

### Conspiracy Against Paul

Acts 23:12–24:21

#### **In Jerusalem** (21:27–23:11)

Within seven days of Paul's arrival at Jerusalem and visit with the Hebrew church, the unbelieving Jews stirred up the crowds against Paul by accusing him of bringing a Gentile into the forbidden temple area. The crowd became so rowdy that Paul's life was in danger. As they were beating by the temple, it became necessary for the Roman government to get involved. The chief captain of the centurions took Paul captive and desired to find out why the Jews were so outraged against him.

Paul was allowed to speak to the crowds, who listened intently when they heard him speak in the Hebrew dialect. He had their attention until he told them about his experience on the road to Damascus and how Jesus Christ told him that he would be sent to minister to the Gentiles. That triggered them once again, and the chief captain ordered for Paul to be brought into the barracks.

The chief captain ordered Paul to be examined by scourging, but when the centurion was stretching him out to be whipped, Paul asked if it were legal for a Roman who was not found guilty of any crime to be whipped. This mistake could bring serious retribution upon the chief captain for breaching Roman law.

The following morning, the chief captain brought Paul before the Sanhedrin to allow them to question Paul. Paul pitted the Sadducees against the Pharisees by shouting out that he had the hope of the resurrection, something the Sadducees do not believe in. They began to argue among themselves and divided between theological ideologies in determining whether or not Paul was guilty. The disagreement became so heated that the captain once again found it necessary to pull Paul away to the safety of the barracks. While Paul was locked up that night, the Lord Jesus Christ came to him personally to encourage him saying that he was going to be a witness in Rome.

#### **Conspiracy** (Acts 23:12–35)

The unbelieving Jews were so incensed that 40 of them banded together and made an oath to neither eat nor drink until Paul was killed. They were going to ask the chief captain to bring Paul out for questioning, and then attack him. However, Paul's nephew, his sister's son, heard about the plot against Paul and was able to warn Paul. Paul then told those in charge of him to bring the boy to the chief captain so he would know what the Jews were plotting.

Although we do not know much about Paul's family, we do know that there were a number of them who were saved. Romans 16 lists several in Paul's family, including Andronicus and Junia who were in prison (Romans 16:7), and Lucius, Jason, and Sospater (Romans 16:21). The apostle Paul was born in the city of Tarsus as Saul, to a father who was a Pharisee (Acts 23:6). He was from the tribe of Benjamin (Philippians 3:5). Beyond what Scripture teaches, nothing else known about his family.

Now that the chief captain heard about the plot, he assembled 200 soldiers, 70 horsemen, and 200 spearmen during the third hour of the night (probably around 9 p.m.) to safely transport Paul to Felix, governor of Caesarea. The chief captain wrote a letter to Felix explaining that he had rescued Paul, a Roman citizen, from the hands of the Jews, and that they were now secretly plotting to kill him. He was sending Paul to him so that he could hear the case against Paul by his accusers.

They traveled to Antipatris that evening, about 45 miles outside of Jerusalem. They stayed the night, and the next day the soldiers went back to Jerusalem while the horsemen brought Paul 30 miles to Caesarea and put him in Felix's care. Felix agreed to hear the case against Paul when he found out Paul was from the important Roman province of Cilicia.

### **Hearing before Felix (24:1–21)**

Five days after Paul arrived in Caesarea, the high priest Ananias arrived with some elders, along with Tertullus, their attorney, to plead their case against Paul to Felix. Tertullus began his opening statement by praising Felix for bringing peace to the whole area, and for the many worthy deeds done on behalf of Israel. He then continued by showing how Paul had disrupted the peace of the whole world as the ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes (those who followed Jesus Christ). He also desecrated the temple. They would have judged Paul by their own law, except that the chief captain, Lysias, forcibly and with great violence, took Paul out of their hands.

Paul defended himself by saying that it was no more than 12 days ago when he went into Jerusalem to worship. During that time, he never stirred up the people by arguing with them about Jesus Christ. Paul also said that there was no evidence of him bringing a Gentile into the temple. He continued by stating that in accordance with what "the Way" believes, he serves the God of the fathers of Israel without violating anything written in the Law and the Prophets. In fact, he believes as they do, that he holds dear the resurrection of the dead, of both the righteous and the wicked. The Jews who had seen Paul in the temple did not say anything against Paul, but the Jews from Asia were the ones who were lashing out against him.

As a Pharisee, Paul believed in the literal interpretation of Scripture and therefore believed that there would be life after death. The Sadducees were the elitists who did not have a literal view of Scripture. However, the Sadducees rejected the authority of the oral tradition (later written down and known as the Talmud) while the Pharisees accepted both the Scripture and the oral tradition, which is why Jesus accused them of ignoring God's commandment and following men's traditions (Mark 7:8; Matthew 15:1–9; Mark 7:1–3). The Pharisees more represented the common people and interpreted Scripture with more flexibility instead of with the rigidity of the Sadducees. Sadducees emphasized that there was no life after death and therefore there would be no punishment or reward in eternity.

Paul uses Scripture literally and therefore believed in the resurrection of the dead. The statement that he believes in the resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked comes from the book of Daniel (Daniel 12:2). This is the first mention in Scripture that the wicked will be resurrected.

The resurrection of the righteous is supported in a number of Scripture passages, including Luke 14:14; John 5:28–29 and Hebrews 11:35. The event called the first resurrection is mentioned in Revelation 20:4–5. This will happen at the beginning of the Millennial Kingdom, and will include all of the righteous who are not a part of the Body of Christ. They will be brought back to life to live in the earthly Kingdom as they were promised (Job 19:25–26; Luke 22:30). The second resurrection will be all the wicked who have died (Revelation 20:6). They will be judged and then thrown into the Lake of Fire (Revelation 20:15). The resurrection of the Church, the Body of Christ, is not part of either of these resurrections because it was a mystery that had not yet been revealed. This mystery resurrection will happen at the end of this Dispensation of Grace, and will include believers who have died and those who are yet living beginning with the salvation of the apostle Paul (1 Corinthians 15:45–57; 1 Thessalonians 4:13–17).

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