

Aim of lesson

To learn from the arrest of Paul and the plot against him, how we can be influenced in our actions by other people and self interest.

Bible background

Acts 21:17-40; 22; 23.

Outline of lesson

Ask the class if they can remember what Paul had been warned would happen to him in Jerusalem (20:23; 21:11).

Welcomed, seized and arrested

Divide the class into three groups. Have each read one of the following sections, and then explain to the rest of the class what they have read. They should also explain which illustration(s) at the top of the worksheet relate to their section. The sections are:

- Acts 21:17-26,
- Acts 21:27-32
- Acts 21: 33-40.

If your class has insufficient members for three groups, the third section can be done by both groups.

Speech from the steps

Read together Paul's speech in Acts 22:1-21. Then, by asking questions, have the class search through the rest of the chapter. Suggested questions are:

- What was the crowd's reaction to Paul's speech?
- What do you think upset them most?
- What did the commander do?
- How did Paul avoid being flogged?
- How did the commander feel when he learned that Paul was a Roman citizen?
- What did the commander arrange the next day?

These questions can form a simple quiz between the three groups if you wish.

Peer pressure

Get the class to consider the question in the workbook, 'Who is being carried along by the crowd?' In a literal sense, Paul is carried by the soldiers with the crowd pressing all round. In a more figurative sense, the people of Jerusalem are carried along by the Jews from Asia (Acts 21:27-28). The behaviour of this crowd (and they would have murdered Paul if they had not been stopped) was probably not what any of them would have done if they had been alone and had had time to think. They were carried along by the crowd, and influenced by a few men with strong grudges, and later by their own prejudices against the Gentiles.

Delivered from the Jews

Divide the class into the three groups again to read Acts 23:1-11,12-22,23-36. Have them report back on what they have read and identify the appropriate illustration again. Alternatively, if your class find reading difficult, you could tell them what happened and have them identify the illustrations.

Discuss with the class the motives behind the action of the four groups depicted on the worksheet – the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the forty or more Jewish plotters, and the Roman commander. Each in some way is 'carried along' by selfish motives. The Pharisees and Sadducees are interested not in whether what Paul says is true, but whether it supports their position. The plotters probably thought they were serving God, having taken an oath, in planning to kill Paul, though their actions are condemned by all the Scriptures which they hold sacred, and the commander twists the truth in his letter in order to show himself in a better light.

Digging deeper

The Sanhedrin

This section explains what the Sanhedrin (Council in some Bibles) was, and investigates people who were in it or associated with it.

Relevance to our lives

Use the last box in the workbook to encourage the class to suggest how we can be 'carried along with the crowd'. They may think of situations at school where they would feel left out if they did not join in, and yet they would not choose such behaviour – like, for instance, not speaking to one member of the class. They may choose their clothes or their language on the basis that 'everyone else does it'. You may like to ask the class to consider this week how much they are influenced by what others do and say.

Prayer

You could ask the class about God's viewpoint on how we make our decisions. Encourage the class to discuss what we should pray for on this subject. Help them to see the need to pray for God to help us to consider his views of what we do as more important than those of anyone else. The class could write a prayer on this subject or agree to pray about it during the week.

Other suggestions for activities

- Since there is a lot of action in this lesson, the class may find it useful to make a 'cartoon strip' set of pictures, illustrating the events in sequence.
- The class could write a letter from a Roman soldier telling what happened from his point of view.