

Acts Chapter Twenty-Three

Acts 23:1-5

And Paul, looking intently at the Council, said, "Brethren, I have lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day." And the high priest Ananias commanded those standing beside him to strike him on the mouth. Then Paul said to him, "God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall! And do you sit to try me according to the Law, and in violation of the Law order me to be struck?" But the bystanders said, "Do you revile God's high priest?" And Paul said, "I was not aware, brethren, that he was high priest; for it is written, 'YOU SHALL NOT SPEAK EVIL OF A RULER OF YOUR PEOPLE.'"

- Paul had tried to tell his story/make his defense the day before
- Brethren—calls them brethren—rather than rulers
- A good conscience before God up to this day—I Cor 4:4—Paul is struck due to accusation of blasphemy
- Ananias—a High Priest who was known for his greed—stole from the tithes—later, because of his pro-Roman politics—he is killed by Jewish nationalists.
- Under Roman law—no man was to be punished prior to a judgment
- Paul was arrested/accused—but not yet found guilty of a charge. Roman law required justice.
- Paul states that the High Priest is breaking the Law—which he has said he was zealous to keep (Deut 25:1-2)
- Paul seems to be unaware that he is dealing with the High Priest—it has been 20 years since he would have had contact
- Exodus 22:28—shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people
- Romans 13:7
- Paul apologizes when he learns he is dealing with the High Priest

Acts 23:6-8

But perceiving that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, Paul *began* crying out in the Council, "Brethren, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees; I am on trial for the hope and resurrection of the dead!" And as he said this, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and Sadducees; and the assembly was divided. For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor an angel, nor a spirit; but the Pharisees acknowledge them all.

- Perceiving—he is able to discern his audience—responds accordingly

- Paul uses discord between 2 parties to further his own defense
- Paul turns trial into a theological argument
- Pharisees then come to Paul's defense
- Paul turns from sharing the gospel to dividing his audience—to make one part sympathetic toward him—instead of united against him.

Acts 23:9-11

And there arose a great uproar; and some of the scribes of the Pharisaic party stood up and *began* to argue heatedly, saying, "We find nothing wrong with this man; suppose a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?" And as a great dissension was developing, the commander was afraid Paul would be torn to pieces by them and ordered the troops to go down and take him away from them by force, and bring him into the barracks.

But on the night *immediately* following, the Lord stood at his side and said, "Take courage; for as you have solemnly witnessed to My cause at Jerusalem, so you must witness at Rome also."

- Great uproar—dissension—probably the greatest Paul faces in the whole Book of Acts
- Paul immediately gains the Pharisees as his ally—they argue with the Sadducees—who are their bitter enemies. These two companies had joined sides to oppose Jesus—Matt 16:1, John 11:47-53
- At first—group is in conflict over the mention of the gentiles—now they are in conflict over the topic of resurrection.
- Commander reaches in once more to spare Paul's life
- This word from the Lord—assurance that Paul was not out of the Lord's will in coming to Jerusalem
- Paul is given information/promise from the Lord—he will be a witness in Rome—his next assignment
- Prior to this event—Paul was miraculously delivered from jail cells—now—the Lord enters the cell to encourage him.
- Take courage—used 5 times in the NT—Matt 9:2, 9:22, 14:27, John 16:33, Acts 23:11
- You have solemnly witnessed to my cause—a comment of approval from Jesus—in spite of little results
- A promise of more to do—also a promise of continued protection—this will be a source of encouragement during the next two years.

Acts 23:12-15

And when it was day, the Jews formed a conspiracy and bound themselves under an oath, saying that they would neither eat nor drink until they had killed Paul. And there were more than forty who formed this plot. And they came to the chief priests and the elders, and said, "We have bound ourselves under a solemn oath to taste nothing until we have killed Paul. "Now, therefore, you and the Council notify the commander to bring him down to you, as though you were going to determine his case by a more thorough investigation; and we for our part are ready to slay him before he comes near *the place*."

- In their zeal—a group bind themselves with an oath—to not eat or drink—until they kill Paul. Must have expected it would be possible for 40 of them to accomplish this.
- The assassins wanted the priests/council to lie—to gain access to Paul (willing to sin to accomplish their zealous goals).

Acts 23:16-22

But the son of Paul's sister heard of their ambush, and he came and entered the barracks and told Paul. And Paul called one of the centurions to him and said, "Lead this young man to the commander, for he has something to report to him." So he took him and led him to the commander and said, "Paul the prisoner called me to him and asked me to lead this young man to you since he has something to tell you." And the commander took him by the hand and stepping aside, *began* to inquire of him privately, "What is it that you have to report to me?" And he said, "The Jews have agreed to ask you to bring Paul down tomorrow to the Council, as though they were going to inquire somewhat more thoroughly about him. "So do not listen to them, for more than forty of them are lying in wait for him who have bound themselves under a curse not to eat or drink until they slay him; and now they are ready and waiting for the promise from you." Therefore the commander let the young man go, instructing him, "Tell no one that you have notified me of these things."

- We learn a bit more about Paul's family—he has a sister and a nephew
- God accomplishes protection using a relative and the Romans

Acts 23:23-30

And he called to him two of the centurions, and said, "Get two hundred soldiers ready by the third hour of the night to proceed to Caesarea, with seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen." *They were* also to provide mounts to put Paul on and bring him safely to Felix the governor. And he wrote a letter having this form:

" Claudius Lysias, to the most excellent governor Felix, greetings.

" When this man was arrested by the Jews and was about to be slain by them, I came upon them with the troops and rescued him, having learned that he was a Roman.

" And wanting to ascertain the charge for which they were accusing him, I brought him down to their Council;

and I found him to be accused over questions about their Law, but under no accusation deserving death or imprisonment.

" And when I was informed that there would be a plot against the man, I sent him to you at once, also instructing his accusers to bring charges against him before you."

- 470 trained Roman soldiers escort him out of Jerusalem
- Paul rides out—not walk
- The day before—these soldiers were ready to beat Paul—now they are given for his protection
- A centurion has 100 soldiers under his authority
- Letter sent by Claudius Lysias—at that time the sender put their name at the beginning rather than the end of a letter
- Claudius—never quite sure of any charges/accusations against Paul
- Under Roman law—Paul was not guilty of anything worthy of imprisonment or death
- Letter is written as though this is a rescue effort on Paul's behalf
- Caesarea was the official center of Roman government. Governor might go up to Jerusalem to conduct business—but residence was in Caesarea.
- Felix had been born a slave—after being given freedom along with his brother Pallas—he became a favorite of Emperor Claudius
- During his term of office in Judea—52-59 AD—things went from bad to worse—ending with a Jewish revolt against Rome

Acts 23:31-35

So the soldiers, in accordance with their orders, took Paul and brought him by night to Antipatris. But the next day, leaving the horsemen to go on with him, they returned to the barracks. And when these had come to Caesarea and delivered the letter to the governor, they also presented Paul to him. And when he had read it, he asked from what province he was; and when he learned that he was from Cilicia, he said, "I will give you a hearing after your accusers arrive also," giving orders for him to be kept in Herod's Praetorium.

- Antipatris—30-40 miles from Jerusalem—open country after this the rest of the way to Caesarea.
- Since he was from Cilicia—Felix was responsible to hear this case.
- Paul will speak before the governor—beginning of promise made 20 years earlier in Acts 9:15
- This became a period of 2 years confinement for Paul

Acts Chapter Twenty-three—Workbook

Key Words:

Harmonize:

Read Romans 13:1-7 and I Peter 2:11-20

Dig:

- 1) Why would the high priest respond violently to what Paul states in vs 1?
- 2) When does Paul choose to speak harshly? When does he use reasoning? When are signs and wonders the reason for an open door?
- 3) When Paul's audience is the Pharisees and the Sadducees—what does Paul assume will happen when he brings up the topic of resurrection?
- 4) How does the Lord encourage Paul—in the midst of this conflict? What does he know as a result?
- 5) Why can Paul declare what he does in verse 1?
- 6) Why is Paul such a threat to Judaism?
- 7) What part of chapter 23 demonstrates God's miraculous help? Could it be overlooked and seen as just coincidence?
- 8) Who is opposed to Paul in this chapter? Who does God use to 'save' Paul?
- 9) What elements of chapter 23 correspond to Jesus' last week in Jerusalem?

10) How did Claudius Lysias make himself look good in his letter to Felix?

11) Where is Paul kept in Caesarea?

Discuss:

- 1) Pharisees and Sadducees were two differing elements in Judaism. What would their equivalent be in the church? Is there a remedy for such division?
- 2) How do Paul's experiences with Roman authority shed light on his comments in Romans 13:1-7? Where did Jesus model submission to human authority? When did he choose to submit to the authority of His Father instead?

Point of Prayer:

Pray for who God would raise up to be the next President of the United States.

Integrate:

What other scriptures come to mind as you read this chapter?

Application:

- 1) Could you say about your life, what Paul says about his life in vs. 1?
- 2) Have you ever justified doing something 'wrong' for what you saw as the greater good?

- 3) In the midst of a trial, do you readily turn to scripture? Share a verse that has comforted you in the midst of a trial.

- 4) Has the Lord shared something with you—given a promise or vision—that has not come to pass? Does this cause you to doubt or does it fuel your faith?

- 5) Is there any part of the description about Paul's nephew that would make you guess his age?

- 6) When someone takes your 'side' in a conflict—does it encourage you? How? Why?

- 7) How are you encouraged by the faithfulness in Paul's life?