

Acts 23

- CITIZENSHIP IN HEAVEN...

- o The Testimony...

- Paul turned to the COMMANDER - asked [in Greek] if he could speak [in Hebrew] to the crowd...
- He gave his DEFENSE [ἀπολογία] to them - by giving his TESTIMONY...
- Saul was a Jew - taught by Gamaliel - zealous for God...
- He PERSECUTED Christians - putting them in PRISON - or to DEATH...
- But then Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus - why are you PERSECUTING Me?
- He CHOSE Paul - to see Him and hear Him - so he could tell everyone about the Lord...
- About the GRACE of God that was so great it could save a SINNER like Paul - **I Timothy 1:16**

- o The Gentiles...

- After THREE years Paul returned to Jerusalem - **Galatians 1:18**
- The Lord told him to QUICKLY get out of Jerusalem...
- Because [διότι] the people would NOT listen to his TESTIMONY [μαρτυρία]
- God instead would instead send Paul to the GENTILES...
- The moment the crowd heard GENTILES - they SHOUTED kill him for he was not fit to live!

- o Citizenship...

- The COMMANDER ordered Paul to be brought into the Antonia Fortress...
- He was to be TORTURED – to find out [ἐπιγινώσκω] what got the crowd angry...
- Paul turned to the CENTURION next to him and calmly asked if it was lawful to torture him...
- The COMMANDER came and demanded [imperative] to know if Paul was ROMAN...
- He had BOUGHT his citizenship at a high price - but Paul had been born FREE...
- The next day the COMMANDER had Paul brought before the SANHEDRIN!

- 1ST - THE SANHEDRIN... vs. 1-11

- o 1st - Good conscience... vs. 1-5

- The Council... vs. 1
 - Then Paul looking earnestly at the council said:
 - Men and brethren I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day!
 - As Paul looked intently [ἀτενίζω] at the 71 leaders of Israel [συνέδριον] - **Numbers 11:16**
 - He opened up his DEFENSE to them by saying - he had lived as GOOD citizen [πολιτεύομαι]
 - Always [πάντα] with GOOD [ἀγαθός] conscience before God up to this very day...
 - His argument was that he had NOT broken any ROMAN laws [citizen]
 - And he had also NOT broken any BIBLICAL laws [conscience before God]
 - Paul was NOT afraid of the standing before Council – because he had done NOTHING wrong!
 - **I Peter 3:15-16** – “If someone asks about your hope always be ready to explain it... keep your conscience clear. Then [when] people speak evil against you they will be ashamed when they see what a good life you live because you belong to Christ.” [NLT]
 - If our lives do NOT match our WORDS - they lose their impact...

- We need to be careful to avoid the sins that would compromise our WITNESS...
- Sins that would DEFILE our conscience – ruin our TESTIMONY for Jesus!
- Whitewashed... vs. 2-3
 - And the high priest Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth.
 - Then Paul said to him: God will strike you - you whitewashed wall!
 - You sit to judge me according to the law - you command me to be struck contrary to the law?
 - The HIGH Priest Ananias - his name means the GRACE [חַן] of God [אֱלֹהִים]
 - Ananias ordered Paul to be STUCK on the mouth [rebuke of his defense]
 - Paul retorted God would STRIKE him - a whitewashed wall [2x NT]
 - The same description Jesus had given to the Pharisees and Sadducees - **Matthew 23:27**
 - They looking CLEAN on the outside - but were ROTTEN on the inside...
 - ROTTEN because he was JUDGING Paul from the Law - but BROKE the law by striking him...
 - Paul had NOT been officially accused of ANY crime - **Deuteronomy 25:2**
 - The problem with RELIGION - is that it makes people HYPOCRITES...
 - The same MEN who tells to follow RULES - also break their own RULES!
 - **Colossians 2:23** - "Rules may seem wise because they require strong devotion - pious self-denial and severe bodily discipline. But they provide no help in conquering evil desires." [NLT]
 - RULES may change the OUTSIDE - but they are superficial...
 - RULES do NOT have the POWER to change our HEARTS...
 - The solution to being a HYPOCRITE - is to admit we are NOT good...
 - That sets us free to come to the ONLY one who can change our heart - **Romans 7:24**
- High Priest... vs. 4-5
 - And those who stood by said: Do you revile Gods high priest?
 - Then Paul said: I did not know - brethren - that he was the high priest.
 - For it is written: You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people!
 - Other men from the Sanhedrin rebuked Paul for speaking against the High Priest of God...
 - Paul apologized [imperfect] - it is written NOT to speak evil about a ruler - **Exodus 22:28**
 - Not that Ananias deserved respect – he was a harsh and corrupt man [Josephus]
 - He used force to take tithes to make himself rich - part of a violent and oppressive leadership!
 - The High Priest was supposed to be HEREDITARY [passed from father to son] - **Exodus 29:9**
 - The reason Paul did NOT recognize Ananias as High Priest - it had become POLITICAL...
 - High Priest were appointed by ROME - not anointed by GOD!
 - **I Peter 2:13**– "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man - for the Lords sake."
 - All authority comes from God - so NO leaders are there by accident...
 - Therefore we should obey and respect those in AUTHORITY [even if they are corrupt]
 - Not because they DESERVE it - but as a GOOD witness to others!
 - **I Peter 2:15** - "By doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men!"
- 2nd - Causing Division - vs. 6-10
 - Anger...
 - Paul realized that through his outburst he lost any chance of a fair trial...
 - Rather than turn the other cheek – Paul had reacted in anger - **Luke 6:29**
 - And even though he had apologized – he still offended the High Priest!
 - Just because something is in our HEADS - does NOT mean it needs to come out our MOUTH...
 - In the MOMENT we often are full of EMOTION - and need to COOL down before we speak...
 - Because if we let HURTFUL words come out - they WILL do DAMAGE!

- **Proverbs 15:1** – “A soft answer turns away wrath - a harsh word stirs up anger.”
- The Resurrection... vs. 6-8
 - But when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees.
 - He cried out in the council: Men and brethren - I am a Pharisee - the son of a Pharisee.
 - Concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead I am being judged.
 - And when he had said this a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees.
 - And the assembly was divided. For Sadducees say that there is no resurrection.
 - And no angel or spirit - but the Pharisees confess both!
- But since Paul KNEW [γινώσκω] the SANHEDRIN was broken up into TWO groups...
 - Some of them were SADDUCEES - the others [ἕτερος] were PHARISEES...
 - He SHOUTED to the Council that he was [present] a PHARISEES [son of a Pharisee]
 - And because [περί] of his HOPE in the RESURRECTION he was being JUDGED [κρίνω]
 - IMMEDIATELY it caused a DIVISION [σχίζω] in the Council...
 - Because the SADDUCEES did NOT believe in the resurrection or angels [spirits]
 - But the PHARISEES believed in them BOTH - **Matthew 22:23**
 - One might question who Paul was trusting to get him out of trouble [himself or God]
 - But as we follow and serve the Lord – God does NOT tell us to turn our brains off [γινώσκω]
 - It is true that God works all things out – but He had given us a mind as well...
 - There is a BALANCE between having FAITH in God – but also using COMMON sense...
 - We are called to be WISE [make good choices] - but ultimately TRUST in the Lord!
 - **Proverbs 16:9** – “A mans heart plans his way - but the LORD directs his steps.”
- No evil... vs. 9-10
 - Then there arose a loud outcry. The scribes of the Pharisees party arose and protested saying:
 - We find no evil in this man. If a spirit or an angel has spoken to him let us not fight against God.
 - When there arose a great dissension the commander fearing Paul might be pulled to pieces.
 - Commanded the soldiers to go - take him by force from among them - bring him to the barracks.
 - The men who did NOT believe in the RESURRECTION [ἀνάστασιν]
 - ROSE up [ἀναστάντες] - play on words - and let out a great CRY [μέγας]
 - Then some SCRIBES [most conservative Pharisees] stood up to FIGHT for Paul...
 - SINCE [indicative] and Angel or Spirit had spoken to him - let us [subjunctive] NOT fight God...
 - The COMMANDER feared Paul would be TORN to pieces [2x NT] - **Mark 5:4**
 - And he told his soldiers to RAPTURE [ἁρπάζω] Paul - and take him to the FORTRESS!
 - The amount of EMOTION that Paul stirred up in the Council [συνέδριον]
 - Reflected the greater state of Jerusalem at this point in history...
 - HISTORICAL differences between the LIBERAL Sadducees and CONSERVATIVE Pharisees...
 - Compounded by the recent conversion of THOUSANDS of Jews to Christianity...
 - Had brought Israel a boiling point - and Paul was at the very center!
- 3rd - To Rome... vs. 11
 - Good cheer...
 - The following night the Lord stood by him and said: Be of good cheer Paul!
 - The next NIGHT - the Lord [κύριος] stood with Paul...
 - And commanded [imperative] him to have COURAGE [θαρσέω]!
 - When the disciples were crossing the STORY sea - and Jesus came walking on the water...
 - He gave the SAME command - be of good cheer [θαρσέω] - **Matthew 14:27**

- When we are the STORMS of life - when everything seems to be going WRONG [prison]
- It is easy to FORGET that God is beside us - we can SMILE...
- That does NOT mean He will change our CIRCUMSTANCES [still in prison]
- But with God on our side - we have the COURAGE to go on - **Romans 8:31**

▪ Testify...

- As you have testified for Me in Jerusalem - so you must also bear witness at Rome!
- The WORK [διαμαρτύρομαι] Paul had for Paul in Jerusalem was done...
- It was time for him to move on - and be a WITNESS [μαρτυρέω] in ROME...
- God was CLOSING one door - so He could lead Paul through another!
- We can get focused on our CIRCUMSTANCES - and miss the bigger picture...
- God allows things to happen in our lives - to DIRECT us to where He wants us to be!

▪ 2ND - PLOT AGAINST PAUL... vs. 12-22

○ 1st - Forty men... vs. 12-15

▪ The Curse... vs. 12-15

- When it was day some of the Jews banded together and bound themselves under an oath.
- Saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul.
- Now there were more than forty who had formed this conspiracy!
- The NEXT day a group of more than FORTY Jews bound themselves to a CURSE [ἀναθεματίζω]
- They would NOT eat or drink until they had KILLED Paul!
- The rule of THREE: an average person can last THREE minutes without air...
- THREE days without water - and about THREE weeks without food...
- This meant these FORTY plus Jews did NOT have much time to KILL Paul!

▪ The Test... vs. 14-15

- They came to the chief priests and elders and said:
- We have bound ourselves under a great oath that we will eat nothing until we have killed Paul.
- You therefore together with the council - suggest to the commander he be brought tomorrow.
- As though you were going to make further inquiries concerning him.
- But we are ready to kill him before he comes near!
- They came to the Chief Priests and Elders telling them about their CURSE...
- The COUNCIL needed to [imperative] ask for the COMMANDER to bring Paul back tomorrow...
- Pretending they were going to ASK for more information [διαγινώσκω]
- But the FORTY Jews would be READY to KILL him!
- In the Bible FORTY is the number of trials or testing [Noah - Israel - Jesus]
- Right after Paul had been given a PROMISE from God - he was TESTED!
- **I Peter 4:12** - "Do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you!"
- We want God to use us - but at FIRST we need to be PREPARED...
- God must FORGE us through fiery trials - into something useful...
- God allows us to go through TRIALS - He puts us in the FIRE...
- So we can be reshaped into the perfect TOOL - fit for the MASTERS use!

○ 2nd - Divine protection... vs. 16-22

▪ The nephew... vs. 16

- When Pauls sisters son heard of their ambush he went and entered the barracks and told Paul!
- The NEPHEW of Paul happened to HEAR [participle] about the ambush...
- So he went into the Antonia Fortress and told [indicative] Paul...

- What are the CHANCES the nephew just HAPPENED to hear the plot...
- Paul had NOTHING to do with his nephew being there – it was all God...
- There are NO coincidences in life – God is in control of EVERYTHING!
- Just because we do NOT see how God is working – does NOT mean He is not there...
- God never sleeps - never rests – and is always working...
- Often the only thing we have to do – is be still and be amazed by what God does!
- **Psalm 46:10** – “Be still and know that I am God.”

▪ The witness... vs. 17-19

- Then Paul called one of the centurions to him and said:
- Take this young man to the commander for he has something to tell him.
- So he took him and brought him to the commander and said:
- Paul the prisoner called me to him and asked me to bring this young man to you.
- He has something to say to you. Then the commander took him by the hand.
- Went aside and asked privately: What is it that you have to tell me?
- Paul called for one of the CENTURIONS - and said [imperfect] to him...
- Take [imperative] this young man to the COMMANDER [χλῖαρχος] he had a message for him...
- The COMMANDER took the young man by the hand [gently]
- Took him aside to a PRIVATE place and asked [imperfect] about his message!
- The COMMANDER was in a difficult position - Paul was a Roman citizen...
- Who had been at the heart of a RIOT [Jews in the Temple tried to kill Paul] - **Acts 21:31**
- And had divided COUNCIL - they almost tore him to pieces...
- Any information about Paul was going to get his attention at this point!

▪ The warning... vs. 20-22

- He said: The Jews have agreed to ask that you bring Paul down to the council tomorrow.
- As though they were going to inquire more fully about him.
- But do not yield to them for more than forty of them lie in wait for him.
- Men who bound themselves by an oath they will neither eat nor drink till they have killed him.
- And now they are ready - waiting for the promise from you.
- So the commander let the young man depart and commanded him:
- Tell no one that you have revealed these things to me!
- The NEPHEW relayed the PLOT he had overheard to the COMMANDER...
- He pleaded with him to NOT [subjunctive] send Paul at the request of the Council...
- The FORTY men were just waiting for his announcement so they could kill Paul...
- The COMMANDER let the boy go - and commanded him to tell know one what he had said!
- We often think God only uses EXTRAORDINARY means to direct us...
- But God can use ANYTHING - He often uses very ORDINARY means...
- He works through our FAMILY [nephew] - through the GOVERNMENT [commander]
- Our part is to recognize when the hand of God moving!

▪ **3RD - ROMAN GUARD... vs. 23-35**

○ 1st - Small army... vs. 23-24

- He called for two centurions saying: Prepare two hundred soldiers.
- Seventy horsemen - and two hundred spearmen to go to Caesarea at the third hour of the night.
- And provide mounts to set Paul on and bring him safely to Felix the governor!

- The COMMANDER called for TWO centurions - and told them to PREPARE [imperative]
- TWO hundred soldiers - SEVENTY cavalry [only here] - TWO hundred Spearmen [only here]
- They were to leave for Caesarea at NINE at night [3rd hour] - under the cover of darkness...
- Caesarea was a ROMAN city - capitol of Judea - the Jews did not have much influence...
- And SAFELY [διασώζω] deliver Paul there to the Roman Governor Felix!
- When the President of the US travels in PUBLIC - he has a security detail [Secret service]
- It is estimated that the total number of people protecting him is around THREE hundred...
- Paul was getting an ESCORT worthy of a PRESIDENT [470 soldiers] - a ROYAL protection detail!
- When [not if] people ATTACK us - we have a CHOICE...
- We can DEFEND ourselves - or we can trust God will be our DEFENSE...
- If we want God to do the work - we need to WAIT for His TIMING...
- Knowing He does a FAR better job of PROTECTING us that we could ever do on our own!
- **Psalm 94:22**– “My soul silently waits for God. From Him comes my salvation. He only is my rock and my salvation. He is my defense. I shall not be greatly moved!”
- 2nd - The Letter... vs. 25-30
 - Claudius Lysias... vs. 26
 - He wrote a letter in the following manner:
 - Claudius Lysias: To the most excellent governor Felix: Greetings!
 - The COMMANDER wrote this letter to go along with Paul...
 - In the LETTER [ἐπιστολή] he gives his NAME: Claudius Lysias!
 - We do NOT have any record of this man outside of the book of Acts...
 - But his name Lysias [Greek] - is likely his given name...
 - And Claudius [Latin] - was likely given to him when he became a Roman Citizen!
 - Rescued... vs. 27-29
 - This man was seized by the Jews and was about to be killed by them.
 - Coming with the troops I rescued him - having learned that he was a Roman.
 - And when I wanted to know the reason they accused him I brought him before their council.
 - I found out that he was accused concerning questions of their law.
 - But had nothing charged against him deserving of death or chains!
 - In his letter - Lysias explained to Felix what happened to Paul...
 - He was about to be KILLED by the Jews when Lysias RESCUED [ἐξαίρέω] him...
 - His MOTIVE for RESCUING Paul was that he LEARNED he was a ROMAN...
 - Lysias actually did NOT find that out until AFTER he had ARRESTED him [illegally]
 - But when he sought to find out the ACCUSATION [imperfect] against Paul...
 - He learned from the COUNCIL [συνέδριον] - it was about their LAW [τοῦ νόμου αὐτῶν]
 - And the charges were NOT worthy of DEATH or CHAINS!
 - Charges... vs. 30
 - When it was told me that the Jews lay in wait for the man - I sent him immediately to you.
 - Also commanded his accusers to state before you the charges against him. Farewell!
 - When Lysias heard about the PLOT by the Jews to KILL Paul...
 - He immediately [that night] send Paul to Felix in Caesarea...

- He also sent word to his accusers - to come to Caesarea to bring their charges against Paul...
- Lysias was leaving it up to Felix to DECIDE what would happen to Paul!
- This would mark the FIRST of THREE trials Paul would endure...
- But it would NOT be Felix who would DECIDE - it would be God who directed...
- Because it was the PLAN of God for Paul to go to ROME - **Acts 23:11**
- 3rd - Caesarea... vs. 31-35
 - At night... vs. 31-32
 - Then the soldiers as they were commanded - took Paul and brought him by night to Antipatris.
 - The next day they left the horsemen to go on with him - and returned to the barracks!
 - The 470 soldiers did as they were told - and took Paul by night...
 - The brought him to ANTIPATRIS - about half way between Jerusalem and Caesarea...
 - A journey of about 65 kilometers that would have taken most of the night...
 - The next day the 400 troops returned to Jerusalem - while the Calvary continued with Paul!
 - The palace... vs. 33-35
 - When they came to Caesarea and had delivered the letter to the governor.
 - They presented Paul to him. When the governor had read it he asked what province he was from.
 - When he understood that he was from Cilicia he said:
 - I will hear you when your accusers have come. He commanded him kept in Herod's Praetorium!
 - When they arrived in Caesarea - the Calvary turned Paul over to the Governor...
 - Who asked where Paul was from - did he have LEGAL authority to oversee his case...
 - Cilicia was in the province of Syria - which Felix also had authority over...
 - But he would WAIT until the Jews came and could present their CASE...
 - In the meantime Paul would be kept in Herods Praetorium...
 - A beautiful PALACE built on the Mediterranean Sea by Herod the Great...
 - It was the residence of the Governor - but also used for high profile prisoners...
 - Paul was NOT in a dungeon - he was staying in a coastal PALACE!
 - Men make their plans – they will say what they want – and do what they want...
 - But NO matter how DARK our circumstances might seem...
 - In the end God is in control – and He uses all things for His purpose...
 - So even if we do NOT like where God has us – we just need to TRUST Him...
 - And if we get our eyes off our problems – we will see God is working!