

Subject	Lessons from Acts	4423
		Acts 23
Title	7 Lessons from Acts 23	
Proposition	To study Acts 23 looking for lessons to help us follow the pattern of the New Testament church.	
Objective	So that we can be the kind of people God would have us to be.	

### 7 LESSONS FROM ACTS 23

#### Introduction:

1. This chapter reveals Paul's speech before the Sanhedrin in which he creates some excitement as he unknowingly rebuked the High Priest, who actually had broken the law.
2. Paul apologized.
3. The difference in the two major Jewish sects was used by Paul in his defense.
  - 1) He knew well the two doctrines and the points at which they were divided.
  - 2) Because some of those before whom Paul stood were fellow Pharisees a division became obvious between the representatives of the two sects.
  - 3) The scene actually became quite unruly and the Roman soldiers, under the direction of the chief captain whisked Paul away.
4. He was told by the Lord that he would visit Rome.
5. Paul's nephew learned about a plot of the Jews to kill Paul and he came with that message to Paul.
  - 1) Paul was able to have the young man tell his news to the chief captain.
  - 2) Immediate action was taken to prevent the murder of Paul.
  - 3) Paul was taken with a heavily armed escort to Caesarea to be held.

#### DISCUSSION: One LESSON from Acts

### 1. Like Paul we should NEVER violate our consciences (1).

Acts 23:1 And Paul, earnestly beholding the council, said, Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.

1. We need to understand clearly that one of the ways the Bible defines sin is violating your conscience—to do something we believe to be wrong, and just go right ahead and do it is SINFUL.
2. Romans 14:23 And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin.
3. Tearing down the conscience is SUPER DANGEROUS business.
  - 1) There is an important reason this is so dangerous.
  - 2) IT IS POSSIBLE FOR THE CONSCIENCE TO BE RUINED to where it no longer functions.
  - 3) Paul describes some who depart from THE FAITH (1 Tm 4.1).
  - 4) 1 Timothy 4:2 Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron;
    - 1- Paul compares this dreadful situation in terms of cattle branding.
    - 2- The flesh that is branded has lost all feeling.
    - 3- Sort of like the leper who loses appendages because they do not feel anything when they are injured.
4. So if someone or some thing is pushing you to do that which you do not believe would be right to do, **RESIST**—this may be Satan's way of getting you to sin.
  - 1) The one who rejoices when Christians do things they do not believe they should do is Satan.
  - 2) The one who grieves over YOU doing something you think to be wrong is Jesus the Christ, your Savior!

- 3) Think about Paul and how careful he would have had to be **ALL OF HIS LIFE** to be able to make the statement he did make in Acts 23.1--...**I have lived in all good conscience before God UNTIL THIS DAY.**

One **LESSON** from Acts

**2. Great illustration of the FACT that “conscience” is NOT always a SAFE GUIDE (1).**

**Acts 23:1** And Paul, earnestly beholding the council, said, Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.

1. **Acts 22:4** And I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women.
  - 1) Even as Paul was persecuting Christians **UNTO THE DEATH**, his conscience **WAS NOT** bothering him.
  - 2) He sincerely **THOUGHT** he was doing the right thing!
  - 3) He considered the followers of Jesus of Nazareth to be enemies of God and His people.
  - 4) He was determined aggressively to fight against God’s enemies.
  - 5) He had not the slightest fear that his own soul was in jeopardy for doing **WRONG**.
2. Saul was sincerely in error.
  - 1) **Acts 26:9** I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.
  - 2) Later on, what Paul had done in his past troubled Paul, but he realized he did what he did out of **IGNORANCE**—**1 Timothy 1:13** Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.
3. In the OT, Abimelech was sincerely in error and it **ALMOST** cost him his life—**Genesis 20:3-7** But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said to him, Behold, thou art but a dead man, for the woman which thou hast taken; for she is a man's wife. (4) But Abimelech had not come near her: and he said, Lord, wilt thou slay also a righteous nation? (5) Said he not unto me, She is my sister? and she, even she herself said, He is my brother: in the integrity of my heart and innocency of my hands have I done this. (6) And God said unto him in a dream, Yea, I know that thou didst this in the integrity of thy heart; for I also withheld thee from sinning against me: therefore suffered I thee not to touch her. (7) Now therefore restore the man his wife; for he is a prophet, and he shall pray for thee, and thou shalt live: and if thou restore her not, know thou that thou shalt surely die, thou, and all that are thine.
4. **UZZAH** was sincerely in error and **IT DID** cost him his life (2 Sam 6.1-7).
5. Multitudes are **SINCERELY IN ERROR** today, **AND**, sadly, it will cause them to be eternally separated and to be punished with everlasting destruction—**2 Thessalonians 1:7-9** And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, (8) In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: (9) Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power;
6. The Bible plainly teaches us that it is **ALWAYS** wrong to go against our consciences!
  - 1) Violating conscience is one of the ways the Bible defines sin.

- 2) **Romans 14:23 And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin.**
- 3) **At the same time, WE MUST REALIZE that just because “it doesn’t seem wrong to me” DOES NOT necessarily mean that it is not a violation of God’s will.**
- 4) **Paul did some terrible things against Christians but did it did not seem wrong to him.**
- 5) **The WORD OF GOD, the Bible, is THE objective standard by which we must order our lives.**

### 3. The GREAT DANGER of sects (6-7).

**Acts 23:6-7 But when Paul perceived that the one part were Sadducees, and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question. (7) And when he had so said, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees: and the multitude was divided.**

1. **COUNCIL**, here is from the Greek for SANHEDRIN—The Sanhedrin might be compared to the SUPREME COURT of the United States.
  - 1) **Scholars have difficulty tracing the origin of the Sanhedrin.**
  - 2) **Perhaps the IDEA for it could be found in this OT text: Numbers 11:16 And the LORD said unto Moses, Gather unto me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom thou knowest to be the elders of the people, and officers over them; and bring them unto the tabernacle of the congregation, that they may stand there with thee.**
2. **Probably, the real beginning of this council was during the Period of the Restoration.**
  - 1) **After the return from Babylonian Captivity, Israel was reorganized WITHOUT a king and the ancient ruling families were given authority.**
  - 2) **The legislative assembly that emerged was a union of the nobility of the land and the priestly aristocracy (see Ezr 5:5; Neh 2:16).<sup>1</sup>**
  - 3) **The influence of this council increased due to the relative freedom enjoyed under the Persians.**
  - 4) **When Greece became the world-dominant power, they allowed that kind of government to continue.**
  - 5) **In the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C. tensions between Sadducees and Pharisees were threatening normal order and the council began scribes of the Pharisee persuasion to be a part of the COUNCIL.**
3. **Little is known about procedure for being admitted to this council, but appointments were made from among the priests, leading scribes, and nobility.**
4. **Paul faces life or death decisions from this council, so he has to think quickly and have a good strategy to avoid being put to death by these powerful men.**
  - 1) **He comes to see that this group of men were divided religiously—Sadducees & Pharisees.**
  - 2) **He took advantage of this religious division because of his knowledge of these differences.**
  - 3) **If some were Pharisees as he was, he surely can gain their support if he uses the right words (v. 6).**
  - 4) **There was so much dissension between these two groups that there had to be an intervention by the Roman authorities to save Paul’s life.**
5. **DIVISION is not a good thing.**

<sup>1</sup> Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, [“Sanhedrin,”](#) *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 1903.

- 1) It was not a good thing for the Sanhedrin to be divided.
- 2) It is an even worse thing for God's people, the church.
- 3) Jesus prayed that His disciples would be ONE—John 17:21 **That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.**
- 4) When the church is divided we displease our Lord and we are unable to accomplish all He would have us to accomplish!!!

## One LESSON from Acts

## 4. The OMNI-PRESENCE of our Lord (11).

**Acts 23:11** And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, **Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.**

1. How comforting these words from Jesus must have been for Paul!
2. FOUR TIMES in Acts we have the record of the Lord visiting and encouraging Paul.
  - 1) Acts 18.9-10
  - 2) Acts 22.17-21
  - 3) Acts 23.11
  - 4) Acts 27.22-25
3. Because the age of miracles was temporary and has been done away with SINCE we now have the completed written revelation, we cannot expect Jesus to speak directly to us today as He did to Paul.
4. However, He is not any less aware of our own desperate situations—HE IS THERE FOR US, TOO.
  - 1) We do have the wonderful blessing of prayer to address our petitions to a loving Father.
  - 2) We do have the PERFECT Mediator between us and God.
  - 3) We have multiples promises that our faithfulness to Him will be rewarded.
  - 4) The same Lord who took such interest in that which was happening to Paul is likewise interested in what is happening to me, as a Christian!.

## One LESSON from Acts

## 5. An illustration of the EXTENT to which evil opposes truth (14).

**Acts 23:14** And they came to the chief priests and elders, and said, We have bound ourselves under a great curse, that we will eat nothing until we have slain Paul.

1. Verse 13 informs us that there were MORE THAN FORTY Jews who were involved in an oath.
2. These men hated TRUTH to the degree that they were willing to vow before God that they ...**WILL NEITHER EAT NOR DRINK...** (v. 21) till they have killed Paul.
  - 1) These men were obviously dedicated to their false ideas!
  - 2) Not only so, they were pretty confident that they would be able to accomplish the thing they were vowing to do. neither eat NOR DRINK.
  - 3) Their degree of hatred for the doctrine of Christ is clearly ABUNDANT and running over!
3. In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, there are multitudes of people who likewise HATE truth.

- 1) They will not change their minds until and unless they are confronted with truth and helped to see the error of their way.
- 2) Some times and in some places, it might be extremely difficult to be a spokesman for God's truth, but that is our challenge and our opportunity, as well!
4. Thankfully, we have examples to follow in our spiritual family's history book, such as the Apostle Paul, that should encourage us to be bold and courageous with TRUTH.

### One LESSON from Acts

#### 6. The COURAGE of ONE YOUNG MAN may have saved a life (16).

Acts 23:16 And when Paul's sister's son heard of their lying in wait, he went and entered into the castle, and told Paul.

1. Acts 23:17 Then Paul called one of the centurions unto him, and said, Bring this young man unto the chief captain: for he hath a certain thing to tell him.
2. YOUNG MAN="9.32 νεανίσκος, ου m; νεανίας, ου m: a young man beyond the age of puberty, but normally before marriage<sup>2</sup>."
3. This young man showed tremendous COURAGE as he spoke out to inform authorities of this deadly PLOT!
4. It is so WONDERFUL that the Book of Acts not only has powerful examples of older Christians, it also provides examples for young people to follow, as well!
5. Young people face many difficulties in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as they seek to live a godly life.
  - 1) One of the attributes they need to develop in abundance is COURAGE.
  - 2) Those of us who are older ought to be about the business of praying for our young people that they will be strong and courageous in resisting the pressure to conform to worldly pressures!

### One LESSON from Acts

#### 7. Sometimes, even in the age of miracles, God used human instrumentality in protecting His own (16).

Acts 23:16 And when Paul's sister's son heard of their lying in wait, he went and entered into the castle, and told Paul.

1. There was a very real danger to the Apostle Paul as is pointed out to authorities by Paul's nephew— Acts 23:20-21 And he said, The Jews have agreed to desire thee that thou wouldest bring down Paul to morrow into the council, as though they would enquire somewhat of him more perfectly. (21) But do not thou yield unto them: for there lie in wait for him of them more than forty men, which have bound themselves with an oath, that they will neither eat nor drink till they have killed him: and now are they ready, looking for a promise from thee.
2. The providence of God is truly amazing.
3. God has all power and is able to use people and things to bring about His will.
4. In this instance, God was able to protect his servant Paul by using information from a courageous young man, and the authorities who ruled Jerusalem in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century.
5. God still uses His providential care to bring about His will TODAY!

### Conclusion:

<sup>2</sup> Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, [Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains](#) (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 107.

1. Let's keep studying Acts.
2. Let's seek to learn all we can to improve our service!