

ACTS

Chapter 23

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.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, “You dare to 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.’”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, the son of a Pharisee. I stand on trial because of my hope in 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 acknowledge them all.)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.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.”

23:1 *Sanhedrin.* See note on 5:21.

brothers. Fellow Jews (see note on 11:1).

good conscience. A consistent claim of Paul.

23:2 *Ananias.* High priest A.D. 47–59, son of Nebedaeus. He is not to be confused with the high priest Annas (A.D. 6–15; see note on Lk 3:2). Ananias was noted for cruelty and violence. When the revolt against Rome broke out, he was assassinated by his own people.

23:2 STRIKE HIM ON THE MOUTH – Paul only made a beginning to make it clear that he was not a person who spoke against the Jewish people and the Jewish law, a person who defile the temple. The command by the priest was illegal. (PBC)

23:3 *whitewashed wall!* Having an attractive exterior but filled with unclean contents, such as tombs holding dead bodies (see Mt 23:27); or walls that look substantial but fall before the winds (see Eze 13:10–12). It is a metaphor for a hypocrite.

23:5 *I did not realize that he was the high priest.* Explained in different ways: 1. Paul had poor eyesight (suggested by such passages as Gal 4:15; 6:11) and failed to see that the one who presided was the high priest. 2. He failed to discern that the one who presided was the high priest because on some occasions others had sat in his place. 3. He was using pure irony: A true high priest would not give such an order. 4. He refused to acknowledge that Ananias was the high priest under these circumstances.

23:6 *Sadducees.* See notes on 4:1; Mt 3:7; Mk 12:18; Lk 20:27. They denied the resurrection and angels and spirits (v. 8).

Pharisees. See notes on Mt 3:7; Mk 2:16; Lk 5:17.

23:10 *commander.* See note on 21:31.

barracks. See note on 21:37.

23:11 *the Lord stood near.* In times of crisis and need for strength, Paul was given help (see 18:9; 22:18; 27:23). – It was the Lord’s will that Paul would also bear witness to him in Rome. Therefore, those Jews in Jerusalem who were bent on his destruction would not succeed. (PBC)

The Plot to Kill Paul

¹²The next morning the Jews formed a conspiracy and bound themselves with an oath not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul. ¹³More than forty men were involved in this plot. ¹⁴They went to the chief priests and elders and said, “We have taken a solemn oath not to eat anything until we have killed Paul. ¹⁵Now 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.” ¹⁶But when the son of Paul’s sister heard of this plot, he went into the barracks and told Paul. ¹⁷Then Paul called one of the centurions and said, “Take this young man to the commander; he has something to tell him.” ¹⁸So 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.” ¹⁹The commander took the young man by the hand, drew him aside and asked, “What is it you want to tell me?” ²⁰He said: “The Jews have agreed to ask you to bring Paul before the Sanhedrin tomorrow on the pretext of wanting more accurate information about him. ²¹Don’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.” ²²The commander dismissed the young man and cautioned him, “Don’t tell anyone that you have reported this to me.”

23:12 *bound themselves with an oath.* Probably these were from the Zealots or the “terrorists” (see note on 21:38) later responsible for revolt against Rome. – Forty men of Israel took God’s name in vain by swearing to commit murder. It is not likely that men who took such an oath would starve or die of thirst if they failed to do what they had sworn, for the rabbis had made it possible for them to be released from such an oath. It is

remarkable that the religious leaders of the people involved themselves in such a plan. They either believed that such actions were a service to God or simply lacked the fear of God. (PBC)

23:16 SON OF PAUL'S SISTER – We do not know the names of Paul's family, nor how many other members there were. (LL)

23:17 *centurions*. See note on 10:1.
commander. See note on 21:31.

23:22 *Don't tell anyone*. For the boy's own safety and because of the commander's plans to transfer Paul under cover of night (see v. 23).

Paul Transferred to Caesarea

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^a to go to Caesarea at nine tonight. ²⁴ Provide mounts for Paul so that he may be taken safely to Governor Felix." 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. 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.

23:23 *soldiers ... horsemen ... spearmen*. Heavily armed infantry, cavalry and lightly armed soldiers. The commander assigned 470 men to protect Paul, the Roman citizen (cf. 22:25–29)—but the Greek for "spearmen" is an obscure word and could perhaps be translated "additional mounts and pack animals" (see NIV text note).

23:24 GOVERNOR FELIX – He occupied the official position which Pontius Pilate once held. (PBC)

23:27 *for I had learned that he is a Roman citizen*. Inserted to gain the commander's favor with Rome, but not a true statement, because the commander did not learn of Paul's citizenship until he was about to scourge him to gain information.

23:30 *ordered his accusers to present to you their case.* He anticipated that the order would be given by the time the letter was delivered.

23:31 *Antipatris.* Rebuilt by Herod the Great and named for his father. It was a military post between Samaria and Judea—30 miles from Jerusalem.

23:33 *Caesarea.* The headquarters of Roman rule for Samaria and Judea—28 miles from Antipatris.

23:34 *The governor.* Antonius Felix. The emperor Claudius had appointed him governor of Judea c. A.D. 52, a time when Felix's brother was the emperor's favorite minister. The brothers had formerly been slaves, then freedmen, then high officials in government. The historian Tacitus said of Felix, "He held the power of a tyrant with the disposition of a slave." He married three queens in succession, one of whom was Drusilla (see note on 24:24). *from Cilicia.* If Paul had come from a province nearby, Felix might have turned him over for trial under another's jurisdiction.

23:35 *Herod's palace.* † Erected as a royal residence by Herod the Great but now used as a Roman praetorium—the place for the official business of the emperor and/or to house personnel directly responsible to the emperor. Praetoria were located in Rome, Ephesus, Jerusalem (Jn 18:28), Caesarea and other parts of the empire.