

## Bi134 Acts

### *Lesson Bi134-39 Trials in Jerusalem*

Have you ever been caught outside in a violent storm? The rain is pounding and the wind whipping! That's a bit how Paul must have felt when the mob surrounded him in the temple courts in Jerusalem. Had it not been for the Roman soldiers, the rioters may have killed him.

Incited by some Jewish rabble-rousers, the unruly mob flooded into the temple courts. They wanted to get at the apostle Paul. The Roman soldiers, however, were able to keep them at bay. The commander of the troop discovered that Paul was from Tarsus and spoke Greek. So he gave him permission to address the crowd. Then, when Paul began to speak to them in their own Jewish language, the place fell silent.

Paul then reminded his hearers of how he, too, was once a zealous follower of the law of Moses and a violent persecutor of the church. He then launched into the story of his conversion. He told how his life was transformed when he encountered the resurrected Christ on the road to Damascus. Finally, he told them how Jesus had commissioned him to preach the gospel to the Gentiles.

When the crowd heard Paul speak about the Gentiles, they were infuriated. They began tearing at their clothes and throwing dust into the air. Someone shouted, "Rid the earth of this man! He is not fit to live!" The commander also became caught up in the frenzy and ordered a centurion to flog Paul; then question him. But Paul surprised the centurion by asking, "Is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen who hasn't even been found guilty?" When the commander heard that Paul was a freeborn Roman citizen, he was alarmed and relented. Still, he kept Paul in chains (Acts 21:37-22:29).

The next day, the commander delivered Paul to a meeting of the Jewish high court, known as the Sanhedrin. They gave Paul permission to speak. Knowing that the assembly was divided between Pharisees and Sadducees, Paul began, "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." When they heard this, the Pharisees (who believe in the resurrection) and the Sadducees (who do not believe in the resurrection) began yelling at each other. The assembly fell into such confusion that the commander once again had to order his soldiers to rescue Paul. They took him back to the barracks. The next night, the Lord Jesus appeared to Paul and told him, "Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome" (Acts 23:1-11).

The next morning a group of about 40 Jews hatched a plot against Paul. They bound themselves with an oath, vowing that they would neither eat nor drink until they had killed him. They told the Jewish rulers about their plan, asking for their help. As a ruse, the chief priests and elders were to ask that Paul be brought before the Sanhedrin for questioning. The conspirators would then pounce on him and kill him on his way to the meeting.

Paul's nephew heard about the plot and told Paul. The apostle called for his guard and had him take the boy to Claudius Lysias, the commander of the barracks. The boy told Lysias

about the plot. That night, the commander had Paul transferred to Caesarea, escorted by a large detachment of soldiers. He wrote a letter to Felix, the governor of Judea, telling him of the situation. He stated that he had examined Paul and had found no charge against him deserving death or imprisonment (Acts 23:12-30).

When Paul spoke to the crowd in Jerusalem, he told them he had met Jesus on the road to Damascus. He would share this testimony again before King Agrippa.

Paul's experience in Damascus was significant for there he had three life-changing encounters. First, he encountered the resurrected Christ, who transformed his life forever. Next, he encountered a disciple named Ananias who prayed with him and told him, "The God of our fathers has chosen you to know his will and to ... be his witness to all men of what you have seen and heard" (Acts 22:14-15). Finally, Paul encountered the Holy Spirit who filled and empowered him to fulfil the task that God had given him. In the rest of Acts, Luke presents Paul as a man who walked in the power of the Holy Spirit. At times, Luke does not say that Paul was full of the Spirit. We can rightfully assume, however, that he is ministering in the Spirit's power.

With this in mind, let's take a moment to reflect on the empowering work of the Holy Spirit in the Book of Acts. One of Luke's main purposes in writing Acts was to present to the church a strategy for effective witness everywhere. At the center of that strategy is the enabling work of the Holy Spirit. He is indeed the Superintendent of the Harvest! He enables the church to fulfill its mandate to preach the gospel to all nations before Jesus comes again. He does this in at least three essential ways:

First, the Holy Spirit enables the church to fulfill God's mission by inspiring its members to get involved. He is ever working in believers' hearts to move them out of their places of comfort into his fields of service. He did this with Peter. When the elders in Jerusalem asked him why he went to the Gentiles in Caesarea, Peter explained, "The Spirit told me to have no hesitation about going with them" (Acts 11:12). The Spirit did the same thing in the church at Antioch. When the time came for the church to send out missionaries to the nations, the Holy Spirit moved in their midst. He told them, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them" (Acts 13:2).

In the same way, the Holy Spirit will help us to mobilize the church today. We must ensure that our church members are filled with the Spirit and allow him to move freely in our churches. Then he will inspire our people to get involved in missions.

Another way the Holy Spirit enables the church to fulfill God's mission is by empowering Christians for witness. Jesus promised his disciples, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

The Spirit empowers our witness in various ways. He inspires our teaching and preaching. He gives us boldness and insight into the gospel and into the lives of those to whom we are ministering. And as we preach the gospel, he manifests his presence through spiritual

gifts, including confirming signs and wonders. We, like the disciples before the Day of Pentecost, must faithfully wait until we have been clothed with power from on high.

A third way the Holy Spirit enables the church to fulfill God's mission is by encouraging workers who are hard at work in ministry. In today's story, the Holy Spirit gave Paul a dream. In that dream the Lord stood near him and told him, "Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome." Because of this, Paul was encouraged to continue in his work.

As he did with Paul, Peter, and others, the Holy Spirit will come to us in our times of great trial and discouragement. He will comfort us through dreams, visions, and inner works of grace. As we seek the Lord's face, the Spirit will keep us focused on the mission of God. The Bible says that we can build ourselves up and keep ourselves in the love of God by praying in the Holy Spirit.

This lesson is **important** because in it we learn how the Holy Spirit will help us to fulfill God's mission.

The **main truth** we learn from this lesson is that we should allow the Spirit to empower us and direct us in ministry.

Let's **review** some important truths we have learned from this lesson.

1. In our story, how did Paul respond when he was falsely accused?  
A. [PAUSE] If you answered that he defended himself, but he also used the opportunity to preach the gospel, you answered correctly.
2. How did the Holy Spirit encourage Paul during his difficult time in Jerusalem?  
A. [PAUSE] If you answered that the Holy Spirit gave him a dream in which Jesus came to him and spoke words of encouragement, you are right.
3. Name three ways the Holy Spirit enables us to fulfill God's mission.  
A. [PAUSE] If you answered, The Holy Spirit enables us to fulfill God's mission by inspiring us, by empowering us, and by sustaining us in ministry, you are correct.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to listen to it two or three more times or until you can tell the story of the Paul's experience in the temple in Jerusalem to others. Also, you should gather a group of believers together and discuss the three ways the Holy Spirit enables Christians in fulfilling God's mission.