

Acts 23

Acts 23.1-10

V1 – Who else in Acts had been called before the Sanhedrin? Peter and John (*Acts 4.9*)

-Paul's self-concept:

1. The least of the apostles, because he had persecuted the church (*1 Cor. 15.9* and *Phil. 3.4-6*)
2. The least of all the saints (*Eph. 3.8*)
3. The chief of sinners (*1 Tim. 1.15*)

-How could Paul call them his "brethren"? Because he had been a member of the Sanhedrin at one time (when he voted for the death of Stephen)

-What does this verse say about the reliability of the human conscience? It can be badly mistaken

V2 – Ananias – Josephus recorded that Ananias was the most corrupt high priest ever in Jewish history

-When the Romans destroyed Jerusalem in 70 A.D., the Jews killed Ananias first!

V3 – John 18.21-23 – Jesus was also struck in the mouth for being too bold with the high priest

-They must have been very arrogant rulers

-*Matt. 23.27* – Jesus called them white-washed tombs

-Actually it was illegal for Paul to be struck, because he was supposed to be innocent until proven guilty

V4-5 – Possible interpretations?

1. Paul might have been using satire
2. It might have been an irregular meeting; no formal clothes
3. Paul's "*thorn in the flesh*" might have been bad eyesight – maybe he couldn't see the High Priest

V6 – In what sense was Paul still a Pharisee? Because he believed in the resurrection of the dead (*1 Cor. 15.13-14*)

-It seems here if Paul gave up hope of changing the Sanhedrin, so he would create discord just to defeat them

-This is like the Trojan War – "Give an apple to the most beautiful woman" – That line caused terrible grief among the Trojans, because it sowed the seeds of jealousy

V7 – Real trouble was rising!

-What very serious division arose at this point? Pharisees vs. the Sadducees

V8 – Definitions of Pharisees and Sadducees

-For remembering the differences between them, the Sadducees were "sad, you see" because they did not believe in the resurrection or anything in the spirit world

-The Pharisees did believe in God and angels and eternal life

V9 – Which group took up Paul's side? The Pharisees

V10 – What did the Roman commander do? Took Paul away, so that he would not be killed

Acts 23.11-24

V 11 – Occasions where the Lord had spoken to Paul

1. *Acts 9.5* – On the road to Damascus
2. *Acts 18.9* – In Corinth
3. *Acts 22.17-18* – In the temple
4. This occasion

V 12 – A crazy oath – **Why?** They would get weaker all the time

-It's like children who say, "I'm going hold my breath until you give me that cookie"

V 13 – Paul was heavily guarded – the assassins were fanatics (more than 40 of them)

-Some think that these were the assassins of *Acts 21.38*

V 14 – Other terrible things in history have been done in the name of God:

1. The Crusades (especially the Children's Crusade)
2. The Inquisition
3. The Salem Witch Trials

V 15 – **What did the assassins plan to do?** Kill Paul as he was being brought to the elders and chief priests

V 16 – Very little is known about Paul's family, but here we learn a little bit about his background (he had a sister and a nephew)

V 17 – **What did Paul do?** Called on his civil rights for protection

-**What does this show about how we can use the government?** To our advantage (especially when the church is being persecuted)

V 18 – He led his nephew to the Roman commander

V 19 – This shows that the Roman government had respect for Paul

V 20-21 – The story is told to the Roman commander

V 23 – It was about 60 miles from Jerusalem to Caesarea

-This is not Caesarea Philippi (far north of the Sea of Galilee), but Caesarea "by the sea" (as it is sometimes called) on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea

-470 soldiers

-**What does this tell us?** The Romans took the threat against Paul very seriously

V 24 – **What was their ultimate plan?** To put Paul on horseback and deliver him safely to Felix the governor

V 25 – They wrote a letter to summarize the events concerning Paul

Acts 23.26-30

V 26 – Claudius Lysias – He named himself after Emperor Claudius and was famous for accepting cash for Roman citizenship

V 27 – **What obvious deception did he make?** "Only before the scourging did I find out that Paul was a Roman citizen"

-So back in the First Century there was already the attitude, "Keep you backside covered. Look out for Number 1," etc.

-Life hasn't changed much since then

V 28 – Claudius Lysias had made arrangements to have Paul examined by the Sanhedrin

V 29 – **What conclusion had Claudius Lysias supposedly reached?** The charges against Paul were all over obscure Jewish laws and that Paul had done nothing worthy of death

V 30 – Claudius Lysias had decided to send Paul to Felix

-Notice how the entire letter was slanted to make Claudius Lysias look good in the eyes of the governor

Acts 23.31-35

V 31 – The second stop on the Fourth Missionary Journey: Antipatris (Roman fort) about 35 miles from Jerusalem

V 32 – The horsemen (infantry) returned to Jerusalem

-**Why?** The threat was largely over at this point

-Felix – The Roman historian Tacitus said about him: *"He reveled in cruelty and lust, and wielded the power of a king, with the mind of a slave"*

-He was strictly an opportunist

-At this point in the First Century, Felix had seduced Drusilla, the sister of Agrippa II and wife of the king of Emesa and had married her

-She was Jewish, so Felix had some knowledge of the Jewish religion

V 33-35 – **What did Felix decide to do?** Hear both sides of the case concerning Paul, and then he had Paul put into the prison there at Caesarea, until the Jews would arrive to give their side of the story

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