

THE LIFE OF THE APOSTLE PAUL

RESPONSES OF THE MOB AND THE SANHEDRIN, ACTS 22:22-23:11

A. The response of the mob (22:22-23)

1. They listened to Paul until he mentioned ministry to Gentiles (22a), ***Up to this word they listened to him.***
 - a. The word that aroused the Jews was *Gentiles*.
 - b. They could not accept the fact that God's grace was for all people, Galatians 3:28, *There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*
 - 1) Jews had taken messages from God to Gentiles in the past like Jonah had done.
 - 2) Paul infuriated them because he was taking the Messiah to the Gentiles without calling them to Judaism.
 - 3) Thomas Constable, *What upset them was that Paul was approaching Gentiles directly about the Messiah without first introducing them to Judaism and its institutions. This was equivalent to placing Gentiles on the same footing before God as Jews, and this was the height of apostasy to the traditional Jewish mind. This is why Paul's hearers reacted so violently and allowed him to say no more.*
2. They were enraged to the point that they wanted Paul dead (22b-23), ***Then they raised their voices and said, "Away with such a fellow from the earth! For he should not be allowed to live." And as they were shouting and throwing off their cloaks and flinging dust into the air,***
 - a. Their anger became so intense that they could not control their emotions which became visible when they began throwing off clothing and throwing dust into the air.
 - b. John Pohill, *They either tore them as a gesture of horror at blasphemy (14:14), or they threw them off their bodies as if ready to stone Paul (cf. 7:58), or they shook them out as if trying to rid themselves of the contamination of his blasphemy, or they waved them wildly in the air to express their collective outrage.*

B. Paul's appeal to the tribune (22:24-29)

1. The tribune decided to torture Paul to find out why he so enraged the Jews (24), ***the tribune ordered him to be brought into the barracks, saying that he should be examined by flogging, to find out why they were shouting against him like this.***
 - a. The tribune is identified in Acts 23:26 as Claudius Lysias.
 - b. He could not understand why the Jews were so enraged by Paul so he decided to have him flogged.
 - 1) He hoped that such torture would compel Paul to tell the truth.
 - 2) The instrument used for flogging consisted of a wooden handle with strips of leather embedded with pieces of bone or metal.
 - 3) Such floggings could result in death or permanent crippling.
 - 4) It is the same tool Roman soldiers used to beat Jesus, note Matthew 27:26, *Then he released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, delivered him to be crucified.*
2. Paul asked the centurion if it was lawful to flog an uncondemned Roman citizen (25), ***But when they had stretched him out for the whips, Paul said to the centurion who was standing by, "Is it lawful for you to flog a man who is a Roman citizen and uncondemned?"***
 - a. As Paul was being prepared for scourging, he asked if it was lawful for a Roman citizen to be flogged but not found guilty of any crime.
 - b. The answer was *no* since Roman law protected citizens from scourging before and after being found guilty.
 - c. Thomas Constable, *The fact that Paul raised a question in his defense rather than demanding his release reflects his self-control in this dangerous situation. He was under the Spirit's control.*

3. Response to Paul's declaration that he was a Roman citizen (26-29), *When the centurion heard this, he went to the tribune and said to him, "What are you about to do? For this man is a Roman citizen." So the tribune came and said to him, "Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?" And he said, "Yes." The tribune answered, "I bought this citizenship for a large sum." Paul said, "But I am a citizen by birth." So those who were about to examine him withdrew from him immediately, and the tribune also was afraid, for he realized that Paul was a Roman citizen and that he had bound him.*

- a. The centurion took the information concerning Paul to Claudius Lysias who went to hear it for himself.
- b. Paul stated that he was a Roman citizen from birth and the tribune was incredulous because he had bought his citizenship for a large sum of money. F. Bruce, *Earlier the government conferred citizenship for rendering valuable service to a Roman general or high official. This is probably how Paul's father or grandfather received his citizenship. As the son of a Roman citizen, Paul inherited this status. Born citizens enjoyed greater respect than Romans who had bought their citizenship.*
- c. It had not always been possible to purchase citizenship until Emperor Claudius (41-54 A.D.). This was probably the time that Claudius Lysias purchased his citizenship and named himself in honor of Emperor Claudius.
- d. The soldiers immediately withdrew from Paul and the tribune was afraid.
 - 1) It was illegal to chain a Roman citizen, as well, which the tribune had done to Paul.
 - 2) Kenneth Gangel, *...no one would challenge a person claiming Roman citizenship. Such a claim was accepted at face value. Those who claimed Roman citizenship and had their claims later disproved faced considerably worse punishment (death).*

C. Paul's defense before the Sanhedrin (22:30-23:10)

1. The tribune had Paul stand trial before the Sanhedrin (30), *But on the next day, desiring to know the real reason why he was being accused by the Jews, he unbound him and commanded the chief priests and all the council to meet, and he brought Paul down and set him before them.*

- a. The tribune released Paul from chains but kept him in custody.
- b. It was decided the Sanhedrin should determine why the Jews were so upset with Paul.
- c. Thomas Constable, *If Paul's offenses proved inconsequential, Claudius Lysias would release him. If the Jews charged him with some religious crime, the Sanhedrin could try him. If they charged him with a civil crime, the Roman provincial governor would try him.*

2. Paul's first appeal (1-5)

- a. His Jewish testimony (1), *And looking intently at the council, Paul said, "Brothers, I have lived my life before God in all good conscience up to this day."*
 - 1) Paul declared that his conscience was clear before God because he had done nothing contrary to the will of God as contained in Hebrew Scriptures.
 - 2) He was setting the stage to proclaim that his Christian beliefs did not compromise his Jewish heritage.
- b. The command of the high priest (2), *And the high priest Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth.*
 - 1) The high priest ordered Paul to be slapped in the face.
 - 2) Why did Paul's comment so upset Ananias that he ordered Paul to be hit?
 - a) The Sanhedrin knew Paul was an outspoken Christian who had defected from the ranks of Jewish leaders persecuting Christians.
 - b) The high priest probably thought Paul was about to preach to them in an attempt to condemn them for rejecting Jewish as Messiah.
 - c) Stanley Toussaint, *Ananias' response is in keeping with what is known about him (Ananias) from Josephus, who described him as insolent, hot-tempered, profane, and greedy.*

- c. Paul's rebuke (3), *Then 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?"*
- 1) Paul reacted to Ananias' illegal command that an uncondemned man be struck.
 - 2) Jewish law considered a person innocent until proven guilty but Paul had not even been charged with a crime.
 - 3) Paul's statement was prophetic in that Ananias would be judged for only being religious on the outside. Compare 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.*
- d. Paul's response to the fact that the man who ordered the strike was the high priest (4-5), *Those who stood by said, "Would you revile God's high priest?" And 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.'*
- 1) He was told that he had just reviled the high priest.
 - 2) He said that he did not know the one who ordered him to be struck was the high priest.
 - 3) He said that one should not speak evil of a ruler, Exodus 22:28, *You shall not revile God, nor curse a ruler of your people.*
 - 4) Was Paul actually unaware that Ananias was the high priest?
 - a) He may not have known who had ordered that he be struck.
 - b) He may have known but spoke ironically, in that how could he be the high priest and disobey the law.
 - c) He may have lashed out in rage after going through so much turmoil.
 - d) He may have been apologizing but regardless, he acknowledged the position if not the person.
3. His second appeal (6-10)
- a. He declared that he was being accused for believing in the resurrection of the dead (6), *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."*
- 1) Paul changed his tact in response to the Sanhedrin's unwillingness to hear his story of being a faithful Jew.
 - 2) He chose to cause a split in the Sanhedrin based on differences of opinion concerning resurrection.
 - a) Sadducees denied resurrection from the dead.
 - b) Pharisees believed in resurrection.
 - 3) He proclaimed that he was a Pharisee and that he was on trial for his hope in resurrection.
 - a) The hope of Messiah rested on resurrection.
 - b) Paul's testimony always centered on resurrection proven by Jesus.
 - c) At this point, Paul was dividing the group against each other with the intent of declaring that resurrection was more than a concept but a reality as seen in Jesus the Messiah.
- b. This brought a split in the Sanhedrin (7-9), *And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor angel, nor spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all. Then a great clamor 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?"*
- 1) Paul had hit a nerve and the two groups started a heated argument.
 - 2) The Sadducees did not believe in the supernatural but the Pharisees did.
 - 3) Some Pharisees declared that Paul did not deserve to be tried since a spirit or angel may have spoken to him. This was not acceptance or defense of Paul's beliefs concerning Jesus but his belief in the supernatural.
 - 4) Again, Claudius Lysias would be unable to determine Paul's guilt or innocence, Kenneth Gangel, *...this passage is not about Sadducee/Pharisee theology, but about a divided house which has forgotten its duty assigned by a Roman officer to investigate whether the prisoner has broken any Jewish laws.*

- c. The tribune had Paul removed for his own protection (10), *And 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 away from among them by force and bring him into the barracks.*
 - 1) Claudius Lysias had Paul removed for his safety because the groups within the Sanhedrin had become so violent.
 - 2) Paul was taken from the Sanhedrin by force and returned to the barracks.

- D. Paul encouraged by the Lord (23:11), *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."*
 - 1. The Lord appeared to Paul and reminded him of his mission.
 - 2. Paul would give testimony to Jesus not only in Jerusalem but in Rome, as well.
 - 3. G. Campbell Morgan, *What a night it was. How full of light, how full of glory. His Master's word of cheer to chase away the dejection of his spirit; his Master's word of commendation astonishing him, and yet comforting him in view of his failure; his Master's word of appointment, filling him with certainty that in spite of all the difficulties in front of him, he should preach in Rome.*
 - 4. F. F. Bruce, *This assurance meant much to Paul during the delays and anxieties of the next two years, and goes far to account for the calm and dignified bearing which seemed to mark him out as a master of events rather than their victim.*

CONCLUSION

- A. Paul boldly proclaimed his message despite possible harm to himself.
- B. Paul never changed the message but he did adapt his methods.
- C. Paul did not have supernatural power but was guided by his sovereign God.