, hold fast to God's hand, and He will bring you out as pure gold, more beautiful for the testing (**1 Peter 1:7**). God uses trials to beautify our souls if we hold fast to Him.

The Sad History of the Jews

Israel was the most favored nation on earth. No people ever had greater blessings placed in their hands, and none ever threw them away in more fierce refusal. By their own acts, their house was left unto them desolate. Jesus beheld Jerusalem and wept over it, **Saying, If thou hadst known . . . the things which belong unto thy peace (Luke 19:42).** Sin blinded their eyes so they could not know. They killed their Savior. The prophets He sent, they scourged, persecuted and killed (**Matthew 23:34**). Paul was one of these. Only a few of his nation could he lead into the light he had found. The rest chose to remain in darkness.

JUST A THOUGHT

**Before turning from an opportunity, ask yourself,
"Am I willing for this to be the last time it is offered?"**

This lesson is adapted from a lesson by Mary Lehmann.
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