

Acts 23 – God’s Providential Protection

I. Paul is Delivered From the Sanhedrin (1-10)

A. Paul Restrains Himself For the Gospel (1-5)

1. Paul Begins His Defense (1)

- a. What does “looked intently” (earnestly beholding) mean here? Courageous? Angry? With Resolve?
- b. Paul begins what he probably thinks will be yet another defense of the faith. He starts by calling them “Men and brethren”
- c. He claims to have a clean conscience before God
 - i. This indicates that in lieu of the charges that are being brought against him, his conscience is clear
 - ii. This doesn’t mean he has a good conscience about his actions in persecuting believers before his conversion.

2. Paul Lashes Out After Being Struck (2-3)

- a. Paul is Struck on the Mouth
 - i. Ananias the High Priest orders Paul to be struck
 - Why was Paul ordered to be struck?
 - Because he was arrogant in his speech? Because he tried to stare them down? Because he was not permitted to speak yet? To demonstrate that what he has said so far is untruthful?
 - Notice that the text doesn’t actually say Paul is struck – was he?
- b. Paul pronounces judgment on the one ordering it (3)
 - i. Paul reacts explosively
 - ii. Paul references Ezekiel 13:8-15 in his rebuke of the one ordering him to be struck
 - The white-washed wall looks solid on the outside, but it will eventually fall
 - This could also allude to what Jesus said about religious leaders being white-washed tombs (Matt. 23:27) – The Jews painted tomb faces white during festival weeks so people would not become defiled by touching them inadvertently. It looked pretty but it was defiling
- c. Paul accuses him of hypocrisy
 - i. Paul says that the one judging by the law has broken the law
 - ii. Leviticus 19:15 declares that judges are not to do unjustly in court. There were very strict laws

about prisoners and justice. To strike him before a hearing was breaking that law

- iii. NOTE: This probably opened Paul's eyes a bit. Remember that The Roman (Lysias) had brought Paul there just to get information about his so-called offenses. Paul probably realized that this was turning into a witch hunt that he would not be able to talk himself out of. He will get no "fair" hearing here.

3. Paul Composes Himself (4-5)

a. Paul is informed of the High Priest's Identity (4)

- i. "Those standing by" – are these attendants? Are they part of the council standing around? Some suggest that the council was not actually in session and this was an informal meeting

b. Paul Acts in accordance with Scripture (5)

- i. Why doesn't Paul know the Identity of the High Priest?

- Possibilities
- Paul didn't know exactly who gave the order?
- Paul didn't remember Ananias was the High Priest? (the last time Paul was in Jerusalem was years earlier)
- Paul is implying that the man giving such an order couldn't possibly be the high priest?
- Paul couldn't see very good?

- ii. Paul realizes He will get no fair hearing

- They are united against him
- They are willing to undermine God's law to condemn him

- iii. Paul realizes that he himself may be accused of subverting God's law by his outburst

- Paul apologizes, citing Exodus 22:28
- Paul does not wish to give offense or subvert the law in any way, even when he is being treated unjustly
- He does not repay evil for evil
- But he will also not offer himself up as a martyr on a platter...

B. Paul is Delivered By a Violent Disagreement (6-10)

1. Paul Plays on the Sanhedrin's Division (6)

a. Paul perceives the division in the council

- i. Paul understands that there are both Sadducees and Pharisees on the Council

- ii. Being a Pharisee, Paul knows all too well the points of disagreement between them (these will be discussed below)
 - b. Paul announces he is being tried for his belief in the resurrection (6)
 - i. Was Paul simply talking about the central claim of his preaching – the resurrection?
 - ii. Did Paul intend to drop a hand grenade in the middle of the council by citing the source of much contention between the two groups?
 - iii. Why does Paul say “I AM a Pharisee” and not “I was a Pharisee?”
2. The Council Erupts in Argument (7-10)
- a. They begin arguing with one another (7-9a)
 - i. The Sadducees believe only the Pentateuch (the first five books written by Moses). They wrongly believed that these books didn’t teach resurrection or spiritual afterlife so they rejected the idea.
 - Jesus proved that the books of Moses do indeed teach the resurrection and afterlife (see Matt. 22:23-33)
 - ii. The Pharisees believed the entire Tanak (The Old Testament) and therefore held to the prophets’ teachings on resurrection, spirits, etc.
 - b. Some Pharisees declare Paul’s innocence (9b)
 - i. “Scribes of the Pharisees” These are the scholars or lawyers in the Pharisee party
 - ii. They declare that since supernatural visions and revelations are real, Paul may have indeed been given a message from God
 - Notice that they do not say it was the Messiah, nor would they agree with Paul’s preaching
 - They are simply arguing for their position. They are simply saying there is nothing illegal about claiming to have received a supernatural message about resurrection.
 - They wouldn’t agree with his testimony, but they admit that it isn’t against the law
 - c. Paul is taken away from the scene (10)
 - i. The argument becomes a dissension (near riot) in the council chamber. Suddenly, Paul fades into the background as everyone fights for their own theological position

- ii. The Roman actually fears for Paul's life. He already fears reprisal from Rome for putting Paul in chains, he can't allow Paul to be harmed in the religious council
 - iii. The Roman orders soldiers to take Paul away
 - iv. The Roman just wanted information about Paul's alleged crime, but a riot has broken out among the religious leaders just as it had broke out among the people.
 - 3. Paul was providentially delivered from the Sanhedrin because God has other plans for him.
- II. Paul is Given A Vision of Divine Assurance (11)
 - A. God Tells Paul to "Take Courage"
 - 1. Paul is instructed to stay strong and remain resolute in his testimony and witness
 - 2. God is using him. He must not allow himself to despair or to become frustrated with his circumstances
 - B. God Tells Paul that He will Testify in Rome just as He has in Jerusalem
 - 1. God assures Paul that he will testify in Rome
 - a. He doesn't tell Paul exactly how he will get there
 - b. This is both an assurance and a warning
 - i. In one sense, Paul will be divinely protected from death until he is able to testify in Rome. He is assured that he will not die here
 - ii. On the other hand, his preaching has gotten him into some tough situations, and now he is going into the heart of the Empire to preach
 - 2. God approves of Paul's testimony in Jerusalem
 - a. By saying that Paul will go testify in Rome, just as he has in Jerusalem, God is implying that his ministry in Jerusalem is approved
 - b. Paul's circumstances may not have turned out good in a physical sense, but he is approved by God
- III. Paul is Delivered From the Threat of Death (12-35)
 - A. A Plot To Kill Paul Develops (12-15)
 - 1. Many Jews Plot to Kill Paul (12-13)
 - a. They bound themselves with a curse – they pronounced an anathema on themselves if they failed to kill Paul
 - i. They invoked God's curse upon them if they fail
 - ii. There were about 40 of them
 - b. They also made an oath not to eat or drink until he is dead. – This means it would have to happen in a day or two.
 - 2. They Inform the Jewish Leaders of their Intentions (14)
 - a. The Jewish council and leaders are made aware of their plot

3. They ask for Paul to be called to council again (15)
4. They plan to kill him in route to the chamber
 - a. They can't kill Paul in the Roman garrison but they can ambush him on the way to the council, if they can get him there.
 - b. Perhaps these 40 men would hide among the crowd and strike at the opportune time
- B. The Romans are Warned of the Plot (16-21)
 1. Paul's Nephew Hears of the Plot (16)
 - a. Paul has a nephew?
 - b. Paul has a nephew that just happened to be in the right place to hear about this plot? Coincidence?
 2. Paul's Nephew is taken to the Roman commander (17-18)
 3. Paul's Nephew Informs About the Plot (19-21)
 - a. "The Jews Will Call for an audience" (19-20)
 - b. "The Jews will wait in ambush to kill Paul " (21)
- C. Paul is Delivered From Danger (22-35)
 1. The commander prepares for Paul's departure (22-24)
 - a. He commands Paul's nephew to remain silent (22)
 - b. He calls for a 470 soldier escort (23)
 - c. He commands Paul to be brought to Caesarea (24)
 - i. Paul will now be escorted out of the city like a VIP – the letter the commander sends with Paul also shows him to be of some importance
 - ii. Paul is still a prisoner as we will see, but we see that God has fulfilled his promise to Paul through all these unbelievers – even in the midst of the crooked world, God is in control
 - iii. This will be Paul's final departure from Jerusalem
 - d. Caesarea was the seat of the provincial government in the region – Felix is the governor
 2. The commander writes a letter to accompany Paul (26-30)
 - a. Introduction and address (26)
 - b. Explanation of Paul's predicament (27)
 - i. Notice how he conveniently forgets to mention that he learned of Paul's citizenship after he had been put in chains
 - ii. He makes it sound like he was protecting a Roman from the beginning
 - c. Description of the commanders investigation (28-29)
 - d. Reason For sending Paul to Caesarea (30)
 3. The commanders escort delivers Paul to Felix (31-35)
 - a. Paul is taken to Caesarea (31-32)
 - b. Paul and the letter are presented to Felix (33)
 - c. Paul is held until his accusers arrive (34-35)