

Jesus Christ's work through the Apostles to the Uttermost

Acts 23 The mock trial and God's protection

"... and ye shall be witness unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judae'a, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." **Acts 1:8**

Introduction: Paul's desire was to share the Gospel with all people. As we saw in the last chapter, even as he was being taken into custody he took the opportunity to share his personal testimony. Now Paul would experience more tribulation, as he endures a mock trial. This trial was only granted after Paul declared his citizenship. All the while we see God's protection.

- I. **Paul's Trial 1-11**
- II. **Paul's Tragedy 12-22**
- III. **Paul's Travel 23-35**

I. **Paul's Trial 1-11**

A. **Good Conscience 1-5**

1. **v1** *"earnestly beholds the council..."* - **Paul walks circumspectly.**
2. We are to earnestly behold the events around us in light of commission from the Savior.
3. Paul was "all in" at every moment for Jesus Christ.
4. One would expect in a trial like this that you too would be sitting at the edge of your seat as well.
5. After giving a formal introduction Paul makes this statement *"I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day."*
6. The word Conscience is actually a composite of two words. **"Con"** – which means with and **"Science"** – which means knowledge.
7. What does Paul mean by saying he has lived in good conscience before God until this day?
8. Is conscience our guide?
9. We can say that our conscience can be influenced: I Corinthians 8:10 (Weak)
10. We can say our conscience can be wounded. I Corinthians 8:12
11. We can say we should be concerned for the consciences of others II Corinthians 4:2
12. We can say that there is a pure conscience and therefore an impure conscience. I Timothy 3:9
13. We can say there is a seared conscience. I Timothy 4:2
14. We can say there is a defiled conscience. Titus 1:15
15. We can have a "purged" conscience through the Holy Spirit. Hebrews 9:14
16. We can say there is an evil conscience and a good conscience. Hebrews 10:22, 13:18, I Peter 3:16, I Peter 3:21
17. Conscience has to do with knowledge and that application of knowledge. Paul before Christ with a good conscience persecuted Christians.
18. This is *"a classic example of the fact that conscience is a good god but a poor guide."* – John Philips

19. Example – John Huss “Give your body to be burned”; The poor women at his execution “Give your faggot to burn him.”
20. **v2** We see Paul is struck by “...*them that stood by him...*”
21. “*And when he had thus spoken, one of the officers which stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, Answerest thou the high priest so?*” **John 18:22**
22. This man Ananias according to John Phillips was the son of Nedebaeus who had been made high priest by Herod Chalcis in AD 47. “He was one of the most mercenary men ever to bring dishonor on what had once been a noble office.” (John Phillips) Apparently, he was extremely wealthy and very influential, using “mafia” style methods to accomplish what he desired. He would meet his demise during the war with Rome that broke out in 66 AD.
23. **v3** Paul’s response to this smiting was one of faith and some even report prophesy though by the next verse it would not appear so. For it was later that Ananias would be smitten according to Josephus. No doubt Paul felt the unfair treatment taking place.
24. The term Paul uses here “...*whited wall...*” suggests evil clothed in purity. It is particularly alarming that today hypocrisy abounds in the form of “external uprightness” while inwardly folks are unchanged. Jesus Christ in speaking on this very subject uses similar terminology, “*Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto **whited sepulchres**, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness.*” (**Matthew 23:27**) Just as a side note sepulchers were whited a full month before the Passover to help them stand out, so that worshippers might not be defiled by accidental contact.
25. **v4** “*And they that stood by said, Revilest thou God’s high priest?*” – For some reason Paul did not recognize that this man was the high priest. No light is given to us as to why other than him just not knowing. But this does raise the question, was it perhaps his actions that dissuaded Paul from thinking he could possibly be the high priest? (Do our actions declare us to be a child of God?)
26. “*The aggravation of which was not only that the person reviled was a priest, an high priest, but an high priest of God; though this could not have been proved, **for there was now no high priest of God but Jesus Christ**; the priesthood was changed and abrogated, and there were no more high priests among men of God's appointing and approving.*” -John Gill
27. **v5** Of course, Paul responds and cites **Exodus 22:28**. Think of this that **Paul’s mind was fixed on having a biblical response**. “*Thou shalt not revile the gods, nor curse the ruler of thy people.*” (Exodus 22:28)
28. We find in this that our response, “The Bible says...” is much better than “My opinion is...”

B. Good Observation 6-11

1. **v6** Notice the two ‘factions.’ We have the Pharisees and Sadducees.
2. Paul’s response was with knowledge. Paul knew well what the Pharisees believed as well as the Sadducees. This was the religious climate of the day, one in which he was very familiar.

3. If you remember Paul's response on Mar's Hill was done with knowledge as well. His design was to expose the division of these religionists. The Chief Captain would see that this indictment was completely false. It was true that the "hope and resurrection of the dead" certainly dealt with the Gospel.
4. **v7** Immediately the multitude was divided. There was dissension and division because of belief. The old statement often made is "doctrine divides" and so it does.
5. *"Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. **For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears;" II Timothy 4: 2,3*** "Sound" – Healthy, true
6. We see today great division because of doctrinal issues. What we call our doctrine (body of truth) should be the Bible. Now this is interesting because most contend to have "derived" their doctrine from the Bible. Oftentimes, cults will major on ambiguous passages or a wrong dividing of the Word of God. There is a reason that we identify as being "Baptists."
7. **v8** We find out a little about the Pharisees and Sadducees. The Sadducees believe in no resurrection, no angels, and no spirit. (In other words, this is it, live for the day! Materialism)
8. **Now picture both of these positions, one believes in the spiritual one does not, one believes in eternity of man and one does not; but both are missing Jesus Christ.**
9. **v9,10** Shows us the *"great dissension,"* Paul once again is in the middle. So much so that the Chief Captain, *"fearing lest Paul should have been pulled in pieces of them, commanded the soldiers to go down,"* and secure him.
10. **Notice the words of comfort.** I am so glad God just does not tell us just to get over it. The Lord Jesus start His message, *"Be of good cheer,"*
11. **Now how many of us would want to be of good cheer at this very moment?**
12. **Let's make note of several items here:**
13. First, of all the Lord Jesus addresses Paul specifically. *"Be of good cheer, Paul..."* In other words, this was not a blanket statement to the masses.
14. Secondly, the Lord Jesus assures Paul the He sees Him. *"...as thou hast testified of me..."*
15. Third, the Lord Jesus assures Paul of the future. *"...so must thou bear witness also at Rome."*
16. Fourthly, though not stated it is implied that God is tell Paul 'I am with you.'

II. Paul's Tragedy 12-22

A. The Curse they were bound by v12

1. *"and bound themselves under a curse..."*
2. These men were so serious they would risk their lives and bind themselves to death to kill Paul.
3. What can make men so willing to give their lives?

4. *"If a man vow a vow unto the LORD, or swear an oath to bind his soul with a bond; he shall not break his word, he shall do according to all that proceedeth out of his mouth."* **Numbers 30:2**
5. The conditions of the vow were such: *"...they would neither eat nor drink till they killed Paul."*
6. "It's either him or us."

B. The Conspiracy they would commit v13

1. They were going to hatch this plot.
2. What was the plot? Draw Paul out and kill him.
3. Could it be possible that the Devil was behind all of this?
4. *"For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places."* **Ephesians 6:12**

C. The Councils involvement v14,15

1. *"Now therefore ye with council signify..."*
2. There is no confirmation that the council would be complicit in this, but yet there is no recorded rebuttal either.
3. Unanimously, Bible scholars agree they were on board with this.
4. Is this not reminiscent of the unlawful acts of Judas and the council dealing with Jesus Christ?
5. Though the Devil is at work, is God still in charge?
6. Paul's nephew just happens to hear *"of their lying in wait..."*
7. Is it not amazing, how many times, things just happen to happen!

D. The Concern of Paul's nephew v16

1. "It is a simple thing for God to bring to naught the schemes of wicked men." – John Phillips
2. This concern did not just end with a moved heart.
3. This concern ended up in action.
4. How many times are we moved by what we hear, but do nothing about it?
5. Imagine if Paul's nephew had done nothing.

E. The Concern of Paul's nephew v16

1. "It is a simple thing for God to bring to naught the schemes of wicked men." – John Phillips
2. This concern did not just end with a moved heart.
3. **This concern ended up in action.**
4. How many times are we moved by what we hear, but do nothing about it?
5. Imagine if Paul's nephew had done nothing.

F. The Captain's willingness to hear v17-19

1. **v17,18** *"Then Paul called one of the centurions unto him, and said, Bring this young man unto the chief captain: for he hath a certain thing to tell him. So he took him, and brought him to the chief captain, and said, Paul the prisoner called me unto him, and prayed me to bring this young man unto thee, who hath something to say unto thee."*
2. **v19** *"Then the chief captain took him by the hand, and went with him aside privately, and asked him, What is that thou hast to tell me?"*
3. What a tender scene. **As we see this it strikes me that God sends the right people at the right time for the right job.**
4. We can gather from this that God's plan is always the best plan.

G. The Confession the boy made v20-22

1. **v20,21** The best fix for a lie is the truth.
2. **v21** *"But do not thou yield unto them:..."*
3. Place yourselves in the Chief Captains shoes and ask the question "to whom will ye yield yourself?"
4. This Captain had a decision to make. Yield to the desires of the crowd or yield to the truth.
5. You and I as Christians have a decision to make: Yield to God or yield to the world.
6. *"Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God."* **Romans 6:13**
7. Those who have not trusted in Jesus Christ as their Saviour must either yield to Jesus Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit or yield to themselves, the world, and the lies of the Deceiver.

III. Paul's Travel 23-35

A. Safety Provided v23,24

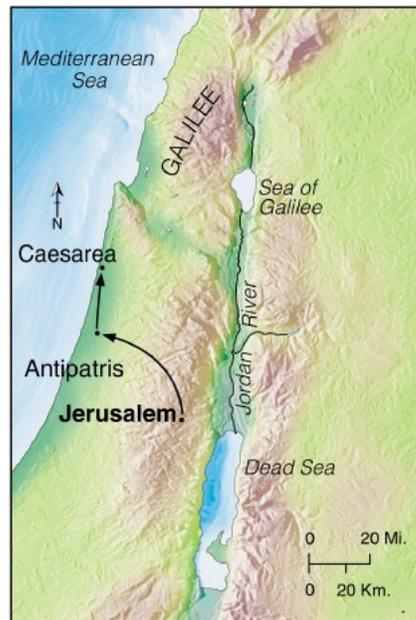
1. v23 2 Centurions
2. v23 200 Hundred Soldiers (foot Soldiers)
3. v23 70 Horsemen
4. v23 200 Spearmen
5. v24 Beasts for the ride
6. "...at the third hour of the night;" They left at 9:00pm.
7. This was ten times the size of the conspirators (40); 470 Soldiers.

B. Serious Letter v25-30

1. v26 We are given the name of the Chief Captain: Claudius Lysias.
2. v26 We are also given to whom Paul was being sent: Governor Felix.
3. v27 The letter is fairly accurate except for the first part, in which Claudius Lysias glosses over the way in which he initially treated Paul. Mark his words, “...*then came I with an army, and rescued him, **having understood that he was a Roman.***”
4. We have to give glory unto God and see ourselves rightly, as sinners saved by grace. We ought to be very cautious when we recognize that we become the hero of every story we tell.
5. v29 Indicates that Claudius understood this to be a matter of the Jews religion rather than of Roman law. Notice the admittance that Paul had “...*nothing laid to his charge worth of death or of bonds.*”
6. v30 Then we find in verse 30 that he passed the responsibility to his superior, Governor Felix.
7. “The Roman procurator would be well able to read between the lines. Of all the provinces in the Roman Empire, Judea was the most volatile and difficult to govern, mostly because of the intense patriotic fervor of the Jews...Felix would understand why his legate in Jerusalem would want to defuse a Jewish religious squabble, especially in the Temple courts.” – John Phillips

C. Short Route v31-35

1. **v31 Antipatris** – “that it was about 17 miles from Joppa. It was about 26 miles from Caesarea, and, of course, about 35 miles from Jerusalem. Herod the Great changed its name to Antipatris, in honor of his father Antipater.” – Albert Barnes
2. Caesarea was in total about ~60 miles. So they went halfway basically.



3. v33,34 Upon arriving, Felix determines the jurisdiction to ensure he properly could be tried under Felix’s authority.
4. v35 This brings us to a good question, do we understand that Jesus has the authority to judge us?