

Acts of the Apostles - Chapter 23 (NIV)

23:1 Paul looked straight at the Sanhedrin and said, "My brothers, I have fulfilled my duty to God in all good conscience to this day." 2 At this the high priest Ananias ordered those standing near Paul to strike him on the mouth.

In Chapter 22, Paul was given a chance to speak before the Jewish mob that wanted to kill him. In order to get to the bottom of the charges against Paul, the Romans take him before the Sanhedrin. When someone feels guilty and has to speak before his accusers, he typically has his head lowered and looks at the ground. Paul speaks boldly so he looks directly at the Jewish leaders. Paul says that up to today, he has lived "*in all good conscience before God*" (NKJV). He has not lived a sinless life but he hasn't sinned any of the "big" sins and he has been faithful to God. The High Priest Ananias held this title between 46-58 A.D. (Not the same high priest that tried Jesus.) He ordered that Paul be hit in the mouth. He obviously didn't think any man should say that he had a clear conscience before God.

"The Ananias who was high priest at this time did no honor to the office. He was well known for his greed; the ancient Jewish historian Josephus tells of how Ananias stole for himself the tithes that belonged to the common priests."

23:3 Then Paul said to him, "God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! You sit there to judge me according to the law, yet you yourself violate the law by commanding that I be struck!" 4 Those who were standing near Paul said, "How dare you insult God's high priest!" 5 Paul replied, "Brothers, I did not realize that he was the high priest; for it is written: 'Do not speak evil about the ruler of your people.'"

Paul said that God will strike them back. He gets this from Deuteronomy 32:35, which says "Vengeance is mine, I will repay says the Lord." Even when Paul called them a name, he was quoting Jesus in Matthew 23:27. They are like "*whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness.*" He says by hitting him, they are violating a law. See Deuteronomy 10:25 to see which law. You can only strike someone after the case has been decided. Paul continues to quote Scripture, he uses Exodus 22:28 but says he is NOT sure it applies to THIS leader when it says "*Do not blaspheme God or curse the ruler of your people.*"

23:6 Then Paul, knowing that some of them were Sadducees and the others Pharisees, called out in the Sanhedrin, "My brothers, I am a Pharisee, descended from Pharisees. I stand on trial because of the hope of the resurrection of the dead." 7 When he said this, a dispute broke out between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. 8 (The Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, and that there are neither angels nor spirits, but the Pharisees believe all these things.)

Paul takes advantage of the difference in the beliefs of the Sadducees and the Pharisees. They are about as far apart as the Republicans and Democrats are in the U.S. Congress today. Paul is following his own model for sharing the Gospel message. In 1 Corinthians 9:20, he said "To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews." Here he becomes a Pharisee to win the Pharisees to his side. He made it about the Resurrection from the dead which fits his Christian beliefs but also their Pharisee beliefs.

“The Pharisees were more likely to find some ground of agreement with Paul, being the more the Bible believers in the Jewish world of that time. They took the Bible seriously, even if they did err greatly by *adding* the traditions of men to what they received in the Bible.” (Guzik)

23:9 There was a great uproar, and some of the teachers of the law who were Pharisees stood up and argued vigorously. “We find nothing wrong with this man,” they said. “What if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?” 10 The dispute became so violent that the commander was afraid Paul would be torn to pieces by them. He ordered the troops to go down and take him away from them by force and bring him into the barracks.

As we have seen throughout Paul’s missionary trips, Paul causes another uproar. Verse 9b says “We find nothing wrong with this man,” they said. “What if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?” So he gets the Pharisees to accept Jesus’ Resurrection. The argument becomes physical and violent. The Roman commander fears for Paul’s life and takes him back to the barracks.

“Later, Paul seemed to suggest that this tactic of bringing up the resurrection controversy in the way that he did *was not* good. He suggests that it was “wrongdoing” on his part (Acts 24:20-21 says “Ask these men here what crime the Jewish high council found me guilty of, 21 except for the one time I shouted out, ‘I am on trial before you today because I believe in the resurrection of the dead!’”)” (Guzik)

23:11 The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, “Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome.”

Paul is given the greatest encouragement possible. God/Jesus tells him to “Take Courage” (NASB) or “Be of Good Cheer (NKJV).” But it is a double edged encouragement with a warning. He will have to testify again but it would be in Rome.

The Plot to Kill Paul

23:12 The next morning some Jews formed a conspiracy and bound themselves with an oath not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul. 13 More than forty men were involved in this plot. 14 They went to the chief priests and the elders and said, “We have taken a solemn oath not to eat anything until we have killed Paul. 15 Now then, you and the Sanhedrin petition the commander to bring him before you on the pretext of wanting more accurate information about his case. We are ready to kill him before he gets here.”

The Jews conspire to kill Paul. Some make an oath not to eat or drink until they have killed Paul. Luke points out that it wasn’t a small group of men but it was forty men. Even the leaders of the Sanhedrin were involved. The Jewish leaders asked the Commander to bring Paul for more accurate information but secretly they were going to have him killed.

23:16 But when the son of Paul’s sister heard of this plot, he went into the barracks and told Paul.

17 Then Paul called one of the centurions and said, “Take this young man to the commander; he has something to tell him.” 18 So he took him to the commander.

The centurion said, “Paul, the prisoner, sent for me and asked me to bring this young man to you because he has something to tell you.”

19 The commander took the young man by the hand, drew him aside and asked, "What is it you want to tell me?"

20 He said: "Some Jews have agreed to ask you to bring Paul before the Sanhedrin tomorrow on the pretext of wanting more accurate information about him. 21 Don't give in to them, because more than forty of them are waiting in ambush for him. They have taken an oath not to eat or drink until they have killed him. They are ready now, waiting for your consent to their request."

22 The commander dismissed the young man with this warning: "Don't tell anyone that you have reported this to me."

Paul's nephew hears about the plot to kill Paul. So he told Paul. Paul sends his nephew to tell the Roman commander about the plot. After Paul's nephew tells the Roman commander, he is told to not tell anyone.

Paul Transferred to Caesarea

23:23 Then he called two of his centurions and ordered them, "Get ready a detachment of two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen to go to Caesarea at nine tonight. 24 Provide horses for Paul so that he may be taken safely to Governor Felix."

The commander sends Paul with a detachment of 200 soldiers, 70 horsemen and 200 spearmen. He took the threat seriously. Paul as a Roman citizen is being taken to the Roman city of Caesarea to be judged by a Roman governor of Judea, named Felix and Paul doesn't have to walk. He gets to ride a horse.

23:25 He wrote a letter as follows:

26 Claudius Lysias,

To His Excellency, Governor Felix:

Greetings.

27 This man was seized by the Jews and they were about to kill him, but I came with my troops and rescued him, for I had learned that he is a Roman citizen. 28 I wanted to know why they were accusing him, so I brought him to their Sanhedrin. 29 I found that the accusation had to do with questions about their law, but there was no charge against him that deserved death or imprisonment. 30 When I was informed of a plot to be carried out against the man, I sent him to you at once. I also ordered his accusers to present to you their case against him.

The Roman commander sent a letter to the governor. It was accurate and reminded me of what Pontius Pilate would have said if he could have passed Jesus to someone else. Read Luke 23:5-16 and consider the similarities of Luke's account of what happened between Pontius Pilate and Jesus compared to the Roman commander and Paul.

What was the charge? He was inciting a rebellion and it was a matter of THEIR law.

Is he guilty? I find no fault with this man.

What to do with him? Pass him to someone else, for Jesus it was King Herod or for Paul it was Governor Felix.

The Roman commander would also send the accusers to Caesarea for the trial.

23:31 So the soldiers, carrying out their orders, took Paul with them during the night and brought him as far as Antipatris. 32 The next day they let the cavalry go on with him, while they returned to the barracks. 33 When the cavalry arrived in Caesarea, they delivered the letter to the governor and handed Paul over to him. 34 The governor read the letter and asked what province he was from. Learning that he was from Cilicia, 35 he said, "I will hear your case when your accusers get here." Then he ordered that Paul be kept under guard in Herod's palace.

They took Paul as far as Antipatris which was about half of the 75 mile trip to Caesarea by the Sea. The commander must have thought that getting to Antipatris was enough walking, let the Cavalry take him the rest of the way on their horses to Caesarea by the Sea.

"When he understood that he was from Cilicia: Perhaps Felix hoped that Paul came from someplace that required that someone else hear his case. Apparently, learning that he was from Cilicia meant that Felix would indeed be responsible to hear and rule on his case."

Since Paul was a Roman citizen, he was treated reasonably well. He traveled on horseback. Instead of prison, he was kept in Herod's palace where he awaited his trial.

"And he commanded him to be kept in Herod's Praetorium: This began a two-year period of confinement for Paul in Caesarea. After that he spent at least two years in Rome. Taken together with travel time, the next five years of Paul's life were lived in Roman custody. This was a striking contrast to his previous years of wide and spontaneous travel." (Guzik)

"Paul needed to receive the promise of Jesus – both promises from 20 years before, and promises recently made – to receive them with confident faith, allowing those promises to make a difference in how he thought and even felt. Every believer must do the same." (Guzik)