



# PAUL'S LIFE AND MINISTRY

Date: 08.31.25 | Paul Defends the Gospel in Caesarea Part 1  
Scripture: Acts 23

## LEVELS OF BIBLICAL LEARNING

### MIDDLE SCHOOL:

- God values all people and calls Christians to live on mission for the sake of reaching the lost with the gospel.
- God continues to work in the world, and people are invited to join Him in His work.
- We are to be involved in reaching the nations through prayer, giving resources, acting with love, and sharing the gospel.
- The church is a fellowship of believers, and we are called to meet together regularly.
- The church is not a place or a building, but rather a community of people who belong to the family of God.

### HIGH SCHOOL:

- God values all people---born and unborn, young and old, male and female, all ethnicities, those of opposing faiths---and calls Christians to live on mission for the sake of reaching the lost through prayer, giving resources, acting with love, and sharing the gospel.
- God continues to work in the world, and as we join Him in His work, He uses people to accomplish His eternal purposes.
- We demonstrate honor for God when we respect the earthly authorities God has placed in our lives.
- The church is a community of believers called to gather regularly to study Scripture, pray, worship, serve, encourage one another, and proclaim the gospel to the world.
- The church is called to train and equip its members for works of ministry.



### MEMORY VERSE

**For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. - Romans 1:16a**

16 F l a n a o t g, f i i t p o G f s t e w b, - use this first letter memorization tool that aids in remembering text by using the first letter of each word as a cue.



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## INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITY

**Play:** Have one of the students in your class be a “walker” and another student be the “guide”. Have the walker close their eyes very tightly. Put several obstacles out in the room that they must avoid. Have the “guide” lead the “walker” around the challenges and to the other side of the room with only their words. Play several rounds, switching roles and obstacles.

**Talk about it:** How did it feel to trust your partner? What helped you feel safe when you couldn't see? Who are some people you trust? Why do you trust them? Why is it important to have people you trust in your life?

**Say:** Today, we will see how Paul trusted God as he faced danger for sharing the Gospel. We too can share the Gospel with courage, knowing that God will guide us and care for us even when we can't see what's ahead.



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## BACKGROUND INFO FOR LEADERS

### Important Terms to Know for This Lesson:

**Pharisee** – The Pharisees were a group of Jewish religious leaders who believed in obeying God's law very carefully. They also believed in angels, spirits, and that one day God would raise the dead to life again. Paul had been a Pharisee before he followed Jesus ([Acts 23:6-8](#)).

**Sadducee** – The Sadducees were another group of Jewish leaders. They were powerful and often worked closely with the priests and the temple. Unlike the Pharisees, they did not believe in angels, spirits, or the resurrection of the dead. This made them strongly opposed to Paul's message about Jesus rising from the dead ([Acts 23:8](#)).

**Sanhedrin (or council)** – The Sanhedrin was the Jewish ruling council in Jerusalem. It was made up of both Pharisees and Sadducees, along with the high priest. They made decisions about religious and legal matters for the Jewish people. Paul was brought before the Sanhedrin to explain why the Jews were accusing him ([Acts 22:30-23:1](#)).

**High Priest** – The leader of the Jewish priests who served in the temple. He was considered the most important religious authority in Israel. In this story, the high priest was Ananias, who ordered Paul to be struck ([Acts 23:2](#)).

**Tribune** – A Roman military officer in charge of about 1,000 soldiers. In this story, the tribune was Claudius Lysias, the commander who kept rescuing Paul from danger and later sent him safely to Governor Felix ([Acts 22:24; 23:10, 23](#)).

After Paul had been beaten and arrested in Jerusalem, the Roman commander was unable to determine the cause of the uproar against him. Having already tried to examine Paul by scourging but finding no answers, the commander turned instead to the Jewish council for clarity. "The next day, desiring to know the real reason why he was being accused by the Jews, he unbound him and commanded the chief priests and all the council to meet, and he brought Paul down and set him before them" ([Acts 22:30](#)). The commander was persistent, committed to upholding Roman law, and determined to learn why the Jews were so violently opposed to Paul.



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When the hearing began, Paul did not attempt to answer specific charges. Instead, he declared that his defense rested in his relationship with God: “Brothers, I have lived my life before God in all good conscience up to this day” ([Acts 23:1](#)). He was more concerned about God’s judgment than the Sanhedrin’s opinion. Though he was a Jew who now followed Jesus, he had done nothing to dishonor God. This claim, however, was inflammatory. The high priest Ananias ordered that Paul be struck on the mouth ([Acts 23:2](#)).

Paul responded sharply: “God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall!” ([Acts 23:3](#)). His words echoed the imagery of [Ezekiel 13:10–16](#) and Jesus’ condemnation of hypocrisy in [Matthew 23:27](#), where religious leaders were compared to tombs decorated on the outside but full of death within. Paul’s accusation cut to the heart: the high priest, clothed in his holy robes, was a hypocrite. Yet it was also unlawful to curse a leader of God’s people ([Exodus 22:28](#)). When one of the bystanders reminded Paul of this, he replied, “I did not know, brothers, that he was the high priest” ([Acts 23:5](#)). His words may have been genuine, since Paul had been away from Jerusalem for many years, or ironic, suggesting that Ananias’ corrupt character was unworthy of the high priesthood. Historical records describe Ananias as greedy, violent, and even a conspirator with the Romans.

Sensing the futility of a fair hearing, Paul wisely shifted strategy. Knowing that the Sanhedrin was made up of both Sadducees and Pharisees, he cried out, “It is with respect to the hope and the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial” ([Acts 23:6](#)). This statement immediately divided the council. Luke explains, “For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor angel, nor spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all” ([Acts 23:8](#)). A heated dispute followed, with Pharisees even declaring, “We find nothing wrong in this man. What if a spirit or an angel spoke to him?” ([Acts 23:9](#)). Though they did not accept Jesus’ resurrection, they defended Paul against the Sadducees. The debate escalated into violence, and once again the Roman commander had to rescue Paul, ordering him back into the barracks ([Acts 23:10](#)).

That night, when Paul’s situation seemed bleak, the Lord Himself appeared to him. “The following night the Lord stood by him and said, ‘Take courage, for as you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem, so you must testify also in Rome’” ([Acts 23:11](#)). This theophany reassured Paul that he had been right to come to Jerusalem. Though he faced opposition from Jews and suspicion from Romans, God’s sovereign plan would prevail. What seemed like the end of Paul’s ministry was actually God’s way of leading him to the very heart of the empire.

The very next morning, more than forty Jews bound themselves with an oath not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul ([Acts 23:12](#)). They planned to have the Sanhedrin request



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Paul's presence for further questioning so that they could ambush him along the narrow streets of Jerusalem ([Acts 23:13-15](#)). But God providentially intervened. Paul's young nephew overheard the plot and reported it to Paul, who then sent him to the commander ([Acts 23:16-18](#)). The tribune took the boy aside privately, listened carefully, and warned him to keep their conversation secret ([Acts 23:19-22](#)).

Recognizing the seriousness of the threat, the commander took immediate action. He ordered two centurions to gather 200 soldiers, 70 horsemen, and 200 spearmen to escort Paul safely to Caesarea under the cover of night ([Acts 23:23-24](#)). Paul was even provided with horses for the journey. In addition, the tribune wrote a letter to Felix, the Roman governor, explaining the transfer. In it, Claudius Lysias portrayed himself in a favorable light, saying he had rescued Paul upon learning of his Roman citizenship. He admitted, however, that the accusations against Paul concerned disputes about Jewish law, not Roman crimes, and that no charge deserving death or imprisonment could be found ([Acts 23:25-30](#)).

The soldiers carried out the plan exactly. They marched Paul as far as Antipatris, about 35 miles from Jerusalem, a location chosen because the open plains beyond it made an ambush less likely ([Acts 23:31](#)). From there, the cavalry continued with Paul while the others returned to Jerusalem. The escort delivered Paul to Governor Felix in Caesarea and presented the letter from Claudius Lysias ([Acts 23:32-33](#)). Felix read the letter, confirmed that Paul was from Cilicia and thus under his jurisdiction, and ordered him to be kept in Herod's praetorium until his accusers arrived ([Acts 23:34-35](#)).

Through false accusations, mistreatment, and even a murder plot, Paul persevered with trust in Jesus. The Jews meant evil against him, but God turned it for good (*cf.* [Genesis 50:20](#)), ensuring that Paul's witness would eventually reach Rome. What looked like defeat was actually God's providence. Just as the Lord stood by Paul at night and told him, "Take courage," so too He stands by us in our trials. Paul's perseverance reminds us that our steps are ordered by the Lord ([Proverbs 16:9](#)) and that nothing can thwart His plan to accomplish His good purposes.



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## LOCATE THE SCRIPTURE & TELL THE STORY

Remind your group that we are studying the New Testament. Throughout the book of Acts, Paul traveled on missionary journeys, sharing the Gospel and helping to gather groups of new believers into the first churches.



### TELL THE STORY - Acts 23

Paul was a Pharisee who hurt Christians and put them in jail. Paul had an amazing encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus. Paul was saved and became a Christian! Next, God called Paul to become a missionary. We learned about Paul's missionary journeys and how he told Jews and Gentiles about Jesus. During his missionary travels, he also started many churches. Last week, we saw how Paul traveled back to Jerusalem and was arrested. Today, we'll see what happened to Paul as he was on trial and faithfully continued to share the Gospel. Paul, along with many other believers, faced persecution and danger because they shared the good news of Jesus, but Paul trusted that God would use the hardships he faced as part of His good plan.

Paul was in danger. After traveling from city to city, telling people about Jesus, he had nearly been killed in Jerusalem by an angry crowd. A Roman commander and his soldiers stepped in and rescued Paul. They took Paul to a safe place.

The next day, the Romans brought Paul to a powerful group of Jewish priests and other leaders. These Jewish leaders wanted to know why Paul was causing problems.

Paul was wise and had a plan. He knew that some of the leaders were Pharisees, and others were Sadducees. Pharisees were religious leaders who taught the law. Sadducees were wealthy religious leaders in charge of the temple. Each group held different beliefs, so Paul knew exactly what to say to provoke them into arguing with each other.

Paul looked straight at the men and said, "I am a Pharisee! I have always tried to do what God wants me to do. I am here because I believe in the resurrection of the dead!" Paul's words made the Pharisees happy because they, too, believed in the resurrection.

But the Sadducees disagreed with what Paul said. Soon, the room was filled with loud arguing between the Pharisees and the Sadducees. This made the Roman commander



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nervous. He was afraid Paul would be hurt in all the commotion, so he ordered his soldiers to take Paul away to a safe place.

That night, the Lord came to Paul. “Have courage!” He said to Paul. “You told me in Jerusalem. I want you to tell about me in Rome, too.”

In the morning, a group of Jews got together and made a plan to kill Paul. They promised not to eat or drink until Paul was dead. These men told the Jewish leaders about their plan.

Paul's nephew overheard their conversation. He hurried to tell Paul everything, and Paul sent him to inform the commander of this important information.

The commander understood that Paul was in great danger. He ordered his soldiers to get ready to travel. They brought a horse for Paul to ride on. Then, in the middle of the night, the soldiers secretly took Paul away to Caesarea, where he would be safe.



## RETELL THE STORY



## SHARE THE GOSPEL

Paul trusted God and believed that God, who showed His love for the world by sending His Son to die on the cross and rise again, would use the danger Paul faced to get Paul to Rome. We too can risk everything to share the Gospel with courage because we know that God loves us and will care for us.



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## QUESTIONS TO REBUILD THE STORY

Paul was often in danger as he traveled to share the Gospel with those who needed to hear. In our story today, Paul was attacked by an angry mob and was rescued by Roman soldiers. Paul was then brought before a group of religious leaders who wanted to know why Paul was causing so much trouble. **What did Paul say when he found out he was speaking to the high priest?** (*Acts 23:5*) Paul understood that it was important to talk about the truth of the Gospel with courage, but also to be respectful of others, especially those in authority like the religious leaders. When we treat others with respect, we honor the Lord and demonstrate trust in God, knowing that those leaders are not outside God's control.

Paul was taken to a safe place, away from the rioting crowd. **What did God say to Paul?** (*Acts 23:11*) God told Paul to have courage because He wanted to use Paul to share the Gospel in Rome. God was not finished helping Paul take the good news around the world. God would use this dangerous situation to get Paul to Rome to share the Gospel with those who had not yet heard. Paul was willing to risk everything to share the Gospel because he trusted that God would take care of him.

The Roman soldiers learned that the Jews had made a plan to kill Paul. **Even when Paul's life was in danger, how did God show He was in control?** (*Acts 23:16*) God had allowed Paul's nephew to overhear the Jew's plan and report it. Nothing is outside God's plan for our lives. He is wise and good. Even when times are difficult and scary, we can trust Him.

**Does trusting God mean we will never have sadness or difficult times? Why not?** Even Jesus, the Son of God, had sad and difficult times. We live in a world filled with sin, so there will be times when we suffer. Remember that we trust God, knowing that no matter what we face, He is with us. Through Jesus, He has saved us, and we have the hope of life with Him forever.

**What is the greatest way God has proven that He loves and cares for us?** God sent His one and only Son, Jesus, to be the perfect sacrifice for our sins because He loves us. Sin is the greatest problem anyone has. Through Jesus, God provided the way for us to be saved.



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He met our greatest need, and we can trust Him to meet every other need we have.

**How can we demonstrate our trust in the Lord?** When we obey what God tells us in His Word, we demonstrate our trust in Him. We can trust the Lord because His plans for His children are good.

**Describe a time when you praised Jesus. Do you praise Jesus when times are going well? What about when times are tough?** Today's story reminds us that Paul faced hard times, but he continued to trust God. Trusting God during hard times is a way to praise Him.

**How do you share the love of Jesus when sinful people surround you?**

**How does our faith in Jesus help us not fear the sinful actions of others?**

**What does this story teach me about God or the gospel?**

**What does the story teach me about myself?**

**Are there any commands in this story to obey? How are they for God's glory and my good?**

**Are there any promises in this story to remember? How do they help me trust and love God?**

**How does this story help me live on mission?**



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## PRAYER PROMPTS

*Thank You, Lord, for Your love and care for us. Thank You for sending Jesus as the sacrifice for our sin. Help us confidently and courageously trust You, knowing You are in control and care for us. Amen.*

## REVIEW UNIT VERSE:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. - Romans 1:16a

16 F l a n a o t g, f i i t p o G f s t e w b, - use this first letter memorization tool that aids in remembering text by using the first letter of each word as a cue.



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## ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

**ATTENTIVE** - God hears and responds to the needs of his children.

**COMPASSIONATE** - God cares for his children and acts on their behalf.

**CREATOR** - God made everything. He is uncreated.

**DELIVERER** - God rescues and saves his children.

**ETERNAL** - God is not limited by time. He exists outside of time.

**FAITHFUL** - God always keeps his promises.

**GENEROUS** - God gives what is best and beyond what is deserved.

**GLORIOUS** - God displays His greatness and worth.

**GOOD** - God is what is best and gives what is best. He is incapable of doing harm.

**HOLY** - God is perfect, pure, and without sin.

**IMMUTABLE/UNCHANGING** - God never changes. He is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

**INCOMPREHENSIBLE** - God is beyond our understanding. We can comprehend Him in part but not in whole.

**INFINITE** - God has not limits in His person or on His power.

**JEALOUS** - God will not share his glory with another. all glory rightfully belongs to him.

**JUST** - God is fair in all his actions and judgements. He cannot over-punish or under-punish.

**LOVING** - God feels and displays infinite, unconditional affection toward his children. His love for them does not depend on their worth, response, or merit.

**MERCIFUL** - God does not give his children the punishment they deserve.

**OMNIPOTENT/ALMIGHTY** - God holds all power. nothing is too hard for God. What He wills He can accomplish.



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## ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

OMNIPRESENT - God is fully present everywhere.

OMNISCIENT - God knows everything, past, present, and future - all potential and real outcomes, all things micro and macro.

PATIENT/LONG-SUFFERING - God is untiring and bears with His children.

PROVIDER - God meets the needs of his children.

REFUGE - God is a place of safety and protection for his children.

RIGHTEOUS - God is always good and right.

SELF-EXISTENT - God depends on nothing and no one to give him life or existence.

SELF-SUFFICIENT - God is not vulnerable. He has no needs.

SOVEREIGN - God does everything according to His plan and pleasure.

TRANSCENDENT - God is not like humans. He is infinitely higher in being and action.

TRUTHFUL - Whatever God speaks or does is truth and reality.

WISE - God knows what is best and acts accordingly. He cannot choose wrongly.

WORTHY - God deserves all glory and honor and praise.

WRATHFUL - God hates all unrighteousness.



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## Application Questions

LOOK UPWARD



- How does this story apply to your relationship with God?
- What does it teach you about Him- His will and His heart?
- What aspect of His character is He inviting you to experience and enjoy?
- How will you benefit by applying the truths of this story in your relationship with God?
- What practical steps can you take to live out these truths in your relationship with God?

LOOK INWARD



- How does this story apply to your heart and your own spiritual growth?
- What does it teach you about yourself, your needs, or your goals in life?
- In what aspects of your personal life is God inviting you to grow and mature?
- How will you benefit by applying the truths of this story inwardly?
- How will those around you benefit?
- What practical steps can you take to allow these truths to help you grow spiritually?

LOOK AROUND



- How does this story apply to your relationship with others?
- What does it teach you about how to see others and relate to them?
- What is god inviting you to do differently in your relationships?



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## Application Questions

LOOK OUTWARD



- How does this story apply to your ministry and mission in life- to your role in God's kingdom, in society, and the world?
- What does it teach you about God's purposes for the world?
- What part of His mission is He inviting you to participate in?
- How will you benefit by applying the truths of this story in your ministry?
- How will the world benefit?
- What practical steps can you take to live out these truths in the world?

LOOK FORWARD



- How does this story apply to your future, both in this age and in eternity?
- What does it teach you about God's plan for your life, now and forever?
- What aspects of eternity is God inviting you to participate in?
- How will you benefit in the future by applying these truths now?
- How will God's kingdom benefit?
- What practical steps can you take to impact eternity now with these truths?