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Acts 23

(2019)

Bible House of Grace contains an easy to read New and Old Testament commentary full of spiritual treasures and pearls, complete with an insightful resource guide illuminating God's love and grace.



Although I believe my aim is pure and God's will perfect this document is still the product of a human man, as to such I neither claim perfect knowledge or perfect understanding.

Acts 23.

Topics.

- Paul gives his testimony before the council and is struck on the mouth.
- The Pharisees and Sadducees argue over the resurrection.
- The tribune feared Paul would be, torn to pieces.
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- Jews make an oath neither to eat nor drink till they had killed Paul.
- Soldiers take Paul to Caesarea to see Felix the governor.

The previous chapter: Paul spoke in Hebrew to a Jewish crowd in Jerusalem and they yelled out away with him, had the tribune not arrived with soldiers it is most likely they would have beaten him to death. Paul badly wounded is carried away by the tribune's soldiers. The chapter ended with the tribune still wanting to know the real reason why the Jews desired to kill Paul so he commanded the chief priests and all the council to meet and he brought Paul down and set him before them.

NOTE: for information concerning people, places and the meaning of words see Map Locations and People of the Bible, and Bible Dictionary on Website Menu.

ACTS 23:1-5

1

Paul gives his Testimony before the council and is struck on the Mouth.

- **Acts 23:1-5:** And looking intently at the council, Paul said, "Brothers, I have lived my life before God in all good conscience up to this day."²And the high priest Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth. ³Then Paul said to him "God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall! Are you sitting to judge me according to the law, and yet contrary to the law you order me to be struck?" ⁴Those who stood by said, "Would you revile God's high priest?" ⁵And Paul said, "I did not know, brothers, that he was the high priest, for it is written, 'You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.'"

NOTE: this entire meeting has been arranged by the tribune because he wants to find out why the Jews want to kill Jesus (see the previous chapter). The reason the Jews want Paul put to death is because he said, "Christ told him to get out of Jerusalem because they will not accept his testimony about the Lord and go far away to the Gentiles" (v18-22). It seems tribune did not understand the Jews fury and desire to kill Paul or he did not believe this was their real reason. This is amazing the high priest Ananias commands those standing by Paul not only to slap him, but slap him on the mouth. Paul called him a whitewashed wall.

Whitewashed wall: means the high priest looked religious and holy on the outside dressed in their religious robes, reading the scrolls, ruling the temple and saying long prayers, but on the inside are prideful and hypocritical full of selfish ambition and wickedness.

The High priest and Jewish religious rulers: were perverting justice for their own gain, oppressing the poor and less fortunate for their own profit and more concerned about their own power, control and status than they were for the people they were ordained to be shepherding. They did not practice what they preached themselves and placed heavy burdens

on others which they themselves were not willing to bear. All the religious things they did were simply so they would look good or spiritual before others. At meetings they loved the best seats so that they looked important because they idolised being esteemed and called by their title and their motive for being religious leaders was for their own financial gain, power and self-importance and not for the LORD or the people who were seeking God. Jesus himself called them hypocrites, blind guides, fools lacking justice, mercy and faithfulness full of greed and self-indulgence like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful and righteous, but within are murderers full of dead people's bones, lawlessness and all uncleanness, a brood of vipers and serpents. At the end of these statements the Lord made the following heart wrenching cry:

- Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not! See, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again, until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord (Matthew 23).

Paul: had the same heart-felt cry for the Jewish people and God's Holy City Jerusalem, desiring that the rulers of the temple and religious authorities of the city would repent, turn from their gross wickedness and accept the world of the Lord. We know Paul felt this way because in the book of Romans he says, "I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh (Rom 9:3), but eventually the opposition of the Jews became so great Paul gave up trying to save them and was forced to turn his attention toward the Gentiles (Acts 18:6). Paul's words:

- Are you sitting to judge me according to the law, and yet contrary to the law you order me to be struck? (v3).

The spirit of the law is love since each law regarding man protects the innocent and the six laws referring to mankind are summed up in the words, "Love your neighbour as yourself," meaning do not deliberately do harm to other humans. No sane person deliberately does things to inflict pain on themselves, loving others as you love yourself is not about feeling some warm and fuzzy emotion towards others, it is about not hurting others as you would not hurt yourself. The thing God hates the most is when we do harm to another person, physically, financially, sexually, emotionally or spiritually and the thing God loves the most is when we do good to others. It is interesting to notice that the major crime that God points out in Noah's time and one of the main reasons for the flood was because of all the violence in the land. Leviticus chapter nineteen makes it clear that our neighbour is every other person, showing that the law requires justice to all people.

The six commandments regarding mankind should be applied to everyone and we must abide by them ourselves. To love in the biblical sense is not an emotional attitude, but the keeping of these laws in relation to our neighbour. This is the general law of justice, beyond that; our conduct is to be regulated by relationship. We must render honour and justice to all people wherever due, but we have a particular responsibility to care for our families and those who belong to Christ. This is the reason Paul told Ananias the high priest, "He is acting contrary to the law by ordering him to be struck?" And the reason Paul says, "He did not know that he was a high priest," because of Ananias violent behaviour and because he is siding with the Jews who have almost beating Paul to death and even seeing how Paul has been brutally treated Ananias is still full of anger and fury toward him and still desiring to have Paul who has committed no crime put to death. When Paul said, "You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people" he is basically saying that he does not consider Ananias a high priest, since all of his behaviour is totally contrary to what God would expect from a man standing as the LORD'S high priest in God's temple.

The Pharisees and Sadducees argue over the Resurrection.

- **Acts 23:6-10:** Now when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, "Brothers, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees. It is with respect to the hope and the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial." ⁷And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. ⁸For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor angel, nor spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all. ⁹Then a great clamour arose, and some of the scribes of the Pharisees' party stood up and contended sharply, "We find nothing wrong in this man. What if a spirit or an angel spoke to him?" ¹⁰And when the dissension became violent, the tribune afraid that Paul would be torn to pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go down and take him (Paul) away from among them by force and bring him into the barracks.

Pharisees (the word Pharisees means "The Separated Ones").

The Pharisees were rulers of the Jews and the most-strict and by far the most influential sect of the three prominent societies of Judaism that were around at the time of Christ (the Pharisees, Sadducees and Essences). Pharisees loved to wear distinguishing garb so as to be easily recognised and were found everywhere in Palestine not only in Jerusalem. They made three contributions to Judaism so that ultimately Pharisaism and Judaism became almost synonymous. The changes the Pharisees made to the Jewish faith began in earnest after the Babylonian captivity, the temple worship and the sacrifices had ceased so the Pharisees, scribes and Sadducees began to centre the activities of Judaism in Jewish Law, tradition and in the religious rites of the Synagogues.

The three changes the Pharisees made to Judaism:

1. **JEWISH LEGALISM:** The Scribes who were considered experts in interpreting the Scriptures studied the traditional exegesis of the Law which resulted in it becoming a major part of Jewish thought and giving **JEWISH LEGALISM** a great impetus during the New Testament era. The Pharisees closely associated with the Scribes organised the followers of the Scribes teaching in the Synagogues thus **LEGALISM** became widespread in the Jewish faith.
2. **FORMALISED RELIGION:** the Pharisees formalised the religion of the Scribes and their interpretation of the law they placed it into the mind of Jewish faith and the practice of it in the synagogues and religious ceremony. The reason the Scribes and Pharisees are often mentioned together in the New Testament is because though the Pharisees were not practical politicians like the more liberal Sadducees, they were the religious leaders of the Jews and the highest qualification for membership into the Pharisees was strict adherence to the Law (Oral or written).
3. **ORGANISATION OF JEWISH RELIGION:** after the 70-year Babylonian captivity and the Maccabean Revolt (165 BC) the Scribes increased tradition and adapted it with the Mosaic Law, but it was the Pharisees who formulated, developed and organised the Scribes teachings into Jewish religion itself. This increased focus on law and tradition resulted in separatism and an almost new religion, because much of it was the opposite from what had been handed down in the Covenant by the prophets.

The Pharisees became a closely organised group: the Pharisees were very loyal to their own society and to each other, but separate from others and even their own Jewish people, they pledged themselves to obey all facets of the traditions to minutest detail and were sticklers to ceremonial purity. This developed into a feeling of superiority over other nations and people. From this superior feeling as well as religious emotion, pride found its most extreme expression. The Pharisees were haughty and arrogant because they believed they were the only interpreters of God and His Word they made life difficult for themselves and bitter for others, and despised those whom they did not consider their equals. The Pharisees

cultivated a national and religious consciousness, which has hardly been equalled. Their teaching that salvation came by maintaining tradition and keeping the law had such a strong influence on the minds of their followers that God's grace was thought to come from self-effort rather than grace so it was only natural that such a religion would ultimately become a matter of externals and not a faith of the heart.

Sadducees: (the word Sadducees means to be righteous).

The Sadducees were the religious political party of the Jewish aristocratic priesthood. They held strictly to the written Law and because they were more interested in maintaining the political status quo than in the religious purity of the nation they became the religious party favourable to the Roman government. The Sadducees are mentioned about a dozen times in the New Testament and most likely referred to when mention is made of the Chief Priest. Though they resisted Christ, the truth of the Gospel and were active against the infant Church Jesus only once warned his disciples against the Sadducees on all other occasions his criticism was against the Pharisees.

Tribune: refers to the chief captain of a band of men. In the ancient Roman republic, a tribune was a representative annually elected to defend the rights of the common people. The tribune at this time was the chief captain Lysias (Acts 23:26) (Acts 24:7, 22).

The tribune feared Paul would be, torn to pieces: this is a perfect example of a group of religious people confessing to believe in God, but manifesting the fruits of the flesh, anger, quarrelling, strife, contention, shouting, dissension, division, clamour to such an extent the uproar became so violent the tribune was afraid Paul would be torn to pieces so he has him taken to his own barracks.

Wisdom from above and earthly wisdom: James says:

- Where earthly wisdom exists there will be disorder and every vile practice because this wisdom stems from a heart full of bitter jealousy and selfish ambition and is therefore unspiritual and demonic contrasted to the wisdom that descends from above which is pure, peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere (James 3:13-17).

It is not a sin to discuss different views of doctrine and of the Scriptures in fact it is spiritually healthy to do so it only becomes a sin when the spirit of the discussion moves from meekness, mercy and peace to one of strife, contention and argument. Had the Pharisees and Sadducees held this council meeting in the wisdom that is from above instead of their earthly wisdom both groups would all have spiritually benefited from it.

ACTS 23:11-15

Paul has Testified in Jerusalem now he must Testify in Rome.

- **Acts 23:11-15:** The following night the Lord stood by him and said, "Take courage, for as you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem, so you must testify also in Rome."¹²When it was day, the Jews made a plot and bound themselves by an oath neither to eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. ¹³There were more than forty who made this conspiracy. ¹⁴They went to the chief priests and elders and said, "We have strictly bound ourselves by an oath to taste no food till we have killed Paul. ¹⁵Now therefore you along with the council, give notice to the tribune to bring him down to you, as though you were going to determine his case more exactly. And we are ready to kill him before he comes near."

NOTICE: the first words the Lord's says to comfort Paul, "Take courage," showing that even though a person is faithfully serving Christ does not guarantee they will be rewarded with a charmed and easy life. It is also interesting to note that the Lord is basically saying to Paul, "You have

done all you can do with the Jews at Jerusalem it is time to move on." Sometimes as much as we might love someone there comes a time when it is far more profitable to move on and spend our energy on others who maybe more receptive to the word of the Lord thus the Lord tells Paul it is time to testify in Rome.

Certain Jews make an oath neither to eat nor drink, till they had killed Paul: over forty Jews strictly bound themselves by an oath not to eat or drink till they had killed Paul and they confirmed this oath with the chief priests and elders it would be interesting to know if they died of thirst or starved to death since Paul was delivered from their plot to murder him. Is it any wonder Jesus called them religious hypocrites, not only are more than forty Jews premeditating a plan to murder Paul the chief priests and elders are in on it thus the reason Jesus said, "you will know who are his sheep and who are wolves by their fruits" (Matt 7:15-20).

ACTS 23:16-22

Paul's Sister's Son warns Paul of the Jews Plot to Kill Him.

- **Acts 23:16-22:** Now the son of Paul's sister heard of their ambush, so he went and entered the barracks and told Paul. ¹⁷Paul called one of the centurions and said, "Take this young man to the tribune, for he has something to tell him." ¹⁸So he took him and brought him to the tribune and said, "Paul the prisoner called me and asked me to bring this young man to you, as he has something to say to you." ¹⁹The tribune took him by the hand, and going aside asked him privately, "What is it that you have to tell me?" ²⁰And he said, "The Jews have agreed to ask you to bring Paul down to the council tomorrow, as though they were going to inquire somewhat more closely about him. ²¹But do not be persuaded by them, for more than forty of their men are lying in ambush for him, who have bound themselves by an oath neither to eat nor drink till they have killed him. And now they are ready, waiting for your consent." ²²So the tribune dismissed the young man, charging him, "Tell no one that you have informed me of these things."

Paul's sister's son tells Paul of the plot to murder him; the lad goes and tells the tribune privately of the Jews plan and oath to kill Paul.

ACTS 23:23-30

The Tribune tells 200 soldiers to take Paul to Felix the Governor.

- **Acts 23:23-30:** Then he called two of the centurions and said, "Get ready two hundred soldiers, with seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen to go as far as Caesarea at the third hour of the night. (9pm) ²⁴Also provide mounts for Paul to ride and bring him safely to Felix the governor." ²⁵And he wrote a letter to this effect: ²⁶"Claudius Lysias, to his Excellency the governor Felix, greetings. ²⁷This man was seized by the Jews and was about to be killed by them when I came upon them with the soldiers and rescued him, having learned that he was a Roman citizen. ²⁸And desiring to know the charge for which they were accusing him, I brought him down to their council. ²⁹I found that he was being accused about questions of their law, but charged with nothing deserving death or imprisonment. ³⁰And when it was disclosed to me that there would be a plot against the man, I sent him to you at once, ordering his accusers also to state before you what they have against him."

Felix: (Antonius) was a Roman governor of Judea. His place of residence was Caesarea, about sixty miles from Jerusalem. He was high in the favour of Claudius, and was made by him governor of Judea. (Josephus calls him Claudius Felix). This shows that the tribune was a far more godly man than were the Jewish religious leaders, since the tribune could have turned a blind eye and all the Jews would have rejoiced at Paul's death, but instead he organised an enormous number of soldiers to protect Paul and take him safely to Felix the governor. It is certain that this tribune

discerned the jealousy and ungodliness of the hypocritical religious leaders of his generation and had no respect for them. It is interesting to consider if this was happening in western courts today the Jewish religious leaders would rightly be imprisoned for planning premeditated murder and Paul would be set free.

The Tribune writes a Letter to Felix: The Tribune (the chief captain Lysias) (Acts 23:26) (Acts 24:7, 22) finding no fault in Paul deserving death or imprisonment writes to Felix explaining all that has been happening concerning Paul and the religious authorities of Jerusalem. He tells Felix that he is sending Paul to him and at the same time ordering Paul's accusers to also go to stand before Felix and state why they are so determined to kill a man who has committed no crime.

ACTS 23:31-35

Soldiers take Paul to Caesarea to see Felix the Governor.

- **Acts 23:31-35:** So the soldiers, according to their instructions, took Paul and brought him by night to Antipatris. ³²And on the next day they returned to the barracks, letting the horsemen go on with him. ³³When they had come to Caesarea and delivered the letter to the governor, they presented Paul also before him. ³⁴On reading the letter, he asked what province he was from. And when he learned that he was from Cilicia, ³⁵he said, "I will give you a hearing when your accusers arrive." And he commanded him to be guarded in Herod's Praetorium. (Herod's judgement hall in KJV).

Cilicia; was conquered by the Romans and became a Roman province.

The soldiers take the letter and Paul to Felix the governor, when Felix learned that Paul was a Roman citizen, he had him guarded in Herod's Praetorian (Herod's judgement hall in KJV) until his Jewish accusers arrived. Ponder for a moment the tribune has informed Felix that Paul's accusers who are coming to defend their case have unlawfully plotted to kill Paul a man innocent of any crime.

As the founder of Bible House of Grace, I would like to thank the many Christian scholars, commentators and theologians who have gone before me, and the many today, who have freely made available their works to enhance the knowledge of the Bible to all people worldwide. It is only with the help of these faithful writers that much of Bible House of Grace exists as it does today.
