

Paul at Jerusalem - Part IV

Paul's Life is in Danger

(Acts 23:12-35)

Introduction:

1. The fact that Paul's life was in danger was nothing new to him. He had experienced severe opposition before, and there were those who (if given the opportunity) would have killed Paul in the hopes that the message that he preached would also die with him!
 - Shortly after his conversion, Paul began to preach about Jesus Christ to the Jews who lived in Damascus – they didn't like his message and plotted to have Paul killed. (Acts 9:22-25)
 - Not long after the incident in Damascus, Paul was in Jerusalem preaching to the Hellenistic Jews about Jesus Christ. They too didn't like the message and attempted to kill Paul. (Acts 9:28-30)
 - On his first missionary journey, the Jews of Iconium and Antioch of Pisidia attempted to kill Paul by stoning him. (Acts 14:19)
 - Another plot by the Jews to have Paul killed was somehow discovered by Paul (see Acts 20:3)
2. Paul knew full well the dangers that awaited him (Acts 21:11-14) and in spite of the physical pain that he faced – he pressed on anyway.
3. This portion of our study (Acts 23:12-35), has one major doctrinal theme, (though not specifically mentioned) – it is the fact that God is Sovereign and He providentially orders the affairs of those who follow Him!

The Conspiracy Itself (Acts 23:12-15)

1. It didn't take Paul's enemies very long to put their murderous plan together:
 - The very next morning after Paul had appeared before the Sanhedrin; a group of about 40+ (extremist and fanatical) Jews gathered themselves together to form a plot to have Paul killed.
 - These people (enemies of the Gospel) were probably frustrated over the fact that Paul had escaped and lived to continue preaching the Gospel.
2. Take note of how serious they were in desiring Paul's death:
 - They took an _____ (*anathematizio*); which meant they were willing to be placed under a curse of divine judgment if they failed.
 - Why were they so opposed to Paul and his message; especially since no proof had been made that Paul violated Jewish law? (II Corinthians 4:4)
 - The devil uses all sorts of ways to stop the spread of the gospel.....can you name some of the ways that he uses?
 - The fact that there were forty or more conspirators was probably due to fact that Paul was heavily guarded and they just didn't want to miss their chance. Plus with that many people it might be hard to determine to actual responsible person.
 - The members of the Sanhedrin (probably those who were Sadducees) were eager to help which shows the corruption within Israel's highest court – since they clearly had no case against Paul.

The Conspiracy Discovered: (Acts 23:16-22)

1. The plot to kill Paul was discovered by Paul's nephew
 - Ironically we don't know too much about Paul's family and this little passage brings up a host of questions for some:
 - 1) What was the name of his nephew? Was he a follower of Christ? How did he learn of the plot to kill Paul?
 - 2) If Paul had relatives in Jerusalem, why didn't he talk about them? Why didn't he stay with them?
 - Once Paul's nephew discovered the plot; he went to the barracks where Paul was being held and informed him.
2. Paul had experienced similar plots from others who wanted to take his life (Acts 9:23, 29, Acts 20:3, 19), and he wasted no time in keeping them from being successful. (Acts 23:17-22)
 - He followed the chain of command by sending the centurion (in charge of Paul) to tell the commander (Lysias) of this plot against Paul.
 - This news was exactly what Lysias needed to remove Paul from any Jewish control over him and thus allowed him to protect Paul (a Roman citizen) with the full force of the Roman military.
3. Can you describe how God was active through this whole situation and how God's providence was shown?

The Conspiracy was Foiled (Acts 23:23-35)

1. The best thing that Lysias could do was to get Paul out of Jerusalem and away from immediate danger. His actions were swift and decisive:
 - He dispatched a total of 470 men (nearly half of his garrison at Jerusalem) to protect Paul.
 - 1) 200 soldiers (probably well trained Roman legionnaires)
 - 2) 200 spearmen (javelin throwers)
 - 3) 70 horsemen (Roman Cavalry)
 - He had the soldiers begin their journey under the cover of darkness (about 9 PM) so as to slip out of Jerusalem undetected.
 - His decision to send Paul to Caesarea was wise in that it was far more secure and less chance of another riot that might lead to Paul's death from an out of control and angry mob.
2. Another important action taken by Lysias was for him to intentionally hand Paul over to the ruling governor of the region who was Felix. (Vs 24)
 - This removed any chance of the Jewish leaders from appealing to have Paul brought back to Jerusalem.
 - 1) Paul had already been found innocent (by the Pharisees) of any charges that he was in violation of Jewish Law.
 - 2) The only remaining question was whether Paul had committed any crimes against Rome which Felix would be the judge of that.
 - The letter from Lysias to Felix spells out the events that brought Paul to Caesarea to ensure he would receive a fair trial as a Roman citizen.

3. Once Paul had arrived in Caesarea he was brought before Felix (Vs 33-35)
 - Felix was the procurator or governor of Judea (from approx. A.D. 52-58)
 - 1) He was one of three governors mentioned in the New Testament (Pilate and Festus being the other two).
 - 2) He was married to Drusilla (Acts 24:24) who was a sister of Herod Agrippa II (great grandson of Herod the Great – Matthew 2:1 and who would later say to Paul; “you almost persuade me to be a Christian”).
 - Once Felix learned that Paul was from Cilicia; he agreed to hear the case.
 - 1) Apparently it was acceptable for a case to be tried in either the province of the accused or the province where the alleged crime took place.
 - 2) Felix made an executive decision to hear the case there since Cilicia was not considered a full province of Rome at the time, and also that the Jews probably would not have wanted to travel to Paul’s hometown of Tarsus.
 - 3) The one requirement was that the witnesses against Paul would have to be present. (Acts 23:30)
 - While Paul awaited trial he was ordered to be kept in Herod’s Praetorium (the governor’s official residence).
 - What follows are a series of Roman trials in which Paul successfully presents the Gospel to three very influential leaders (Felix, Festus, and Agrippa II) along with a host of spectators.
4. What man meant for harm – God will turn it around for the good and the results will be for His glory!

Closing Remarks:

1. This passage contains one very important message – which is God’s Providential Protection!
 - It was no accident that the plot to kill Paul was uncovered!
 - It was no accident that Paul was placed under the protection of the Roman military.
 - It was no accident that Paul was brought before Felix to receive a public Roman trial.
 - It was no accident that Paul would receive a platform (on three occasions) to present the Gospel to some of the most influential Gentiles of his day.
2. This entire process was orchestrated by God:
 - So that Paul could rub shoulders with Roman soldiers and share Christ with them. I don’t doubt that many soldiers confessed Christ as Savior due to Paul’s influence.
 - Paul would have opportunity to share his testimony of how God changed his life to not just Felix, Festus, and Agrippa II, but to their wives, and the lawyers, and the witnesses against him, and to the spectators all around the courts.
 - Paul may have accomplished more for the cause of Christ during these series of trials than on all of his three missionary journeys combined.
 - No one could have imagined the success Paul would have even in the midst of trial and tribulation.

3. All of this will ultimately bring Paul to Rome where his influence for the cause of Christ continue with even broader implication:
- During his time in Rome he will write some of his greatest Epistles:
 - 1) _____
 - 2) _____
 - 3) _____
 - 4) _____
 - 5) I _____ and II _____
 - 6) _____
 - While under house arrest and even in prison – the success of Paul’s ministry cannot be measured as so many lives were impacted by not just his preaching but his life.
 - The church at Rome along with the other churches established and influenced by Paul will create a means for the Gospel to spread through the early centuries of church history as well as the centuries to come.
 - 1) During some years the church has seen its share of corruption and darkness.
 - 2) During other years the church has seen reformation and revival.
4. We owe a great debt to Paul’s willingness to trust God and remain faithful to Him.....how about you? Are you willing to suffer for Christ so that others can come to know Him?