

Lesson 21
Acts 22:30 – 23:35
PAUL THE PRISONER

Memory Verse: “They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience.” 1 Tim 3:9 (NIV)

We read from the preceding passage that Lysias still wanting to find out the story behind this remarkable man, Paul, so he calls the Jewish Sanhedrin to examine him (22:30). Paul soon sees, however, that the Sanhedrin is already set against him and he is not likely to get justice there (23:1-5).

Paul therefore changes his tactics. The one who has spoken to the Roman commander in Greek, addresses the mob in Aramaic, announces himself as God’s apostle to the Gentiles and claims to be a Roman citizen, now calls himself a Jewish Pharisee! He is being condemned because of his orthodox Pharisaic belief in the resurrection (23:6).

The immediate result of Paul’s declaration is that the Sanhedrin is split in two, Pharisees against Sadducees. Some Pharisees think Paul is not such a bad person after all (much the same as another Pharisee had said of Peter and John in a similar Sanhedrin dispute more than twenty years earlier; see 5:33-39). In the uproar that follows the Roman soldiers again save Paul from possible death (23:7-10). The Lord is still with Paul and eventually would bring him to Rome (23:11).

The Jews are not finished yet. They decide to ask Lysias to send Paul to the Sanhedrin for a fresh trial the next day, so they can attack and kill him on the way (23:12-15). Unfortunately for the Jews, the plan is discovered and reported to Lysias (23:16-22).

Knowing that the Jews will carry out their plan if at all possible, Lysias thinks it better to remove Paul from Jerusalem altogether. He decides to send Paul to the provincial capital, Caesarea, where he will come under the direct control of the provincial governor (23:23-24). In sending a letter to the governor, Lysias carefully rearranges the story to make sure that no blame can be placed on himself (23:25-30). As Paul leaves Jerusalem for the last time, he has still not seen the fulfilment of his lifelong wish of unity between Jerusalem and the Gentile churches. But he does not give up his fight against Jewish misunderstandings (23:31-35).

“Paul the prisoner” (Acts 23:18) was the name the Roman soldiers used for the apostle, a designation he himself often used (Eph. 3:1; 4:1; 2 Tim. 1:8; Philem. 1, 9). Paul was under “military custody,” which meant he was bound to a Roman soldier who was responsible for him. Prisoners under “public custody” were put in the common jail, a horrible place for any human being to suffer (Acts 16:19–24).

Paul’s friends could visit him and help meet his personal needs. It is sad that we don’t read, “And prayer was made fervently by the church for Paul” (see Acts 12:5). There is no record that the Jerusalem church took any steps to assist him, either in Jerusalem or during his two years in Caesarea. This is an exciting chapter, and in it we can learn from Paul’s experiences with confrontations.

Scriptural Reading: Acts 23:1-35

Things to learn: 1) Conscience and Doctrine 2) Courage, Commendation and Confidence 3) Commitment and Provision

Read the introduction to this study and Acts 22:30 - 23:35

Questions:

1) How did Paul use “conscience and doctrine” in his approach to defend the charges against him from the Jewish Council (Acts 22:30 – 23:10)?

2.) Why did the Lord Jesus Christ appear to Paul as recorded in Acts 23:11?

3) Review the remaining verses (23:12-35) and share what you have learned from Paul’s commitment to his calling in doing God’s will from this chapter.