

## **Acts chapter 23 Taken from the following source:**

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Paul begins his self-defense in good faith.

23:1 Evidently Paul intended to give his testimony again, this time to the Sanhedrin ("Council"). He addressed this body using the formal address common among Jews (lit. "Men brothers," Gr. *Andres adelphoi*). He identified himself as a Jew by his manner of speech, since his loyalty to Judaism was in question. Paul frequently claimed to have lived with a clear ("perfectly good") "conscience before God" (cf. 20:18-21, 26-27; 24:16; Rom 15:19, 23; Phil. 3:6; 2 Tim. 4:7). Paul referred to the "conscience" about 23 times in his epistles. Here this claim meant he believed that nothing he had done, which he was about to relate, was contrary to the will of God contained in the Hebrew Scriptures. Specifically, his Christian beliefs and conduct did not compromise his Jewish heritage. "He was not, of course, claiming sinlessness, nor was he referring to the inner spiritual conflicts of Rom. 7. The reference was to the externals of his life, and the blamelessness of his conduct as measured by the demands of the Law (cf. Phil. 3:4-6)."

23:2 Paul's claim to uprightness so incensed "Ananias the high priest," that he ordered a soldier to "strike Paul (him) on the mouth." Probably Ananias, who was a Sadducee, had already made up his mind that Paul, who had been a Pharisee, was guilty. An officer of another high priest had similarly struck Jesus when He had testified before the Sanhedrin (cf. John 18:20-23). Ananias became high priest in A.D. 47. He was not the Ananias who is called the high priest in the Gospels and in 4:7. The Jewish high priesthood was a political appointment during Rome's occupation of Palestine. Josephus painted this Ananias as a despicable person. He seized, for his own use, tithes that should have gone to the ordinary priests, and he gave large bribes to Romans and Jews. The emperor at one point summoned him to Rome, on charges of being involved in a bloody battle between Jews and Samaritans, but he escaped punishment. He was very wealthy, and resorted to violence and even assassination to accomplish his ends. He was also very pro-Roman, and the Jews finally assassinated him

Jewish law considered a person innocent until proved guilty, but Ananias had punished Paul before he had even been charged, much less tried and found guilty. Paul reacted indignantly and uttered a prophecy of Ananias' judgment that God fulfilled later. A "whitewashed wall" was one that was frequently inferior on the inside, but looked good outwardly (cf. Ezek. 13:10-16; Matt. 23:27). Paul's reaction was extreme, but as he proceeded to explain, it resulted

from misunderstanding. It is inexcusable in a high priest that is appointed to judge according to the law."

23:4-5 Paul may not have known that the person who commanded the soldier to strike him was the high priest for any number of reasons

The high priest was "a ruler of the Jews (your people)" in a higher sense than was true of the rest of the Sanhedrin members. Paul's quotation from Exodus 22:28 showed that he was in subjection to God's revealed will, concerning which he was on trial for repudiating. Being subject to governmental authorities is as much of a requirement under the New Covenant as it was under the Old . Paul quoted the Old Covenant here for the benefit of the Jews who lived under it.

23:6 Paul recognized that he could not get a fair trial in a court that did not even observe the law it purported to defend, so he changed his tactics. He decided to divide the jury and began his defense again . This time he took the offensive. The issue of "the (hope and) resurrection of the dead" was fundamental in Paul's case (cf. 17:32). Israel's national hope of deliverance by her Messiah rested on the resurrection of that Messiah as predicted in the Hebrew Scriptures. By raising the old controversy of whether resurrection is possible, Paul divided his accusers. He is trying to change the entire issue of his trial, and he will persist in this effort in subsequent scenes. Therefore, the significance of Paul's statement that he is on trial 'concerning hope and resurrection of the dead' can be understood only by considering the development of this theme in later scenes.

23:7-8 Paul's belief in the resurrection divided the Sanhedrin. The "Sadducees" denied the "resurrection," as well as the existence of (good) "angels," and (evil) "spirit(s)," but the "Pharisees" believed in ("acknowledge[d]") these things.

23:9-10 The Pharisees sided with Paul, and the Sadducees opposed him. Their emotional dispute excluded any possibility of a serious examination of Paul's conduct, or even a clarification of the charges against him. The Pharisees moreover defended Paul's claim to having received a vision on the Damascus Road (22:6- 11) or in the temple (22:17-21), but the Sadducees repudiated it. The Roman commander must have thrown up his hands in dismay, and "was afraid Paul would be torn to pieces by them." For a second time he could not discover what Paul had done, or why so many Jews hated him. Pilate had a similar problem with Jesus (John 18:28—19:15). Claudius Lysias decided to take Paul into protective custody in the Fortress ("the barracks"). The Lord's encouragement of Paul

23:11 Paul was undoubtedly wondering how he would ever get out of the mess in which he found himself. At this critical moment, during the "night of the

next day" ("following night"; Gr. *te epiousē nykti*), the Lord appeared to him again and "stood at his side." The Lord's appearances to Paul all occurred at great crises in his life. He assured the apostle that he would bear "witness in (at) Rome," as he had already done in Jerusalem. The Lord's reassurance must take the place of miraculously opening doors. The divine power that rescues from prison has become a powerful presence that enables the witness to endure an imprisonment that lasts for years."

23:12-15 Paul's adversaries (cf. 21:27-29) evidently agreed together not to "taste" food or drink again until Paul was dead). Their plan was to have the chief priests and elders of Israel ask the Roman commander to return Paul to the Sanhedrin for further questioning. Assassins planned to kill him somewhere on the streets: between the Fortress of Antonia and the Hall of the Sanhedrin. These two buildings were not far apart. The plotters surely realized that Paul's Roman guards might kill some of their number in the process. "The oath was not so suicidal as it seems, since provision was made by the rabbis for releasing participants from the consequences of failure to carry out their purpose if external circumstances had made it impossible."

23:16-17 We know nothing more about "Paul's sister" than what Luke stated here. She may have lived in Jerusalem, Tarsus, or elsewhere. Obviously her "son," Paul's nephew, sided with his uncle rather than with the assassins. This is the only reference to Paul's immediate family in the New Testament. Paul could receive visitors in the barracks where he was a prisoner, because he was a Roman citizen in protective custody. He could also summon a centurion to do certain favors for him, which he did here.

23:18-22 The commander took the advice of Paul's nephew seriously. He probably knew Ananias well enough to know that the high priest would go along with this assassination plot.

23:23-24 The commander also realized that Paul's enemies in Jerusalem would stop at nothing to see him dead. As long as Paul was in Jerusalem there was a danger of rioting. Consequently Claudius prepared to send him to the Roman provincial capital with a heavy guard under cover of night. The total number of soldiers may have been 270 or 470, depending on the meaning of *dexiolaboi*, "spearmen." This word may refer to either foot soldiers or to led horses. The question is whether there were, in addition to the 200 infantrymen and 70 cavalrymen, 200 "spearmen" or 200 "extra horses." The third hour of the night was 9:00 p.m. This is the third time Paul left a city secretly at night (cf. 9:25; 17:10). Obviously Claudius Lysias did not want the assassination of a Roman citizen on his record, so he took precautions to protect Paul. Paul's guards continued to treat him with the respect due a Roman citizen. The commander

even provided horses for him to ride on. "The size of the escort is not excessive, in view of the troubled times and Jewish fanaticism."

23:25 The commander had to send a copy of the background of Paul's case along with Paul himself. Luke wrote that what follows in the text was substantially what the "letter" contained.

23:26 This is the first mention of the commander's name in Acts. His Greek name was "Lysias," and when he purchased his Roman citizenship (cf. 22:28), he must have also taken, as his first name, the Roman name of the emperor. "Felix" was the governor of the Roman province of Syria, which included Judea. Claudius Lysias addressed Felix politely).

23:27-30 The commander put himself in the best light possible in view of the facts. He mentioned his "rescue" of Paul in the temple courtyard, but did not include that he almost flogged Paul. New in this letter is the mention of Paul's arrest by the Jews, Lysias wrote that he had rescued Paul because he knew ("having learned") that Paul was a Roman citizen, but in fact the commander only learned of Paul's Roman citizenship after he had arrested ("rescued") him (21:34; 22:26-27). Of particular importance is the notice that in Lysias' judgment, Paul was not guilty of any crime (cf. John 18:38) "deserving death or imprisonment," but his case only involved disputes ("questions") over Jewish theology or "their Law" (cf. Gallio in 18:14-15). This was another judgment, favoring not only Paul but Christianity, by a Roman official, that Luke carefully documented. Every Roman magistrate before whom Paul appeared (Gallio, Lysias, Felix, and Festus) declared him innocent. Undoubtedly Claudius Lysias told the Jewish leaders to go to Caesarea after Paul had left Jerusalem.

23:31-32 The large contingent of Roman soldiers escorted Paul, through the Judean hill country and the Shephelah (foothills), to the town of "Antipatris," about 37 miles northwest of Jerusalem. The remaining 28 miles to Caesarea covered flatter terrain, in an area that had a sparser Jewish population. Paul's party traveled across this distance in daylight. The foot soldiers "returned" to Jerusalem ("the barracks") from Antipatris, and the 70 remaining cavalry soldiers ("horsemen") escorted Paul the rest of the way to Caesarea. Paul's departure from Jerusalem was the first leg of his journey to Rome. God had used Paul as His witness in Jerusalem, once again, and had preserved him to witness to the uttermost part of the earth.

Paul's ministry in Caesarea was from prison. Luke devoted about three chapters to Paul's ministry in Caesarea, primarily to reemphasize the legality of Christianity while various Roman officials scrutinized it, and to repeat major themes in Paul's addresses.

23:33 The "governor" (procurator) of Judea at this time was Antonius Felix (A.D. 52-59). Pontius Pilate occupied this office from A.D. 26 to 36. Felix had a reputation for being a harsh ruler who had risen from a lowly background. The Roman historian Tacitus described him as follows. "... Antonius Felix, practiced every kind of cruelty and lust, wielding the power of [a] king with all the instincts of a slave." He was apparently a freed man, someone who had been a bondsman (indentured servant or bondslave) but had received his freedom from an authoritative Roman, who in this case was Emperor Claudius' mother, Antonia. He was the first slave ever to become the governor of a Roman province. Felix rose to power as a result of his influential brother, his self-serving political maneuvering, and his three calculating marriages. He normally dealt very severely with Jews, especially "The Daggersmen," the terrorists who sought to overthrow Roman rule by assassinating key Romans and pro-Roman Jews (cf. 21:38)

23:34-35 Felix inquired concerning Paul's home "province" for the following reason: If Paul had come from an area in the empire that had its own ruler, in addition to a Roman governor, then that local authority had a right to witness the proceedings (cf. Luke 23:6-12). "Cilicia" was not such a place, however, so Felix could deal with Paul himself. He needed to hear the testimony of Paul's "accusers," of course. Consequently Felix "kept" Paul in the governor's palace, "Herod's Praetorium," which Herod the Great had built, until those Jews arrived and he could conduct a hearing. The governor's palace had cells for prisoners. Paul would have been fairly comfortable there