

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.

Acts 23:2 And the high priest Ananias commanded them that stood by him to smite him on the mouth.

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?

Acts 23:4 And they that stood by said, Revilest thou God's high priest?

Acts 23:5 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.

This chapter opens in direct context from the previous chapter. Paul had been brought before the Jewish authorities and was now ready to address them in the presence of the Roman commander.

In his opening statement Paul declared that he had lived in good conscience before God until this very day. Ananias, the high priest, immediately ordered those that stood near Paul to hit him on the mouth for that statement. (Note: The NIV Commentary states that Ananias served as high priest from 48-58 or 59 AD.)

Paul immediately denounced this action in light of the law that these religious leaders declared to so revere. I liked the CJB translation: "God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! Will you sit there judging me according to the *Torah*, yet in violation of the *Torah* order me to be struck?"

Those standing by him then accused Paul of insulting the high priest. Paul then apologized by declaring that he was not aware that he was addressing the high priest; he knew that the law forbade one speaking badly of the ruler of your people. This basically acknowledged that though he didn't have to respect the man, he would have respected the office in light of the law.

Acts 23:6 ¶ 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.

Acts 23:7 And when he had so said, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees: and the multitude was divided.

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

As a former Pharisee, Paul was aware that the council consisted of both Sadducees and Pharisees; so he shouted out that he was a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee, and it was because of the hope and resurrection of the dead that he was being accused. This is a reference to Paul having seen and heard from the resurrected Jesus as indicated by the context of the following verses.

This statement immediately provoked an argument between the two factions. The Sadducees did not believe in resurrection after death or in the existence of angels or spirits; however, the Pharisees believed in both.

Acts 23:9 And there arose a great cry: and the scribes *that were* of the Pharisees' part arose, and strove, 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.

The dispute between the two factions resulted in some of the scribes identified as Pharisees taking up for Paul. They declared that they found no fault in him, and it was not for them to decide if a spirit or angel had spoken to him. If so, they should not fight against God.

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.

The situation became so violent that the commander ordered his soldiers to take control of Paul by force and bring him inside the barracks to ensure his safety.

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.

That night the Lord stood beside Paul and encouraged him. He told Paul that just as he had testified about Jesus in Jerusalem, he would just as surely testify of Him in Rome.

Personally, I believe that the Lord's communications with Paul during this whole process affirm Paul's choice in determining to go to Jerusalem. It was God's will for Paul to testify of His Son both in Jerusalem and in Rome in a very high profile way. In fact, it was God's guarantee that Paul would live to testify in Rome.

I liked Guzik's comment on this verse: "Paul had been miraculously delivered from jail cells before; but this time, the Lord met him right in the jail cell. We often demand that Jesus deliver us *out* of our circumstances, when He wants to meet us right *in* them. We sometimes think we are surrendering to Jesus when we are really only demanding an escape. God wants to meet us *in* whatever we face at the moment."

Acts 23:12 ¶ 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.

Acts 23:13 And they were more than forty which had made this conspiracy.

Acts 23:14 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.

Acts 23:15 Now therefore ye with the council signify to the chief captain that he bring him down unto you to morrow, as though ye would enquire something more perfectly concerning him: and we, or ever he come near, are ready to kill him.

The next day more than forty of the men who opposed Paul gathered together and bound themselves under a curse swearing to eat or drink nothing until they had killed Paul. These men came to the chief priests and elders and told them of their plan. They wanted the religious leaders to convene the council, the Sanhedrin, and seek permission to interrogate Paul for more specific information to give them the opportunity they needed to attack him.

Acts 23:16 And when Paul's sister's son heard of their lying in wait, he went and entered into the castle, and told Paul.

Acts 23:17 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.

Acts 23:18 So he took him, and brought *him* to the chief captain, and said, Paul the prisoner called me unto *him*, and prayed me to bring this young man unto thee, who hath something to say unto thee.

Acts 23:19 Then the chief captain took him by the hand, and went *with him* aside privately, and asked *him*, What is that thou hast to tell me?

Acts 23:20 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 enquire somewhat of him more perfectly.

Acts 23:21 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.

Acts 23:22 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.

This time God came to Paul's aid in the person of his nephew. He had heard of the plot and came to the barracks to tell Paul. Paul called over one of the centurions and asked him to take the young man to see the commander because he had something important to tell him. I am sure that Paul was being treated with the respect due a Roman citizen presumed innocent until proven guilty of a crime. The centurion took Paul's nephew to see the commander who then took him aside to find out what he had to say. The young man told the commander of the conspiracy to kill Paul and warned him that more than forty men were involved. They only needed his cooperation to carry out their plan. The commander then sent the young man away with instructions not to tell anybody what he had revealed to him.

Acts 23:23 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;

Acts 23:24 And provide *them* beasts, that they may set Paul on, and bring *him* safe unto Felix the governor.

The commander called two of his centurions and told them to get their men (200 soldiers) ready to go to Caesarea. They were to also arrange for 70 horsemen and 200 spearmen to accompany them; they would leave at 9:00 p.m. They were also to prepare fresh horses for Paul to ensure that he was delivered safely into the

custody of Felix, the governor of the province of Judea. According to the NIV Commentary, this would have been almost half the garrison at Antonia Fortress. The commander obviously did not want to take the chance of having a Roman citizen who was in his custody murdered.

Acts 23:25 And he wrote a letter after this manner:

Acts 23:26 Claudius Lysias unto the most excellent governor Felix *sendeth* greeting.

Acts 23:27 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.

Acts 23:28 And when I would have known the cause wherefore they accused him, I brought him forth into their council:

Acts 23:29 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.

Acts 23:30 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.

Commander Claudius Lysias then wrote a letter to be delivered to Felix. He informed the governor that Paul had been taken prisoner by the Jews and would have been killed if he and his army had not rescued him. He also told the governor that he had found out that Paul was a Roman citizen. He reported that he had tried to determine the specifics of the charges against Paul by allowing him to be interrogated by the Sanhedrin. From that experience, he had determined that their charges were in connection to their religious law, and that Paul had done nothing to deserve death or imprisonment. He then told the governor that he had been informed of a plot to kill Paul even though he was in custody, so he was sending him under heavy guard to Felix. He also told Felix that he had informed Paul's accusers that they would have to appear before him to make their case.

Acts 23:31 Then the soldiers, as it was commanded them, took Paul, and brought *him* by night to Antipatris.

Acts 23:32 On the morrow they left the horsemen to go with him, and returned to the castle:

Acts 23:33 Who, when they came to Caesarea, and delivered the epistle to the governor, presented Paul also before him.

The soldiers did everything they had been ordered to do and took Paul safely to Antipatris. At that point the 70 horsemen continued on with Paul to Caesarea, and the rest returned to Jerusalem. Upon arriving in Caesarea, they delivered both Paul and the letter to the governor.

Acts 23:34 And when the governor had read *the letter*, he asked of what province he was. And when he understood that *he was* of Cilicia;

Acts 23:35 I will hear thee, said he, when thine accusers are also come. And he commanded him to be kept in Herod's judgment hall.

After the governor had read the letter, he asked Paul where he was from, and Paul told him that he was from Cilicia. Felix informed Paul that he would hear his testimony when his accusers presented themselves. He then ordered that Paul be kept in Herod's judgment hall.