

The Book of Acts

Chapter 23

Acts 23:11-13

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.

12 And when it was day, certain of the Jews banded together, and bound themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul.

13 And they were more than forty which had made this conspiracy.

- i. Review
 1. In chapter 22, we saw Paul attempt to make his first defense following his arrest, speaking to a group of Jews and Roman soldiers outside the castle (headquarters).

2. Rather than defending his actions against his accusers, he began by giving his testimony about how he met Jesus
3. He began with his Jewish roots in education with Gamaliel, his persecution of the church, and then his mysterious meeting with Jesus whose glory blinded him.
4. He told of Ananias praying for the healing of his eyes and his baptism calling on the name of the Lord.
5. His testimony was cut short when Paul got to point in his testimony where Jesus told him to preach to the Gentiles. The Jews reacted with more mob violence.
6. To solve the matter and get Paul to confess his crime, the Roman soldiers bound Paul to have him scourged, but Paul then revealed he was a Roman citizen so they stopped.
7. The Roman captain decided they would all appear before the Jewish council on the next day to try to learn what Paul was being accused of.

- ii. Paul's Defense Before the Sanhedrin (Verses 1-10)
 - A. Hypocrisy of chief priest
 - 1. The chief captain had been unable to determine the charges the Jews made against Paul.
 - 2. So, on the morning after Paul had spoken to the people from the top of the stairs, he brought him down to appear before the council, for a more formal interrogation.
 - 3. The gospel and the book of Acts mentions this council many times. It is the Sanhedrin, which was the highest legal, legislative, and judicial body among the Jews, which was led by the high priest, which at this time was Ananias, or the high priest's deputy.
 - 4. It appears that the Roman officials were not running this meeting:
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.

5. Paul began his defense by declaring, from his heart, that he had lived in all good conscience before God to the present time.
6. He hoped to convince the council, and all the Jews, that he had not given up his faith in the God of their ancestors by believing in Jesus, but rather that he had found God in Jesus.
7. But his start at declaring his innocence received a scornful rebuke from the high priest:
Acts 23:2 And the high priest Ananias commanded them that stood by him to smite him on the mouth.
8. Perhaps the priest disagreed with the idea that one who believed in Jesus could do so in good conscience. Jesus and followers of the Way had been an irritation to them for nearly 25 years ever since they condemned Jesus.

9. So it brought a humiliating slap on the mouth for Paul.
10. But Paul, unhindered, had a quick response:
*Acts 23:3 Then said Paul unto him, God shall smite thee, thou whited wall: for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be **smitten contrary to the law?***
11. Jesus had given the same judgment of the religious leaders:
Matt 23:27-28
27 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness.
28 Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.
12. Paul was not retaliating for a personal attack against him but pointed to the hypocrisy of one who was supposed to be

enforcing the law, yet he judged Paul **unjustly** before his examination was even complete.

- B. Paul shows respect for the ruler of the people
 - 1. Yet then members of the council accused Paul of reviling the high priest:
Acts 23:4-5
4 And they that stood by said, Revilest thou God's high priest?
5 Then said Paul, I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest: for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people.
 - 2. Paul was quoting:
*Ex 22:28 Thou shalt not revile the gods [God, Hebrew Elohim], nor **curse the ruler of thy people.***
 - 3. Paul understood that the law demanded respect for the ruler of the people, which meant the high priest in this setting.

4. However, because it had been about six years since he had been in Jerusalem (following his second missionary journey), and the high priests were removed and installed by the Romans frequently based on political reasons, it is understandable that Paul did not know who it was who had ordered him smitten.
 5. But Paul did not retract his condemnation of Ananias. He simply acknowledged his respect for the office of high priest
- c. Paul divides the council
1. Although Paul's first words were viciously attacked, it did not deter or discourage him. In fact, the spirit of wisdom came upon him as he now looked over the council and noticed who was in the room.

Acts 23:6-7

6 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.

2. As a Pharisee himself, Paul was aware of the frequent hostile clashes between the Pharisees and Sadducees over their theological differences.
3. They were two major religious divisions among the Jews, and, of the two, the Pharisees were the more spiritual.
4. They believed in the resurrection of the dead, in angels, and in spirits, and they held rigidly to the law. They were so rigid in fact, that they added many traditions of the elders that added rules for how to obey the law.
5. The Sadducees believed only in the five books of Moses, and did not believe in a

resurrection (Mat 22:23, Mk 12:18, Luke 20:27)

6. It was perhaps a word of wisdom from the Lord when Paul drew attention to the differences between the two groups, so that instead of standing in unity against him, the council became divided against each other.
7. When he reminded them that he was a Pharisee, and that it was for the Pharisees' hope of the resurrection that he was now being examined of them, the Pharisees immediately sided with him and against the Sadducees, who did not believe in the resurrection of the dead.

Acts 23:8 For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both.

8. This caused a fight to break out in the council between the Pharisees and Sadducees:

*Acts 23:9 And there arose a **great cry**: and*

*the scribes that were of the Pharisees' part arose, and **strove** [fought, contended severely, protested strongly], saying, We find no evil in this man: but if a spirit or an angel hath spoken to him, let us not fight against God.*

9. And verse 10 begins
*Acts 23:10 And when there arose a **great dissension** [argument]...*
10. The great dissension was such a loud argument and disagreement, that the chief captain was again forced to rescue Paul, who, being caught in the midst of this struggle, was in danger of being pulled apart.
*Acts 23:10 And when there arose a **great dissension**, the chief captain, fearing lest Paul should have been **pulled in pieces** of them, commanded the soldiers to go down, and to take him by force from among them, and to bring him into the castle.*

- iii. The Lord Appeared to Paul (Verse 11)
 - 1. In times of great crisis and uncertainty, Paul was often encouraged and given clear and perfect direction by appearances of the Lord in visions.
 - 2. Like when in a state of uncertainty about where to go waiting in Troas, the Lord spoke to him in a vision, and made him know he was to go to Macedonia (Acts 16:6-10).
 - 3. The Lord again spoke to him in a vision when the Jews of Corinth viciously opposed him, and assured him that no man should hurt him, but that he was to boldly declare His gospel because “there is much people in this city.” (Acts 18:9-10)
 - 4. He now appeared to him again to assure him he would be delivered from the Jews, and would yet preach His gospel in Rome. *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.

5. When one has committed the keeping and the direction of his life wholly to the Lord, he can live through all the storms of this life in a state of quiet peaceful calm and assurance.

IV. Paul Delivered from the Jews' Conspiracy (Verses 12-35)

A. Plot to assassinate Paul

1. Religion without God makes men into cruel fanatics. History records many atrocious crimes committed under the guise of defending their religion.
2. Jesus had warned His disciples that such fanatics would put them out of the synagogues, and even kill them, in the belief that they were doing God's service.

John 16:1-3

16 These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended.

2 They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service.

3 And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me.

3. That is the danger of religion without really knowing God.
4. What happened next was in that very spirit. Twice the Romans had intervened and stopped the mob from killing Paul. They came up with yet another plan:

Acts 23:12-13

12 And when it was day, certain of the Jews banded together, and bound themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul.

13 And they were more than forty which had made this conspiracy.

5. These fanatics were so convinced of this plot, that they sought the help of the high

priest to carry out their plans.

Acts 23:14-15

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.

15 Now therefore ye with the council signify to the chief captain that he bring him down unto you to morrow, as though ye would inquire something more perfectly concerning him: and we, or ever he come near, are ready to kill him.

6. Apparently the high priest, who had Paul slapped for saying he was living in good conscience, was himself void of all conscience as he was willing to subvert justice and become a partner in Paul's assassination attempt.
7. If they could only get him outside the safety of the castle, these men were willing to risk their own lives in a plot to overcome the Roman guards and kill Paul.

8. The chief priests and elders were agreeable with their atrocious plot.

B. Paul gets assistance from his nephew

1. However, you may remember that years before, there were some members of the council, like Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, who were followers of Jesus and did not consent to the plot to crucify Jesus.

2. And since then, Acts records a number of priests had also been saved:

Acts 6:7 And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.

3. God had already appeared to Paul the night before to assure him of divine protection in the face of the Jews' determination to kill him.

4. So somehow, word of the plot of those men reached Paul's nephew.

5. He either heard of the plot himself, or perhaps an informant in the counsel told him of the plot:

Acts 23:16-17

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

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.

6. Then when Paul's nephew had privately revealed the plot to the chief captain, he was charged to tell no one that he had spoken to him of this matter.

Acts 23:20-22

20 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 inquire 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. 22 So the chief captain then let the young man depart, and charged him, See thou tell no man that thou hast shewed these things to me.

7. The chief captain went into action, making rapid but definite plans to save Paul from the Jews.

c. Paul taken from Jerusalem to Caesarea

1. Notice the size of the police force the captain commanded to secure Paul's safe passage out of Jerusalem:

Acts 23:23-24

*23 And he called unto him two centurions, saying, Make ready **two hundred soldiers** to go to Caesarea, and **horsemen threescore and ten**, and **spearmen two hundred**, at the*

third hour of the night [9:00pm];

*24 And provide them **beasts**, that they may set Paul on, and bring him safe unto Felix the governor.*

2. We learn the name of the chief captain and the governor as the captain writes a letter of transmittal to the Roman governor, passing this difficult case up the chain of command.

Acts 23:25-30

25 And he wrote a letter after this manner:

26 Claudius Lysias unto the most excellent governor Felix sendeth greeting.

27 This man was taken of the Jews, and should have been killed of them: then came I with an army, and rescued him, having understood that he was a Roman.

28 And when I would have known the cause wherefore they accused him, I brought him forth into their council:

29 Whom I perceived to be accused of questions of their law, but to have nothing

laid to his charge worthy of death or of bonds.

30 And when it was told me how that the Jews laid wait for the man, I sent straightway to thee, and gave commandment to his accusers also to say before thee what they had against him. Farewell.

3. Claudius Lysias was following a careful protocol in protecting Paul. He was nearly guilty of having Paul flogged, not realizing he was a Roman citizen. So now, he was not going to mess things up and get into further trouble for not honoring Paul's citizenship rights.
4. He was giving the Jews orders to present their charges before the governor's court in the capital city of the region, Caesarea.
5. Verse 31-33 describe the journey from Jerusalem to Caesarea, showing how the horsemen transported Paul to Caesarea

along with the transmittal letter from Claudius Lysias.

6. The chapter ends with:

Acts 23:34-35

34 And when the governor had read the letter, he asked of what province he was. And when he understood that he was of Cilicia;

35 I will hear thee, said he, when thine accusers are also come. And he commanded him to be kept in Herod's judgment hall.

7. Next time in chapter 24, we will hear Paul try for a third time to give his defense.
8. The next time it is before the Governor Felix and there were very few Jews present in the room and there were no interruptions, so Paul is finally able to tell his whole story.