LESSON 23:
PAUL IN PRISON, PART 2 (ACTS 22:30-23:35)

After taking Paul into custody and saving him from the Jewish mob, the Roman soldiers took Paul into the barracks. There, they were about to scourge Paul to find out who he really was and what was going on. In the process, they discovered he was a Roman citizen.

PAUL BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN (ACTS 22:30-23:11)

22:30-23:5. Despite several attempts, the commander was still trying to understand why the Jews were accusing Paul. So, Paul was taken from the barracks and brought before the Sanhedrin (the highest Jewish council), which had been instructed to convene about the matter. Note that the last interaction Paul had with the Sanhedrin would have been when he was persecuting Christians. Paul asserted that he had lived in all good conscience before God. Even though he had previously persecuted Christians, he was convinced it was the right thing to do (Acts 26:9-11). Now, he had been living as a Christian and preaching the gospel because he believed it was right. Offended by the suggestion that Paul was living in good conscience before God, Ananias (the wicked high priest who occupied the office from 47-58 A.D.) ordered Paul to be struck in the mouth. Paul responded by saying God would strike him (receive Divine retribution) and identified him as a whitewashed wall (covered with whitewash to hide its crumbling or real nature), indicating his hypocrisy (Ezekiel 13:10-16; Matthew 23:27). Paul said he was being judged according to the Law, yet he had just been struck contrary to the teachings of the Law (as an act of injustice, Leviticus 19:15). Those present asked how Paul could speak evil against God's high priest. Paul's reply indicated that he did not know Ananias was the high priest and indicated he would not have done so if he had known (citing Exodus 22:28). Perhaps he had not seen who had spoken or did not recognize Ananias as the high priest due to some factor (e.g. perhaps not in his formal robe). Regardless, Paul recognized he should not speak against a leader, despite that one being hypocritical and disrespectful.

23:6-11. Paul identified the division present in the Sanhedrin, as it was composed of both Pharisees and Sadducees (two sects of Judaism). The Sadducees denied the resurrection as well as the existence of spiritual beings (angels and spirits), while the Pharisees believed in these. Paul exposed this division (perhaps recognizing he would not get a fair trial), identifying himself as a Pharisee. Paul had been a Pharisee (Acts 26:5; Philippians 3:5) and was still like a Pharisee on these key dividing issues. In fact, Paul was being judged because of the hope of the resurrection of the dead (as the resurrection of Christ was a central issue to Paul's ministry). The Jews hated the Christians' claim that Jesus rose from the dead (Acts 4:1-2). Paul said this was the issue he had been imprisoned over (Acts 24:21; 26:6-8, 21-23; 28:20). Paul's affirmation divided the Sanhedrin, and an argument broke out between the Pharisees and Sadducees. The Pharisees took Paul's side and declared they had found nothing wrong with him, even suggesting that a spirit or angel could have spoken to him. As the argument among the Sanhedrin grew violent, the commander became afraid Paul would be torn apart and ordered the troops to get Paul and take him back to the barracks. The following night, the Lord appeared to him, instructing Paul to be courageous and assuring him that he would testify about Christ in Rome, as he had done in Jerusalem (as Paul had wanted to do, Romans 15:22-29).

A PLOT TO KILL PAUL (ACTS 23:12-22)

23:12-15. The next day, unbeknownst to Paul, a plot was made to kill him. A group of about 40 Jews bound themselves under an oath/curse that would hold them responsible before God, saying they would not eat or drink until they killed Paul. They were probably zealous for the Law and believed they were doing good in this murderous act (John 16:2). They went to the chief priests and elders to inform them of this oath and wanted the Sanhedrin to make a request to the commander that Paul would be brought down to them, while they set an ambush to kill Paul when he got nearby. Perhaps they would apologize to the commander for the trouble previously caused, and were hoping he would be eager to get the answers about Paul he was looking for.

23:16-22. Through God's providence, Paul's nephew (his sister's son) heard about the plot of the Jews against Paul (the circumstances that brought this about are unknown). He reported these things to Paul in the barracks. Note that it was common for the family and friends of prisoners to take care of the prisoners by bringing them food and other necessities. When Paul heard of the plot, he called for a centurion, telling him to take his nephew to the commander. The commander then took Paul's nephew aside, and the circumstances were explained. Paul's nephew urged the commander

not to allow the Jews to persuade him to take Paul back to the Sanhedrin. After listening, the commander instructed Paul's nephew not to tell anyone that he had told him this information. Certainly, it would be easier for the commander to take the necessary countermeasures if no one else knew that he was aware of the plot.

PAUL IS TAKEN TO CAESAREA (ACTS 23:23-35)

23:23-30. Having learned about the plot against Paul, the commander (Claudius Lysias) determined to protect Paul by sending him to Caesarea (about 65 miles northwest), where he could appear before the Roman governor, Felix (governor from 52-60 A.D.), and escape danger. He sent Paul away at night (around 9 PM), escorted by 200 soldiers, 70 horsemen (cavalry), and 200 spearmen. Paul was also given an animal to ride. The commander sent a letter to the governor, explaining the situation with Paul. He indicated that Paul had been seized by the Jews and was about to be killed before he arrived with his troops. After he learned that Paul was a Roman citizen (note there is no mention of the scourge that was stopped), he took him to the Sanhedrin and found out that the issue was about questions concerning their law, and Paul was not worthy of death or imprisonment. But, when a plot was discovered against Paul, he sent Paul to the governor and ordered the accusers to make their case before the governor.

23:31-35. The 470 soldiers did as they were instructed and brought Paul as far as Antipatris (about 40 miles toward Caesarea), evidently far enough to get Paul out of danger. 400 soldiers then returned to Jerusalem, while the 70 horsemen (cavalry) continued taking Paul to Caesarea. There, they delivered Paul and the letter to the governor. Establishing Paul as being from the province of Cilicia, Felix determined it would be appropriate for him to hear the case whenever Paul's accusers arrived. In the meantime, Paul was ordered to be kept under guard at Herod's Praetorium (palace, the governor's residence, where judgment was also administered), likely in a holding cell.

CONCLUSION

Paul had escaped the Jewish plot to kill him by the providence of God (involving Paul's nephew and a sympathetic Roman commander). Now, he had been transported to Caesarea. There, he had to wait for his accusers to make their case against him before the Roman governor, Felix.

DISCIPLESHIP QUESTIONS

How did Paul live in relation to his conscience?

How did Paul address the hypocrisy of the high priest?

How did Paul respond to finding out he had spoken against the high priest?

How and why did Paul expose the division in the Sanhedrin?

What connection did the resurrection of Christ have with Paul's imprisonment?

What did God promise Paul about his future gospel work?

What plot was made against Paul?

How was Paul rescued from the plot against him?

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