

Paul Arrested, Jailed and Encouraged

Acts 21:37–23:11

Paul was warned that if he went to Jerusalem, he would be bound and mistreated. When he went to Jerusalem, he visited with the Hebrew church. He most likely presented the offering he had been collecting from the Grace churches (Romans 15:25–26; 1 Corinthians 16:1–4; 2 Corinthians 8:1–7), and used some of the offering to pay for the vow of the four men (1 Corinthians 21:26). Paul had no authority over the church in Jerusalem because they were members of the Little Flock who were being taken care of by Peter, James, and John. Likewise, they had no authority over the members of the Body of Christ (Galatians 2:7–9).

Paul had been there less than seven days when the unbelieving Jews rose up against him and stirred up all the people saying that Paul was preaching against the nation of Israel and against the Mosaic Law. When the captain of the guard heard that a man's life was in danger, he dispatched his soldiers to capture Paul and bring him in for questioning.

Paul speaks to the crowd (Acts 22)

Although beaten and chained, Paul asked permission to speak to the people. The chief captain was surprised to hear Paul speak in Greek because he thought Paul was an Egyptian terrorist. Paul told them that he was a Jew from Tarsus, which was once the Roman capital of the region of Cilicia. It also happened to be the city where Queen Cleopatra and Mark Antony first met. Hearing that Paul came from a Roman city and that was a Jew, he allowed Paul to speak to the people.

Paul stood on the stairs and motioned for the people to listen. The rowdy crowd quieted down, allowing Paul to speak in the Hebrew tongue, first giving them some personal history. He was born in Tarsus and trained under the well-known teacher, Gamaliel, and had learned every aspect of the Law. He became a zealous Pharisee who persecuted the Little Flock of believers to the point of death and also brought many more to prison.

He then told them of his meeting with the Lord Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus. Paul related how the voice asked him why he was persecuting Him. Paul was led into the city where he eventually met with Ananias, a man who followed the Law and had a good report among the Jews. After Ananias restored his sight, he gave Paul the message that he was chosen by God to be a testimony to all men. He then was water baptized.

Paul continued his account saying that he later came to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple when the Lord came to him and told him to get out of that city because they will not receive his testimony concerning the Lord. Paul finished by saying that the Lord told him he was to be sent far from Jerusalem unto the Gentiles.

That triggered them to once more become an angry riotous crowd. The chief captain hastily brought him into the stockade and decided to examine him by whipping. They bound Paul and were ready to whip him when Paul asked them if it was permissible to whip a Roman citizen who had not been tried. This alarmed the captain who immediately had him released. If Paul made an issue of this, the captain could have gotten into much trouble.

The next day, Paul was released and the captain ordered the chief priests and the full Sanhedrin to convene to find out the truth behind the people's uprising. Paul was brought before them to testify.

Paul speaks to the Sanhedrin (Acts 23:1–10)

The Sanhedrin consisted of up to 71 leaders of Israel who acted as the final authority of Hebrew law. They lost their authority once the temple was destroyed in AD 70. They were like our Supreme Court. Paul was brought before the Sanhedrin by the Roman captain to determine the truth about Paul.

The High Priest was well aware of Paul and his claims, probably having heard him give his defense before the crowd a day or so earlier. At that time, Paul told them of his meeting with the Lord Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus and his claim that God would send him far away to the Gentiles. Now Paul stands before the Sanhedrin saying that he had done nothing before God that goes against his conscience. The reaction was one of utter contempt for Paul, and the High Priest was driven to have those standing beside Paul strike him on the mouth. They were disgusted over Paul's claimed that God wanted a Jew to have anything to do with uncircumcised Gentiles.

There is an interesting parallel between the events surrounding Jesus' arrest and Paul's. Both were hated by the Jews who were shouting, "Away with him" (John 19:15; Acts 21:36; 22:22). Both were held by the Roman government, and both were struck on the mouth (John 18:22; Acts 23:2). Also, Jesus called the leaders of Israel whitewashed tombs (Matthew 23:27), the same thing Paul calls them in Acts 23:3. The nation of Israel was still rejecting prophets and apostles sent from God.

An accused person being struck before properly hearing a case was in violation of the Mosaic Law (Leviticus 19:15; John 7:51). Upon being struck, Paul calls the High Priest a whitewashed wall for violating the very Law he claimed he upheld. A whitewashed wall was made to look nice on the outside, but was corrupt in the inside. Once Paul was made aware that he spoke these words against the High Priest, he backed off and quoted a passage from the Law which says that a person was not to speak evil of God nor against a ruler of the people (Exodus 22:28). All through this examination, Paul demonstrated that he was very well familiar with the Mosaic Law.

Seeing that there were both Pharisees and Sadducees within the group, Paul cried out that he was a Pharisee. The Pharisees were the conservative theologians while the Sadducees held a liberal interpretation of the Law. The Pharisees believed in the resurrection of the dead, but the Sadducees did not. Paul took advantage of this situation by emphasizing that he was a Pharisee, and that he was on trial for the hope of the resurrection of the dead. Suddenly, instead of Paul being the main focus, the Pharisees and Sadducees began to argue among themselves. The Pharisees began to defend Paul saying that perhaps an angel or spirit had spoken to Paul. The Sadducees rejected this idea since they did not believe in angels or spirits. The dispute became so heated that the commander of the soldiers ordered his troops to take Paul away to the barracks in order to protect him.

The Lord's encouragement (verse 23:11)

The previous days were taxing for Paul. Although he knew that there would be trials and persecution in Jerusalem, to actually go through it probably brought Paul to the edge of his endurance. When we are struggling with problems we can turn to Scripture to strengthen and encourage us. We can also be encouraged by the prayers of the saints. The Lord also sends personal help in the form of another believer (Acts 14:22; 15:31; Romans 1:12; 15:4–5; 2 Corinthians 4:4–7; Colossians 4:8, 11; Ephesians 6:21–22; 1 Thessalonians 3:2). When Paul was completely alone in the jail cell, Jesus Christ came to him personally to encourage him and give him the strength to continue in the ministry. We shouldn't expect Jesus Christ to personally visit us, but he is involved in our lives through other believers, who together are the Body of Christ and manifest Christ in the flesh (2 Corinthians 4:10–11).

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