

THE COUNCIL AND THE CONSPIRACY

Acts 23

Introduction:

- 1. Right thinking people have always honored those who stood without compromise for truth and righteousness.**
 - a. These heroes have not usually been so honored by their peers.**
 - b. Often they were beaten, slandered, imprisoned and/or killed.**
- 2. After his conversion to Christ, Paul never once looked back.**
 - a. He was continually harassed and hunted by the Jews.**
 - b. Within the Lord's church he had enemies, especially Judaizers.**
- 3. In Acts 23, Paul is brought before a council of the Jews who were seeking an excuse to put him to death.**
- 4. He had to be rescued again by the Roman soldiers who had earlier saved him from the Jewish mob.**
- 5. The Roman commander ordered the Jews to appear before him to bring their charges against Paul.**

Discussion:

- I. PAUL DEFENDED HIMSELF BEFORE THE COUNCIL (1-10).**
 - A. Paul's opening statement was, "I have lived before God in all good conscience until this day."**
 - 1. Paul had persecuted the church, but he believed he was doing God's will.**
 - 2. He had been a "blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man" (1 Tim. 1:13).**
 - B. Is conscience always a safe guide?**
 - 1. Conscience is the result of training.**
 - 2. If one's conscience has been trained wrong, he will be able to do evil without feeling guilty.**
 - 3. Muslim jihadists kill innocent civilians in good conscience because they are trained to believe it is Allah's will.**
 - 4. The Scriptures are the only safe guide to right and wrong.**
 - C. The high priest commanded Paul to be struck on the mouth because of his affirmation of good conscience.**
 - 1. It was against the law to strike one who was not yet condemned.**
 - 2. Jesus had received the same illegal treatment from the Council.**

3. Ananias “was one of the worst men who ever wore the robes of the high priest. His career of crime and extortion...finally ended in (his) assassination” (J. W. McGarvey, Com. on Acts).
4. Paul responded: “God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! For you sit to judge me according to the Law, and do you command me to be struck contrary to the Law?”
 - a. This was “righteous indignation” (Mark 3:5; Eph. 4:26, 27).
 - b. Jesus had called religious leaders “whitewashed tombs” (Matt. 23:27).
5. Did Paul apologize or did he use sarcasm?
 - a. He recognized the Law taught one must not speak evil of a ruler (Exod. 22:28).
 - b. We must show respect for the office even if we do not respect the one who holds it.
 - c. Paul may have been saying, “I could not tell he was high priest because his behavior is not what that of a high priest should be.”

D. Paul saw the Council was divided between Pharisees and Sadducees.

1. The Sadducees denied the existence of angels, spirits, and the resurrection, but the Pharisees believed in them.
2. Paul used this disagreement to his advantage.
 - a. He was formerly a Pharisee.
 - b. The resurrection was at the heart of the Gospel which Paul preached (1 Cor. 15:1-4).
 - c. He was being judged because of his belief.
 - d. The Pharisees began defending Paul and the Sadducees vigorously opposed them.
 - e. Paul was caught between the two and had to be rescued once again by the Roman commander.

II. THE LORD APPEARED TO PAUL TO COMFORT HIM (11).

A. Paul had been warned that bonds awaited him in Jerusalem.

1. He had been nearly beaten to death by a mob of the Jews.
2. He was nearly scourged by the Romans.
3. He was in danger of being torn apart in court.
4. Further trials and dangers were still ahead.

B. He must not be discouraged for the Lord was with him (Matt. 28:20).

1. He had testified in Jerusalem.
2. He would also testify in Rome.

III. JEWISH ASSASSINS TOOK AN OATH TO KILL PAUL (12-35).

- A. Forty men took an oath not to eat or drink until Paul was dead.**
 - 1. They asked the council to request a further hearing.**
 - 2. They planned to use the opportunity to murder Paul.**
 - 3. Paul's nephew learned of the plot against his uncle's life.**
 - 4. He revealed it to Paul and to the Roman commander.**

- B. The commander arranged for Paul to be taken to Caesarea.**
 - 1. Caesarea was the seat of the Roman government.**
 - 2. It was 80 miles from Jerusalem on the Mediterranean.**
 - 3. He sent an escort of 200 soldiers, 200 spearmen, and 70 cavalrymen with Paul.**
 - 4. They traveled about 40 miles to Antipatris that night and arrived in Caesarea the following day.**

- C. Claudius Lysias sent a letter to Felix, the Roman Governor.**
 - 1. He explained how Paul came to be in his custody.**
 - 2. He lied when he said he had rescued Paul because he had learned he was a Roman.**
 - 3. He only learned Paul was a Roman when Paul told him as he was being bound illegally to be scourged.**
 - 4. He did make it clear that Paul had nothing charged against him deserving chains or death.**

- D. Paul was kept in custody until a hearing could be arranged.**
 - 1. Because he was a Roman citizen and formal charges were yet to be pressed, Paul was treated well.**
 - 2. He was kept in Herod's former palace under "house arrest."**

Conclusion:

- 1. Paul's imprisonment in Jerusalem, Caesarea and Rome lasted about five years.**
- 2. Luke was with Paul during this time.**
- 3. Paul finally had to appeal to Caesar to receive justice.**
- 4. Paul suffered greatly for the Cause of Christ, but he knew the crown of life would surely be worth it all.**
- 5. Why not obey the Gospel today that you may also have the crown of life (Acts 22:16)?**