

## ***The Church of the Servant King***

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### ***Survey of the Bible Series – The Book of Acts***

(SB\_Acts 22\_23\_Paul's Defense Before Felix)

#### **Introduction**

Our previous study took us through chapter 22 of the book of Acts. Chapter 22 records Paul's address to the Jewish mob that had attempted to kill Paul before the commander of the Roman garrison arrived with Roman soldiers and centurions to restore order. This must have been quite a disturbance since it required the attention of the commander and approximately 200 of his men since Luke uses the phrase "soldiers and centurions" (Acts 21:32). (A centurion commanded a *centuria* that consisted of approximately 100 men, thus they would be roughly the equivalent of a captain or in the case of a senior centurion, a major in today's US Army and Marines).

Once the Romans arrived, the Jewish mob ceased their attempts to kill Paul and Paul was taken into custody by the Romans. The commander of the Roman garrison (about 600 to 1000 men) allowed Paul to address the mob from the top of the stairs leading into the Antonia fortress that adjoined the Temple grounds. Chapter 22 records Paul's address and the Jewish mob's response.

Paul spoke to the mob in Hebrew and they listened attentively to him. Paul described his teaching that was received from the respected Gamaliel (22:3). He recounted his conversion at the appearance of Jesus while on the road to Damascus as he made his way to persecute Christians (Acts 22:4-11). He received instruction from the Lord through Ananias, a respected Jew (22:12-16). The Lord instructed Paul while he prayed in the Temple to leave Jerusalem and go to the Gentiles since the Jews would not accept his testimony (22:17-21).

When Paul mentioned the Gentiles, the Jewish mob went wild (22:22-23). This prompted the commander of the garrison to extract more information from Paul by scourging at which point Paul mentioned his Roman citizenship from birth (22:24-26). This was enough to cause the Roman soldiers to withhold any punishment (22:27-29).

The commander of the Roman garrison commanded all of the Jewish religious leadership to appear before him and sort through the facts. This is where we find ourselves in chapter 23.

#### **Paul Before the Sanhedrin (22:30-23:10)**

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. 23:1 AND Paul, looking intently at the Council, said, "Brethren, I have lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day." 2 And the high priest Ananias commanded those standing beside him to strike him on the mouth. 3 Then Paul said to him, "God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall! And do you sit to try me according to the Law, and in violation of the Law order me to be struck?" 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.'" 6 But perceiving that one part 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!" 7 And as he said this, there arose 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. 9 And there arose 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?" 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.<sup>1</sup>

It is interesting that Paul began his address to the Sanhedrin with the words "men and brethren." Paul was attempting to be conciliatory in his tone and identify with his listeners – all this after having almost been killed the previous day by them. As soon as Paul declared his innocence with the words "I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day," the high priest Ananias ordered that Paul be struck on the mouth. This action is consistent with Josephus' description of Ananias as insolent, hot-tempered, profane and greedy.<sup>2</sup> Ananias was a Sadducee and Paul had been a Pharisee. This fact may have influenced Ananias as he seems to have pre-determined Paul's guilt.

Ananias became high priest in A.D. 47. The Jewish high priesthood was a political appointment during Rome's occupation of Palestine. Josephus painted Ananias as a despicable person. He seized for his own use tithes that should have gone to the ordinary priests and gave large bribes to Romans and Jews. The emperor summoned him to Rome on charges of being involved in a bloody battle between Jews and Samaritans, but he escaped punishment. He was very wealthy and resorted to violence and even assassination to accomplish his ends. He was also very pro-Roman, and the Jews finally killed him in their uprising against Rome in A.D. 66.<sup>3</sup>

I have personally encountered religious types who were capable of verbal attack on a personal level against those who held different positions than did they. Due to their position and status, they believed that their actions were consistent with what God would desire since they have an inflated opinion of themselves and their importance to God. While I haven't personally witnessed any physical abuse in the name of religion, past and present history is replete with examples of physical abuse in the name of the advancement of religion.

By ordering someone else to do his dirty work for him, Ananias was hiding behind a veil like a "white-washed wall." Ananias was in the position of a judge according to the Law, yet he was violating the very law he was sworn to uphold. Paul called attention to this hypocrisy in his own defense. Paul recognized evil for what it was.

When questioned for speaking to the high priest in the way in which he did, Paul responded that "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.'" How could it have been that Paul was not aware that Ananias was the high priest? Was Paul lying? This possibility has apparently troubled some

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New American Standard Bible*, (La Habra, California: The Lockman Foundation) 1977.

<sup>2</sup> Stanley Toussaint, "Acts" in John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary – New Testament*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Scripture Press Publications, Inc., 1983, 1985), 419.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Constable, "Notes on the Book of Acts," [www.soniclight.com](http://www.soniclight.com)

theologians based upon the various explanations proffered for Paul's statements. Here is a sample listing of some of the possibilities:

- Paul had not been in Jerusalem for an extended visit for over 20 years and may not have been able to recognize the current high priest
- Perhaps Ananias was not wearing his high priestly robes since this was not a regular meeting of the Sanhedrin.
- Perhaps Paul was looking in another direction when Ananias gave the order to strike him
- Paul had poor eyesight
- Another possibility is that Paul was speaking in irony: "I did not think that a man who would give such an order could be the high priest."
- Paul lost his temper

It is interesting that Paul voiced similar passionate statements on other occasions where Truth was at issue and the grace available through it was being negated by the actions of others.

11 But when Cephas came to Antioch, **I opposed him to his face**, because he stood condemned. 12 For prior to the coming of certain men from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he *began* to withdraw and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision. (Gal 2:11-12)

11 But I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why am I still persecuted? Then the stumbling block of the cross has been abolished. 12 **Would that those who are troubling you would even mutilate themselves.** (Gal 5:11-12)

**2 Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers**, beware of the false circumcision; 3 for we are the *true* circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh. (Phil 3:2-3)

Paul had a history of not being afraid to call a spade a spade and did not mince his words where Truth, freedom and grace was being compromised in any way. Therefore, it is my opinion that Paul knew exactly what he was doing. Paul was using sarcasm to highlight the hypocrisy of one who held a position of power in regard to spiritual matters, yet who abused that power to suppress the Truth. Of the possible interpretations previously listed, only the recognition that Paul was speaking in irony is the closest to acknowledging this. Paul's actions as an apostle of the Lord Jesus are consistent with the actions of Jesus Himself Who on many occasions referred to oppressors of Truth, freedom and grace as "hypocrites" (Matt 16:3; 23:13-15, 23, 25, 27, 29; Lu 12:56; 13:15), "serpents, brood of vipers" (Matt 23:33) and "blind guides" (Matt 23:16). He also pronounced "woes" upon the scribes and Pharisees (Matt 23:13ff). As with Paul, this very direct language came after He had suffered long with and demonstrated great patience with those who were spiritually blind. In Jesus and Paul's cases, those to whom they responded in such a fashion were those who were entrenched in cosmic power sphere #2 (the hatred complex) in which their arrogance and rejection of the Truth was Satanically energized, not just driven by the selfish interests of cosmic power sphere #1 (the arrogance complex).

Another interesting thing to note regarding Paul's statements is that he quotes from the Mosaic Law, specifically Exodus 22:28. This same principle embedded in the Law was also incorporated into Paul's teaching of church age body of Christ believers in Romans 13:1-7.

1 LET every person be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. 2 Therefore he who resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. 3 For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same; 4 for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings

wrath upon the one who practices evil. 5 Wherefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake. 6 For because of this you also pay taxes, for *rulers* are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing. 7 Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax *is due*; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor. (Rom 13:1-7)

I believe that Paul was simply accommodating his address to the frame of reference of his hearers when he quoted from the Mosaic Law. Paul was not sanctioning the Mosaic Law per se as the authority for life in the present age.

Once Paul realized that he was not going to get a fair trial, he stopped his attempts to construct his own self-defense and he seized the opportunity to turn his opposition upon each other so that he might be heard in a civil court. Obviously, Paul understood better than we ever will the primary issue that divided the two major components of the Sanhedrin, i.e. the Pharisees and the Sadducees. The Pharisees sided with Paul on the issue of the resurrection and admitted that Paul could have seen a vision (22:6-11, 17-21), whereas the Sadducees did not. The high priest, Ananias was a Sadducee. They weren't capable of objective thought due to their reversionistic spiritual status. They were only capable of emotional reaction to anything that was at variance with their belief system. When the hearing turned to a scene much like many TV news talk shows of today with everyone talking over each other at the same time, the Roman commander must have given up on this second attempt to sort out the issues with an orderly process of due diligence.

#### **The Lord Offers Personal Encouragement to Paul (23:11)**

On previous occasions, Paul was personally delivered from prison by an angel sent from the Lord (16:23-26 cf. 5:17-21; 12:1-11). That type of deliverance was not to be the case this time. Paul would endure two years of imprisonment and there is no doubt that the extreme opposition and rejection by his own countrymen who were acting in defense of previously revealed Truth (i.e. the Mosaic Law) and the long-held, albeit legalistic traditions surrounding its interpretation, would exact a heavy toll from Paul. Paul's peace and strength to endure the upcoming years of imprisonment depended upon this assurance from the Lord that he was on a God-sanctioned path and mission. God was using Paul to plow new theological ground. Paul needed to know that he was plowing in the right field.

#### **The Jews Plot to Kill Paul (23:12-22)**

The plan of Paul's assassins-to-be was to convince the Roman commander to deliver Paul to the Jewish authorities once again for questioning. As Paul was to be transported between the Fortress of Antonia and the meeting place of the Sanhedrin, the band of assassins had agreed to kill Paul no matter the cost. They realized that the Roman soldiers might even kill some of them in the process, but their religious zeal motivated by the arrogance of cosmic 2 thinking made the action of killing Paul justified in their minds.

The reference here to Paul's sister and nephew is the only reference in Scripture to Paul's earthly family. The fact that the Roman commander took the advice of Paul's nephew seriously reflects the wisdom and experience of this man with the religious fanaticism and methods of Ananias. Ananias' practices to retain power were obvious and the Roman commander has demonstrated a very rational and objective mind through his approach to dealing with this crisis.

### **Paul is Sent to Felix (23:23-35)**

The Roman commander spared no expense to insure that Paul was escorted from the city without causing a riot. The contingent consisted of approximately 470 men (200 infantry, 70 horsemen, and 200 spearmen). This was almost one-half of the Roman garrison in Jerusalem. Paul was treated with the respect due him as a citizen of Rome and Claudius Lysias certainly did not want to have to answer for the death of a citizen of Rome at the hands of a Jewish mob while under his protective custody. Felix was the governor of the Roman province of Syria which included Judea. Pontius Pilate had occupied this office from A.D. 26 to 36.

Antonius Felix governed Judea from A.D. 52 to 60. Felix had been a slave, but had gained the status of freedman under the Emperor Claudius. Because Felix's brother was a friend of the emperor, Felix's political career blossomed, even though he was not popular among his peers. Felix was known for indulging in every kind of lust, and the writer Tacitus described him as "exercising the powers of a king with the character of a slave."<sup>4</sup>

When a prisoner was transferred to a superior, the subordinate was required to submit a written explanation of the case. In his letter to Felix, the Roman commander, Claudius Lysias took a few liberties with the facts in order to present himself in the best possible light. He mentions the rescue of Paul in the temple grounds, but doesn't mention the fact that he almost flogged Paul. He wrote that he had rescued Paul because he was a Roman citizen; however, he didn't discover that fact until after he had taken Paul into custody. To his credit, Lysias did note that he did not believe Paul to be guilty of any crime, rather his case seemed to involve disputes over Jewish theology.

As the Roman contingent made their way to Caesarea, the entirety of the contingent accompanied Paul through Judea. Once they reached the town of Antipatris, about 37 miles from Jerusalem, the contingent reduced the size of the protective force commensurate with the reduced threat assessment. The 70 horsemen accompanied Paul the remainder of the way.

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<sup>4</sup> Earl D. Radmacher, gen editor, *The Nelson Study Bible* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1997), 1866.