

Acts 23

Acts 22:12-21 And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good report of all the Jews which dwelt [there], 13 Came unto me, and stood, and said unto me, Brother Saul, receive thy sight. And the same hour I looked up upon him. 14 And he said, The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know his will, and see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of his mouth. 15 For thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard. 16 And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord. 17 And it came to pass, that, when I was come again to Jerusalem, even while I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance; 18 And saw him saying unto me, Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy testimony concerning me. 19 And I said, Lord, they know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on thee: 20 And when the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him. 21 And he said unto me, Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles.

The Gentiles ... With this word from Paul, the riot broke out again. It was as evil and unreasonable as all riots; and only the protection of the soldiers prevented their murder of the apostle on the spot.

Acts 22:22 And they gave him audience unto this word, and [then] lifted up their voices, and said, Away with such a [fellow] from the earth: for it is not fit that he should live.

"The despised word 'Gentiles' was a red flag waived in the face of those wild, savage bulls of hate." Such wild and bitter cries revealed a carnal lust for Paul's blood. Here was a shout "for his immediate execution without the formality of a trial."

Acts 22:23 And as they cried out, and cast off [their] clothes, and threw dust into the air,

... cast off [their] clothes ... With Adam Clarke we view this as evidence that "Some of them were actually throwing off their clothes, in order to prepare to stone Paul." One wonders if Paul remembered what was done to Stephen, and that now his own life would have been snuffed out on the very spot where they mobbed Stephen, except for the providence of God. Some of Paul's old buddies, no doubt, were in the business of keeping the clothes of the executioners, just as he himself had done when Stephen died.

... threw dust into the air ... Where did they get the dust? They must have brought it with them such as some activists today would take eggs or tomatoes to throw at their political opponents. This was pure bestiality, characteristic of a sadistic, uncontrollable mob.

One can only imagine the perplexity and concern of Claudius Lysias (LIE-see-uhs), the chief captain. Twice in one day, there had been an awesome disturbance in the very shadow of Roman power and authority ... the fortress of Antonio ... and Paul was the center of both disturbances. He determined to get to the bottom of it.

Acts 22:24 The chief captain commanded him to be brought into the castle, and bade that he should be examined by scourging; that he might know wherefore they cried so against him.

This affords a glimpse of the brutal culture in which a "confession" was tortured out of any hapless wretch who happened to be accused or the center of any disturbance.

Brooks Foss Westcott informs us:

Recent investigations at Jerusalem have disclosed what may have been the scene of the punishment (of Jesus). It is a subterranean chamber, discovered by Captain Warren, on what Mr. Ferguson holds to be the site of Antonio - Pilate's Praetorium - "stands a truncated column, no part of the construction, for the chamber is vaulted above

the pillar, but just such a pillar as criminals would be tied to be scourged. It cannot be later than the time of Herod."

If Westcott is correct, then this is the same pillar where Paul was bound; and there is something moving in the thought that here the great apostle was bound to the very device upon which our Lord so shamefully suffered.

Acts 22:25 And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said unto the centurion that stood by, Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned?

... bound him with thongs ... This was a different kind of binding from that of "the chains" that bound Paul earlier. This was a formal stretching of his body on the pillar preparatory to beating him half to death; and the very initiation of such an act was contrary to Roman law, for a citizen of Rome might not be either bound in such a manner or scourged.

... Is it lawful ... ? Of course it was not lawful; and Paul's appeal in this instance to his Roman citizenship was all that was needed to abort the savage punishment he was about to endure. The centurion, true to his duty, at once revealed the situation to the Chief Captain chiliarch (CHILL-ee-arch), from Greek: meaning "commander of a thousand" and occasionally rendered "thousandman" in English is a military rank dating back to Antiquity.

Acts 22:26 When the centurion heard [that], he went and told the chief captain, saying, Take heed what thou doest: for this man is a Roman.

This was shocking news to Claudius Lysias, for he was already guilty of illegally binding Paul; and the penalties that Rome inflicted for violations in this sector were drastic. He at once made a personal trip to the scene of the intended scourging.

Acts 22:27 Then the chief captain came, and said unto him, Tell me, art thou a Roman? He said, Yea.

Paul's word was all that was required, for it was a capital offense to plead Roman citizenship if it was not true; and, therefore, Lysias did not need any documentation; which, if he had required it, would no doubt have been available in the public records of Tarsus.

Acts 22:28 And the chief captain answered, With a great sum obtained I this freedom. And Paul said, But I was [free] born.

With a great sum ... As Dummelow said, "It is evident that the chief captain had not bought his citizenship under Claudius (41-54 A.D.), who sold it for a merely nominal sum." This fact has an affirmative bearing on the early date of events in this chapter, for Claudius Lysias had received his citizenship at a time prior to Claudius.

... But I was [free] born. ... From this, it appears that Paul's father had been awarded Roman citizenship, or that even his grandfather had received it, by what means we are totally unaware; however, the most reasonable guess is that it came about from some signal and outstanding service to the emperor.

Acts 22:29 Then straightway they departed from him which should have examined him: and the chief captain also was afraid, after he knew that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him.

Lysias knew full well that no man would dare to assume citizenship if it did not truly belong to him ... and orders were instantly given for the removal of the instruments of torture.

Still, the binding itself was forbidden for a citizen; and the fact of Paul's being freeborn raised the question of his having friends at Rome; and from such considerations Lysias himself was afraid.

So far as the common Jew is concerned, the man on the street. This section paints a somber picture of the hatred towards the Gospel as Paul preached it.

This contrast sharply to the dignity that Rome held toward its citizens. So bitterly does the Jews hate the Gospel that they will mob murder even a brother who embraces it and preached it. So much does this pagan Roman respect his Roman law, he will protect, defend and exercise his sense of justice for any citizen even for a Jew. The contrast is marked and unmistakable. The behavior of those who could once call themselves: "God's own chosen people" their behavior towards God's messenger is darkness when compared to the light of how Rome cares for its citizens.

Acts 22:30 On the morrow, because he would have known the certainty wherefore he was accused of the Jews, he lo nded the chief priests and all their council to appear, and brought Paul osed him from [his] bands, and comma down, and set him before them.

The council here was the Sanhedrin, the same evil court that had judicially murdered the Son of God; and one is struck by the position of Lysias being so much like that of Pontius Pilate. As a matter of fact, it will be remembered that Pilate's residence, like that of Felix, was actually at Caesarea. Normally, the affairs in Jerusalem were handled by the head of the Roman garrison in Antonio.

On this occasion, the bloodthirsty Sanhedrin would not be able to intimidate or frighten the chiliarch into doing their will; therefore, they were compelled against their wishes to submit to Paul's being transferred beyond the reach of their hatred. The events leading up to that development are related in the next chapter.

The period of Paul's imprisonment began with his arrest and rescue by Claudius Lysias (LIE-see-uhs), as recorded in the last chapter; and here we have thesecond of five pleas which Paul made in the various

situations developing from his being a prisoner. This imprisonment was to last until the conclusion of Acts.

PAUL'S SECOND DEFENSE: HIS PLEA BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN

Acts 23:1-2 And Paul, earnestly beholding the council, said, Men [and] brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day. 2 And the high priest Ananias commanded them that stood by him to smite him on the mouth.

The council ... This was the historic court of the Hebrews called the Sanhedrin, including perhaps some of the very men who had condemned Jesus to death.

In all good conscience ... until this day ... Paul repeatedly affirmed that he had always maintained a good conscience in the sight of God I Corinthians 4:4, even declaring that "from his forefathers" he had worshiped God with a pure conscience II Timothy 1:3. This "is an unanswerable argument against the oft-repeated theory" that all religious actions are right, just so long as one is sincere in what he does.

Ananias ... His ordering Paul to be struck in the mouth was an arrogant and illegal display of prejudice and unscrupulous hatred toward Paul. The order was probably obeyed the instant it was given. "He was one of the most disgraceful profaners of the sacred office of the high priest."

Acts 23:3-4 Then said Paul unto him, God shall smite thee, [thou] whited wall: for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law? 4 And they that stood by said, Revilest thou God's high priest?

God shall smite thee ... This was doubtless a prophecy put in Paul's mouth by the Lord; for it is a fact that not many years later the

reprobate Ananias was murdered by his own people at the time of the beginning of the Jewish war.

Contrary to the law ... It was illegal to smite a man who had not been condemned; and, as yet, Paul had not even been tried; but such nice distinctions concerning the rights of defendants had long before ceased to exist in the reprobate court known as the Sanhedrin. The final years of that once sacred tribunal were marked by every kind of vice and venality.

... Revilest thou God's high priest? It WAS illegal to revile an authority such as the high priest; but the Sanhedrinists were much quicker to defend that law than they were to honor the law forbidding striking a man illegally.

Acts 23:5 Then said Paul, I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest: for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people.

... I wist (knew) not, ... The view here is that Paul simply spoke the truth and that he did not know the high priest by his personal appearance, although he might indeed have known his name. Paul's understandable outrage and impromptu protest, in all probability inspired, had two very important results: (1) it prophesied the destruction of Ananias, and (2) it led Paul to see at once that there was not any possibility of justice for him in such a tribunal.

Acts 23:6 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 the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question.

... resurrection of the dead ... The so-called "moral problem" comes here. Was it strictly true that Paul had been brought before them because of his teaching on the doctrine of the resurrection? Well, of course it was.

Acts 23:7-9 And when he had so said, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees: and the multitude was divided. **8** For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both. **9** And there arose a great cry: and the scribes [that were] of the Pharisees' part arose, and strove, saying, We find no evil in this man: but if a spirit or an angel hath spoken to him, let us not fight against God.

Paul's identification of himself as a Pharisee is also offensive to some people; but it should be remembered that the "noble Pharisee" must never be identified with the Pharisees whom Jesus denounced. Many priests became Christians cf: Acts 6:7, most of whom were doubtless Pharisees; and it is very likely that much of Luke's gospel cf: Luke 9:51-19:28 was researched through Luke's interviews with such Pharisees (then Christians) while Paul suffered the two whole years incarceration in Caesarea. The true and righteous Pharisees, of whom Paul must be reckoned, obeyed the gospel. Paul's words in this passage have the effect of saying, "Only such as I am are the TRUE Pharisees."

The notion that Paul's claiming to be a Pharisee in this situation was improper, is nullified altogether by the fact that he also made the same claim before King Agrippa cf: Acts 26:5 and in his letter to the Philippians cf: Philippians 3:5; thus there was nothing unusual about the identification of himself with the Pharisees here.

Acts 23:10 And when there arose a great dissension, the chief captain, fearing lest Paul should have been pulled in pieces of them, commanded the soldiers to go down, and to take him by force from among them, and to bring [him] into the castle.

Dissension ... This was the third riot in two days! And, at that time, the chief captain was still totally ignorant of any cause for such disturbances. Lysias had saved Paul's life in each of the three riots, and would be called upon to save it a fourth time the next day. "He

must have been confused and disgusted. What kind of people were these Jews? He could make no sense out of their words and actions."

We have speculated somewhat with regard to Paul's insistence on returning to Jerusalem, even wondering if perhaps there was some degree, at least, of Paul's being out of complete harmony with the divine will by his refusal to change his plans. Certainly the disciples at Tyre interpreted the words of the Holy Spirit as a directive for Paul "not to set foot in Jerusalem" cf: Acts 21:4; and Luke agreed with them. Whether or not they were right is immaterial, because Paul did not so interpret the words of the Spirit but went on to Jerusalem, the others reluctantly saying, "The will of the Lord be done." In this problem we may have a glimpse of the truth that men do not always know with dogmatic certainty what the words of the Holy Spirit mean. Otherwise, it would not be true that "We walk by faith and not by sight." There must have been some dreadful feelings of uncertainty, disappointments and grief in Paul's heart, and emotions of fear that perhaps, after all, he had been wrong about this trip to Jerusalem.

Then came the glorious reassurance from the Lord himself.

Acts 23:11 And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.

Christ himself comforted and strengthened his apostle.

Our Lord's specific assurance that Paul should go to Rome could indicate that Paul's mind had been deeply troubled by events which he might have thought were the end of any hopes he had of going to Rome. The very fact of Jesus' appearance to Paul in this context speaks of the absolute necessity of it.

Acts 23:12-16 And when it was day, certain of the Jews banded together, and bound themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. 13 And they were more

than forty which had made this conspiracy. 14 And they came to the chief priests and elders, and said, We have bound ourselves under a great curse, that we will eat nothing until we have slain Paul. 15 Now therefore ye with the council signify to the chief captain that he bring him down unto you to morrow, as though ye would enquire something more perfectly concerning him: and we, or ever he come near, are ready to kill him.

The Lord had called the temple a den of thieves and robbers; and here is the most amazing proof of it.

More than forty ... How many more? Well, to the forty, one must add the chief priests and the elders of the people, the entire dominant factor which controlled the temple itself. How evil this once glorious institution had become! Once the moral nature of man is decapitated at the highest level, the consequent descent to lower and lower levels of shame, carnality and depravity is inevitable and accelerated. Having rejected the Christ only some thirty years before, the temple partisans at the time here recorded shamelessly exhibited the morality of a group of vicious outlaws.

Incidentally, it should be observed that the whole temple party had already conceded to themselves that any fair hearing of Paul's case before Lysias (LIE-see-uhs) would result in his acquittal. This conspiracy, therefore, is their own announcement of Paul's innocence.

Bound ... under a curse ... Bruce gave the form of such an oath thus, "So may God do to us, and more also, if we eat or drink until we have killed Paul." The spirit of Jezebel rested upon the temple fathers, for she made a similar vow: "So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time" cf: 1 Kings 19:2.

Conspiracy ... This word occurs "only here in the New Testament." Amazingly, they "knew that many of the chief priests and elders

would favor their murderous designs," indicating that the satanic behavior in the temple was known to many and recognized as typical of their operations. The plot to kill Paul was skillfully designed and would in all probability have succeeded if it had not been providentially frustrated. It was simple enough. The high priest would request of Lysias another hearing, promising, of course, that no riot would ensue next time, and pretending of course that they would fully resolve the matter at another hearing; and there was no reason to suppose Lysias might not have honored such a request. In the meanwhile, forty desperate men, armed with daggers, would waylay the escort as they started for the meeting place and murder Paul before he ever appeared before the Sanhedrin, which of course would have professed surprise and avoided all implications involving themselves. Beautiful! But God did not allow it.

Acts 23:16 And when Paul's sister's son heard of their lying in wait, he went and entered into the castle, and told Paul.

Paul's sister's son ... This is all that is known of this "young man," as Paul called him, and all that is known of Paul's sister; and we shall refrain from indulging speculative guesses concerning them. It seems proper, however, to receive the deduction of Conybeare (CO-nee-beer) to the effect that "The whole narrative gives the impression that he was a very young man." This is justified by the chiliarch's taking him "by the hand" cf: Acts 23:19.

It would be interesting to know just how this lad learned so much about that conspiracy, and if his mother was a Christian, and why, if they were living in Jerusalem, Paul would have been staying with Mnason instead of his sister, etc. Root's suggestion that "the young man" might have been "a rabbinical student in Jerusalem as Paul himself had been a generation before" is an example of the guessing which scholars like to indulge.

Acts 23:17 Then Paul called one of the centurions unto [him], and said, Bring this young man unto the chief captain: for he hath a certain thing to tell him.

Note that Paul did not trust the centurion with the message, but rather contrived to get it delivered to the chief captain himself.

Acts 23:18 So he took him, and brought [him] to the chief captain, and said, Paul the prisoner called me unto [him], and prayed me to bring this young man unto thee, who hath something to say unto thee.

This young man ... The same word is used of Paul, as "the young man" at whose feet the clothes of Stephen were laid. The centurion discharged the errand for Paul exactly as requested, indicating the favor in which Paul was viewed in the castle.

Acts 23:19 Then the chief captain took him by the hand, and went [with him] aside privately, and asked [him], What is that thou hast to tell me?

The care with which Lysias protected himself against any possible eavesdropping is notable, and his caution was well rewarded; for after receiving the tip-off on what was afoot, he could move without the temple conspirators' knowledge that he had intentionally acted to thwart their murder of an innocent man. In the political climate of that era, this was decidedly to his advantage.

Acts 23:20-21 And he said, The Jews have agreed to desire thee that thou wouldest bring down Paul to morrow into the council, as though they would enquire somewhat of him more perfectly. 21 But do not thou yield unto them: for there lie in wait for him of them more than forty men, which have bound themselves with an oath, that they will neither eat nor drink till they have killed him: and now are they ready, looking for a promise from thee.

The full and concise manner of "the young man's" report suggests that he was at least of sufficient age to grasp all the details of the plot, indicating also the exercise of a rather subtle diplomacy. Whereas the plotters proposed that the council should have Paul brought down, in order that "they" the council might further examine him, the young man's report of it gave the right of inquiry to the chiliarch, "as though thou wouldest inquire."

Acts 23:22 So the chief captain [then] let the young man depart, and charged [him, See thou] tell no man that thou hast shewed these things to me.

Thus protecting him against any premature knowledge of what he might do, the chiliarch acted with decisive speed and authority to checkmate the evil conspirators.

Acts 23:23-24 And he called unto [him] two centurions, saying, Make ready two hundred soldiers to go to Caesarea, and horsemen threescore and ten, and spearmen two hundred, at the third hour of the night; 24 And provide [them] beasts, that they may set Paul on, and bring [him] safe unto Felix the governor.

The whole force was either 270 or 470 men; and their departure at the third hour of the night (9:00 P.M.) was thus well ahead of any request the chief priests might send to him the next day; and the size of the escort was large enough to kill any thought of the forty conspirators of following it, overtaking it, and murdering Paul anyway. This abruptly aborted their plot.

Provide beasts ... This has been variously understood as the need of several mounts for Paul, which would be changed from time to time on such a forced march; or as including mounts for the soldiers guarding Paul, and to whom he was still presumably chained; or as including sufficient mounts for Luke and other companions of Paul. The text affords no way of knowing exactly what all might have been included.

Felix the governor ... This was the procurator of Judaea, one of the successors of Pontius Pilate, although the office itself, for a time, had disappeared under the rule of Herod Antipas I, who was king over the whole area once ruled by Herod the Great; and, of course, during his reign no procurators were needed. However, Herod was summarily slain by an angel of God cf: Acts 12:23 in 44 A.D.; and after that, the old system of procurators was revived.

FELIX

Felix Marcus Antonius, a brother of Pallas, the notorious favorite of Claudius, through influence at Rome, was named procurator of Judaea about 52 A.D., an office he held until recalled by Nero in 59 A.D. He was succeeded by Festus. Thus, this is another date in secular history that touches and illuminates Acts. The events being described by Luke in this chapter occurred two years before the recall of Felix, that is, in 57 A.D. (This favors a 55 A.D. date for Romans.)

Felix, trading on his influence in Rome, was an unscrupulous scoundrel. Paul was innocent, and should have been released at once; but Felix hoped to get a fat bribe, and kept Paul in prison. He put down certain brigands and robbers, "but he himself was worse than any of them." Hervey tells how he "murdered Jonathan the high priest, using the ASSASSINS," one of the "high priests" who held office during the term of Ananias, whose high priesthood was interrupted.

The epitaph which history has written by his name is this: "With savagery and lust, he exercised the powers of a king with the disposition of a slave."

Acts 23:25-26 And he wrote a letter after this manner: 26 Claudius Lysias unto the most excellent governor Felix [sendeth] greeting.

Here is revealed the name of the chief captain. The coincidence of his being called "Claudius" at a time when Claudius was emperor might have resulted from Lysias' mere annexation of the name "as a compliment to the emperor, such liberties being then common."

In addition, Felix' importance is further seen in the fact that his outrageous and unprincipled conduct did much to precipitate the war in 70 A.D. which led to the ruin of Israel. Dummelow said: "His folly and cruelty goaded the nation into disaffection and rebellion."

Acts 23:27-30 This man was taken of the Jews, and should have been killed of them: then came I with an army, and rescued him, having understood that he was a Roman. 28 And when I would have known the cause wherefore they accused him, I brought him forth into their council: 29 Whom I perceived to be accused of questions of their law, but to have nothing laid to his charge worthy of death or of bonds. 30 And when it was told me how that the Jews laid wait for the man, I sent straightway to thee, and gave commandment to his accusers also to say before thee what [they had] against him. Farewell.

LYSIAS' LETTER

This is a classical example of a self-serving distortion of truth to serve selfish and political ends. "Having understood that he was a Roman ..." implies that the rescue was made to prevent harm to a Roman citizen, whereas Lysias did not even know that he was a Roman until after he had illegally bound him, a fact left comfortably out of sight in his letter!

The genuineness of such a document as this is evident in every nuance of it. This was politics as it was played in the Roman Empire in those days. Alas, it may be feared that the same old game goes on in the same old way in all times and places.

Significantly, Paul is sent to Felix, not as a criminal, but as a fellow citizen rescued. If an honorable man had held the office then entrusted to Felix, Paul would have been released at once.

Acts 23:31-33 Then the soldiers, as it was commanded them, took Paul, and brought [him] by night to Antipatris. 32 On the morrow they left the horsemen to go with him, and returned to the castle: 33 Who, when they came to Caesarea, and delivered the epistle to the governor, presented Paul also before him.

Antipatris, 26 miles south of Caesarea, was rebuilt by Herod the Great in honor of his father Antipater (hence the name). Plumptre gave the distance from Jerusalem as 42 miles; others say it was 38.

Brought him by night to Antipatris... means one of two things: (1) Paul and his escort of 470 men made a forced march in order to arrive at Antipatris the same night they left Jerusalem, or (2) that they stopped en route, arriving at Antipatris the next night. The words are capable of either construction.

Came to Caesarea ... Boles appropriately observed that: They entered Caesarea in daylight, and such a parade would have attracted many curious eyes. Philip and other Christians of Caesarea must have been startled to recognize the rapid fulfillment of prophecy concerning Paul's journey to Jerusalem.

Acts 23:34-35 And when the governor had read [the letter], he asked of what province he was. And when he understood that [he was] of Cilicia; 35 I will hear thee, said he, when thine accusers are also come. And he commanded him to be kept in Herod's judgment hall.

What province ... ? This was a pertinent question to determine if Paul really came under his authority; finding he had no worry on that point, he postponed any action until he could devise some manner of turning the situation to his own profit.

In Herod's judgment hall. Vicious criminals would not have been kept in such a palace, and therefore it may be inferred that Paul was honorably treated and given the best accommodations available for a man under detention. This was to be Paul's home for two whole years, during which Luke would canvass the cities and villages of Galilee Judaea, Samaria, etc., preparatory to writing the Gospel of Luke. Perhaps in that work of the incomparable Luke, one may read the purpose of that strange providence which left the greatest of apostles to suffer frustration and delay under the lock and key of Felix. For the benign character of Paul's imprisonment in Herod's palace, however, one may be grateful and thankful to the Lord.

A final observation is again what care pagan man exercises a better sense of justice through the world ruler Rome than the Jews the covenant people.

Religion when it is controlled by sin, proves more destructive to justice than humanity's natural instinct for justice.

Sources: KJV, theWord.com, Burton Coffman, BW Johnson, Adam Clark, Dummelow , FF Bruce, McKnight and JW McGarvey, Boles Commentaries, Wikipedia, and World Conquest.