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## Acts 23

### Paul Before the Sanhedrin

Paul is going to start out by appealing again to his fellow Jews and declaring his innocence before God. Apparently, that does not bode well with the High Priest. So, what was the issue?

**1And Paul, earnestly beholding the council, said, Men *and* brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day. 2And the high priest Ananias commanded them that stood by him to smite him on the mouth.**

There are several back stories to this moment in time. First of all, you were not to speak to the High Priest until told to, so for that offense Paul was slapped in the face.

The behind-the-scenes story is that this particular High Priest Ananias was known as violent, haughty, gluttonous, and rapacious man” quoting Pulpit Commentary.

This from Ellicott’s Commentary

*“The son of Nebedæus was conspicuous for his cruelty and injustice, and had been sent to Rome as a prisoner to take his trial before Claudius (A.D. 52). He had been acquitted, or at least released, and had returned to Judæa. To him this assertion of a life so utterly unlike his own seemed almost like a personal insult.”*

Those in Israel that were Roman sympathizers turned against this evil High Priest Ananias in 66 AD. According to Expositor's Greek Testament.

*“But his Roman sympathisers made him an object of hatred to the nationalists, and in A.D. 66, in the days of the last great revolt against the Romans, he was dragged from a sewer in which he had hidden, and was murdered by the weapons of the assassins whom in his own period of power he had not scrupled to employ,”*

Now, back to Paul's interaction with this vial High Priest.

**3Then 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?**

Paul just short of calling fire down from heaven, levels an appropriate charge against this High Priest. A smite by God is consistent with eternity in hell one could assume.

**4And they that stood by said, Revilest thou God's high priest? 5Then 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.**

*Exodus 22:28 Thou shalt not revile the gods, nor curse the ruler of thy people.*

There are given 3 explanations as to why spoke in such a harsh manner against the High Priest from Pulpit Commentary.

Quoting:

1. It arose from the uncertainty that existed whether Ananias really was high priest or not at this time, or whether the office was not in abeyance.
2. Others attribute to Paul's weakness of sight the fact that he did not see that Ananias was sitting in the presidential chair, neither was able to recognize his features.
3. Others, giving to οὐκ ᾔδειν a sense which it never bears, render, "I did not reflect," or "bear in mind, that he was high priest."

**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.

Paul knows that there is a division among the Pharisees and Sadducees over "life after death". Pharisees believe in life after death and Sadducees do not. So, Paul was able to start an argument between the ruling Jews over doctrine.

**7**And when he had so said, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees: and the multitude was divided. **8**For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both. **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. **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.

Division is a tool of Satan on many occasions. Satan has used division to divide Israel, to divide people from relationships to religions to denominations to doctrines.

**11And 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.**

Christ the Lord stands by His appointed teacher of the Gentiles. Paul is despised and hated by his own countrymen of the religious leadership all because of his love of Christ. The conversation Paul had though short with the leaders was needed from the Lord's perspective. God will time and time again try to break through the mantle of rejection of Him. God has endured that since He created mankind. It is another reason why we know the Wrath of God is coming.

### **The Plot to Kill Paul**

**(John 16:1-4)**

**12And 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. 13And they were more than forty which had made this conspiracy. 14And 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. 15Now 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.**

A little different conspiracy in several ways. First to conspire with that many people is bound to lead to a leak of the plan. Secondly to then go tell the religious leadership of your plan is again fraught with the possibility of someone in authority finding out and stopping it. None-the-less that is what these folks did.

Anytime we allow the hatred of something or someone to consume us we lose all perspective right and wrong. The hatred of Paul was really the hatred of what Paul was teaching and that was the Jesus was the Messiah that Israel had been waiting for.

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

Go figure with that many people knowing about the idea to kill Paul, someone was going to talk. The leak came out and the response was to save Paul.

**17Then 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. 18So 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. 19Then 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? 20And 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.**

The plan of course was to dupe the Roman Soldiers into brining Paul out into the open so they could kill him. If the Roman Commander were to lose a prisoner especially a Roman citizen, his command would end along with his life.

**21But 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. 22So 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.**

On the reverse of the Jewish idea of telling everyone what the plan was, the Roman Commander who knew how valuable information was so he told Paul's nephew to not tell anyone what he told them.

### **Paul Sent to Felix at Caesarea**

**23And 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; 24And provide *them* beasts, that they may set Paul on, and bring *him* safe unto Felix the governor. 25And he wrote a letter after this manner:**

It is obvious the commander knew the value of his prisoner to his own career so he took no chances and mounted a small army to protect Paul and sent him to the Governor Felix.

A side note of Felix, from Ellicott's Commentary

*“In the household of Antonia, the mother of the Emperor Claudius, there were two brothers, first slaves, then freed-men, Antonius Felix and Pallas. The latter became the chosen companion and favourite minister of the emperor, and through his influence Felix obtained the procuratorship of Judaea.”*

Felix married the granddaughter of Mark Anthony and Cleopatra. In fact, Felix had 3 wives, all helping to solidify his political position. He was a brutal ruler and was allowed to get away with many evil things due to his brother Pallas being a favorite of the emperor. Not sure what “being a favorite” means, but probably not good.

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

Any Roman Soldier would of course be diplomatic to an appointed political leader such as Felix even though he would know of the evil this man had and would do. After Emperor Claudius' rule ended it was filled by a more evil emperor, Nero and Felix was reappointed by Nero.

The following is the letter written by the Roman Commander in Jerusalem to Felix.

**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.

Pretty succinct as to what had happened. Key in the communications was that Paul was a Roman.

**31** Then the soldiers, as it was commanded them, took Paul, and brought *him* by night to Antipatris. **32** On the morrow they left the horsemen to go with him, and returned to the castle: **33** Who, when they came to Caesarea, and delivered the epistle to the governor, presented Paul also before him.

The distance from Jerusalem to Caesarea was in total about 68 miles. Vs 31 indicates that the Commander took the several hundred soldiers, both horsemen and foot soldiers. He took the foot soldiers as far as Antipatris which was about 42 miles from Jerusalem. Believing they were well beyond any location for an attempted attack, he sent the foot soldiers back to Jerusalem and had the horsemen continue on the 26 miles to Caesarea with Paul.



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

Felix asks Paul from what province he was a Roman citizen in, Paul replies “Cilicia” where Tarsus Paul’s birthplace is at.

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

As was the Roman judicial system, Paul was allowed to face his accusers as they testified before Felix as to what the crime was that Paul committed.

The “Judgement Hall” was built by Herod as a residence so it was not likely a prison but much more comfortable. It is likely the residence of Felix, so some portion of it must have been secured and set aside for Roman prisoners awaiting trial.

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