
Lesson 10 - Paul the Prisoner

Introduction: Only a person who truly had an eternal perspective and who truly valued the purpose of God over his own life could have joyfully endured the ordeal that Paul went through after a highly successful ministry around the Roman Empire. Paul was accustomed to being falsely accused, but when he returned to Jerusalem after the third missionary journey with an offering for his nation from the Gentile believers, he was violently accosted and arrested. This began a series of trials culminating in Paul going to Rome as a prisoner to face trial by the Emperor.

I. PAUL IS ARRESTED

- A. The accusation against him – Acts 21:27-29
 - 1. He is destroying Judaism by preaching against its foundations¹ (v. 28)
 - 2. He is destroying Judaism by profaning the temple (vv. 28-29)
- B. The reality – Acts 21:17-26
 - 1. He submits to church leadership
 - 2. He accommodates Judaism for the sake of peace
- C. The rescue – Acts 21:29-40
 - 1. The mob wanted to kill him (vv. 29-36)
 - 2. Paul wanted to preach to them (vv. 37-40)
- D. The message – Acts 22:1-29
 - 1. He recalls his conversion and commission (vv. 1-21)
 - 2. The crowd rejects his inclusion of gentiles (vv. 22-23)
 - 3. The tribune plans to torture him for a confession (vv. 24-29)

II. JUDICIAL HEARING BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN

- A. Paul was a prisoner of the tribune and subject to Roman law – Acts 22:30
 - 1. The tribune ordered the hearing
 - 2. He needed to know if Paul had committed any crime

¹ It is interesting that this is the very charge that was made against Stephen (Acts 6:13-14) and formed the basis for Saul's vengeful persecution against the church.

- B. Paul is transferred to Caesarea – Acts 23:11-35
 - 1. Christ reassures Paul by telling him that he will testify in Rome (v. 11)
 - a) This gives Paul confidence through the long ordeal ahead
 - b) This reminds Paul that Christ fulfills His purposes in His way
 - 2. A plot was formed to kill Paul (vv. 12-35)
 - a) Reported by Paul's nephew (vv. 16-22)²
 - b) Foiled through massive show of strength (vv. 23-35)³

III. PAUL IS TRIED BEFORE THE ROMAN GOVERNOR FELIX

- A. He is accused of being an enemy of Judaism and guilty of breaking the *Pax Romana* – Acts 24:1-9
 - 1. He is a bad guy (public menace)
 - 2. He leads an illegal religion
- B. Paul refutes their charges by reviewing the facts – Acts 24:10-21
 - 1. “The timeline doesn’t fit the charges” (v. 11)
 - 2. “There is no evidence against me” (vv. 12-21)
- C. Felix’s response – Acts 24:22-27
 - 1. Troubled over the gospel message (vv. 24-25)
 - 2. Hopes for a bribe (v. 26)
 - a) Possibly because of Paul’s social status and implied wealth
 - b) Possibly because Paul has so many friends (v. 23)
 - 3. Leaves Paul in custody for two years to please the Jews (v. 27)

IV. PAUL IS TRIED BEFORE THE ROMAN GOVERNOR FESTUS

- A. Paul’s case was the new governor’s first order of business – Acts 25:1-6
- B. The Jews make the same accusations against Paul as before – Acts 25:7

² This is the only information we have about Paul’s family during his lifetime.

³ 200 foot soldiers, 70 cavalry and 200 spearmen seems to be more than needed, but this probably reveals the seriousness with which Roman citizenship was regarded in the first century.

- C. Paul responds that he has committed no crime⁴ – Acts 25:8
 - 1. No crime against the Jewish religion
 - 2. No crime against the Jewish society
 - 3. No crime against the Roman authority
- D. Festus seeks to sacrifice Paul to gain favor with the Jews – Acts 25:9
- E. Paul exercises his Roman rights and appeals to Caesar
 - 1. Perhaps he is frustrated by the process to this point - Acts 25:10
 - 2. Perhaps Paul saw this as his only hope for survival – Acts 25:11
 - 3. Probably he recognizes this as the means to fulfill Jesus' promise - Acts 23:11)

V. PAUL PREACHES TO KING AGRIPPA AND OTHER PROMINENT MEN

- A. The event is occasioned by the need to write a charge against Paul to the Emperor – Acts 25:12-27
- B. Paul uses the occasion to proclaim the gospel – Acts 26:1-32
 - 1. He begins cordially (vv. 2-3)
 - 2. He gives his personal history as a persecutor (vv. 4-11)
 - 3. He tells the story of his conversion (vv. 12-18)
 - 4. He explains his obedience to Christ's commission (vv. 19-23)
 - 5. He extends an invitation to believe (vv. 24-29)
- C. Agrippa and Festus agree that Paul is innocent – Acts 26:30-32

VI. PAUL AT ROME

- A. As always, Paul meets with the Jewish leadership – Acts 28:17-29
- B. Acts ends with Paul proclaiming the Gospel – Acts 28:30-31
- C. Possible outcomes for Paul
 - 1. Paul was tried and executed by Nero at the close of Acts

⁴ At no point after his initial arrest does Paul seek to present the claims of the gospel to the Jewish leaders. Perhaps he recognized that they had sinned away their opportunity for salvation by this point and he treated them in the same way that Jesus had treated them during his earthly ministry.

2. Paul was released by Nero and then recaptured several years later
 - a) This view seems to fit the biblical record more accurately
 - (1) We know that Paul wrote the Prison Epistles (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon) during this period
 - (2) The character and details of the Pastoral Epistles (1st & 2nd Timothy and Titus) are much different and seem to be written from a different environment
 - b) This view is supported by strong church tradition
 - (1) History reports that Nero went insane and began to seriously persecute Christians after the great fire in Rome in 64 A.D.
 - (2) Various reports state that Paul traveled to Spain and then was recaptured by Nero and executed in around 67 A.D.

Conclusion: Paul's testimony is one of faith and obedience. He shows us the power of a life lived for the Kingdom of Christ empowered by the Holy Spirit. May all of our lives be continually inspired by his example, his doctrine and his consistent confidence in the Lord.