

# The Acts of the Apostles

## LESSON 23

## **Paul Appears before the Sanhedrin (Acts 22:30-23:10)**

*The next day, because he wanted to know for certain why he was accused by the Jews, he released him from his bonds, and commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear, and brought Paul down and set him before them. Acts 22:30*

The meeting of the Sanhedrin was filled with confusion (Acts 23:1-10).

*Then Paul, looking earnestly at the council, said, "Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day." 2 And the high priest Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth. 3 Then Paul said to him, "God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! For you sit to judge me according to the law, and do you command me to be struck contrary to the law?" 4 And those who stood by said, "Do you revile God's high priest?" 5 Then Paul said, "I did not know, brethren, that he was the high priest; for it is written, 'You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.'" 6 But when Paul perceived that 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; concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead I am being judged!" 7 And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees; and the assembly was divided. 8 For Sadducees say that there is no resurrection--and no angel or spirit; but the Pharisees confess both. 9 Then there arose a loud outcry. And the scribes of the Pharisees' party arose and protested, saying, "We find no evil in this man; but if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him, let us not fight against God." 10 Now when there arose a great dissension, the commander, fearing lest Paul might be pulled to pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go down and take him by force from among them, and bring him into the barracks.*

The various occurrences in this chapter of Paul's life highlight the corruption in both religion and politics. There was corruption in the Sanhedrin (religious leaders). Paul was struck when he was answering questions (Acts 23:2).

It was customary to treat an impudent witness this way. They actually had a shoe fitted with an iron heel that was used for this purpose. When a witness made an outburst he was struck across the mouth with the heel of the shoe. This was meant to be a humbling experience since the shoe was held in low esteem. Ananias was known to be a real difficult man. There is even some question as to whether he was the high priest or just filling in for the high priest during a vacancy of office.

Paul was not an impudent witness. He was only answering a question.

- Witnesses were bribed to give false testimony (Acts 24:5-6).
- Party rivalry was more important than justice (Acts 23:9).
- There was a lack of concern for the actual truth.

- They were willing to conspire with thugs to kill Paul (Acts 23:12-16).

There was corruption in the Roman officials (political leaders). They were open to bribes (Acts 22:28). They used power for personal gain (Acts 24:26). They preferred political favors over justice (Acts 24:27). Paul used the corruption to his advantage.

With the Sanhedrin he played to their rivalry to accomplish his purpose (Acts 23 6-10).

Paul knew that there was absolutely no chance for a fair trial. He was looking for a way of escape. God opened his eyes to a particular fact. He operated in the word of wisdom to throw the meeting into confusion and get the principal players to go after each other.

With the Romans he used his citizenship to accomplish his purpose (Acts 25:11).

## **Paul Experiences a Plot to Kill Him (Acts 23:11-22)**

Forty religious zealots hatched a plot to kill Paul. They swore themselves to an oath not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul (Acts 23:12-13). They entered into league with the religious leaders to participate in the plot against Paul (Acts 23:14-15). They would get the Sanhedrin to ask the Romans to send Paul down for another hearing and the zealots would ambush him along the way.

God encouraged and protected Paul through difficult times. God encouraged Paul that his ministry would go forward to Rome (Acts 23:11). The Lord stood by Paul just as he had stood by Stephen. But the following night the Lord stood by him and said, “Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome.”

God moved upon Paul’s nephew to reveal the plot to Paul and then to the Roman commander (Acts 23:16-22). Paul’s nephew may have been one of the zealots or had an inside relationship with one of the zealots. Somehow he became aware of the plot against Paul and could not allow the plan to go forward.

## **Paul is Sent to Caesarea for Trial (Acts 23:23-35)**

The Roman commander (Claudius Lysias) decided to smuggle Paul out to Caesarea to receive a fair trial. The Roman commander wrote a letter to Felix the governor of Caesarea explaining the situation (Acts 23:25-30). The commander made himself out to be a bit of a hero in this letter rushing to the rescue of a Roman citizen. He says nothing of the fact that he almost beat him without a trial.

Paul received a major military escort to Caesarea for a better hearing (Acts 23:23, 31- 32). The escort consisted of a total of 470 soldiers including 200 foot soldiers, 200 spearmen and 70 cavalry (Acts 23:23).

*The foot soldiers and spearmen went as far as Antipatris, only the cavalry*

*continued to Caesarea* (Acts 23:32).

The escort took place under the cover of darkness (Acts 23:23, 31). The letter was delivered to Felix (Acts 23:33). Felix agreed to take the case and hold Paul until his accusers arrive (Acts 23:34-35).

## **Paul Appears before Felix (Acts 24:1-21)**

After five days the Jewish accusers arrived in Caesarea with their lawyer (Acts 24:1). They used a hired lawyer or orator because they did not have much of a case. They used a lawyer because they knew that Jews were not favored in Romans courts. Tertullus is not a Jewish but a Roman name. Perhaps he would get a better hearing because of his name.

Tertullus presented the case against Paul before Felix (Acts 24:1-9). He definitely tried to persuade the court with flattery (Acts 24:2-4).

***When Paul was called before the court, Tertullus spoke for the prosecution: “Most Honorable Felix, we are most grateful in all times and places for your wise and gentle rule. 3 We are much aware that it is because of you and you alone that we enjoy all this peace and gain daily profit from your reforms. 4 I’m not going to tire you out with a long speech. I beg your kind indulgence in listening to me. I’ll be quite brief.” –Msg***

Actually history records that Felix was a very incapable governor. The Jews certainly did not like him. Tacitus describes him as one who “exercised the powers of a king with the mind of a slave.”

He placed Paul in a very bad light (Acts 24:5).

- He referred to him as a plague.
- He referred to him as a creator of dissension.
- He referred to him as a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes.

He presented twisted and false charges against Paul (Acts 24:6-9). The only real charge that was given before Felix is that Paul tried to profane the temple. Paul was given an opportunity to give a defense to the charges (Acts 24:10-21).

Paul denied the charges by describing why he was in Jerusalem, what he was doing and what he was not doing.

**Paul said he was not...**

**Disputing with anyone in the temple.**

**Inciting the crowd.**

**Profaning the temple.**

**With a multitude or a tumult.**

**Paul said he was in Jerusalem...**

**To worship.**  
**To bring alms.**  
**To bring an offering for the nation.**  
**To be purified in the temple.**  
**Paul indicated that they may have been offended because...**

He belonged to a sect called “the Way.”  
He had said something about the resurrection of the dead.

Paul challenged anyone who had actually witnessed bad behavior on his part to come and testify against him (Acts 24:19-20).

## **Felix Postpones a Decision (Acts 24:22-27)**

*But when Felix heard these things, having more accurate knowledge of the Way, he adjourned the proceedings and said, “When Lysias the commander comes down, I will make a decision on your case.” 23 So he commanded the centurion to keep Paul and to let him have liberty, and told him not to forbid any of his friends to provide for or visit him. 24 And after some days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, he sent for Paul and heard him concerning the faith in Christ. 25 Now as he reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and answered, “Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you.” 26 Meanwhile he also hoped that money would be given him by Paul, that he might release him. Therefore he sent for him more often and conversed with him. 27 But after two years Porcius Festus succeeded Felix; and Felix, wanting to do the Jews a favor, left Paul bound.*

Felix decided not to decide (Acts 24:22). Indecision in itself is a decision. There is no question that he was not excited about this case and most likely knew that there was nothing to it. The excuse he gave for his delay was that he would wait for the Roman commander to come and verify the charges. However, it does not appear that this ever happened or was ever pursued.

He kept Paul in a minimum security situation with liberties (Acts 24:23). This indicates that he did not view Paul as any kind of a threat or a conspirator. He was most likely in military custody chained to a Roman soldier (We will define this custody more fully in the last lesson of this course).

Felix wanted to hear what Paul believed. Evidently Felix and his wife Drusilla knew something of the sect called the Way and were curious to hear more. Even though Felix seemed to be touched by Paul’s discussion, he did not respond in repentance. He procrastinated once again. Now as he reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and answered, “Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you.” Acts 24:25

Felix knew Paul was innocent but wanted a bribe (Acts 24:26). Paul had said something about bringing an offering of money to the nation. No doubt Felix presumed that Paul had more money

available to him. He was hoping that Paul would try to buy his way out of prison. Paul did not make any attempt to do so.

Felix was succeeded by Festus after two years (Acts. 24:27). Festus left Paul bound because he knew that it would please the Jews. He wanted to get his tenure as governor off to a good start.

## **Paul Appeals to Rome (Acts 25:1-12)**

With the change in leadership to Festus, the Jews seized the opportunity to come against Paul once again. They made an appeal through a petition to have Paul returned to Jerusalem for trial (Acts 25:2-3). They planned another ambush to kill Paul in route to Jerusalem (Acts 25:3). Festus convened a court to listen to the Jews' charges (Acts 23:4-7). Festus was inclined to do the Jews a favor and return Paul to Jerusalem for trial (Acts 25:9).

Paul appealed to Rome to escape being exported back to Jerusalem (Acts 25:10-12).

***So Paul said, "I stand at Caesar's judgment seat, where I ought to be judged. To the Jews I have done no wrong, as you very well know. 11 For if I am an offender, or have committed anything deserving of death, I do not object to dying; but if there is nothing in these things of which these men accuse me, no one can deliver me to them. I appeal to Caesar." 12 Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered, "You have appealed to Caesar? To Caesar you shall go!"***

Paul's appeal to Caesar got Festus off of the hook but it also ensured that Paul would not be a free man for a long time.

## **Paul Appears before Agrippa (Acts 25:13-26:32)**

King Agrippa and his wife Bernice came to Caesarea and ended up getting involved in Paul's case at the request of Festus (Acts 25:13-14). Festus briefed Agrippa on the case (Acts 25:15-21). Festus indicated that the only charges that the Jews brought against Paul had to do with some religious questions (Acts 25:18-19).

When the accusers stood up, they brought no accusation against him of such things as I supposed, but had some questions against him about their own religion and about a certain Jesus, who had died, whom Paul affirmed to be alive.

Agrippa decided that he wanted to hear Paul for himself (Acts 25:22). Festus also wanted Agrippa to hear Paul because if he was going to send Paul to Rome he needed to know what to charge him with (Acts 25:24-27).

***And Festus said: "King Agrippa and all the men who are here present with us, you see this man about whom the whole assembly of the Jews petitioned me, both at Jerusalem and here, crying out that he was not fit to live any longer. 25 But when I found that he had committed nothing deserving of death, and that he himself had appealed to***

***Augustus, I decided to send him. 26 I have nothing certain to write to my lord concerning him. Therefore I have brought him out before you, and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that after the examination has taken place I may have something to write. 27 For it seems to me unreasonable to send a prisoner and not to specify the charges against him.”***

Paul testified before Agrippa (Acts 26:1-23). He summarized his early life (Acts 26:1-11). He recounted his conversion experience (Acts 26:12-18). He described his ministry of preaching Christ to both Jews and Gentiles (Acts 26:19-23). Paul experienced a two-fold result. Festus thought that he had gone mad (Acts 26:24). Agrippa was almost persuaded to be a Christian (Acts 26:28). Agrippa rendered a verdict (Acts 26:29-32). Paul had done nothing worthy of chains.

Had Paul not appealed to Caesar he might have been set free. Paul appeared before four different Roman officials up to this point. The following is a summary of their opinions. Claudias Lysias the arresting officer could not even put a specific charge to Paul's apparent offense when writing to Felix.

Felix the governor of Caesarea could find no fault with him but kept him in prison hoping for a bribe. Festus the next governor of Caesarea could find no fault with him and asked Agrippa to help him formulate a charge that would make sense to Rome.

Herod Agrippa the king of the Jews could find no fault in him and would have let him go but for the fact that Paul had already appealed to Rome.