

## ACTS CHAPTER TWENTY THREE

### Read vs. 1-5

*As this chapter begins, we see that the chief priests and the Sanhedrin (Jewish rulers) are assembled to hear Paul's case. This body of men symbolically represent the whole nation of Israel. This is now the 5<sup>th</sup> time that they have been confronted with the gospel. The first is recorded in Mark 14:53-64 where Jesus Himself stands before them. In Acts 4:5-17 Peter and John testify before them. Acts 5:17-33 records the confrontation with the apostles. Stephen, the first martyr, addresses them in Acts 6:12-7:1 and 7:54. In each of these cases they have totally rejected Christianity. As the rulers of the nation they are leading the Jews away from the truth. Now Paul is going to speak to them once again. Will we see them moving any closer to Christ?*

#### 1. *Comment on Paul's assessment of himself in vs. 1.*

*Paul's conscience was no doubt in tune with God because he walked in daily obedience. This is not the case with all men. Compare Titus 1:15 which talks about a corrupt conscience and I Tim. 4:2 where men with a "seared" conscience are mentioned. The conscience can be desensitized and hardened by disobedience. It is influenced by culture and by training. The things we see, the things we do, our parents, friends and other people that we get our information from are what shapes the conscience. Paul probably had a clear conscience when he was persecuting Christians, too, but he was still in the wrong. The Bible is the only true and consistent guide for our lives. It will always be the standard. It never changes and it is always true. Compare John 17:17. A person who walks with God and who follows His Word is a person who enjoys a clear conscience and is filled with peace and joy.*

#### 2. *Compare the reactions of Jesus and Paul when they were slapped in the face. (vs. 2-5 and John 18:22-23)*

*Paul seems to lose his temper briefly in this passage. Perhaps he was grieved that these leaders were so corrupt. He was probably personally acquainted with some of them from his life before his salvation. . He seems to have a revelation of what is ahead for Ananias. God did "strike" Ananias later in his life. History tells us that he was later dragged from a sewer where he was hiding and killed by assassins.*

#### 3. *Why does Paul call Ananias a whitewashed wall? (cp. vs. 3 and Matt. 23:27& 28)*

*White paint can only cover dirt for just so long before the dirt and stains bleed through. Paul considered Ananias's grandeur and righteous appearance to be nothing more substantial than a thin coat of white covering. True righteousness begins in the heart.*

*Notice his apology in verse 5. Paul's eyesight may have been so bad that he really didn't see the high priest. He knows he must respect him for his office even if he can't respect him*

*as a person. Nevertheless, Paul's conscience does convict him as he remembers Ex. 22:28 which says "Do not blaspheme God or curse the ruler of your people." Also compare Jude 8 & 9 and I Peter 2:13 & 14*

Read vs. 6-11

4. *What did Paul hope to do by saying that he himself was a Pharisee and that the resurrection was the reason he was in trouble? (vs. 6-8)*

*Saducees are like today's humanists. They reject God and elevate mankind and his freedom to make his own rules and standards of conduct. There are no standards. Whatever seems right for you is OK.*

*Pharisees could be compared to religious leaders of today who preach that salvation is earned by doing good works. They claim to know God, but they don't see the hopelessness of man without the grace of God. Their basic philosophy is that man is good. If we just don't corrupt children, they will grow up to be great adults. The Bible tells us that we are all sinners. Our natural inclination is to be self-centered and to live for pleasure. We are not drawn to God and godliness unless God draws us to Himself. Please consider Romans 3:10-18 and John 14:6.*

*Even though neither one of these groups had a true understanding of spiritual things, Paul hoped to take advantage of their differences to create a controversy between the Saducees and the Pharisees. He hoped to win the Pharisees support by showing that they had a common enemy in the Saducees.*

5. *Did the plan work? (vs. 9)*

*The Pharisees rallied behind him almost to spite the Saducees. If Paul's teaching was against what the Saducees believed, then he must be OK! There was soon such an uproar between the two groups that Paul had to be rescued once again by the Roman troops.*

6. *How did God comfort Paul in vs. 11?*

*What peace this would have given him, knowing that he wouldn't die until he at least reached Rome. He had many life-threatening circumstances coming into his life, but he could go confidently through them all! Paul was no doubt comforted by remembering this special nearness of the Lord in his many coming tribulations. If God was on his side, why should he worry about anything else? This is now the third recorded time that God personally comforts Paul. Compare Acts 22:17-22 and Acts 18:9. God wants Christians to experience His peace in all circumstances. Please read Phil 4:6 & 7.*

Read vs. 12-22

7. *What oath did the Jews swear concerning Paul? (vs. 12)*

*I always find this passage a little amusing. I would never want to take an oath about something that God might intervene in! I wonder how they managed to resume eating without losing face in front of the priests and elders?*

8. *How did they plan to get to Paul? (vs. 15)*

*Why was their plan doomed? God had promised to deliver Paul! Do you wonder what happened to these men since they had vowed not to eat or drink?*

9. *Who does God use to rescue Paul? (vs. 16 & 22)*

*We know very little from scripture about Paul's family, but here we learn that he had a sister and a nephew. Had they also become believers? In Romans 16 Paul makes a reference to his relatives. See verses 7, 11 & 21.*

Read vs. 23-35

10. *How many soldiers were assigned to protect Paul? (vs. 23)*

*This was not to keep him from escaping, but to ward off the ambush if necessary. The commander was probably happy to have this excuse to send Paul somewhere else. He had become a problem for him, not knowing what to do with this person who attracted so much interest and yet seemed to be innocent of any law breaking. Sending him to Caesarea would take the pressure off of the situation.*

11. *How did the chief captain view Paul's case?*

*I rescued him because \_\_\_\_\_.* (vs.27)

*I realized it was a question of Jewish \_\_\_\_\_.* (vs.29)

*I don't think he deserves \_\_\_\_\_.* (vs.29)

*He was required by law to send a letter of explanation along with the prisoner. He gives a good explanation with the exception of his own bad judgment concerning the near scourging of a citizen.*

12. *Felix said Paul's hearing would have to wait until \_\_\_\_\_.* (vs. 35)

*This occurred 5 days later.*