

³⁰ But on the next day, wishing to know for certain why he had been accused by the Jews, he released him and ordered the chief priests and all the Council to assemble, and brought Paul down and set him before them^a.

^{23:1} Paul, looking intently at the Council^b, said, “Brethren, I have lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day^c.” ² The high priest Ananias^d commanded those standing beside him to strike him on the mouth^e. ³ Then Paul said to him, “God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall! Do you sit to try me according to the Law, and in violation of the Law order me to be struck^f?” ⁴ But the bystanders said, “Do you revile God’s high priest?” ⁵ And Paul said, “I was not aware, brethren, that he was high priest; for it is written, ‘You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people^g.’”

^a 22:30 **But on the next day, wishing to know for certain why he had been accused by the Jews, he released him and ordered the chief priests and all the Council to assemble, and brought Paul down and set him before them.** The commander, Lysias (23:26; 24:7, 22), still did not have accurate information about the charges against Paul. Evidently the Romans had authority to order the Sanhedrin to convene.

^b 23:1 **Paul, looking intently at the Council.** Paul had been at another meeting of the Sanhedrin in which he gazed intently (same word in Acts 6:15). The difference years before was the angle, for Paul was likely in the condemning assembly and Stephen was the angelic object of his gaze.

^c 23:1 **Brethren, I have lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day.** The human conscience upholds natural law and is common to every man (Romans 2:15). It can also be trained for evil or for good (1 Corinthians 8:7; 1 Timothy 4:2). Paul was being “conscientious” even when he was breathing out murderous threats against the Christians as well as when he was being threatened as a Christian.

^d 23:2 **The high priest Ananias.** Ananias (or Annas II) was the son of another Annas, who served as high priest during the childhood of Jesus. The office of high priest had become largely a political appointment and Annas I kept his own family in power even after he left office before Jesus began His earthly ministry.

^e 23:2 **commanded those standing beside him to strike him on the mouth.** This was one way a man’s words could be stopped. It was not the first time Scripture records a servant of the high priest striking an accused in the face. Jesus was also struck before this same body (John 18:20-23) after questioning the methods of his accusers. The difference was that Jesus needed not apologize as did Paul for “speaking evil of a ruler.” Jesus was the ruler.

^f 23:3 **God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall! Do you sit to try me according to the Law, and in violation of the Law order me to be struck?** Paul used similar language to that of his Lord, comparing a hypocrite with something having only a coat of paint to hide what is under the surface (Matthew 23:27). Ananias was not one qualified to enforce what he himself violated. The law demanded that judges judge justly (Leviticus 19:25; Deuteronomy 25:1-2). Ananias was eventually assassinated.

^g 23:5 **I was not aware, brethren, that he was high priest; for it is written, “You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.”** A number of reasons for Paul’s apparent backpedaling have been offered:

- Some have said that Paul was being sarcastic, that he couldn’t believe someone called God’s high priest would behave in such an unrecognizable manner.
- Others cite the historical note that this man Ananias was only an interim high priest and that Paul did not feel the need to show him the same respect as to the actual high priest.
- Still others think that the man was not wearing the priestly garments (a hastily called meeting) or that Paul did not recognize him because he had been away for so long.
- I tend to look at other New Testament evidence that Paul had eye trouble (2 Corinthians 12:7; Galatians 4:15; 6:11) and simply did not see who was speaking and ordering him to be slapped. It is not likely that a former member or at least cohort of the Council

⁶ But perceiving that one group were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, Paul *began* crying out in the Council, “Brethren, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees; I am on trial for the hope and resurrection of the dead^a!” ⁷ As he said this, there occurred a dissension between the Pharisees and Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. ⁸ For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor an angel, nor a spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all^b. ⁹ And there occurred a great uproar; and some of the scribes of the Pharisaic party stood up and *began* to argue heatedly, saying, “We find nothing wrong with this man; suppose a spirit or an angel has spoken to him^c?” ¹⁰ And as a great dissension was developing, the commander was afraid Paul would be torn to pieces by them and ordered the troops to go down and take him away from them by force, and bring him into the barracks^d.

¹¹ But on the night *immediately* following, the Lord stood at his side and said, “Take courage^e; for as you have solemnly witnessed to My cause at Jerusalem, so you must witness at Rome also^a.”

would fail to recognize the high priest. Paul knew he had wrongly disrespected one in authority over himself and humbly confessed his error using Scripture (Exodus 22:28).

^a 23:6 **But perceiving that one group were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, Paul began crying out in the Council, “Brethren, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees; I am on trial for the hope and resurrection of the dead!”** Commentator Albert Barnes suggests that perhaps part of the reason for Paul’s fixed gaze in verse one had been to count heads to see how many of each party were present. Even with his eye problems he may have noted that the distinctive garments of the Pharisees were in the majority. His creative move gained him some safe footing as the sea of varying opinions parted.

The Lord Jesus often encountered these two sects—one religious and conservative and the other secular and liberal. Paul identified himself here as a conservative even though—as in our day—to do so also placed him in the company of some of the enemies of the gospel.

See a note about Paul’s background in 23:16. Paul repeated often that the resurrection of Christ (the hope of Israel) was the reason why he was in chains (23:6; 24:15, 21; 26:6-7; 28:20).

^b 23:7-8 **As he said this, there occurred a dissension between the Pharisees and Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor an angel, nor a spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all.** Luke adds his own commentary, defining the positions of the Pharisees and Sadducees, so the reader will see the significance of Paul’s statement.

^c 23:9 **We find nothing wrong with this man; suppose a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?** This was not superstition, but fear of God. It fell short of saving faith, but it did serve to keep Paul from a united attack of the Council.

^d 23:10 **And as a great dissension was developing, the commander was afraid Paul would be torn to pieces by them and ordered the troops to go down and take him away from them by force, and bring him into the barracks.** The freedom of religion for Jews stopped when that religion endangered a Roman citizen.

^e 23:11 **But on the night immediately following, the Lord stood at his side and said, “Take courage.”** It is just like our Lord to break into frightening situations with the words, “Take courage.” This word (one word in the original) is almost exclusively attributed to Jesus in the New Testament. He used it when he offered forgiveness and healing to a paralyzed man on a mat who had become the center of a crowd’s attention (Matthew 9:2). He used it when an ailing woman surrounded by a mob dared touch his garment and interrupt a mission of mercy (Matthew 9:22; Luke 8:48). He used it when his very presence walking on a stormy sea frightened the disciples more than the storm had (Mark 6:50). When Jesus beckoned him, the crowds outside Jericho used it to comfort blind Bartimaeus after they were embarrassed by his loud cries for mercy (Mark 10:50). Jesus used it to encourage his disciples when news came that they would be left in a hostile world that he had overcome (John 16:33). Notice that the word

¹²When it was day, the Jews formed a conspiracy and bound themselves under an oath, saying that they would neither eat nor drink until they had killed Paul^b. ¹³There were more than forty who formed this plot. ¹⁴They came to the chief priests and the elders and said, “We have bound ourselves under a solemn oath to taste nothing until we have killed Paul^c. ¹⁵Now therefore, you and the Council notify the commander to bring him down to you, as though you were going to determine his case by a more thorough investigation; and we for our part are ready to slay him before he comes near *the place*^d.”

¹⁶But the son of Paul’s sister heard of their ambush, and he came and entered the barracks and told Paul^e. ¹⁷Paul called one of the centurions to him and said, “Lead this young man to the commander, for he has something to report to him^f.” ¹⁸So he took him and led him to the commander and *said, “Paul the prisoner called me to him and asked me to lead this young man to you since he has something to tell you.” ¹⁹The commander took him by the hand and stepping aside, *began* to inquire of him privately, “What is it that you have to report to

was only used in frightening situations. Every time it was used Jesus was about to do something great.

^a 23:11 **“for as you have solemnly witnessed to My cause at Jerusalem, so you must witness at Rome also.”** Just as Jesus allowed his disciples to endure a storm in a boat after he had told them they were going to *the other side* (not the bottom, Mark 4:35-41), so Paul here is given a promise that he serves “the God of the other side.” Trouble would come, but a trip to Rome was guaranteed.

Faith is not something you stir up within yourself. It is simply trusting what God has said. Every sin problem is a theological problem—that is—when you sin, you sin because your God is too small, your Bible too thin. Paul’s response to adversity is a direct reflection of what he believed about God and his word.

^b 23:12 **When it was day, the Jews formed a conspiracy and bound themselves under an oath, saying that they would neither eat nor drink until they had killed Paul.** These men literally “anathematized” (Greek) themselves. The pronounced upon themselves a curse if they did not kill Paul. Because God keeps him promises (verse 11), these men would become awfully hungry after their hasty, emotional vow. The rabbis were known to release people from vows in such circumstances as we are about to witness.

^c 23:14 **They came to the chief priests and the elders and said, “We have bound ourselves under a solemn oath to taste nothing until we have killed Paul.”** The NASB is not strong enough in its translation of this phrase. Two forms of “anathema” are used next to each other. It should read something like, “We cursed ourselves with a curse.”

^d 23:15 **Now therefore, you and the Council notify the commander to bring him down to you, as though you were going to determine his case by a more thorough investigation; and we for our part are ready to slay him before he comes near *the place*.** It is possible that the Pharisees on the Council, who had just defended Paul, knew nothing of this plot. The assassins sold their idea because the Sanhedrin would appear to have had no part in the plot.

^e 23:16 **But the son of Paul’s sister heard of their ambush, and he came and entered the barracks and told Paul.** As time goes on we learn more personal information about this apostle from Tarsus in Cilicia. He told the church at Philippi that he was of the tribe of Benjamin. We have learned that he was educated at the feet of Gamaliel. He reminded the Sanhedrin that he and his father before him were Pharisees. Now we learn that he had a nephew—and likely a sister—in Jerusalem.

^f 23:17 **Paul called one of the centurions to him and said, “Lead this young man to the commander, for he has something to report to him.”** Paul could have told his nephew not to worry because he was trusting God in this situation, but he sent the young man for help. Was Paul really trusting God if he sought government protection? We must never pray, “The government is my shepherd, I shall not want,” but God-ordained government protections are what God often uses to preserve his interests. The lesson is this: God uses human instruments, even secular ones, to accomplish his purposes.

me^a?” ²⁰ And he said, “The Jews have agreed to ask you to bring Paul down tomorrow to the Council, as though they were going to inquire somewhat more thoroughly about him. ²¹ So do not listen to them, for more than forty of them are lying in wait for him who have bound themselves under a curse not to eat or drink until they slay him; and now they are ready and waiting for the promise from you.” ²² So the commander let the young man go, instructing him, “Tell no one that you have notified me of these things.”

²³ And he called to him two of the centurions and said, “Get two hundred soldiers ready by the third hour of the night to proceed to Caesarea, with seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen^b.” ²⁴ *They were* also to provide mounts to put Paul on and bring him safely to Felix the governor^c. ²⁵ And he wrote a letter having this form:

²⁶ “Claudius Lysias, to the most excellent governor Felix, greetings.

²⁷ “When this man was arrested by the Jews and was about to be slain by them, I came up to them with the troops and rescued him, having learned that he was a Roman^d.²⁸ “And wanting to ascertain the charge for which they were accusing him, I brought him down to their Council; ²⁹ and I found him to be accused over questions about their Law, but under no accusation deserving death or imprisonment.

³⁰ “When I was informed that there would be a plot against the man, I sent him to you at once, also instructing his accusers to bring charges against him before you.”

³¹ So the soldiers, in accordance with their orders, took Paul and brought him by night to Antipatris^e. ³² But the next day, leaving the horsemen to go on with him, they returned to the barracks. ³³ When these had come to Caesarea and delivered the letter to the governor, they also presented Paul to him. ³⁴ When he had read it, he asked from what province he was, and

^a 23:19 **The commander took him by the hand and stepping aside, began to inquire of him privately, “What is it that you have to report to me?”** The word translated “young man” does not tell us how young. It was used of Paul in 7:58 when he consented to Stephen's death. The fact that the nephew was taken by the hand might indicate that he was quite young, perhaps a young teen.

^b 23:23 **And he called to him two of the centurions and said, “Get two hundred soldiers ready by the third hour of the night to proceed to Caesarea, with seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen.”** Even a contingent of nearly five hundred bodyguards could not have protected Paul were it not for God's sovereign plan to preserve him. God's chosen method of preservation was to use the government.

^c 23:24 **They were also to provide mounts to put Paul on and bring him safely to Felix the governor.** Felix was an evil man who ruled from A.D. 52, when appointed by Claudius, until the Jews complained to Nero.

^d 23:27 **“When this man was arrested by the Jews and was about to be slain by them, I came up to them with the troops and rescued him, having learned that he was a Roman.”** The details of this letter might be impressive if only they were factual. In truth he did rescue Paul, but he only learned of his Roman citizenship *after* he was about to have him illegally beaten. It reveals the desire of Claudius Lysias to appear good before Felix even at expense of the truth.

^e 23:31 **So the soldiers, in accordance with their orders, took Paul and brought him by night to Antipatris.** Antipatris, from which the marching soldiers returned to Jerusalem, is the Old Testament Philistine city of Aphek. This stop on the way to Caesarea would have been familiar to Paul. Ironically it was here that David, hunted by his Jewish brothers, found himself defended by a Gentile king (1 Samuel 29:1-2). Paul knew the history of this place where God had made a wall fall on 27,000 of his enemies (1 Kings 20:30). God would care for his servant this time as well.

when he learned that he was from Cilicia, ³⁵ he said, “I will give you a hearing after your accusers arrive also,” giving orders for him to be kept in Herod’s Praetorium.^a

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^a 22:30-23:35 This text is a lesson in the sovereignty of God. God is in the business of getting you where you need to be to bring him the highest glory. While this often hurts, it is always the most loving thing that could happen to you. Paul trusted the sovereign Lord even when circumstances did not go his way. Observe from this large selection the gifts—some of them unusual—that God gave Paul. These are reasons why you can praise God even for His unusual gifts:

1. Uncomfortable confrontations are an opportunity to unleash the truth. God gave Paul a hearing before his accusers. This allowed the truth to come out.
2. Your own stumbling gives people the chance to see how God’s people deal with their own error. God gave Paul a humbling lesson. Paul’s confessed error provided the Sanhedrin and us with an example of Christian humility and an application of Exodus 22:28.
3. Stressful circumstances may uncover God’s creative image in you. God gave Paul a creative mind. As David feigned madness to confound the king of Gath, Paul used a witty political move to redefine issues and polarize the Sanhedrin.
4. You may find friends among God’s enemies. God gave Paul legal status and Roman protection. God’s best interests included Paul’s preservation at this point.
5. Your setbacks are in reality progress in God’s sovereign plan. God gave Paul his own promises. This arrest was a step toward getting Paul to Rome.
6. Persecution is evidence of the presence of God. God gave Paul a plot on his life. News of that plot got him to Caesarea for better protection.
7. Invasions of your peace give you a platform as Christ’s ambassador. God gave Paul public attention. God had told him he would carry the gospel before Gentiles and their kings (Acts 9:15-16), so the real center of attention was Jesus, not Paul.