

11

SCHEMES AND RESCUES

ACTS 23-24



For Paul, under arrest in Jerusalem, the moment of crisis becomes the moment of vision. As in Corinth (Acts 18:9-10), so now in Jerusalem, the Lord will stand by Paul. These moments of clarity from the Lord have been all-important for Paul, just as they have been for countless Christians ever since. As Christians, we often sell ourselves short by quietly forgetting these moments, shrugging them off, or not talking about them for fear others won't understand or won't believe us. If you've ever experienced the Lord's provision of a special measure of insight or comfort in response to prayer, then you know what a difference it can make.

PAUL BEFORE THE COUNCIL (23:1-35)

1. At the outset of chapter 23, Ananias, the Jewish High Priest, ordered Paul to be punched in the mouth. Why? What did Paul say? Would you or could you say that? Why or why not?
2. The Roman tribune doesn't understand why the Jews are so bothered by Paul. Hence, he arranged a hearing for Paul before the Jewish high court, the Sanhedrin. In 23:1-10, how does Paul show his respect for authority? How does he challenge it? How can we follow his example?
3. In how many ways, in Acts 23:11-35, do you see the Lord's hand of protection over Paul? List them below.

4. Read Acts 23:26-30. How is Claudius Lysias showing himself to be a skilled politician in his letter to Felix? How has the Lord utterly turned the tables in favor of Paul's cause? (Hint: Consider the Roman military's various dealings with Paul. What's changed and, according to verse 11, why?)

PAUL BEFORE FELIX (24:1-27)

Luke has been writing the story of the early church, and particularly of Paul, as a succession of "trials." The gospel is all about God putting the world right through Jesus Christ. Luke wants his readers to see the life of the church itself in that same way. We shouldn't imagine that people will leave us alone or be indifferent to what we are doing. Christian faith is to be publicly seen, felt, and heard. If we are the people in and through whom God is putting into effect the setting right that began in Jesus, we should expect to see that uncomfortable but necessary setting right work going on all over the place, sometimes in martyrdom and sometimes in vindication and acquittal, as the church makes its way in the world.

5. Read Acts 24:1-27. What are the charges being laid against Paul? What does he admit to and what does he deny?
6. How would you explain the inconsistency of Felix's treatment of Paul in verses 22-27? In verse 25, why would justice, self-control, and the coming judgment be such uncomfortable topics for Felix?
7. In times when it seems like everything is on hold and nothing positive is happening in your life, how can Paul's experience be of some practical help to you?