

# ACTS

## Chapter 23

And looking intently at the council, Paul said, “Brothers, I have lived my life before God in all good conscience up to 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 is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall! Are you sitting to judge me according to the law, and yet contrary to the law you order me to be struck?” 4 Those who stood by said, “Would you revile God's high priest?” 5 And Paul said, “I did not know, brothers, that he was the high priest, for it is written, ‘You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.’” 6 Now when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, “Brothers, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees. It is with respect to the hope and the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial.” 7 And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. 8 For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor angel, nor spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all. 9 Then a great clamor arose, and some of the scribes of the Pharisees' party stood up and contended sharply, “We find nothing wrong in this man. What if a spirit or an angel spoke to him?” 10 And when the dissension became violent, the tribune, afraid that Paul would be torn to pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go down and take him away from among them by force and bring him into the barracks. 11 The following night the Lord stood by him and said, “Take courage, for as you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem, so you must testify also in Rome.”

23:1 *brothers*. Fellow Jews. (CSB)

*good conscience*. A consistent claim of Paul. (CSB)

Paul declares his conscience is free from guilt regarding the charges against him. (TLSB)

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

Son of Nedebaeus; served as high priest from c AD 47 to 58. He was cruel and despised and was assassinated by the Sicarii in AD 66. (TLSB)

*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)

This violent act probably stemmed from Ananias's violent character. Jesus received similar treatment (Jn 18:22). (TLSB)

23:3 *God is going to strike you*. Whether a curse or a prediction of the future, Paul's brash statement demonstrates his dismay at being hit unjustly. (TLSB)

*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. (CSB)

Paul paints the high priest as one whose fair exterior conceals from human eyes the corruptness of one doomed to God’s judgment. (TLSB)

*contrary to the law.* Perhaps a reference to Lv 19:15. Luther: “A Christian may act as a judge and sentence a murderer to death, yet not on his own behalf or for his own ends but on behalf of others and by virtue of his office. Then it is the same as if God had done it, for His ordinance is doing it. In short, it is permissible to curse on account of the Word of God; but it is wrong to curse on your own account for personal vengeance or some other personal end” (AE 14:258). (TLSB)

**23:4** *revile.* Paul’s words were understood as an insult of Ananias. (TLSB)

**23:5** *I did not know 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. (CSB)

One of a series of commands God gave His people after the Ten Commandments. (TLSB)

**23:6** *Sadducees.* They denied the resurrection and angels and spirits (v. 8). (CSB)

*Pharisees.* Paul refers to his training under Gamaliel, his way of life, and his Pharisaic ancestry, employing a “divide and conquer” strategy; cf v 8. (TLSB)

*the hope and the resurrection.* Or, “the hope of the resurrection.” Jesus’ resurrection from the dead and the believers’ resurrection were key concepts in what the apostles preached (e.g., 2:32; 3:15; 4:10). (TLSB)

**23:7** *divided.* Because the Pharisees and Sadducees disagreed about the resurrection. (TLSB)

**23:8** *resurrection ... angel ... spirit.* The Sadducees did not believe in these things, though they could find them in the Books of Moses (e.g., Gn 16; 19; 22.) They seemed to deny much of what could be called spiritual or otherworldly. (TLSB)

**23:9** *scribes.* They held themselves to be the authority in matters of interpreting Scripture. (TLSB)

*What if a spirit or an angel spoke to him?* They had no problem believing Paul might have had such a supernatural experience. (TLSB)

**23:10** *dissension became violent.* Luke intensifies a word used in v 7; the Council has become an angry mob. (TLSB)

**23:11** *the Lord stood by him.* In times of crisis and need for strength, Paul was given help (see 18:9; 22:18; 27:23). (CSB)

Not clear whether this refers to a vision or to another post-resurrection appearance of Jesus. (TLSB)

*you must testify also in Rome.* Paul had already expressed the desire to preach the Gospel in Rome, and Jesus now confirms that it is part of His divine plan for Paul (TLSB)

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)

**22:30–23:11** Paul boldly speaks of Christ's resurrection before the Council, and in so doing, he cleverly divides the Council. At times, you may be in situations where you are afraid to share openly your Christian beliefs. The crucified and risen Christ forgives you for any past failures to confess Him before others, yet He also promises to always be at your side and support your testimony (Mt 28:20). • Dear Jesus, You are the resurrection and the life. Make me bold, like Paul, so that I am never ashamed to speak Your truth. Amen. (TLSB)

#### *The Plot to Kill Paul*

**12 When it was day, the Jews made a plot and bound themselves by an oath neither to eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. 13 There were more than forty who made this conspiracy. 14 They went to the chief priests and elders and said, "We have strictly bound ourselves by an oath to taste no food till we have killed Paul. 15 Now therefore you, along with the council, give notice to the tribune to bring him down to you, as though you were going to determine his case more exactly. And we are ready to kill him before he comes near." 16 Now the son of Paul's sister heard of their ambush, so he went and entered the barracks and told Paul. 17 Paul called one of the centurions and said, "Take this young man to the tribune, for he has something to tell him." 18 So he took him and brought him to the tribune and said, "Paul the prisoner called me and asked me to bring this young man to you, as he has something to say to you." 19 The tribune took him by the hand, and going aside asked him privately, "What is it that you have to tell me?" 20 And he said, "The Jews have agreed to ask you to bring Paul down to the council tomorrow, as though they were going to inquire somewhat more closely about him. 21 But do not be persuaded by them, for more than forty of their men are lying in ambush for him, who have bound themselves by an oath neither to eat nor drink till they have killed him. And now they are ready, waiting for your consent." 22 So the tribune dismissed the young man, charging him, "Tell no one that you have informed me of these things."**

**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. (CSB)

The conspirators vowed they would be cursed by God if they did not fulfill their sinister mission. (TLSB)

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)

**23:15** The conspirators must have known that at least some members of the Council were corrupt enough to go along with their plot. (TLSB)

**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)

Paul's nephew is mentioned only here in Scripture. It is not known whether he was a Christian. (TLSB)

*entered the barracks.* Since Paul was not convicted of a crime, he was allowed to have visitors. (TLSB)

**23:17** *young man.* Usually refers to a male between the ages of 20 and 40. (TLSB)

**23:19** *take this young man to the tribune.* Context implies that the tribune literally pulled him aside to speak with him. The phrase is also evidence of eyewitness testimony. (TLSB)

**23:20–22** The tribune had already witnessed the Jews' anger against Paul (21:30–36; 22:22–24; 23:10). A plot such as Paul's nephew described was certainly feasible. The tribune wanted to do what he could to protect Paul, a Roman citizen. (TLSB)

**23:22** *tell no one.* For the boy's own safety and because of the commander's plans to transfer Paul under cover of night (see v. 23). (CSB)

**23:12–22** Forty Jews, in conjunction with their leaders, create a plot to kill Paul. But Paul's nephew intervenes. He is an example to us of how family members may support one another in trying times and call upon legitimate authority in support of God's people. Good government and family are blessings of God's providence that enable the Gospel to spread among us. • Thank You, God, that we can always count on Your unchanging Word and Your goodwill. Grant us confidence in You and Your blessings. Amen. (TLSB)

*Paul Sent to Felix the Governor*

**23** Then he called two of the centurions and said, "Get ready two hundred soldiers, with seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen to go as far as Caesarea at the third hour of the night. **24** Also provide mounts for Paul to ride and bring him safely to Felix the governor." **25** And he wrote a letter to this effect: **26** "Claudius Lysias, to his Excellency the governor Felix, greetings. **27** This man was seized by the Jews and was about to be killed by them when I came upon them with the soldiers and rescued him, having learned that he was a Roman citizen. **28** And desiring to know the charge for which they were accusing him, I brought him down to their council. **29** I found that he was being accused about questions of their law, but charged with nothing deserving death or imprisonment. **30** And when it was disclosed to me that there would be a plot against the man, I sent him to you at once, ordering his accusers also to state before you what they have against him." **31** So the soldiers, according to their instructions, took Paul and brought him by night to Antipatris. **32** And on the next day they returned to the barracks, letting the horsemen go on with him. **33** When they had come to Caesarea and delivered the letter to the governor, they presented Paul also before him. **34** On reading the letter, he asked what province he was from. And when he learned that he was from Cilicia, **35** he said, "I will give you a hearing when your accusers arrive." And he commanded him to be guarded in Herod's praetorium.

**23:23–24** The tribune wanted to diffuse a volatile situation, so he provided a heavy military escort to take Paul by night to Caesarea, c 55 mi away. This city was the administrative center for the governor of the province of Judea. (TLSB)

**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.” (CSB)

**23:24** *Felix the governor* – He occupied the official position which Pontius Pilate once held. (PBC)

**23:25** *to this effect.* Luke provides the sense of the letter, perhaps based on an oral report about it. (TLSB)

**23:26** *Claudius Lysias.* First mention of the tribune’s name (TLSB)

*governor Felix.* Served as governor of Judea from AD 52 to 60. He was known to be cruel. (TLSB)

**23:27** *having learned that he was 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. (CSB)

Claudius Lysias presents the events to cover up the fact that he ordered Paul to be flogged before learning he was a Roman citizen. (TLSB)

**23:29** *charged with nothing deserving death or imprisonment.* During Paul’s appearance before the Council, the matter of him bringing a Gentile into the inner courts of the temple had not been raised. (TLSB)

**23:30** *ordering his accusers also to state before you what they have against.* He anticipated that the order would be given by the time the letter was delivered. (CSB)

Vv 20–22. The tribune explains the action of Paul’s nephew without naming names. (TLSB)

**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. (CSB)

. C 30 mi S of Caesarea. The escort had traveled about half the distance to the destination. (TLSB)

**23:32** They judged that enough distance was now between Paul and the conspirators, and they were also in territory inhabited primarily by Gentiles. (TLSB)

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

*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. (CSB)

Felix wanted to determine who had jurisdiction in Paul’s case (cf Lk 23:6–7). (TLSB)

**23:34** *from Cilicia*. If Paul had come from a province nearby, Felix might have turned him over for trial under another’s jurisdiction. (CSB)

**23:35** *accusers*. Originally, Jews from Asia (21:27); the accusers that come to Paul’s hearing are the high priest and some elders from Jerusalem (24:1). (TLSB)

*Herod’s praetorium*.† 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. (CSB)

Herod the Great had built for himself a palace at Caesarea. It became the home of the governor of the province. (TLSB)

**23:23–35** Claudius Lysias turns Paul’s case over to Felix the governor. All circumstances point to the apostle’s innocence of any crimes against the state. Life sometimes brings unjust suffering, especially to Christ’s followers. Christ’s death on the cross provides for our forgiveness when we have been unjust to others and gives us strength to bear our sufferings in His abiding grace. • Lord, I praise You because You are just and You have justified me through faith in Jesus. Forgive me when I am unjust to others, and give me strength to bear even unjust suffering. Amen. (TLSB)