

The Acts of the Holy Spirit

Gloria Dei Lutheran Church

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Paul in Roman Custody; Jerusalem to Caesarea

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Paul's Defense Before the Sanhedrin ([23:1-9](#))

Paul, looking earnestly at the council: When he says "I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day", Paul was not trying to say he was sinless, perfect, or that his conscience had never told him he was wrong. Rather, he responded to God and conscience when he had done wrong, and had set things right.

...The high priest Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth: Paul's assertion he had lived in good conscience before God up until this day drew the wrath of the high priest. Ananias was offended that anyone accused of such serious crimes would claim a "clear" conscience.

God will strike you, you whitewashed wall!: I wonder what Paul's tone of voice was as he rebuked the high priest. Was it an outburst of anger, or was it a calm, collected rebuke, which might actually have more weight to it. Whatever his tone, this rebuke was both accurate and justified in that the high priest indeed was a "whitewashed wall"; a thin veneer of purity covering obvious corruption. The high priest was also not only to be the administrator of Jewish law, but also the example of living up to it. His command to have Paul struck was in fact contrary to both the spirit and the letter of the law. According to Deuteronomy 25:1-2, only a man found guilty can be beaten, and Paul had been found guilty of nothing.

The Jewish historian Josephus tells of how Ananias stole for his own use tithes that rightly belonged to the common priests. Paul was definitely in the right with his characterization.

God will strike you: Paul's words here are prophetic, perhaps even moreso than he himself realized. According to F. F. Bruce and others, Ananias was brutally killed by Jewish zealots because of his pro-Roman politics, hunted down like an animal, and executed at the hands of his own people.

Even so, Paul agreed that it was wrong to speak evil of the ruler of your people (see Exodus 22:28), considering the office more than the man; but claims he did not know that Ananias was the high priest. Some suggest he did not know this because his eyesight was bad. There's is an inference about this in Galatians 4:14-15 and 6:11, as well as from early church tradition and commentaries. Others suggest that Paul is being sarcastic here.

Paul perceived... Sadducees and... Pharisees: Paul apparently read his audience, and saw they were not conducive to the gospel - the actions of the high priest and the attitudes of those present made this plain. So, Paul gives up on preaching the gospel, and does what he can to preserve his liberty before this council that clearly wanted to lynch him. Paul's strategy now is to divide the Sanhedrin along party lines, to get the Pharisees sympathetic to him.

The Pharisees took the Old Testament seriously, even if they did err by adding many traditions of men to what they received in the scriptures.

The Sadducees, on the other hand, were the religious "liberals" of their day, denying the reality of life after death and the entire concept of resurrection.

So often the Sadducees and Pharisees were enemies, but of course they were united in opposition against Jesus (Matthew 16:1, John 11:47-53), and so also Paul.

I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee: Knowing his audience, Paul refers to his heritage as a Pharisee, and declares, "concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead I am being judged." He knew this was a hot issue between these two parties, but also, this was essentially a true claim. At the very heart of the Gospel is a resurrected Jesus Christ!

...The assembly was divided: Paul picked the right issue. Framing his situation in these terms gains him the Pharisees as an ally, and he could then let *them* argue it out with the Sadducees. For their part, the Pharisees, in saying "let us not fight against God" are returning to the previous attitude that their leader Gamaliel had advised in Acts 5:38-39.

Saved by... the Roman Commander and Jesus ([23:10-11](#))

Now when there arose a great dissension: The Roman commander must now be certain that these Jews are crazy with their endless disputes. Previously, they rioted over the one word, "Gentiles," and now it is over another single word, "resurrection"!

...Take him by force from among them: The commander removed Paul for his own safety, and left him in custody in the barracks. It wouldn't be surprising if Paul sat alone in the barracks that night, with his head in his hands, having "lost" the opportunity to preach the Gospel at the Sanhedrin.

...The Lord stood by him and said, "Be of good cheer": Jesus' presence with Paul here was a unique manifestation. This reads as if it was a physical appearance by Christ. Paul clearly needed this, but Jesus promises every believer He will always be with them (Matthew 28:20 et al).

Remember, Paul had been miraculously delivered from jail cells before; but this time, the Lord met him right in the jail cell. How often do we pray that Jesus would deliver us out of our circumstances, when in reality His will and desire are to meet us in those circumstance so we can bear witness to Him in the middle of them?

Be of good cheer, Paul: Jesus was not only present with Paul; He gave him words of comfort. Jesus would not have said "be of good cheer" unless Paul needed to hear those words. Paul knew his situation was bad, but he didn't know the half of it! The next day, forty Jewish assassins would gather together and vow to go on a hunger strike until they murdered Paul. Paul didn't know at the time of this visitation by Jesus that this would happen, but Jesus sure did!

Anyone can be of good cheer when everything is great, but as Christians we can be of good cheer even when everything is rotten (Romans 8:28!)

...So you must also bear witness at Rome: Jesus reminds Paul what he had done in Jerusalem, and tells him that more work of that for him remains in Rome. So even if Paul was discouraged about the lack of results in Jerusalem, his responsibility was to preach and teach the Word of God, and to testify of Jesus; the results were *God's* responsibility. The promise of more work to do was also a promise of continued protection. Paul would not leave this world until he had finished running the course that God had appointed for him.

The timing of this promise was perfect. It didn't look like Paul would get out of Jerusalem alive, much less make it to Rome. Jesus not only knows what we need to hear; He knows when we need to hear it.

We know Paul really wanted to go on to Rome (Acts 19:21, Romans 1:9-12). Sometimes we think that just because we want something a lot, it couldn't be God's will for us. Not necessarily! As we grow in sanctification, our desires become more in line with God's, and sometimes He just gives us the desires of our heart (Psalm 37:4).

Paul Delivered from the Assassins' Plot ([23:12-22](#))

They would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul: These men lack nothing when it comes to zeal, but their zeal is not "according to knowledge" (Romans 10:2). Zeal and devotion by themselves are not the foundation of an individual's relationship with God.

Suggest to the commander that he be brought down to you tomorrow: In their zeal, they think it's perfectly justifiable to lie to the Roman commander to carry out their plan. They will readily disobey God so that they can follow their zeal.

One wonders, did these men who made the vow of fasting actually die, because they failed in their mission to kill Paul? Probably not. New Testament scholar Richard Longnecker notes that Ancient rabbis allowed for certain types of vows to be broken: "vows of incitement, vows of exaggeration, vows made in error, and vows that cannot be fulfilled by reason of constraint" - exclusions allowing for almost any contingency!

So when Paul's sister's son heard of their ambush...: In these unusual circumstances, we see God's protecting hand all over Paul, this time in the intervention of his nephew.

Paul Escapes to Caesarea (23:23-35)

Prepare two hundred soldiers: Again, we are impressed with the wise action and fairness of the Roman commander, whose name we now learn was Cladius Lysias. How interesting that the Holy Spirit inspires Luke to record all of this for us.

Remember, Acts was written as an “amicus brief” for Paul before his case was heard by Emperor Nero in Rome. So perhaps it should not surprise us that Luke emphasizes those events that cast Roman officials in a positive light!

I rescued him, having learned that he was a Roman: In this letter, Claudius implies that he learned of Paul's Roman citizenship right away, however, he says nothing of the way Paul was bound twice and almost scourged for the same of interrogation. No surprise there!

The assessment that Paul had nothing charged against him “deserving of death or chains” was important for Luke to record. Since Roman officials trying Paul's case were going to read this document, they needed to know that other Roman officials had judged Paul "not guilty."

Took Paul and brought him by night to Antipatris: Why did the 200 soldiers go only this far, and not all the way to Caesarea? Because the most dangerous part of the road was only up to Antipatris. Per commentator William Barclay:

"Up to Antipatris (about 25 miles) the country was dangerous and inhabited by Jews; after that the country was open and flat, quite unsuited for any ambush and largely inhabited by Gentiles."

And he commanded him to be kept in Herod's Praetorium: The chapter ends with Paul awaiting trial in Caesarea, the Lord's words of encouragement and His promise that lonely night in Jerusalem fresh in his mind.