

THE BOOK OF ACTS

CHAPTER 23

THE CONSPIRACY AGAINST PAUL

THE CHALLENGE OF CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

God has a plan and purpose for each one of our lives. He has specific people he intends our lives to reach with the gospel message. Just as Joseph was sold into slavery, Daniel thrown into the lions, and Paul taken prisoner, yet each fulfilled God's plan. The adversities we face in life cannot stop God's ultimate plan and purpose for our lives.

DISSENSION BETWEEN THE PHARISEES AND SADDUCEES (1-10)

Paul addresses the council in an attempt to defend himself. Ananias, the high priest, commands that Paul be struck in the mouth, which is illegal. This angers Paul, and he challenges the high priest without realizing the office the man holds. When Paul is informed that Ananias is the high priest, he immediately becomes submissive to the office in which Ananias stands. At the same time, Paul perceives that both Sadducees and Pharisees are present. He cries out that he is a Pharisee who believes in the resurrection knowing this will cause a stir between the Pharisees and Sadducees in the room. The Pharisees in the crowd suddenly want Paul acquitted and the Roman captain who is standing at the back of the room recognizes Paul's innocence. He then commands his soldiers to take Paul by force and take him into the fort.

PAUL STRUCK

Act 23:1 Then Paul, looking earnestly at the council, said, "Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day."

And Paul, earnestly beholding (eye to eye) the council (Sanhedrin), said, Men and brethren, I have lived (politeuomai: been a citizen [politics]) in all good conscience before God until this day.

The Jewish Council is comprised of the lawmakers and supreme court of the land. Jewish law is excellent but has been corrupted by religion. The lawmakers are also the religious leaders and are religiously prejudice. Paul tries to defend himself by Jewish law, but is immediately met with their prejudice. It will be Roman law that will save him again. Paul thinks these men represent Jewish law, not religion. Paul has broken no civil law and begins by telling of his innocence as a free citizen.

Act 23:2 And the high priest Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth.

And the high priest Ananias commanded them that stood by him (officers, bailiffs) to smite (beat) him on the mouth.

This is illegal. They cannot legally sentence and execute punishment in the courtroom. This was done with Jesus (Matthew 26:67) and was also illegal (Leviticus 19:35; Deuteronomy 25:1; John 7:51). Paul knows Jewish law, and this shocks Ananias. Paul loses his temper.

Act 23:3 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?"

Paul charges, "You gave a command to smite me, and God will smite you! God gave you the law you are using to try me, and you are abusing it." Paul calls the judge a whitewashed wall. Whitewash was used to hide stains. This man is using his office to cover corruption and prejudice. This is a term for being a hypocrite (Matthew 23: 27).

No one has ever called the chief priest a phony, a hypocrite. A judge is supposed to presume a person innocent until proof has been presented to confirm or contradict his ruling. This judge has already passed a sentence without evidence.

Act 23:4 And those who stood by said, "Do you revile God's high priest?"

This is a shock to Paul. He now realizes how corrupt the Jews have become. This man represents the highest office a man can have in the nation of Israel. This man is ordering the corruption of the law. Paul knows that God demands respect for the office even though it may be filled by a corrupted and evil person (Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-17).

Act 23:5 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.'"

Then said Paul, I wist (knew) not, brethren, that he was the high priest: for it is written (Exodus 22:28), Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people.

Paul understands where he now stands and who he spoke against. The word of God comes into the scene now. Paul will be submissive and respectful of the office although the man Ananias is corrupt. This also occurred to the disciples in 5:27-42. They respected the office, but disobeyed their commands against preaching the Word of God.

Act 23:6 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!"

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 (concerning) the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question (krino: judge, decree, determined).

23:6 resurrection, *anastasis* (an-as-tas-is); A standing up again, restoration to life, rising from the dead. A compound of *ana*, “again,” and *histemi*, “to stand.” The resurrection of Jesus is the firstfruits or prototype of the future resurrection of all that are in the grave. In verse 6, *anastasis* is the coming resurrection that occurs at the Judgment Day. Another usage of *anastasis* is “a moral recovery of spiritual truth.”

DISSENSION OVER THE RESURRECTION

Act 23:7 And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees; and the assembly was divided.

And when he had so said, there arose a dissension (stativ: static, uproar, uprising) between the Pharisees and the Sadducees: and the multitude was divided (schizo: schizophrenia, split).

This one phrase hit the major area of disagreement between the two sides: the resurrection of the dead.

Act 23:8 For Sadducees say that there is no resurrection—and no angel or spirit; but the Pharisees confess both.

For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess (homologeo: acknowledge) both.

The Sadducees do not believe in the supernatural. They are rationalists (Matthew 22: 23-32) and dismiss the spirit world and its existence. The Pharisees are the scholars who pour over the letters of the Word of God. They are legalistic about salvation and spirituality and thus reject Jesus for righteousness. But they do believe in the future resurrection of the dead and the past resurrections recorded in the Old Testament.

Act 23:9 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."

The Pharisees are the great students of the Mosaic Law and Old Testament prophets. It is no longer Paul on trial, but the Pharisees and their doctrine. They are now fighting to protect one of their own. They even change their charge against Paul from guilty to innocent. They wanted to kill Paul earlier and now they have acquitted Paul without a trial since they have found him to be a Pharisee. They even go on to admit that condemning Paul is fighting against God. God taught Paul. Angels can also teach. In the Old Testament, many prophets were taught by angels.

Act 23:10 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 Romans are standing in the back of the courtroom, observing this mockery of justice. Now the Sadducees probably hate Paul even more for using his background to divide the courtroom. The Roman captain sees Paul is innocent and is now required to protect him. Paul is taken away by the Romans and left alone.

Paul now becomes very discouraged. His ministry is stopped, and he is fighting for his life. After this mockery of justice, he realizes how far the Jews have degenerated. He also realizes what a great mistake he has made and the arrogance with which he has been involved.

THE LORD JESUS ENCOURAGES PAUL (11-16)

Paul becomes discouraged, and the next night Jesus appears to him and tells him he will share the gospel in Rome. A group of Jews join together and express their determination to kill Paul. This group of more than forty, ask the Sanhedrin to call for Paul as if they need to question him more, but instead they plan to kill him.

PAUL IS DISCOURAGED

Act 23:11 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."

And the night following the Lord (Jesus) stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified (diamartureomai: stood up, witnessed) of (concerning) me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness (martureo: speak out for me) also at Rome.

Jesus encourages Paul: "Be of good cheer! Don't be discouraged!" Why was Paul discouraged?

1. He missed God's will because of his personal legalism.
2. He is frustrated by his lack of progress in Jerusalem.
3. He is being kept alive by the Roman military, yet they are also detaining him.

Jesus now appears in a vision to encourage Paul. This is the third time Paul has been encouraged by a vision from the Lord (16:9; 18:9-10). In prison, Paul begins to condemn himself. He is probably feeling as if God can never use him again and about how he has let down so many believers who tried to warn him. He also realizes how he has compromised his ministry by taking the vow in Jerusalem and offering a sacrifice before the multitudes. In this situation, he asks God to forgive him and Jesus appears to him in the prison. Paul will now get his eyes back on the Lord.

Discouragement comes when we get our eyes off the Lord and onto ourselves or others around us (Hebrews 12:3-4). This is a great hazard in ministry. The Lord is telling Paul to get his eyes back on Him. Jesus told Paul that he has stood in Jerusalem but will speak in Rome. God's will from the beginning was for Paul to preach in Rome, but Paul's desire was to preach in Jerusalem. Jerusalem hates Paul. Believers had an all-night prayer meeting for Peter in prison

(12: 5), but not one prayer is going up for Paul while in Jerusalem. He is hated by the saints in Jerusalem.

He will now go to Rome and will speak and write to the churches of Ephesus, Colosse, and Philippi. Paul is in doubt at this point about his future in the ministry. In this verse, Paul's colossal mistakes have come to a head and he is in maximum discouragement. The Lord tells him to be encouraged. At this point, when Paul is at his weakest, God is at his strongest.

JEWS ARE DETERMINED TO KILL PAUL

Act 23:12 And when it was day, some of the Jews banded together and bound themselves under an oath, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul.

These Jews are taking a vow. Either they gave up on their vow after many days or they died of starvation because Paul lived for many more years. These were religious unbelievers. Paul has been encouraged during the night, and Satan is out to destroy him through these men. The Jews have taken a vow to kill Paul in order to make a name for themselves. Again, Paul's greatest opposition came from religion. Legalism always persecutes grace. These men make this vow out of emotion like many Christians do today who "present their bodies," or "surrender to full-time service." Unless God deals with you, you will either break the vow or live outside God's will for a long time.

Act 23:13 Now there were more than forty who had formed this conspiracy.

Act 23:14 They came to the chief priests and elders, and said, "We have bound ourselves under a great oath that we will eat nothing until we have killed Paul.

This is a new, young, and zealous crowd going to the old religious leaders.

Act 23:15 Now you, therefore, together with the council, suggest to the commander that he be brought down to you tomorrow, as though you were going to make further inquiries concerning him; but we are ready to kill him before he comes near."

Now therefore ye with the council (Sanhedrin) signify to the chief captain that he bring him (Paul) down unto you tomorrow, as though ye would enquire something more perfectly (accurately) concerning him: and we, or ever (if) he comes near, are ready to kill him.

They are asking the Sanhedrin to act as if they need Paul for further questioning and clarification of his testimony. When he is brought down by the Romans this group of young Jews plans to kill him. This is a trap being set for Paul.

PAUL IS INFORMED OF A CONSPIRACY

Act 23:16 So when Paul's sister's son heard of their ambush, he went and entered the barracks and told Paul.

Apparently Paul's nephew was at the meeting or had connections through someone who was born again where he learned of the conspiracy against Paul. Many times Paul has known of danger in his own spirit (9:24; 20:3), but this time God uses natural circumstances.

PAUL'S NEPHEW IS TAKEN TO THE CHIEF CAPTAIN (17-22)

Paul calls one of the guards and asks him to take his nephew to the chief captain. Paul's nephew is taken before the chief captain and reveals the plot of the Jews to kill Paul.

Act 23:17 Then Paul called one of the centurions to him and said, "Take this young man to the commander, for he has something to tell him."

Then Paul called one of the centurions (a guard) unto him, and said, Bring this young man unto the chief captain (chiliarcho: commander of a thousand soldiers [21:31]): for he hath a certain thing to tell him.

Act 23:18 So he took him and brought him to the commander and said, "Paul the prisoner called me to him and asked me to bring this young man to you. He has something to say to you."

Paul's nephew tells the chief captain of the assassination plot. The captain represents all that is great in Rome. He handles this by law and order, not personal ambition.

Act 23:19 Then the commander took him by the hand, went aside, and asked privately, "What is it that you have to tell me?"

Act 23:20 And he said, "The Jews have agreed to ask that you bring Paul down to the council tomorrow, as though they were going to inquire more fully about him.

Act 23:21 But do not yield to them, for more than forty of them lie in wait for him, men who have bound themselves by an oath that they will neither eat nor drink till they have killed him; and now they are ready, waiting for the promise from you."

Act 23:22 So the commander let the young man depart, and commanded him, "Tell no one that you have revealed these things to me."

The guard kept the whole event secret for Paul's protection because Paul was a Roman citizen.

THE CAPTAIN'S PLAN (23-24)

The captain calls two centurions and instructs them to gather 470 military men ready to protect Paul as they deliver him to Caesarea to stand before Felix, the governor.

Act 23:23 And he called for two centurions, saying, "Prepare two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen, and two hundred spearmen to go to Caesarea at the third hour of the night;

The captain's plan to take Paul safely to Caesarea included 200 infantry, 70 Cavalry, and 200 armed guards (470 total for Paul's protection). They will escort Paul at the third hour of the

night (9:00 p.m.). Two centurions are sent, one for the infantry and one for the Calvary and armed guards. The armed guards and infantry lead Paul past the point of greatest danger. The Calvary takes Paul the rest of the way into Caesarea (verses 30-32).

Act 23:24 and provide mounts to set Paul on, and bring him safely to Felix the governor."

They provide an animal for Paul to ride to arrive safely to meet Felix, the governor. This is only a six-mile ride, but Paul must be bound safely for trials because he is innocent until proven guilty.

At this time, Caesarea is run by Felix. At one time, he had been a slave, and though he rose in the Roman government, Felix still thought like a slave and corrupts the government throughout the reign of Claudius and Nero. He is money-mad and would take a bribe from Paul to free him, but Paul will appeal to Caesar.

A LETTER TO FELIX (25-35)

The chief captain writes a letter to Felix explaining the events surrounding Paul's arrest and his reason for delivering Paul to him. Both the letter and Paul are safely delivered to Felix.

Act 23:25 He wrote a letter in the following manner:

Act 23:26 Claudius Lysias, To the most excellent governor Felix: Greetings.

Act 23:27 This man was seized by the Jews and was about to be killed by them. Coming with the troops I rescued him, having learned that he was a Roman.

Act 23:28 And when I wanted to know the reason they accused him, I brought him before their council.

Act 23:29 I found out that he was accused concerning questions of their law, but had nothing charged against him deserving of death or chains.

Act 23:30 And when it was told me that the Jews lay in wait for the man, I sent him immediately to you, and also commanded his accusers to state before you the charges against him. Farewell.

Act 23:31 Then the soldiers, as they were commanded, took Paul and brought him by night to Antipatris.

Paul and the troops spend the first night in Antipatris, a city named for Herod's father Antipater.

Act 23:32 The next day they left the horsemen to go on with him, and returned to the barracks.

Act 23:33 When they came to Caesarea and had delivered the letter to the governor, they also presented Paul to him.

Act 23:34 And when the governor had read it, he asked what province he was from. And when he understood that he was from Cilicia,

When Felix first meets Paul, he asks him where he is from. This is an attempt at getting a bribe. If Paul comes from a rich area, he will have the ability to pay a large sum of money to Felix for his freedom. When Felix learns of Paul's aristocratic background, he mentions bringing the accusers to incite fear in Paul to possibly get even more money from him.

Act 23:35 he said, "I will hear you when your accusers also have come." And he commanded him to be kept in Herod's Praetorium.