

Lesson 29 – Acts 22:30-23:35

Council & Conspiracy

Strikes and protests. There are various types of them. Picket signs, boycotting places or products, refraining from eating by going on a hunger strike are a few examples of these. Some protests are even violent and destroy property. Strikes have long been a way to pressure change.

Paul faced a violent group of “hunger strikers.” More than forty zealous Jewish men were so determined to kill him that they took an oath to not eat until their mission was accomplished. Hunger strike or not, their passionate hatred of God’s servant would not change the Lord’s plan to protect Paul.

Unfaithful Leaders

In the Old Testament, God called leaders and directed them to “feed the flock.” Many Jewish leaders throughout history failed to care for the people. Ezekiel 34:2-4 describes their sad condition of caring only for themselves at the expense of the people.

Jesus also recognized the hard hearts of the Jewish leaders, the scribes and Pharisees, in the New Testament. In Matthew 23:13 and 16, Jesus calls them hypocrites who were shut off from the kingdom of heaven. He refers to them as blind guides who are trying to lead others but do not know what is true.

In the Book of Acts, Paul had to defend himself before the Jewish Council. The Pharisees and Sadducees, which made up the Council, were the teachers and preachers as well as enforcers of the Law of God.

Into the Word: Acts 22:30-23:35

Earlier in chapter 22, Paul had been at the center of a Jewish uproar. Now the Roman commander brings Paul before the Jewish Council to try to find out for certain why he is being accused.

1. Paul stands before the Council as chapter 23 begins. He states that he has a good conscience before God and has no reason to feel guilty. Explain what happens next. vv.2–3 *The high priest commanded that those near Paul hit him for that remark. Paul then snapped back at him, threatening the high priest with God’s wrath for breaking the Law that he was supposed to be upholding through the trial.*

Paul was quick to back down in recognition of the authority of the high priest’s office, even though he disagreed with what Ananias had done. [TM note: this is not the same Ananias who helped Paul in Damascus]

2. Paul realized the Council was made up of Pharisees and Sadducees, who deeply disagreed about life after death. On which side of that argument did Paul place himself? vv.6, 8 *Proclaiming that he believed in the resurrection sided with the Pharisees. Note that Paul identifies himself as a Pharisee in v.6 and Philippians 3:5. The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection (v.8).*

Because they rejected Christ, the Pharisees were no friends of Paul, yet sided with him in this argument. The Pharisees said that maybe a spirit or an angel from God had spoken to him. They knew very well that the Sadducees in the council did not believe in spirits or angels and would become angry.

3. Once again, the Romans stepped in to protect Paul from infuriated Jews. He was put into protective custody because they were afraid he would be torn to pieces by the Jews (v.10). Verse 11 tells us Jesus appeared to Paul the next night and said, “Take courage; for as you have solemnly witnessed to my cause at Jerusalem, so you must witness at Rome also.” Why was the promise to go to Rome important to Paul? Romans 15:23 *Paul longed to visit the congregation there in Rome. Note also Romans 1:11, 15, and his desire to share the Gospel.*

The very next morning, a group of more than forty Jews formed a conspiracy. The group planned to ambush Paul and murder him in the street. They demonstrated their resolve by taking an oath before God not to eat or drink

until they had succeeded in killing Paul.

4. How did Paul's nephew spoil the plan? vv.16–21 *Paul's nephew heard about this plan and told Paul about it. Paul told one of the soldiers to bring his nephew to the commander so he could be informed.*

The commander believed the story. He immediately ordered the men under his command to assemble a small army of 200 soldiers, 70 horsemen, and 200 spearmen. This unit would leave at 9:00 at night to smuggle Paul off on a 70-mile trip to Caesarea and deliver him to Felix the governor.

The letter the commander wrote to Felix recapped the events of the last several days and explained why Paul was being sent to him. The commander also had instructed Paul's accusers to bring their charges before Felix.

5. The soldiers delivered Paul, along with the letter, to the governor. What was promised to Paul in verse 35? *Felix would hear the case brought against him. Paul would be kept in Herod's Praetorium until his accusers arrived.*

New Ideas:

Respect for Authority

Paul reacted when Ananias unfairly ordered him to be struck, but he quickly backed down when he realized that Ananias was the high priest, the spiritual leader of Israel (Acts 23:1-5).

Later Paul made several statements about being respectful of and obedient to those in authority. Summarize these in the following Scripture texts:

I Timothy 2:1-2	<i>We should offer "prayers petitions and thanksgivings" for kings and others in authority.</i>
I Timothy 5:17	<i>"Let elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching." This is referring specifically to honoring them by compensating them for their work.</i>
Titus 3:1	<i>Remind them "to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed." We are to be subject, that is, to recognize our proper position under their authority, and be obedient to the rulers and authorities.</i>

Memory Verse

Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed.

Titus 3:1

Extra Memory Challenge

Romans 13:1

*Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities.
For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.*

Discussion Questions

Each teacher should encourage, as much as time permits, discussion and inquiry on the part of students. Not every aspect of the following questions is addressed here, and students may have thoughts related to but not mentioned in this guide. The obligation of the teacher, then, is to understand as deeply as possible the Scriptures that are being discussed, in order to answer as well as possible any questions a student might have.

1. The Jewish leaders in Acts 23 showed they were more concerned with their own success than caring for the people. What traits do we desire to see in godly leaders in our churches? First Timothy 3:1-7 may help guide your discussion.

We pray that leaders in the Church would demonstrate the traits that Scripture calls for: humility, patience, integrity, honesty,

selflessness, love, etc. Class opinion may range far and wide on the topic, but the focus of discussion should be more on the traits of godly pastors and teachers than on the failings of Christian leaders. Remind students to pray for pastors and leaders, and take time in your class to pray for them.

2. We read in I Timothy and Titus and elsewhere in Scripture about our attitude toward the people who have charge over us. Why is it so important for us to be obedient and respectful to authorities, even if we don't like what they have to say? What might happen if we choose to only listen to what we like to hear?

God has placed some in positions of authority over us. These offices or positions are established by God for our good. Our obligation is to honor them with respect and obedience. They may have a fuller picture of what is best for all than we do. We might, on occasion, be wrong or misinformed. If everyone follows his or her own desires, it leads to chaos. The 4th commandment gives us the direct commandment to "Honor your father and mother," which Luther explains as meaning, "We should fear and love God so that we do not despise our parents and superiors, nor provoke them to anger, but honor, serve, obey, love, and esteem them."

Daily Devotions

Sunday:	Genesis 37:1-4
Monday:	Genesis 37:5-11
Tuesday:	Genesis 37:12-17
Wednesday:	Genesis 37:18-22
Thursday:	Genesis 37:23-36
Friday:	Genesis 39:1-18
Saturday:	Genesis 39:19-23

THE LUTHERAN CHURCH AND ITS CHURCH YEAR

* What is the Christmas celebration?

"Christ-mass" refers to the service in the Catholic tradition to celebrate the birth of Jesus. The date of December 25 was likely chosen to counteract some pagan festivities at that time of the year in the Roman Empire. In the Church Year calendar, Christmas isn't only a one-day celebration but really lasts for 12 days from December 25 to January 6. The Christmas season helps us recall the glad tidings the angels brought to the shepherds near Bethlehem: "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior who is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:10).

1. What is your favorite Christmas carol? Why?
(Pick a Christmas carol and tell what you like about it.)

2. How does Titus 3:4-5a express the meaning of Christmas?
God demonstrated His love and kindness by sending the Savior to save us.