

# Prison, Plot and Providence

## Study 23a: THE SHREWDNESS OF SERPENTS (22:22-23:9)

### 22:22-29 What may we learn from Paul re worldly wisdom? (Matt.10:16; Luke 16:8)

(1) It could not be the simple mention of the Gentiles that provoked them; for among these many of the Jews now present had their home and business. It was not the intimation that the Gentiles might be saved, for this had always been conceded, and the Pharisees were famous for their proselyting zeal (see Matt. 23,15.) But Paul's claim to a divine commission as Apostle of the Gentiles ... was immediately connected by his hearers with the previous charge against him ... of apostasy and blasphemy and sacrilege, which seemed to be confirmed by what he now said, so that they broke out afresh against him, not simply because he had been sent forth to the Gentiles, but because his saying this convinced them that he did reject the law, and had profaned the temple. **J. A. Alexander** *Acts of the Apostles* p.309

(2) We learn here we are under no obligation as Christians to give up our civil privileges (which we are to receive and prize as the gift of God) to every insolent invader. In a thousand circumstances, gratitude to God and duty to men will oblige us to insist upon them and engage us to strive to transmit them improved, rather than impaired, to posterity. **John Wesley** *Notes* p.490

(3) Paul made a great impression upon [Lysias]. ... now he discovered that, by right of birth, Paul was a Roman citizen. It is an interesting demonstration of the "first European" in action. Paul was the first person known to history who visibly bore in his own person the integrated heritage of the three cultures -- Hebrew, Greek, and Latin -- from which European civilization has, over the centuries, sprung. **E.M. Blaiklock** *ACTS: The Birth of the Church* p.227

(4) Luke has often had opportunity to show how much better Gentiles behaved toward the gospel than the Jews. Here ... he sets the spirit of the governments of the two in contrast. Paul had said once and again among his brethren, "I am a Jew." He had declared how his course at the beginning was approved by a devout Jew in Damascus. But it avails nothing. "I am a Jew" has no weight among Jews. So now in the castle of the heathen he says, "I am a Roman," when at once thongs fly open, chains fall off, officers tremble, and hostile purposes cease. The tribune even grows confidential and companionable, and tells how with a great price he purchased his free Roman citizenship. Luke shows triumphantly how much better it is for Paul to be a Roman among the heathen than to be a Jew



**Joseph Addison Alexander**

(1809-1860)

Princeton Bible scholar, master of over 20 languages, identified the principal reason for Jewish persecution of Paul -- the charge of apostasy from Moses

among his fellow countrymen. Among the former there is respect for law and human rights. Among the latter rights are trampled under foot and unbelieving hatred of the gospel and its minister have usurped the place of righteous order. Israel is fast hastening to its doom.

**J.M. Stifler** *Acts* p.222

### 22:30-23:5 As in the previous situation, what is Paul appealing to? (John 10:34,35)

(5) How can we explain this scene? If it had been an official meeting, Ananias would have been sitting in the center of a semicircle, and the priests would have been formally attired. Paul, who was no stranger to the Sanhedrin in his younger days, would certainly have recognized the high priest, even if he had never seen this particular person. Or, did Paul have such poor eyesight that he didn't see who had spoken? Or was he speaking with bitter irony: "You didn't talk like a high priest; how did I know you were?" All of these answers had been given. For myself, I am satisfied with the explanation that it was an informal session, and that Paul did not know that it was the high priest. His apology was genuine. **W.S. LaSor** *Church Alive* p.330

### 23:6-9 Consider how Paul is our exemplar, both in his knowledge and use of Roman law, and in his practical usage of the subtle distinctions within the theologies of Judaism (1 Cor.11:3; compare Christ's silencing of Herodians, Sadducees and Pharisees in Matt.22)

(6) You see, there were 2 rival sects in Judaism 1900 years ago. The Sadducees were materialists. They did not believe that man existed in another world after death. The Pharisees, on the other hand, were entirely scriptural and orthodox and believed in the resurrection of the dead; they believed in the conscious existence of the spirit of man between death and resurrection; and they believed in angels created by God and sent forth to be ministers to men. Paul, seeing that there were men of both parties in that group sitting in judgment on him, took advantage of the situation to get the help of the Pharisees. You might say, "Well, is that exactly transparent on his part?" I rather think I would have done the same thing, and so I am not going to condemn him. **Harry Ironside** *Acts* p.539

## Study 23b: THE PLOT FOILED BY PROVIDENCE (23:10-22)

### 23:10,11 Why a great text for cultists? (1:7,8)

(7) What is significant is that the appearance of Paul before the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem is described as *witness*, and that Paul's appearance before the emperor will also be for the purpose of witnessing to Jesus. This, rather than defending himself against specific charges, is Paul's task in court. For similar visions at decisive points in the narrative see 16:9; 18:9f; 27:23f; in all these cases, except the first, the vision stands in the context of imminent

danger and serves to encourage Paul. **I.H. Marshall** *The Acts of the Apostles* p.366

### 23:12-22 How does incidental detail reveal the providential hand of God? (Luke 23:50-53)

(8) The plot, quite unexpectedly, throws a ray of light on Paul's family, the only scrap of information we possess. Paul's nephew was

his sister's son. If the secret plotting of the fanatics became known to Paul's sister, the family must have had the highest connections in the city. It was, moreover, an act of no small courage thus to lay information. The deference with which Lysias treats the boy is also notable. **E.M. Blaiklock** *op. cit.*, p.234

(9) I remember years ago when I was a Salvation Army officer, we used to say that there were 3 things that should characterize every saint of God: "Now abideth these 3: grit, grace and gumption; but the greatest of these is gumption." Gumption is just good, common,

ordinary sense, and I know many Christians who do not use good sense. Some way or other they have an idea they are God's favored people and it is not necessary to use good judgment and wisdom in regard to the affairs of life; the Lord will undertake for them. Bless you, if you are hungry and a good dinner is put before you, God is not going to put the food into your mouth in some miraculous way. And so God isn't turning upside down the universe in order to please people who happen to be in difficult circumstances. He expects us to use common sense. **Harry Ironside** *op. cit.*, p.551

## **ACTS: The APOLOGETICS of the APOSTLES (study 24)**

# Organized Opposition

### **Study 24a: USING THE WORLD ... BUT NOT TO THE FULL (23:23-24:9)**

#### **23:23-35 Is this impressive escort really necessary?**

(10) Just think of it! 470 Roman soldiers, all to protect this Christian servant of God and keep him from his foes who were seeking his life! God saw that he was protected. Did He need the Roman soldiers!? No, He could have sent several legions of angels; but God doesn't work in miracles unless it is necessary, and so He used soldiers instead. **H. Ironside** *op. cit.*, p.552

(11) If Luke lingers thus over the story and fills it with details he must intend to show how God's invisible hand could use the world power, which he had ordained, to serve him in protecting his servant from apostate Judaism. Those who have fallen from right are ever more mischievous than those who never professed the right. For in this case pure heathenism, with its natural sense of justice, did more to promote the kingdom than those who professed to know God, but did

not. **J.M. Stifler** *op. cit.*, p.230

#### **24:1-9 As with Jesus, what strategy does opposition adopt? (Luke 23:1,2)**

(12) This is the only place in the New Testament where 'Nazarene' is used to describe Christians. It was a term applied to Jesus himself (2:22), and outside the New Testament it was later applied to groups of Jewish Christians who held unorthodox views. It is quite likely that Jewish Christians may have been nicknamed after the name attached to their leader, especially if the word contained a contemptuous reference: 'Can anything good come out of Nazareth?' (Jn. 1:46); later the word could have been appropriated by some particular group of Christians. **I.H. Marshall** *op. cit.*, p.375

### **NEXT STUDY:**

## ***The SPIRIT SPEAKS -- SELECTIVELY***

### ***How far do the responsibilities of citizenship extend for Christians?***

Sometimes we are told that because Christians are heavenly citizens, they have no responsibility whatever as to citizenship here on earth. We have even heard it said that inasmuch as one cannot be a citizen of two countries at the same time here on earth, so one cannot be a citizen of heaven and a citizen of earth at the same time. But this certainly does not follow. Since it was right for the Apostle Paul to claim Roman citizenship in order that he might not have to suffer scourging, then it was also incumbent upon him -- and is incumbent upon any citizen of any country in this world -- to fulfill the responsibilities of citizenship. In other

words, if I am to have certain protection as a citizen, I owe it to my country to act accordingly when it comes to fulfilling my responsibilities. It is true I am a citizen of heaven, but I am also a citizen of whatever country I belong to on earth by natural relationship, and so I am to be loyal to my government, to pay my taxes, and to accept even military responsibilities, as at the present time, if I am subject to them. It would be unthinkable that one would be entitled to claim protection from a country if he did not loyally respond to the rightful demands of its government. **H. Ironside** *op. cit.*, p.532