

THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

ACTS 23-24

The events in Acts 23 remind me of the day in 1975 when baseball great, Henry Aaron, came to Atlanta wearing a Milwaukee Brewers' uniform. *It was a shock.*

For the previous 21 seasons "*Hammering Hank*" had been the pride of the Braves - the face of the franchise. The all time home run king was a Brave, not a Brewer.

But there he was, #44, sitting in the visitor's dugout.

And every long time Braves fan, like myself, felt just a little twinge of betrayal. We felt stabbed in the back.

Hank Aaron had changed teams... *as had the Apostle Paul.* There were Jews who had studied with Paul in Jerusalem. Together with him, they'd offered Temple sacrifices. He'd supervised Stephen's stoning.

Now, they must've felt betrayed to see their former hero on the other team. A once devoted Jew was now a Jesus-follower. He even offered salvation to Gentiles.

The Jews seethed over Paul's conversion.

When they saw him in the Temple the crowd mobbed him and began to beat him up. If a Roman garrison hadn't been dispatched, the Jews would've killed him.

As Acts 21 closes he's on the steps of police headquarters. The mob wants to stone him. There's such bedlam the chief of police can't even reconstruct what's happened. That's when Paul starts to preach.

His goal for 20 years was to preach the Gospel of Jesus to his Jewish peers. *Never in his wildest dreams though did he think it'd be like this, but who's to argue with God's methods.* He's fixated on the opportunity.

In Chapter 22 Paul shares his testimony. And the crowd listens intently, until Paul speaks the word “Gentiles” - which sets off another angry firestorm.

The Roman in charge wanted to know why the Jews were so hostile toward Paul, so the captain decided a more formal proceeding was in order. Which brings us to Chapter 23... We'll actually begin in Acts 22:30...

“The next day, because he wanted to know for certain why he was accused by the Jews, he released him from *his* bonds, and commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear (This council was the Sanhedrin, the Jewish Supreme Court. The same body that condemned Jesus to death is subpoenaed), and (they) brought Paul down and set him before them.

Then Paul, looking earnestly at the council...” What a moment this was! The last time Paul had eyeballed these men he was on their side. He was their heavy hitter - *their hit man*. Now he's in the opposing dugout.

And look at how he opens... he's brimming with courage! “Men and brethren...” Normally, a defendant would address the Sanhedrin as “Rulers of the people.”

For someone to call them “men and brethren” was to put himself on their level. Yet that's how Paul viewed them - as

peers. He'd been one of them... *But you can be certain his language angered them even further.*

As did his next comment, “Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.”

The Jews probably ripped their clothes. They would've considered such a claim to be blasphemous.

With no understanding of the righteousness that comes through faith in Jesus any talk of a “good conscience” was arrogant at best... heretical at worst.

How dare Paul claim to be right with a holy God?

In fact, the high priest orders a crony to cold cock Paul. Verse 2, “Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth.” Then Paul said to him, “God will strike you, you whitewashed wall!

For you sit to judge me according to the law, and do you command me to be struck contrary to the law?”

Wow, Paul strikes back. He counterpunches the high priest. *And in my opinion, Paul may've lost his cool...*

Remember, his goal is to preach the Gospel. Starting out by calling the High Priest a hypocrite is probably not a good introduction to an evangelistic sermon.

Apparently, even Paul lost control at times. He gets angry at Ananias' duplicity, harshness, and unfairness.

Verse 4, “And those who stood by said, “Do you revile God's high priest?” Then Paul said, “I did not know, brethren, that he was the high priest; for it is written, ‘You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.’” Here Paul quotes Exodus 22:28.

And his rebuttal can be taken a couple of ways.

He could be speaking sarcastically, "*I didn't know a guy like this could be High Priest.*" Paul could've been referring to Ananias's poor priestly record. The man was a miserable High Priest. He served in the post for twelve years and used his Temple oversight to pad his pockets. He was eventually murdered by the Jews.

Or Paul might not have actually seen that it was the High Priest to which he spoke. We talked earlier about the eye problems that plagued Paul. His inflammation may've flared up and impaired his vision. Whatever the reason Paul realizes he's already dug himself a hole...

And he looks for a way out of the jam. We're told, "**But when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, "Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee; concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead I am being judged!" And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees; and the assembly was divided.**"

Verse 8, "**For Sadducees say that there is no resurrection (And of course, that's why they're **sad-you-see**) - and no angel or spirit; but the Pharisees confess both.**" At the time there were two main priestly parties in Judaism - Pharisees and Sadducees - and Paul shrewdly diverts attention off himself by pitting these two factions against one another theologically.

The Sadducees were liberals, the materialists. They denied *the existence of angels - the immortality of the soul - and the*

resurrection of the body. They believed that only the first five books of Moses were inspired.

Whereas the Pharisees were the super-naturalists. They believed in angels, and eternal life, and the resurrection. They held the whole Bible as inspired by God - the Law, and the Poets, and the Prophets...

And Paul knew these groups were fierce rivals...

He appeals to Pharisaical pride. All the Jews were angry Paul preached that Jesus had risen, but here he reminds the Pharisees they believe in the resurrection of the body. In a sense, he's on their side. He cleverly reframes his trial as an attack on Pharisee-ism.

“Then there arose a loud outcry. And the scribes of the Pharisees’ party arose and protested, saying, “We find no evil in this man; but if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him, let us not fight against God.”

In a roundabout way the doctrine he taught actually substantiated the Pharisees, so they back off Paul...

But a heated debated arises with the Sadducees. **“Now when there arose a great dissension, the commander, fearing lest Paul might be pulled to pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go down and take him by force from among them, and bring him into the barracks.”** The commander was afraid Paul would become a pulley-bone. They would tear him in two. So he again dispatches a garrison to save Paul's skin.

And imagine, Paul's discouragement. Three times now he has tried to preach the Gospel to the Jews, but with very little success. *He's sunk into a funk...*

But *the God of all comfort* comes in verse 11, “**But the following night the Lord stood by him and said, “Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome.”**”

I’m sure Paul had considered his trip to Jerusalem a failure. I’ll bet he wondered, “*Maybe I should’ve heeded all the warnings I received, and stayed away.*”

But that wasn’t God’s opinion. God commends Paul’s efforts: “***Be of good cheer, Paul, for as you have testified of Me in Jerusalem...***” God speaks of Paul’s witness to the Jews in a positive light. Let’s always remember our responsibility is to simply share the Gospel. How folks respond is between them and God.

Recall last week we discussed whether Paul was right or wrong to visit Jerusalem at this particular time.

God called Paul to be “**the apostle to the Gentiles.**”

And everywhere Paul preached to Gentiles, He saw positive results - people got *saved*... But whenever he tried to preach to Jews, he got *jailed* or even worse.

Prior to this visit to Jerusalem, believers and prophets alike had warned Paul of danger ahead...

When he arrived, James suggested he perform a ritualistic vow to court Jewish sympathies. The effort failed. Paul’s visit to Jerusalem got him into trouble.

We could call it a mistake. We could conclude this trip was born out of stubbornness, not the will of God.

But not so fast... Earlier in Acts 19:21 we’re told Paul “**purposed in the Spirit**” to go to Jerusalem. He said in

Chapter 20 none of the warnings moved him. He was ready not only to be chained, but to die for Jesus' sake.

In Romans 9:3 Paul even said he would go to hell if it meant the Jews got to heaven. *I'm not sure I could honestly say that about anyone...* How do you say a man with this passion for the lost is outside God's will?

In fact, review Paul's calling at the time of his conversion. Jesus said Paul would "bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake." We should know that favorable results aren't always an indicator we're walking in God's will.

So here's my answer to the question, "was it God's will for Paul to visit Jerusalem and enter the Temple at this particular time?" *I have no idea!* Here's a classic case where *the will of God seems as clear as mud.*

If you've been a Christian for any length of time you realize when it comes to these kind of subjective decisions, discerning God's will isn't an exact science.

What college do I attend? Who do I marry? Where do I buy a house? Do I go to Jerusalem? Do I join with other Jews in taking a vow? You can't open your Bible and get a definitive answer to these sort of questions.

As Paul did, you listen to your heart - you stay open to advice from friends - you lean toward the promptings of the Holy Spirit... *but what if you're still unclear?*

Here's what you should realize about God and His will... God is experienced in working with frail and fallible people. Sometimes I have a difficult time discerning my wife's desires, *and we can talk and text.*

How much more difficult is it for me to pick up on the spiritual nuances and leadings of the Holy Spirit?

And God understands my dilemma. He knows how dense I am. That's why He includes some latitude in His will. I think there's a plus or minus margin for error.

Walking in God's will seldom requires me to stop on a dime. I don't have to hit a bull's eye from a thousand feet. I think God makes allowances for our humanness.

In Psalm 18:36 this is what David meant when He prayed, "You enlarged my path under me, so that my feet did not slip." He was saying, as long as his heart was right, God made sure his feet stayed on the path.

When he slipped God enlarged the path under him.

Even if we get out of step - veer a bit right or left - He doesn't abandon us. God stretches out the white lines beneath us to keep us in His will. He enlarges the lane to keep us moving in the right direction. Here God may've widened His will to accommodate Paul's zeal.

I believe God loves us, and won't let us forfeit His blessings just because we miss a cue, or there's a little play in the steering wheel of our lives. God is big enough to accommodate His children's weaknesses.

Here's my point... *Did Paul do everything right? I doubt it.* But in the end God got him where He wanted him to go. God

fulfilled His will for Paul. And He'll fulfill His will in my life if my heart is right and I trust in Him.

Verse 12, “And when it was day, some of the Jews banded together and bound themselves under an oath, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. Now there were more than forty who had formed this conspiracy. They came to the chief priests and elders, and said, “We have bound ourselves under a great oath that we will eat nothing until we have killed Paul.” These guys harbor some serious animus toward Paul. They go on a “Kill The Christian Weight Loss Program.” No matzo balls, no falafels, no lamb chops until Paul is dead meat. Forty men take this oath.

“Now you, therefore, together with the council, suggest to the commander that he be brought down to you tomorrow, as though you were going to make further inquiries concerning him; but we are ready to kill him before he comes near.” The hungry assassins conspire with the chief priests to set up an ambush.

“So when Paul's sister's son heard of their ambush, he went and entered the barracks and told Paul.”

Apparently, Uncle Paul had a nephew within earshot of the conspirators. *What do you think the odds were of this nephew walking past these Jewish thugs just as they were devising their plot against Paul?*

This was obviously, God's providence at work.

God performed a miracle. He made sure *the right boy* was in *the right place at the right time!*

“Then Paul called one of the centurions to him and said, “Take this young man to the commander, for he has something to tell him.” So he took him and brought him to the commander and said, “Paul the prisoner called me to him and asked me to bring this young man to you. He has something to say to you.”

Then the commander took him by the hand, went aside, and asked privately, “What is it that you have to tell me?” And he said, “The Jews have agreed to ask that you bring Paul down to the council tomorrow, as though they were going to inquire more fully about him.

But do not yield to them, for more than forty of them lie in wait for him, men who have bound themselves by an oath that they will neither eat nor drink till they have killed him; and now they are ready, waiting for the promise from you.” So the commander let the young man depart, and commanded him, “Tell no one that you have revealed these things to me.”

And he called for two centurions, saying, “Prepare 200 soldiers, 70 horsemen, and 200 spearmen to go to Caesarea at the third hour of the night...” which was around 9:00 pm. They’ll move Paul just after dark, and he’ll travel with a heavily armed military detachment.

“And provide mounts to set Paul on, and bring him safely to Felix the governor.” We’ll talk more about the Roman Procurator, Governor Felix in Chapter 24...

Remember, Caesarea-by-the-Sea was Rome’s headquarters in Israel. The governor came to Jerusalem only on special occasions. He preferred life on the coast. That’s

why for Paul to be tried by Felix he had to be transported from Jerusalem to Caesarea...

Which would put him at risk of an ambush.

The Roman commander knows Paul is a high value target for terrorists, so he puts together a military detail to transport him 65 miles from Jerusalem to Caesarea.

And along with the prisoner, he sends a letter. Verse 25, “He wrote a letter in the following manner: Claudius Lysias, to the most excellent governor Felix: Greetings.

This man was seized by the Jews and was about to be killed by them. Coming with the troops I rescued him, having learned that he was a Roman. And when I wanted to know the reason they accused him, I brought him before their council. I found out that he was accused concerning questions of their law, but had nothing charged against him deserving of death or chains. And when it was told me that the Jews lay in wait for the man, I sent him immediately to you, and also commanded his accusers to state before you the charges against him.” And he closes, “Farewell.”

“Then the soldiers, as they were commanded, took Paul and brought him by night to Antipatris.” This was the half-way marker from Jerusalem to Caesarea.

The road from Mount Zion to Antipatris was narrow and mountainous. It was perfect for an ambush. But the road north of Antipatris toward Caesarea was flat and open. The dangerous part of the journey was over.

Thus, “The next day (foot soldiers and spearmen) left the horsemen to go on with him, and returned to the barracks.”

The infantry troops returned to Jerusalem, while the cavalry finished the escort to Caesarea.

Verse 33, “When they came to Caesarea and had delivered the letter to the governor, they also presented Paul to him. And when the governor had read it, he asked what province he was from. And when he understood that he was from Cilicia, he said, “I will hear you when your accusers also have come.” And he commanded him to be kept in Herod’s Praetorium.”

Paul occupied a cell in Herod’s palace.

Chapter 24, “Now after five days Ananias the high priest came down with the elders...”

Notice, even though Caesarea was north of Jerusalem, we’re told the High Priest’s entourage “*came down.*” Jerusalem is in the mountains, thus to go anywhere from Jerusalem you always descend.

At the time, the High Priest Ananias was 80 years old. That he was willing to make a 65 mile trip over rugged terrain is proof of just how much he hated Paul.

And coming with Ananias was “*a certain orator named Tertullus.*” Tertullus was a professional orator. He was probably the equivalent of a trial lawyer.

Once the Stanford Research Institute tested how various professions effected a person’s perspective.

The first interviewee was an **engineer**. He was asked, “*What does two plus two make?*” Being trained in the

exactness of mathematics the engineer responded, “Well, in absolute terms, four.”

The second interviewee was an **architect**. He was asked, “what does two plus two make?” Due to the creativeness of an architect’s craft his reply was more elaborate. “Well, there’re several possibilities: $2 + 2$ makes 4, but so does 3 and 1, even $2\frac{1}{2} + 1\frac{1}{2}$...”

The final interviewee was a **lawyer**. The researcher asked him, “what does $2 + 2$ make?” The attorney gets up, walks over, shuts the door, pulls the blinds closed; then leans into the researchers, and whispers, “Well, you tell me, what would you like for it to make?” Sad to say, lawyers have the reputation for bending the truth.

And such was the case with this lawyer, Tertullus.

Tertullus was skilled in rhetoric, a master of verbal deception. He was a high-priced lawyer brought in by the Sanhedrin to send Paul up the river. Tertullus could flatter a judge, and obscure the facts, and dress up a lie. He was slick and shrewd - a real truth bender.

It’s been said, “The American judicial system doesn’t determine innocence and guilt, but who has the best lawyer.” Tertullus was hired to present the priest’s case. “These gave evidence to the governor against Paul.”

And when he was called upon, Tertullus began his accusation, saying: “Seeing that through you we enjoy great peace, and prosperity is being brought to this nation by your foresight, we accept it always and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness.” Here is where you need to reach

into the pocket on back of the seat in front of you, and pull out the air-sickness bag.

This is nauseous! Makes you want to puke.

Tertullus claims Governor Felix had brought peace and prosperity to Judea. To the contrary, this Roman Governor was corrupt, and brutal toward the Jews.

Marcus Antonius Felix was the only Roman procurator to ever rise to his position from the ranks of a slave. But though he climbed in *status*, Felix remained the same in *stature*. He was a brutish man.

Tacitus, the Roman historian says of Felix, “he had the *power of a king and the mind of a slave.*” Felix was anything but what Tertullus calls him, “*noble.*”

“Nevertheless, not to be tedious to you any further, I beg you to hear, by your courtesy, a few words from us. For we have found this man a plague (literally, a pest), a creator of dissension among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes.” He makes Paul sound like a gang leader. *There’s the Bloods and Crips and “Nazarenes.”*

Here's another first century name given to the followers of Jesus. They were called “**Nazarenes**” after Jesus’ hometown... But this was also a derogatory term. Since Nazareth was a hick town, a backwoods, off-the-beaten-path place, this was like calling the Christian community “*rednecks*” or “*swamp people.*”

Tertullus begins his case in verse 6, “(Paul) even tried to profane the temple, and we seized him, and wanted to judge him according to our law.” Of course, the lawyer begins by telling Felix an outrageous lie...

Rather than profane the temple protocol, Paul had wanted to placate the Jews by observing a ritual.

“But the commander Lysias came by and with great violence took him out of our hands...” Talk about rewriting history - the Romans tried to stop the violence of the Jews. Tertullus paints Lysias as the agitator.

He goes on to blame the Roman Commander Lysias for forcing everyone to make this trip to Caesarea.

The Jewish leaders were handling *the Paul situation* their own way, and could've spared everyone this trial if Lysias had left them alone. By stepping in Lysias ended up “commanding his accusers to come to you.”

He goes on in verse 8, “By examining him yourself you may ascertain all these things of which we accuse him.” And the Jews also assented maintaining that these things were so.” Of course, their account was full of lies. Tertullus was a slime ball lawyer in action.

Verse 10, “Then Paul, after the governor had nodded to him to speak, answered: “Inasmuch as I know that you have been for many years a judge of this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself...” Paul knew Felix had been around the block a time or two with these Jews. He knew their ways. He'd been governor over Palestine for seven years - from 52-59 AD.

And Paul is thankful for his longevity, “because you may ascertain that it is no more than twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem to worship. And they neither found me in the temple disputing with anyone nor inciting the crowd, either in the synagogues or in the city. Nor can they prove the things of which they now accuse me.” Tertullus had been long on *style*, but short on *substance*. The Jews had an argument, but no evidence to back it up. What he’d said was fake news.

Now the defense is going to present its case.

Paul begins, “But this I confess to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect, so I worship the God of my fathers...” Notice, the Jews at the time considered Christianity “a sect” or “branch of Judaism.” Most Jews would’ve considered it a heretical branch of Judaism, but a Jewish sect nonetheless.

Paul on the other hand referred to Christianity as “the Way.” Jesus wasn’t just one sect among many sections - a small slice of something bigger. Jesus is “the Way” - the only Way for man to relate to God.

Paul goes on to explain his faith, “believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets. I have hope in God, which they themselves also accept, that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust.” Paul would not have labeled himself “a former Jew,” but “a fulfilled Jew.” Nothing he believed contradicted the OT, or his Hebrew heritage.

His faith in Jesus was a fulfillment of Judaism.

Jesus said as much in Matthew 5:17, "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill." Never did Jesus nullify or contradict Judaism, He simply took it a step further. The work of Jesus **completed** the OT imagery.

Jesus is *the new Temple, the perpetual priesthood, the ultimate sacrifice, the author of a better covenant.* He's *the fulfillment of all the prophet's predictions.*

Verse 16, "This being so, I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men." This is how Paul opened his defense before the Sanhedrin in 23:1 - *before he was punched in the mouth.* Paul never violated his biblical sensibilities.

He now gives his version of the Temple riot... "Now after many years I came to bring alms and offerings to my nation, in the midst of which some Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with a mob nor with tumult. They ought to have been here before you to object if they had anything against me."

What created the mob were false accusations by Jews who said Paul brought a Gentile into the Temple. Of course, now those Jews are nowhere to be found. They'd vanished in the possibility of cross-examination.

Verse 20, "Or else let those who are here themselves say if they found any wrongdoing in me while I stood before the council, unless it is for this one statement which I cried out, standing among them, 'Concerning the resurrection of the dead I am being judged by you this day.'" Here Tertullus

must've figured he'd met his match. Paul was also a shrewd debater.

A good number of the Jewish delegation accusing Paul before Felix were Pharisees, who believed in the future resurrection of the body. Here, Paul insists he's being condemned for the same belief held by his accusers - *the resurrection of the body!* It's hypocrisy!

Of course, the charge against Paul wasn't his belief in *the resurrection of all*, but *the resurrection of One*, Jesus of Nazareth. Yet Paul shrewdly frames his case so it becomes impossible for the Pharisees to condemn him without also condemning themselves.

This is how Paul got off the hook in chapter 23 in Jerusalem, so he goes to the well one more time. He's gaining experience at getting out of tight squeezes!

Verse 22, “But when Felix heard these things, having more accurate knowledge of the Way he adjourned the proceedings and said, “When Lysias the commander comes down, I will make a decision on your case.””

It's interesting that Felix had some prior knowledge of Christianity. We're told later his wife was Jewish. His info may've come from her... Felix wants to hear from the commander who initially dealt with the disturbance.

Sadly, there's no record Lysias ever made it to court.

“So (Felix) commanded the centurion to keep Paul and to let him have liberty, and told him not to forbid any of his friends to provide for or visit him.”

Paul was placed under house arrest in Caesarea where he'll live for the next two years. *He can entertain friends. Speak to small groups. Disciple believers. His fellow Christians can visit and bring food and supplies.*

Rather than a cold, dank prison - *God gives Paul a two year all expense paid stay in the beautiful coastal town of Caesarea.* After three long, rigorous missionary journeys, God is supplying Paul a little rest and relaxation. This was Paul's siesta before his final lap.

And these two years in Caesarea provided Paul's sidekick, Luke, an opportunity to do the important research and verification that went into His writings.

Remember, Luke was educated. He was a doctor and a historian. Based in Caesarea with Paul, over the next two years he could visit Nazareth, Galilee, Jerusalem, Bethlehem. He could run down the stories.

All over the countryside Luke was able to conduct interviews with people, who 25 years earlier, had seen firsthand the life, and miracles, and teaching of Jesus.

Many of the eyewitnesses were still alive. Luke was able to speak to Mary, the shepherds, Jesus' brothers, Peter, John, Nicodemus, even officials in Pilate's court. Imagine, the interview Dr. Luke had with Lazarus!

Luke compiled his research into two volumes.

He wrote two letters to a rich sponsor named Theophilus. We call them the books of Luke and Acts.

In the opening of Luke's Gospel he refers to "Theophilus" by the title, "*most excellent.*" This was a common label given to Roman governmental officials.

It's possible that Luke's Gospel, and its sequel, Acts, were actually written as part of Paul's legal defense before the Caesar in Rome. That would mean that two of the NT's *longest books* were actually *legal briefs*.

To me this is all a wonderful example of God's undeniable faithfulness. At first Paul's trip to Jerusalem seemed like a disaster, yet God used it give Paul some needed rest and refreshment - **and** to provide the Church two of its greatest treasures: Luke and Acts.

It's proof of the truth Paul wrote to the Romans in 8:28, "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose." Here's a provocative thought... *If Paul hadn't been detained for two years in Caesarea would we even be reading Acts tonight?*

And could it be your inconveniences or disruptions are being used by God to do a good thing in your life?

Verse 24, "And after some days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, he sent for Paul and heard him concerning the faith in Christ."

Felix's wife was Drusilla, the great-granddaughter of Herod the Great, who slaughtered all the male babies in Bethlehem while trying to kill Jesus. Her great-uncle, Herod Antipas, beheaded John the Baptist and stood trial over Jesus. In Acts 12, her father, Herod Agrippa I had Apostle James beheaded.

This was the fellow who let the crowd praise him as God, and was judged for his arrogance when worms ate out his intestines.

This Drusilla was the Meghan Markle of her day - a star in the royal family. Except unlike Meghan, Drusilla was born into the ruling class. She was a Herodian.

And over the years she'd heard, seen, and read a lot about Jesus. Now to have Christianity's leading spokesperson in her palace - *what an opportunity!* She hoped to talk to Paul. She probably had a notebook page full of questions. Felix and his wife were seekers.

“Now as he reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and answered, “Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you.” Notice, the content of Paul's message to Felix and those assembled. He speaks to pagans about three topics: “*righteousness, self-control, and the judgement to come*” - in other words, *victory from yesterday's sin, victory over today's temptations, and victory at tomorrow's judgment.*

I wish Paul's sermon had been recorded and loaded to YouTube. *How many internet hits would Paul's sermon have gotten?* I'm sure it would've gone viral.

But notice Felix' sad reply. He was afraid and answered, “*Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you.*” He delayed making a decision to a more convenient time... *Hey, it's never more convenient to come to Jesus than right now.*

Statistics show that 82% of all Christians come to Jesus before the age of 19. And here's why... the more times you say "no" the harder it is to say "yes."

Resist the Spirit and it causes a hardening of the spiritual arteries. And often the effects are irreversible.

In a sense, *commitment is never convenient*, but it's imperative. Verse 25 tells us Felix was "afraid." Like a lot of people, Governor Felix was afraid to relinquish control and surrender his life to the will of another.

But Felix had an additional motive. "Meanwhile he also hoped that money would be given him by Paul, that he might release him." Felix never filed formal charges against Paul because he hoped for a bribe.

He was expecting Paul to try and buy his freedom.

"Therefore he sent for him more often and conversed with him." Paul and Felix had numerous conversations, *yet apparently a more convenient time to get right with God never came up!* That's why the most convenient time to commit your life to Jesus is always right now!

The chapter ends, "But after two years Porcius Festus succeeded Felix; and Felix, wanting to do the Jews a favor, left Paul bound." The Jews wanted Paul to rot in prison, and the new governor was happy to comply. Paul remains under house rest for two years...

Until he concludes "enough is enough," and forces the hand of a new governor to send him to Rome.

That's where we'll pick it up next week...