
Acts 22:30-23:35 ~ Teacher's Lesson Paul the Roman Citizen

Review: At the end of his third missionary journey, Paul went to Jerusalem with a love offering from the Gentile churches. Along the way, the Holy Spirit repeatedly told him he would be arrested and handed over to the Gentiles in Jerusalem. Sure enough, while in the temple, unbelieving Jews saw Paul and tried to kill him, assuming Paul had brought Gentiles into the Temple. This caused the local Roman garrison to intervene to keep the peace. In order to keep from being flogged by Romans soldiers, Paul appealed to his Roman citizenship. His Roman citizenship also put him under the protection of the Roman Empire. The next day, the Roman tribune ordered the chief priest and council¹ to convene so he could find out what Paul had done wrong.

******What unpleasant encounter did Paul have with the high priest (22:30-23:5)?** The high priest unlawfully ordered Paul to be struck. Paul, not knowing he was the high priest, condemned the man for hypocrisy.

- 1. Why do you suppose Ananias ordered Paul to be struck (23:2)?** Perhaps he had already judged Paul to be guilty, in contrast to Paul's "not guilty" plea 23:1. His intense dislike for Paul became evident in the next chapter, wherein we learn Ananias was willing to travel 60 miles to Caesarea to press charges against Paul.²
- 2. Why was being called a whitewashed wall an insult (22:3)?** See *Ezekiel 13:10-12*. Paul said Ananias was like an unstable wall which was whitewashed externally but was structurally unsound.³

Jesus spoke of the religious leaders being whitewashed tombs:

ESV **Matthew 23:27** Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness.

- 3. What was hypocritical about ordering Paul to be struck (23:3)?** See *Leviticus 19:15*, *Deuteronomy 25:1-2*. Paul was being judged by the Law, yet contrary to the Law he was struck without due process. Paul's assessment was correct: Ananias was indeed a hypocrite who sat in judgment according to the Law, yet who did not really care what the Law said.

ESV **Leviticus 19:15** You shall do no injustice in court.

¹ "Council" is from *sunedrion*, or Sanhedrin, a Jewish supreme court with both civil and religious jurisdiction. It had its own police force and could judge all cases except those involving capital punishment (*New Bible Dictionary*, 1070). The tribune probably did have authority to convene an official meeting of the Sanhedrin, but rather an unofficial consultation as might be required by the police when investigating a crime (Marshall, 381).

² Kistemaker, 809.

³ *Ibid.*, 810.

ESV **Deuteronomy 25:1-2** If there is a dispute between men and they come into court and the judges decide between them, acquitting the innocent and condemning the guilty, then if the guilty man deserves to be beaten, the judge shall cause him to lie down and be beaten in his presence with a number of stripes in proportion to his offense.

- **Ananias (23:2):** The Jewish historian Joseph recorded that Ananias was one of the most disgraceful profaners of the sacred office. He became wealthy by seizing for himself tithes meant for the support of the other priests. He made free use of violence and assassination to further his interests.⁴ As it turned out, Ananias truly was struck down: he was later assassinated by Jewish guerrillas for being pro-Roman.⁵

Separation of Church and State: Ananias is a great example of why early Baptists wanted to see a separation of church and state.

What did Paul do when he learned that it was the high priest who ordered him to be struck (23:5)? The closest he came to apologizing was to explain that he did not know the man was the high priest. If he had known, he would not have insulted him. Paul probably never thought the high priest would order an action contrary to the Law, which may be the ironic meaning of what Paul said.

4. What application does 23:5 hold for us today? See *Exodus 22:28, Romans 13:1-7, 1 Peter 2:13-17*. We are not to speak evil of our rulers, even if they are wicked men. This is a lesson that Christians in democratic countries need to relearn! For the Christian, freedom of speech does not extend to speaking evil of rulers.

ESV **Exodus 22:28** You shall not . . . curse a ruler of your people.

ESV **Romans 13:7** Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.

ESV **1 Peter 2:17** . . . Honor the emperor.

5. How might 23:5 help us understand the correct usage of the Law of Moses today? The new covenant made the Sinai covenant obsolete. As a Christian Jew, Paul was no longer under the Law of Moses. However, he kept the Law in order to be in a better position to witness to his fellow Jews. Paul spoke as a Jew to other Jews who were still under the Law. However, 23:5 does help us understand the correct usage of the Law of Moses today. New covenant believers can extrapolate principles from the Law for today. In general, the New Testament tells us to honor government officials. The Law of Moses helps us understand what that looks like: in this case, it means not cursing a ruler.

Example: David was unlawfully being persecuted by King Saul. However, when David had the chance to kill Saul in his sleep, he refused to do it:

⁴ Bruce, 450.

⁵ Marshall, 382.

ESV 1 Samuel 26:9b-11 . . . who can put out his hand against the LORD's anointed and be guiltless? . . . The LORD forbid that I should put out my hand against the LORD's anointed.

******How did Paul manage to split the council (23:6-10)?** The council was historically divided between Sadducees and Pharisees. Knowing this, Paul, in a brilliant court-room maneuver, uttered a statement dear to the Pharisees and offensive to the Sadducees.

ESV **Matthew 10:16** . . . I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.

6. Why did Paul want to split the council (23:6-10)? With such a corrupt high priest as was Ananias, Paul knew the chances of a fair trial were slim. If the two factions (Sadducees and Pharisees) united in falsely accusing him of disturbing the peace (the *pax Romana*), he might lose the favor of the tribune.⁶ Paul's goal was to split the council and win the allegiance of at least one side.

According to 23:8, what was the difference in belief between Sadducees and Pharisees?

The Pharisees believed in the resurrection of the dead, but the Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection of the dead (**Joke:** That's why they're sad, you see).

The Sadducees were so conservative that they only accepted the writings of Moses as inspired. Since Moses did not clearly teach the doctrine of the resurrection, the Sadducees did not believe in the general resurrection of the dead. The Pharisees were more open minded in that they accepted the rest of the Old Testament as inspired, and thus held to the doctrine of the resurrection.⁷

- **Resurrection (23:6):** Paul knew that the Pharisee's belief in the general resurrection of the dead (23:6) allowed for the possibility of Jesus' resurrection. This is the real heart of the matter:

ESV 1 **Corinthians 15:13** But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised.

Based on 23:10, how bad did the dissension become? It became so violent that the tribune thought Paul might be torn to pieces. He had to order the soldiers to take Paul by force and return him to the barracks.

Second Rescue: This is now the second time the Romans rescued Paul from physical harm.

Bad Witness: After seeing the behavior of the unbelieving Jews, the tribune was probably not in the least bit tempted to convert to Judaism!

⁶ Kistemaker, 814.

⁷ Marshall, 384.

ESV **Romans 2:23-24** You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the law. For, as it is written, "The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you."

The tribune called this council to learn the charges against Paul. Did he learn anything (23:6-10)?? No! Yet again he could not find out what the problem was.

Why did he just ask Paul was the problem was? He probably did, but like any good investigatory, he wanted to hear both sides.

How do you think Paul felt about this turn of events (23:10)? Glad? Sad? Pleased? Scared? *Let class speculate.*

Insight: This episode showed that official Judaism was not prepared to tolerate Christianity since it was moved by irrational hatred.⁸

Application: You will face opposition and trials in your service to the Lord. It is par for the course. Don't be surprised when it happens!

ESV **1 Peter 4:12** . . . do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.

Watch Your Back! In this case, Paul's opposition came from religious leaders, not pagans. Indigenous Sri Lankan church planter Muralee Kanga once stated that much of the opposition he gets has come from theological liberal "Christian" pastors and missionaries on the island!

******What word of encouragement did Jesus have for Paul (23:11)?** Jesus promised Paul that he would testify about Jesus in far-off Rome. It was already Paul's desire to go to Rome. Previously, on his third missionary journey, writing from Corinth to the church in Rome, Paul wrote:

ESV **Romans 1:13-15** I want you to know, brothers, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented) . . . I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

7. Comparing 23:11 back to 23:10, how did Paul feel about what happened in the council? Since Jesus came to encourage him, Paul may be felt discouraged. On the other hand, considering what happened next (the plot to kill Paul), he needed encouragement for that too.

- **"Take courage" (23:11):** These words (*tharséo*) are only found seven times in the New Testament, and six of the seven were spoken by Jesus! Jesus spoke it in the imperative mode. This is a gentle and gracious command, but it is a command none-the-less.⁹

⁸ Marshall, 380.

⁹ Steven J. Cole, "Lesson 60: The Lord Who Encourages (Acts 23:11)", Bible .org. Accessed 07/13/2018.

Application: To give a word of encouragement to someone who is feeling down is to be like our Lord Jesus. George Herbert, an English pastor and poet, said, "Good words are worth much, and cost little."¹⁰

You may be in your own version of a Roman jail, a prison of difficult circumstances. The Lord didn't need to send out angels to find Paul. The Roman soldiers didn't separate Jesus from Paul. The Lord knows where you are and what you are going through.

ESV **Hebrews 13:5** . . . he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."¹¹

ESV **Jeremiah 29:11** . . . I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for wholeness and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.

ESV **Hebrews 6:10** For God is not so unjust as to overlook your work and the love that you showed for his sake in serving the saints, as you still do.

ESV **1 Corinthians 15:58** Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

8. This is the fourth and last time that Jesus appeared to Paul and spoke to him (23:11). Most Christians go their whole lives without Jesus appearing to them. What does this tell us about Paul? This tells us that Paul was very important to the establishment of the church. He was unique. He was an apostle. He wrote Scripture.

The Bible states that the household of God is:

ESV **Ephesians 2:20** built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone . . .

******How did the Jews take the Law into their own hands (23:12-15)?** Forty Jews conspired to kill Paul the next time he came to the council. This, of course, was completely contrary to the teachings of Moses.

What special assassin's diet went along with their oath to kill Paul (23:12)? They said they would not eat nor drink until they had killed Paul. It was do or die (of starvation).

9. Why were these Jews so determined to kill Paul (23:12)? *See back to 21:27-28.* They were well aware that he taught the Gentiles they did not have to keep the Law of Moses.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ A promise made by Jehovah to Joshua (Joshua 1:5).

10. What in 23:14-15 shows the corrupt nature some on the council? They became aware of the plot and agreed to be complicit in it (by summoning Paul under the pretext of further questioning).¹² These religious leaders were not concerned with true justice or due process. They obeyed the Law only when expedient and broke it when the end justified the means.

11. How would these assassins have killed Paul when there would have been Roman soldiers escorting him (23:15)? There were forty assassins and probably only a small detail of soldiers.

Application: There are many (too many) in leadership in churches today who are no different from the chief priests and elders. They are hirelings, in it for the money, or the power, or the prestige, or the women. They may pretend to believe the Bible (many don't even do that), but they have no intention of truly obeying the teachings of Jesus. They think they know better. They believe they are qualified to sit in judgment on God's Word and decide which parts are true and which are not.

ESV **Matthew 7:15** Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.

******How did the tribune learn of the ambush (23:16-22)?** In God's providence, Paul's nephew heard of the plot and informed Paul and the tribune. That forty men plus the high priest and elders were part of the plot, it cannot have remained a secret.

12. Paul told his nephew to inform the tribune of the ambush (23:17). Why does this not show a lack of faith in what Jesus told Paul in 23:11? God often uses natural means to carry out His will/promises. It is the same with predestination. God sovereignly saves His elect, but He most often uses the foolishness of evangelism in the process.

13. Why do you suppose the tribune actually believed the young man (23:16-22)? The tribune was a seasoned veteran who already had a lot of negative experience with the Jews!

14. Why did the tribune charge the young man to tell no one (23:22)? The tribune probably had a surprise of his own and did not want to take any chance of it leaking out that he knew about the ambush. It may also have been dangerous for the young man to be identified as a snitch.

• **Cordial Relations:** Paul's relationship with the Roman tribune and centurions appears to have been quite cordial. As a Roman citizen, he was treated with respect, especially since no charges had been filed against him that related to Roman law.¹³

¹² They presumably spoke to the Sadducees and not the Pharisees.

¹³ Kistemaker, 821.

******How did the tribune ensure Paul's safety from the plot (23:23-25)?** He ordered four hundred and seventy men to take Paul to Caesarea at 9 p.m. (the third hour). This constituted half of the Roman cohort in Jerusalem.¹⁴

15. Why did the tribune go to such great lengths to protect Paul (23:23-25)? See 22:22-29. The primary reason is because Paul was a Roman citizen. A secondary reason may have been because the tribune had unlawfully bound Paul and came close to having him flogged; he wanted to stay on Paul's good side!

16. Why was Paul taken to Caesarea (23:23) as opposed to Damascus or Jericho or someplace else? See 23:24. Caesarea was a Roman administrative city where Felix, the governor of Judea, lived.¹⁵ It was about 50 miles northwest of Jerusalem, on the Mediterranean.

The soldiers left with Paul at 9:00 p.m. (23:23). When was that in relation to when the ambush was plotted to take place (23:20)? They left the night before the ambush was to take place, before the fake request ever came. It is quite possible they Jews never realized their plot has been discovered.

******17. What reason did the tribune give for sending Paul to Felix (23:26-30)?** The tribune wanted to be sure Paul was protected from assassination (since he was a Roman citizen), and so that he got a fair trial.¹⁶ Felix was legally obligated to protect Paul.

Based on 23:26, what was the tribune's name? The tribune's name was Claudius Lysias. If a person bought Roman citizenship (22:27), it was common to take on the name of the emperor in power when citizenship was granted. In this case, it appears that Claudius was Caesar, who ruled from A.D. 41 to 54. Paul's arrest in Jerusalem appears to have happened in the early 60s.

What gloss did the tribune make in 23:27? The tribune made it sound like he rescued Paul from the crowd because he knew he was a Roman citizen. The truth is that the tribune did not realize Paul was a citizen he had already been arrested, bound and was about to be flogged.

18. What was the tribune's assessment of Paul's guilt (23:29)? The tribune concluded that Paul had broken no Roman law, but rather of was allegedly guilty of breaking Mosaic law. The tribune realized that the accusations against Paul were theological, not criminal.¹⁷ He concluded that Paul had done nothing deserving of death.

¹⁴ ESV Study Bible, 2136.

¹⁵ Ibid., 2135.

¹⁶ This is the only secular letter in the whole New Testament (Marshall, 390).

¹⁷ Marshall, 391.

******19. Why did Felix decide to hear Paul's case (23:31-35)?** Felix agreed to hear Paul's case because Paul was from the province of Cilicia, a province over which Felix had jurisdiction.¹⁸

Final Phase of Fulfillment Begun: Paul's appearance before Felix was the start of the final phase of Paul's ministry:

ESV **Acts 9:15** . . . he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings . . .

- **Antipatris (23:31):** Paul and his protective escort spent the night in a city called Antipatris (23:31), which was about half way to Caesarea. The next day, the day of the intended ambush back in Jerusalem, the foot soldiers marched back to Jerusalem and the cavalry rode on with Paul to Caesarea.
- **Herod's Praetorium (23:35):** Herod's palace that served as Felix's quarters.

So What?

20. If we followed Paul's example in 23:5, how should it impact our conversations about current political leaders?

21. What does 23:2-3 (unlawful strike) and 23:12-15 (plot to kill Paul) tell us about some people who are religious leaders? See 2 Peter 2:1-3.

ESV **2 Peter 2:1-3a** . . . there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies . . . And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. And in their greed they will exploit you with false words.

22. On the whole, how does today's passage (Acts 23) illustrate Romans 13:3-4?

ESV **Romans 13:3-4** . . . rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer.

**** = ask this question before reading the text aloud. Doing so will cause focus.

- These lessons are designed for a 45 minute session and are based on the text of the ESV.
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¹⁸ ESV Study Bible, 2136.