

**ACTS 23-24 PAUL UNDER ARREST IS TAKEN TO CAESAREA**



We begin this study with Paul in Jerusalem, inside the Roman fortress of Antonia and before the Jewish Sanhedrin and the Roman commander. He had just given his defense, but when he spoke of having a pure conscience before God for what he did, the Jewish High Priest ordered him to be struck in the mouth. Afterwards, Paul shot back that God would punish him for this violation of the Jewish law but when told it was the High Priest, Paul promptly apologized. He then realized there were many Pharisees present and having been one, he used another tactic to arouse their sympathy and divide the Jewish leadership.

Luke records, "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!' And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees; and the assembly was divided. For Sadducees say that there is no resurrection—and no angel or spirit; but the Pharisees confess both. 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.' (Acts 23:6-9).

As Barclay explains, "Then Paul made a claim that he knew would set the Sanhedrin by the ears. In the Sanhedrin there were Pharisees and Sadducees whose beliefs were often opposed. The Pharisees believed in the minutiae of the oral Law; the Sadducees accepted only the written Law. The Pharisees believed in predestination; the Sadducees believed in free-will. The Pharisees believed in angels and spirits; the Sadducees did not. Above all, the Pharisees believed in the resurrection of the dead; the Sadducees did not. So Paul claimed to be a Pharisee and that it was for the hope of resurrection from the dead he was on trial. As a result the Sanhedrin was split in two; and in the violent argument that followed Paul was nearly torn in pieces. To save him from violence [especially since he was a Roman citizen] the commander had to take him back to the barracks again" (note on Acts 23:9).

Next, Paul is back in the prison and fearing for his life when Christ visits him. Luke writes, "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. 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'" (Acts 23:10-11).

As *Expositor's* mentions, "Paul had feared such a reception at Jerusalem, and now his worst fears were being realized. He had planned to go to Rome and minister throughout the western part of the empire after his visit to Jerusalem (Rom 15:24-29). But developments at Jerusalem were building up to a point where it appeared his life could come to an end in the city through any number of circumstances beyond his control. Undoubtedly he was despondent as he awaited the next turn of events in his cell in the fortress. But 'the following night' the risen and exalted Jesus appeared to Paul, as he has done at other critical moments in his ministry (Acts 18:9-10; 22:17-21), and encouraged him by his presence. So now the Lord said, 'Take courage!' And He assured Paul that he would yet testify in Rome as he had done in Jerusalem. Certainly, as Bruce observes, 'this assurance meant much to Paul during the delays and anxieties of the next two years, and goes far to account for the calm and dignified bearing which seemed to mark him out as a master of events rather than their victim' (Book of the Acts, p. 455)."

Luke continues, "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. Now there were more than forty who had formed this conspiracy. 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. 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' (Acts 23:12-15).

*Expositor's* notes, "To show their determination, they vowed not to eat or drink till they had accomplished their purpose. That did not mean, however, that they would necessarily have to starve if they failed. The rabbis allowed four 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. The conspirators' plan, though violating both the letter and the spirit of Jewish law pertaining to the Sanhedrin, was in keeping with the character of the high priest Ananias" (note on Acts 23:15).

Luke then adds, "So when Paul's sister's son heard of their ambush, he went and entered the barracks and told Paul" (Acts 23:16).

*Expositor's* brings out, "We have no knowledge about Paul's sister and his nephew, or of how the young man learned of the plot. In his letters Paul says nothing of his immediate family, and this is Luke's only reference to any of Paul's relatives. Perhaps Paul had stayed with his sister and her family when he studied under Gamaliel I at Jerusalem and when he returned from Damascus as a Christian--though he probably did not stay with her on later visits to the city, and certainly not on his last visit. From Philippians 3:8, where Paul speaks of having 'lost all things' for the sake of Christ, many have supposed that he was disinherited by his family for accepting and proclaiming Jesus as the Messiah. Such a supposition seems likely. Yet family ties are not easily broken; so when his uncle was in mortal danger, Paul's nephew could not stand by without warning him. After all, in Judaism the saving and preservation of life takes precedence over everything else. As a Roman citizen under protective custody, Paul could receive visitors--among them his nephew. So when Paul heard his warning, he asked one of the centurions to take his nephew to the commander" (note on Acts 23:16).

Luke continues, "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.' 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.' Then the

commander took him by the hand, went aside, and asked privately, 'What is it that you have to tell me?' 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. 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.'

So the commander let the young man depart, and commanded him, 'Tell no one that you have revealed these things to me.' 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; and provide mounts to set Paul on, and bring him safely to Felix the governor'" (Acts 23:12-22).

Again Barclay has the best comments on this section, "Here we see two things. First, we see the lengths to which the Jews would go to eliminate Paul. Under certain circumstances the Jews regarded murder as justifiable. If a man was a public danger to morals and to life they regarded it as legitimate to eliminate him. So forty men put themselves under a vow. The vow was called a *cherem*. When a man took such a vow he said, 'May God curse me if I fail to do this.' These men vowed neither to eat nor drink, and put themselves under the ban of God, until they had assassinated Paul. Fortunately their plan was laid bare by Paul's nephew. Second, we see the lengths to which the Roman government would go in order to administer impartial justice. Paul was a prisoner; but he was a Roman citizen and therefore the commander mobilized a small army to see him taken in safety to Caesarea to be tried before Felix. It is strange how the fanatical hatred of the Jews--God's chosen people--contrasts with the impartial justice of the commander--a heathen in Jewish eyes" (note on Luke 23:20). We also see the great value of being a Roman citizen in those days.

Luke then mentions about the commander, "He wrote a letter in the following manner: Claudius Lysias, To the most excellent governor Felix: Greetings. 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. And when I wanted to know the reason they accused him, I brought him before their council. I found out that he was accused concerning questions of their law, but had nothing charged against him deserving of death or chains. 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. Then the soldiers, as they were commanded, took Paul and brought him by night to Antipatris. The next day they left the horsemen to go on with him, and returned to the barracks. When they came to Caesarea and had delivered the letter to the governor, they also presented Paul to him. And when the governor had read it, he asked what province he was from. And when he understood that he was from Cilicia, he said, 'I will hear you when your accusers also have come.' And he commanded him to be kept in Herod's Praetorium" (Acts 23:22-35).

Barclay gives the background, "The seat of Roman government was not in Jerusalem but in Caesarea. The praetorium is the residence of a governor; and the praetorium in Caesarea was a palace which had been built by Herod the Great. Claudius Lysias wrote his letter, absolutely fair and completely impartial, and the cavalcade set out. It was 60 miles from Jerusalem to Caesarea and Antipatris was 25 miles from Caesarea. Up to Antipatris 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. So at Antipatris the main body of the troops went back and left the cavalry alone as a sufficient escort. The governor to whom Paul was taken was Felix and his name was a byword. For five years he had governed Judaea and for two years before that he had been stationed in Samaria; he had still two years to go before being dismissed from his post. He had begun life as a slave. His brother, Pallas, was the favorite of Nero. Through the influence of Pallas, Felix had risen first to be a freedman and then to be a governor. He was the first slave in history ever to become the governor of a Roman province. Tacitus, the Roman historian, said of him, '[A master of cruelty and lust who] exercised the prerogatives of a king with the spirit of a slave.' He

had actually been married to three princesses one after another...the third was Drusilla, the daughter of Herod Agrippa the First. He was completely unscrupulous and was capable of hiring thugs to murder his own closest supporters. It was to face a man like this that Paul went to Caesarea."

Luke says, "Now after five days Ananias the high priest came down with the elders and a certain orator named Tertullus. These gave evidence to the governor against Paul. And when he was called upon, Tertullus began his accusation, saying: 'Seeing that through you we enjoy great peace, and prosperity is being brought to this nation by your foresight, we accept it always and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness. Nevertheless, not to be tedious to you any further, I beg you to hear, by your courtesy, a few words from us. For we have found this man a plague, a creator of dissension among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. He even tried to profane the temple, and we seized him, and wanted to judge him according to our law. But the commander Lysias came by and with great violence took him out of our hands, commanding his accusers to come to you. By examining him yourself you may ascertain all these things of which we accuse him.' And the Jews also assented, maintaining that these things were so" (Acts 24:1-9).

*Expositor's* states, "Tertullus intended to create the impression of political sedition against Rome in his first two charges (disturbing the peace among the Jews; being a ringleader of the Nazarenes) and to argue the right for Judaism to impose the death penalty in his third charge (attempting to desecrate the temple). During his reign over Judea, Felix had repeatedly crucified the leaders of various uprisings and had killed many of their followers for disturbing the *Pax Romana*. Tertullus's endeavor, as supported by the high priest and the Jewish elders with him, was to put Paul on the same level as these brigands, with the hope that in his insensitivity to the issues, Felix would act in his usual manner simply on the basis of their testimony" (note on Acts 24:8).

Next time, we will see what happens to Paul as he defends himself before Felix, the cruel Roman governor.