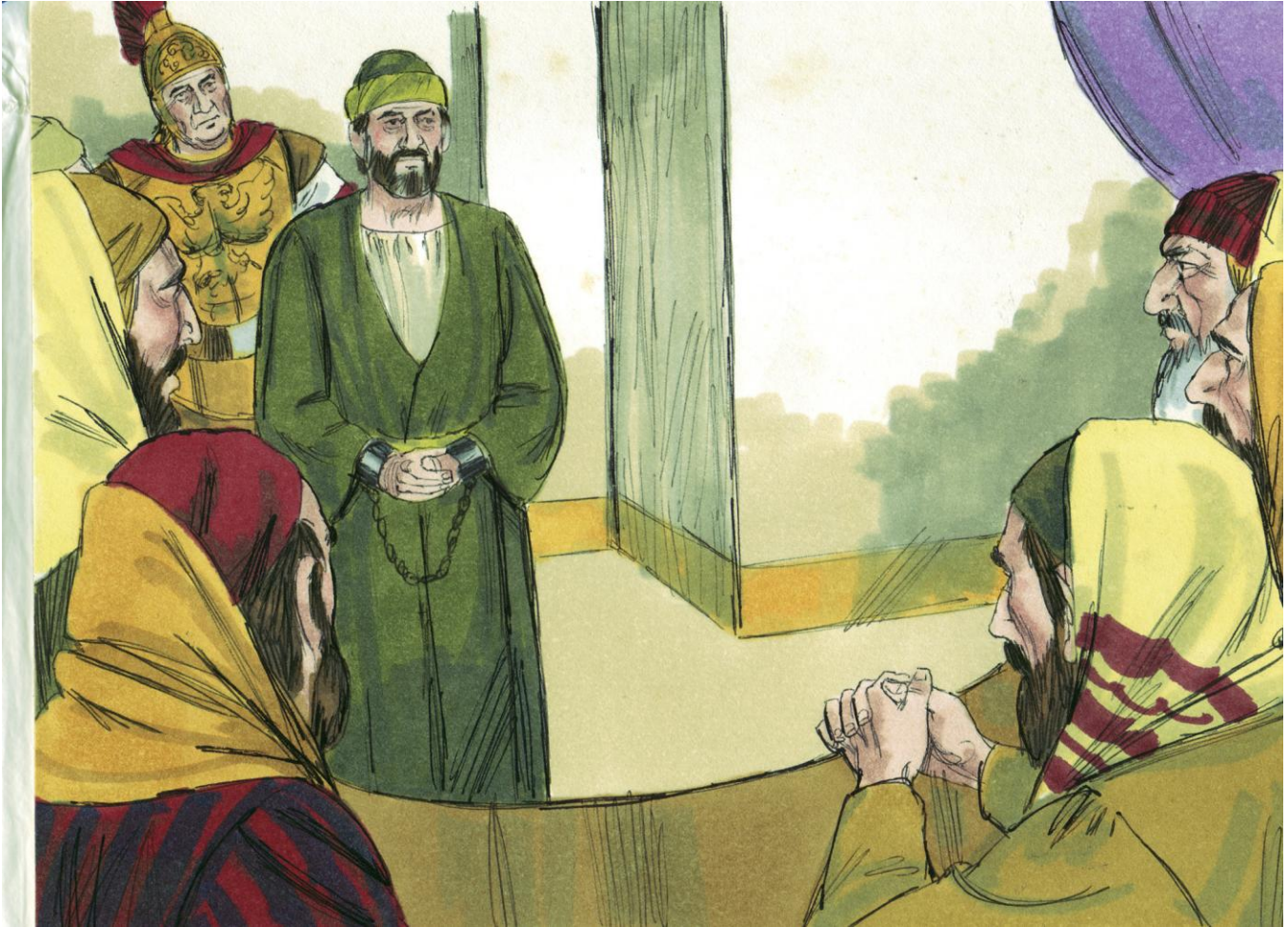


ACTS CHAPTER 23



Paul before the Sanhedrin (Acts 23:1-11)

Paul looked directly at the Sanhedrin and said, “Brothers, I have conducted myself before God in all good conscience to this day.”

At this, the high priest Ananias ordered those standing near Paul to strike him on the mouth.

Why commanded the high priest to smite Paul on the mouth? What Paul said, and the manner in which he said it, enraged him. Addressing them as his equals the apostle fixed

his eyes on them with searching gaze and cast reflections on their integrity by earnestly asserting that he had lived “before God in all good conscience to this day”.

Then Paul said to him, “God will strike you, you whitewashed wall!”

Paul called Ananias a whitewashed wall as a metaphor for a hypocrite. Whitewashed walls have an attractive exterior but are filled with unclean contents, such as tombs holding dead bodies; or walls that look substantial but fail before the winds (see Ezek. 13:10-12).



You sit here to judge me according to the law, yet you yourself violate the law by commanding that I be struck.”

Why did Paul not show the same humility as had his Lord when similarly outraged? In this connection it should be observed that our Lord had come to earth especially to take the blame and bear the penalty for the sins of others and particularly for His people, Israel, while on this occasion Paul faced Israel’s rulers after their final demonstration of apostasy against Messiah. The actions of both our Lord and Paul on these two occasions are therefore representative; the one of God’s mercy to Israel, the other of His judgment upon them.

But those standing nearby said, “How dare you insult the high priest of God!”

“Brothers,” Paul replied, “I was not aware that he was the high priest, for it is written: ‘Do not speak evil about the ruler of your people.’”

How do we explain Paul’s answer to those who upbraided him for rebuking the high priest? His answer has been understood by some as sarcasm. However, it is doubtful that Paul’s words could have been intended as a sarcastic rebuttal. In the first place, it would not be like Paul to “speak evil of dignitaries.” Second, Israel’s high priests, at this time of her history, were appointed with gross irregularity, partly due to national apostasy from God’s commands and partly to Rome’s intrusion, so that one illegitimate high priest after another held office and the council was even presided over, at times, by substitute “high priests.” Under these circumstances – and Paul having been in Jerusalem but a few days – it is quite understandable that he would not recognize the high priest. Furthermore, if Paul’s words would be a confession that he had spoken hastily, he would have apologized to the high priest.

Then Paul, knowing that some of them were Sadducees and others Pharisees, called out in the Sanhedrin, “Brothers, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee. It is because of my hope in the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial.”



Why did Paul say that he still was a Pharisee? It was with regard to the doctrine of the resurrection that he was a Pharisee. The apostle's statement was in no way misleading for his hearers understood perfectly that he was not now associated with the organized body of Pharisees.

As soon as he had said this, a dispute broke out between the Pharisees and Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. For the Sadducees say that there is neither a resurrection, nor angels, nor spirits, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all.

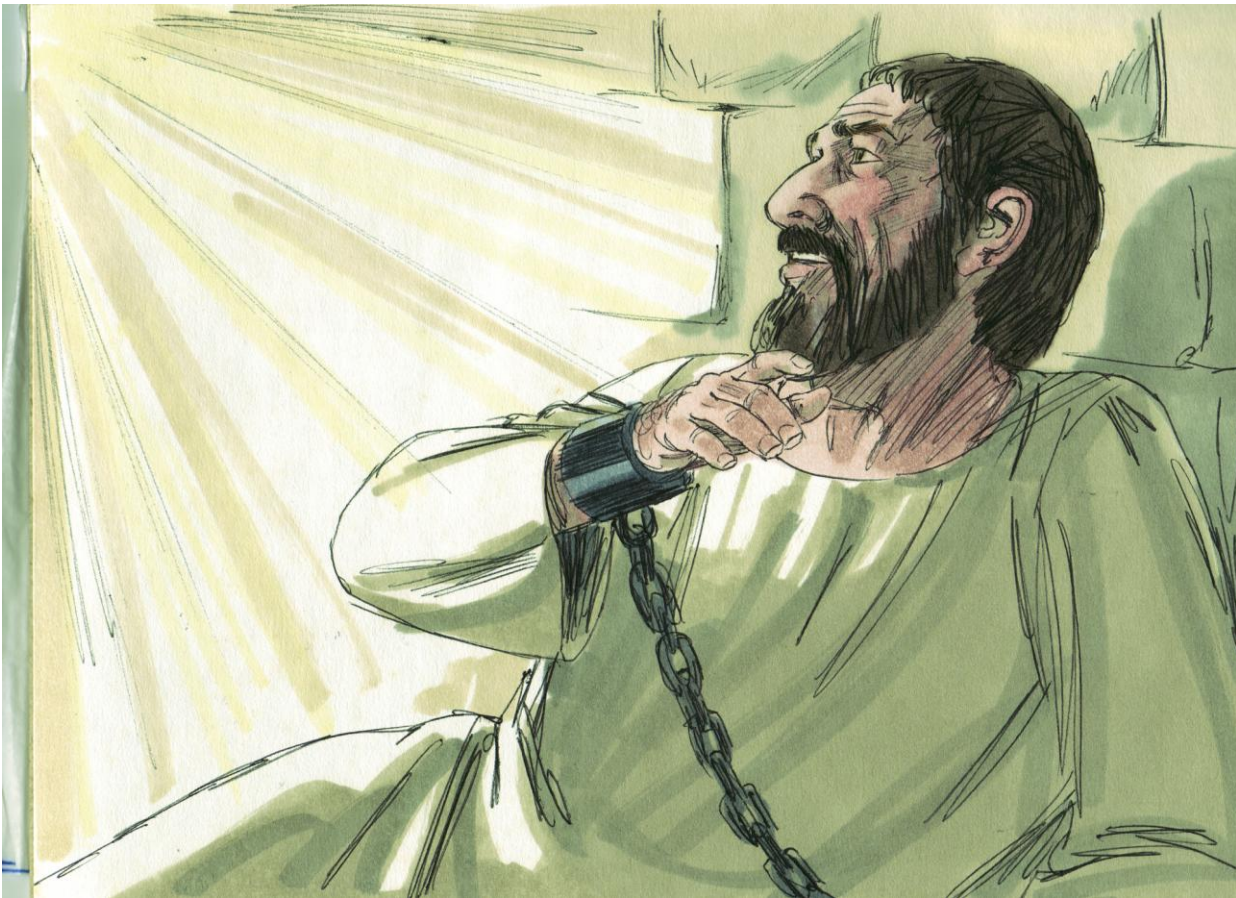
A great clamor arose, and some scribes from the party of the Pharisees got up and contended sharply, "We find nothing wrong with this man. What if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?"

The dispute grew so violent that the commander was afraid they would tear Paul to pieces. He ordered the soldiers to go down and remove him by force and bring him into the barracks.



Why is there a change from the respectful, sympathetic, conciliatory approach of yesterday to the “rough-and-tumble” tactics of today? Paul did so to extricate himself from the legal power of an apostate Sanhedrin. He grasps the initiative and keeps it, rebuking a jurist for ordering an illegal abuse and crying out that he is a Pharisee, so as to divide and confound them.

The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, “Take courage! As you have testified about Me in Jerusalem, so also you must testify in Rome.”



The Plot to Kill Paul (Acts 23:12-22)

When daylight came, the Jews formed a conspiracy and bound themselves with an oath not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul. More than forty of them were involved in this plot.

They went to the chief priests and elders and said, “We have bound ourselves with a solemn oath not to eat anything until we have killed Paul. Now then, you and the Sanhedrin petition the commander to bring him down to you on the pretext of examining his case more carefully. We are ready to kill him on the way.”

But when the son of Paul’s sister heard about the plot, he went into the barracks and told Paul.

Then Paul called one of the centurions and said, “Take this young man to the commander; he has something to tell him.”

So the centurion took him to the commander and said, “Paul the prisoner sent and asked me to bring this young man to you. He has something to tell you.”

The commander took the young man by the hand, drew him aside, and asked, “What do you need to tell me?”



He answered, “The Jews have agreed to ask you to bring Paul to the Sanhedrin tomorrow on the pretext of acquiring more information about him. Do not let them persuade you, because more than forty men are waiting to ambush him. They have bound themselves with an oath not to eat or drink until they have killed him; they are ready now, awaiting your consent.”

So the commander dismissed the young man and instructed him, “Do not tell anyone that you have reported this to me.”

Paul Sent to Felix (Acts 23:23-35)

Then he called two of his centurions and said, “Prepare two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen, and two hundred spearmen to go to Caesarea in the third hour of the night. Provide mounts for Paul to take him safely to Governor Felix.” And he wrote the following letter:



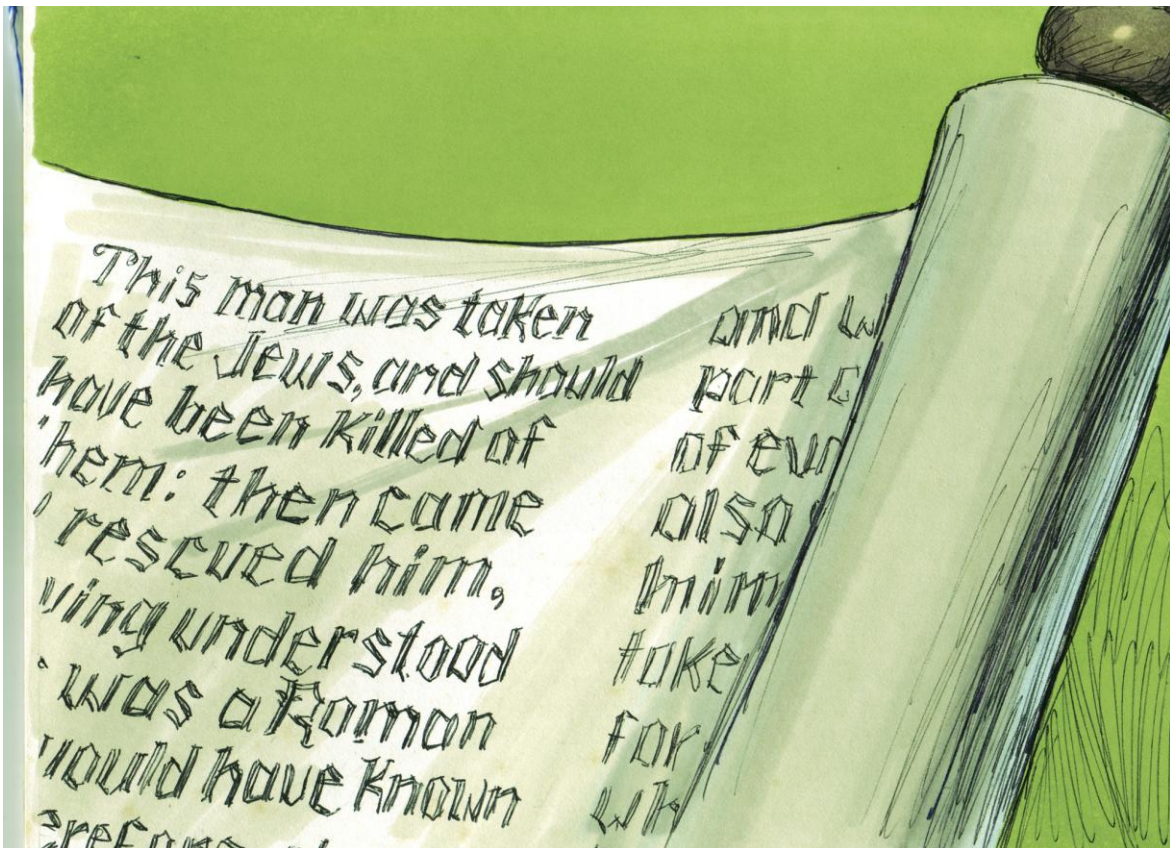
Claudius Lysias,

To His Excellency, Governor Felix:

Greetings.

This man was seized by the Jews, and they were about to kill him when I came with my troops to rescue him. For I had learned that he is a Roman citizen, and since I wanted to understand their charges against him, I brought him down to their Sanhedrin. I found that the accusation involved questions about their own law, but there was no charge worthy of death or imprisonment.

When I was informed that there was a plot against the man, I sent him to you at once. I also instructed his accusers to present their case against him before you.



So the soldiers followed their orders and brought Paul by night to Antipatris, which was a military post between Samaria and Judea – 30 miles from Jerusalem. Antipatris was rebuilt by Herod the Great and named for his father, Antipater. Herod the Great is the one who murdered the male children from two years old and under in Bethlehem (Matthew 2:16).



Photo 39. Antipatris from above

The next day they returned to the barracks and let the horsemen go on with him. When the horsemen arrived in Caesarea, they delivered the letter to the governor and presented Paul to him.

The governor read the letter and asked what province Paul was from.

Learning that he was from Cilicia, he said, “I will hear your case when your accusers arrive.”



Photo 40. Herod's palace and the Roman Praetorium in Ceasarea

Then he ordered that Paul be kept under guard in Herod's Praetorium. This building was erected as a royal residence by Herod the Great but now used as a Roman government center (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 (Phil. 1:3), Ephesus, Jerusalem (John 18:28), Caesarea and other parts of the empire.

QUESTIONS OF ACTS CHAPTER 23

ALL ANSWERS CAN BE FOUND IN THE TEXT OF CHAPTER 23

1. Who ordered those standing near Paul to strike him on the mouth?

2. What did Paul say to this man?

3. What did those standing nearby say to Paul?

4. Why did a dispute broke out between the Pharisees and Sadducees, and was the assembly divided?

5. What did the commander do to avoid that Paul would be torn to pieces?

6. What did the risen Jesus Christ say to Paul the following night?

7. How many Jews were involved in the plot to kill Paul?

8. Who heard about the plot and told Paul?

9. What did the commander say to the young man after hearing about the plot?

10. How many people took Paul safely to Governor Felix in Caesarea and what time did they leave Jerusalem?

ACTS CHAPTER 23 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

Paul before the Sanhedrin

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2At this, the high priest Ananias ordered those standing near Paul to strike him on the mouth.

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5“Brothers,” Paul replied, “I was not aware that he was the high priest, for it is written: ‘Do not speak evil about the ruler of your people.’”

6Then Paul, knowing that some of them were Sadducees and others Pharisees, called out in the Sanhedrin, “Brothers, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee. It is because of my hope in the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial.”

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The Plot to Kill Paul

(John 16:1–4)

12When daylight came, the Jews formed a conspiracy and bound themselves with an oath not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul. **13**More than forty of them were involved in this plot. **14**They went to the chief priests and elders and said, “We have bound ourselves with a solemn oath not to eat anything until we have killed Paul. **15**Now then, you and the Sanhedrin petition the commander to bring him down to you on the pretext of examining his case more carefully. We are ready to kill him on the way.”

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19The commander took the young man by the hand, drew him aside, and asked, “What do you need to tell me?”

20He answered, “The Jews have agreed to ask you to bring Paul to the Sanhedrin tomorrow on the pretext of acquiring more information about him. **21**Do not let them persuade you, because more than forty men are waiting to ambush him. They have bound themselves with an oath not to eat or drink until they have killed him; they are ready now, awaiting your consent.”

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Paul Sent to Felix

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34The governor read the letter and asked what province Paul was from. Learning that he was from Cilicia, **35**he said, “I will hear your case when your accusers arrive.” Then he ordered that Paul be kept under guard in Herod’s Praetorium.

Scripture taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE(r),

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