

80. Paul Was Informed of a Conspiracy Against Him

In our last topic, we saw that Paul was faithful to speak about the resurrection of Christ even when he was brought before the Sanhedrin. In the same way, we want to show our children how to be faithful to speak about the resurrection of Christ at every opportunity, including times when people are in opposition to that message. In our topic today, we are going to see that there was great opposition to the message of Paul. In fact, there were a group of more than forty Jews that agreed together that they would not eat until they had killed Paul. We will also see how the Lord protected Paul from that mob.

Acts 23:12-13 says, “And when it was day, some of the Jews banded together and bound themselves under an oath, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. Now there were more than forty who had formed this conspiracy.” We see that some of Jews were very determined to put Paul to death. The next day, a group of these Jews that were determined to kill Paul gathered together to make their plans. They actually bound themselves together with an oath. This was a very strong oath. The word translated “oath” is translated “accursed” in Galatians 1:8-9 where it says, “But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.” Here, we see that the root word of the word used by these forty men meant to be accursed or to be judged.

These men agreed together that they would not eat or drink anything until they had killed Paul. This was a large group, because we see that more than forty men were a part of this group. This reminds us of how strong the hatred was of these people against the Gentiles. They were ready to kill Paul, because he said that God had sent him to the Gentiles. This group of men also wanted the backing of the chief priests and elders.

Acts 23:14-15 says, “They came to the chief priests and elders, and said, ‘We have bound ourselves under a great oath that we will eat nothing until we have killed Paul. Now you, therefore, together with the council, suggest to the commander that he be brought down to you tomorrow, as though you were going to make further inquiries concerning him; but we are ready to kill him before he comes near.’” In order for these men to carry out their plan, they needed the help of the chief priests and elders to get Paul out of the Roman barracks so that they could kill him.

These men told the chief priests and elders about the vow that they had made. They said that they had made an oath that they would not eat or drink until they had killed Paul. Then, they made their request for help from the chief priests and elders. They asked the chief priests and elders to gather the whole council and make a request of the Roman commander to bring Paul down to talk to them again the next day. The chief priests were to act like they wanted to ask some additional questions of Paul. However, the men said that they would kill Paul before he could be brought before the council. Here, we see that there were many people in addition to the forty who had become a part of this plan to kill Paul because of his concern to take the Gospel to the Gentiles.

However, the Lord had made a promise to Paul that he would also share the Gospel in the city of Rome. As a result, we see the way that the Lord arranged protection for Paul. Acts 23:16-18 says, “So when Paul’s sister’s son heard of their ambush, he went and entered the barracks and told Paul. Then Paul called one of the centurions to *him* and said, ‘Take this young man to the commander, for he has something to tell him.’ So he took him and brought *him* to the commander and said, ‘Paul the prisoner called me to *him* and asked *me* to bring this young man to you. He has something to say to you.’” The Lord put the nephew of Paul in the right place at the right time to hear about the plan of these men to ambush and kill Paul.

We have no idea why this nephew was in the city of Jerusalem at this time since the family lived in the city of Tarsus. However, we see that the Lord had a reason for leading this young man to Jerusalem at this particular time. Then, the Lord made it possible for him to hear some of the men talking about what they planned to do to Paul. The nephew also chose to act, rather than just hear, because he realized the life of his uncle was in danger. We are not even told whether this nephew had become a Christian or was just led by the Lord to protect His uncle. We are reminded that the Lord will carry out His promises and the plans of people cannot stop the fulfillment of those promises. God was going to carry out His plan to make it possible for Paul to share the Gospel in Rome.

Then, the nephew of Paul went to the Roman barracks and told Paul what he had overheard. Paul immediately called a Roman centurion and asked him to take the young man to the Roman commander. Paul said that the young man had something to tell the commander that was very important. The centurion did as Paul requested and brought the young man to the commander. Then, the centurion explained to the commander the request that Paul had made. He told the commander that the young man had something important to tell the commander.

Acts 23:19-22 says, “Then the commander took him by the hand, went aside and asked privately, ‘What is it that you have to tell me?’ And he said, ‘The Jews have agreed to ask that you bring Paul down to the council tomorrow, as though they were going to inquire more fully about him. But do not yield to them, for more than forty of them lie in wait for him, men who have bound themselves by an oath that they will neither eat nor drink till they have killed him; and now they are ready, waiting for the promise from you.’ So the commander let the young man depart, and commanded *him*, ‘Tell no one that you have revealed these things to me.’” Here, we see the great difference in the attitude that the Roman commander had toward Paul once he learned that Paul was a Roman citizen. The commander was ready to do whatever Paul requested.

Then, the commander took the nephew to a place where they could speak privately and no one would hear them. The commander asked the nephew what Paul wanted his nephew to tell the commander. The nephew immediately began to tell about the plot of the Jews to kill Paul. He said that the Jews had agreed to ask the commander to bring Paul down to the Sanhedrin the next day. The leaders of the Sanhedrin were going to act like they wanted to ask some additional questions of Paul. The nephew said that they would make it sound like they just wanted to get some additional questions answered.

However, the nephew said that the real plan of the Jews was to kill Paul before he could even be brought into the meeting of the council. This shows one of the common things that people try to do when they want to do evil to others. They may even try to make it look like they are interested and have further questions. The Word of God gives us some wonderful promises if people would ever to do something like this to us. Hebrews 13:5-6 says, “*Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’*” So we may boldly say: ‘The LORD *is* my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?’ Here, we see that the Lord would never forsake us.

As Christians, we are also promised that nothing will ever separate us from the love of God. Romans 8:37-39 says, “Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” The reason that nothing can separate us from the love of God is due to the fact that God has already shown His love to us when He gave His Son to pay the penalty for our sin and set us free from the consequences of that sin.

Then, the nephew asked the Roman commander not to yield to the request of the Jewish religious leaders. The nephew then explained about the plan of the group of Jews that had together promised that they would not even eat or drink until they had killed Paul. As a result, the commander learned that there were more than forty men that had agreed together that they would not eat or drink until they had killed Paul. Here, we see the sinful condition of the heart of mankind. Jeremiah 17:9-10 says, “The heart *is* deceitful above all *things*, and desperately wicked; who can know it? I, the LORD, search the heart, *I* test the mind, even to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings.” Without the love of Christ leading a person, that person is capable of any sin.

That is why the Lord gives each person a new nature at the time of salvation. 2 Peter 1:4 says, “By which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption *that is* in the world through lust.” We want to help every Christian understand the fact that they were given a new nature at the time they received forgiveness of sins. The Roman commander listened carefully to the words of the nephew of Paul. Then, the commander told him not to tell anyone what he had said to the commander.

We want to help our physical and spiritual children grow in their understanding of the fact that their new nature gives them the desire to please God and the Holy Spirit gives them the power to please God as they yield to Him. We also want to help them understand how the Lord protected Paul by giving his nephew the opportunity to hear of the plot against Paul. We can also trust the Lord to carry out His plan to use our lives whether it is by life or by death. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children grow in their understanding of how the Lord works in and through our lives.