

The Book of Acts
Chapter 23
The Confrontation becomes Personal

According to scholars this part of the drama of end of Paul's ministry occurred in 58 a.d.

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!"

This resembles the case when Jesus was tried before the Sanhedrin . Unlike Paul, Jesus was very sparse in his own self defense. With Paul we have a new element added, that of the Roman magistrates who are in attendance. They provide a buffer zone that allows Paul to take certain liberties to speak without constraint to the Jewish authorities.

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.' [a]" **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." *Now Paul invokes a long stand theological contention, that of resurrection which he knows will surely bring an added division between the squabbling factions.*

7 When he said this, a dispute broke out between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. **8** *(The Sadducee's doctrine teaches that there is no resurrection, nor do they believe in a spiritual realm with angels or 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." *This is one of those rare, intimate visits from the Lord, not in a dream at this time, but in a very real manifestation such as I believe was the way he appeared to Paul in Arabia for those three years of intimacy and discipleship that he spoke about. (Galatians 1:17) At times of unusual consequence in the calling of certain saints Jesus has appeared in the natural to give strength and encouragement.*

The Plot to Kill Paul

12 The next morning some 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.” *The level of desperation among certain of the Jewish factions becomes so craven as to perform an assassination through ambush reminiscent of the assassination of Julius Caesar.*

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

The information given in verse 16 reveals a sister to Paul and Paul's unnamed nephew who takes on the important role here as the informer. We do not know anything more about this family connection. He may have been converted after Paul's testimony or not. Was there another mention of her through any scriptural account? Evidently not.

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: “Some 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.” *More of the drama is transpiring. The entire story of the Acts is one after another of dramatic events, heroic characters, encounters and relationships. No movie has yet done it justice.*

Paul Transferred to Caesarea

23 Then he called two of his centurions (*centurians have command over a hundred soldiers*) and ordered them, “Get ready a detachment of two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen [b] 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 (Paul) 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.*

(It is interesting to note the accuracy of the letter which was sent to Felix. Luke the author of Acts appears to have had access to it.)

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. *This journey made by the Romans guarding Paul is 53 miles, 85 kilometers to Caesaria from Jerusalem, Antipatris, built by Herod the great and named after his father, Antipas, is just beyond Joppa.*

For Chronology of the events described in Acts go to this link.

http://www.christianbiblereference.org/st_acts_intro.htm