



Walking Through the Scripture Together

October 5 - 11, 2008

Acts 22:30-23:35

lion's den

Text Acts 22:30-23:35 (TNIV)

Paul Speaks to the Crowd

30 The commander wanted to find out exactly why Paul was being accused by the Jews. So the next day he released him and ordered the chief priests and all the members of the Sanhedrin to assemble. Then he brought Paul and had him stand before them.

1 Paul looked straight at the Sanhedrin and said, "My brothers, I have fulfilled my duty to God in all good conscience to this day." **2** At this the high priest Ananias ordered those standing near Paul to strike him on the mouth. **3** Then Paul said to him, "God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! You sit there to judge me according to the law, yet you yourself violate the law by commanding that I be struck!"

4 Those who were standing near Paul said, "How dare you insult God's high priest!"

5 Paul replied, "Brothers, I did not realize that he was the high priest; for it is written: 'Do not speak evil about the ruler of your people.'"

6 Then Paul, knowing that some of them were Sadducees and the others Pharisees, called out in the Sanhedrin, "My brothers, I am a Pharisee, descended from Pharisees. I stand on trial because of the hope of the resurrection of the dead." **7** When he said this, a dispute broke out between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. **8** (The Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, and that there are neither angels nor spirits, but the Pharisees believe all these things.)

9 There was a great uproar, and some of the teachers of the law who were Pharisees stood up and argued vigorously. "We find nothing wrong with this man," they said. "What if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?" **10** The dispute became so violent that the commander was afraid Paul would be torn to pieces by them. He ordered the troops to go down and take him away from them by force and bring him into the barracks.

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

The Plot to Kill Paul

12 The next morning 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 men were involved in this plot. **14** They went to the chief priests and the elders and said, "We have taken 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 before you on the pretext of wanting more accurate information about his case. We are ready to kill him before he gets here."

16 But when the son of Paul's sister heard of this plot, he went into the barracks and told Paul.

17 Then Paul called one of the centurions and said, "Take this young man to the commander; he has something to tell him." **18** So he took him to the commander.

The centurion said, "Paul, the prisoner, sent for me and asked me to bring this young man to you because he has something to tell you."

19 The commander took the young man by the hand, drew him aside and asked, "What is it you want to tell me?"

20 He said: "The Jews have agreed to ask you to bring Paul before the Sanhedrin tomorrow on the pretext of wanting more accurate information about him. **21** Don't give in to them, because more than forty of them are waiting in ambush for him. They have taken an oath not to eat or drink until they have killed him. They are ready now, waiting for your consent to their request."

22 The commander dismissed the young man with this warning: "Don't tell anyone that you have reported this to me."

Paul Transferred to Caesarea

23 Then he called two of his centurions and ordered them, "Get ready a detachment of two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen to go to Caesarea at nine tonight. **24** Provide horses for Paul so that he may be taken safely to Governor Felix."

25 He wrote a letter as follows:

26 Claudius Lysias,

To His Excellency, Governor Felix:

Greetings.

27 This man was seized by the Jews and they were about to kill him, but I came with my troops and rescued him, for I had learned that he is a Roman citizen. **28** I wanted to know why they were accusing him, so I brought him to their Sanhedrin. **29** I found that the accusation had to do with questions about their law, but there was no charge against him that deserved death or imprisonment. **30** When I was informed of a plot to be carried out against the man, I sent him to you at once. I also ordered his accusers to present to you their case against him.

31 So the soldiers, carrying out their orders, took Paul with them during the night and brought him as far as Antipatris. **32** The next day they let the cavalry go on with him, while they returned to the barracks. **33** When the cavalry arrived in Caesarea, they delivered the letter to the governor and handed Paul over to him. **34** The governor read the letter and asked what province he was from. Learning that he was from Cilicia, **35** he said, "I will hear your case when your accusers get here." Then he ordered that Paul be kept under guard in Herod's palace.

Small Group Discussion Guide

Lean In

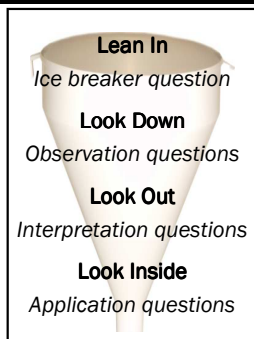
- Share a time when you had to appear before a judge in court (or just the principal at school). What happened?

Look Down / Look Out

- What is the Roman commander's purpose in sending Paul before the high council? What overall picture do you have so far of the commander's character? What contrasts do you see between him and the Jewish authorities in this story? Any surprises here?
- How does Paul's initial comment strike you? Innocent? Bold? Maybe too bold? Why was he struck for the statement? What do you hear in Paul's answer upon being informed that he had insulted the high priest? Contrition, sarcasm, or what?
- What does Paul see in the council at this point, and what does he shout? What effect does it have upon them? What is the commander forced to do? Why do you think Paul did this?
- What confirming message does Paul receive from the Lord that night?
- What is driving this fanatical oath to kill Paul? What made Paul so dangerous? What impresses you about Paul's young nephew? What does Paul do with the information his nephew shares?
- What further insights do you see into the commander's heart and character? Into Paul's nephew? What risks is this young man taking? What risk is the commander not willing to take? What steps does he take to provide for Paul's safety?

Look Inside

- How do you typically respond to being wronged? Strike back verbally or otherwise? Just take it? Point out the wrong? Get back indirectly later? Or what?
- How can we keep religious zeal from driving us to alienation and rage against our perceived enemies?



Family Discussion Guide

Day One Acts 22:30-23:5

How do you usually respond when someone verbally or even physically strikes you? What do you learn from Paul's example before the high council? What do you think it means to "turn the other cheek" as Jesus says?

Day Two Acts 23:6-11

How does Paul use his wits when he sees he's not going to get a fair trial? What do you usually do when you don't think an authority is not being fair? What do you learn from Paul?

Day Three Acts 23:12-18

When have you risked standing with someone that no one else likes? Who has stood by you when you were alone?

Day Four Acts 23:19-24

Paul was protected by the Romans from threats against him. How have you seen God protecting you like that in your life? How have you allowed others to help?

Day Five Acts 23:25-35 (additional reading Romans 13:1-7)

Why is it important for Christians to be good citizens and obey government authorities? When do you think it's okay for Christians to challenge government authorities?

details, details...

Paul looked straight at the Sanhedrin

The Greek word *synedrion* was used generically to refer to a civic council or a local court. In the gospels and Acts it is applied to the Jewish high court, traditionally composed of seventy elders and directly connected, by tradition, with Moses and his council of elders who helped him decide disputes among the people. The priestly party of the Sadducees always played a leading role in this body in the first century world, but for pragmatic reasons they had been forced to allow many popular and learned Pharisees into their number. Membership in the Sanhedrin was confirmed by appointment and accompanied by a ceremony of the laying on of hands.

The high priest Ananias

This is the third character named Ananias we have encountered in Acts (the drop dead disciple in chapter 5, the wise and faithful believer who comes to a blind Saul in chapter 9, and now this final Jewish high priest we meet in Acts). Ananias served as high priest, presiding over the council from AD 47 to 59 when he was ousted, hunted down, and assassinated by a mob for his cruelty and his pro-Roman policies.

God will smite you, whited wall!

A solemn denunciation? An angry outburst? It's hard not to see some teeth in Paul's rebuke — in which case it should be comforting to us to know that even an aged apostle could lose his temper. Funny how we so often try to rescue biblical characters from being human. As it is, Paul's outburst was more prophetic than anything. Ananias would be dead within a year of Paul's pronouncement.

"Don't speak evil about the ruler of your people."

Once again, some here see Paul catching himself and apologizing for his outburst, because he really didn't know who the high priest was — and Ananias was not dressed distinctively from the other chief priests on the council. Others hear his words laced with bitter sarcasm: "Oh, I'm so sorry — I didn't know he was the high priest, he doesn't act like one..." But it seems like that would have gotten him another slap—or worse. I guess we'll have to wait for the replay.

The son of Paul's sister

This is the only mention of Paul's physical relatives made anywhere in Acts. Paul speaks a lot about sons, brothers and even mothers to him in the family of believers, but outside of this incident we are otherwise left to wonder about Paul's extended family and how they responded to him — just as we are left to wonder about this brave young man and what happened to him.

Life in Bible Times

Three Jewish Parties

Three key Jews parties or groups show up in this week's text. First in the council, we very explicitly meet — again — the Pharisees and Sadducees. Just a quick recap on who these people were. As Luke summarizes here, the Pharisees believed in resurrection, angels and spirits. You could say they were rooted in the future. Future vindication, future judgment, future kingdom, all grounded in the reality of a spiritual realm all around them. We would call them solid, conservative evangelicals, if we had to find a cultural equivalent. They embraced their entire Bible and emphasized obedience and clean living as they looked forward to God's upcoming consummation of all things.

The Sadducees (name probably from *Zadok*, meaning "righteous ones") were people anchored in the present. They were pragmatic and savvy, political and wealthy. The spiritual realm was superstition to them. It's up to us to run things as best we can, using the tools at hand. We would call them liberals, probably, if we had to find an equivalent label. They only held to the first section of their Bible (the Law) and scoffed at spiritualized interpretations of it. For them, belief in resurrection and religious doomsday theology was not only foolish, but dangerous and the source of most of their problems.

The third group, I would propose, appears in the shadows of our story. The Zealots functioned as a Jewish gang with knives. They hated gentiles, and for that reason hated Paul. They are likely candidates for the forty fanatics with the death wish for Paul.