

THE BOOK OF ACTS

ACTS 23:1-11 | LESSON SUMMARY

Violence

ACTS 23:1, "And looking intently at the council, Paul said, 'Brothers, I have lived my life before God in all good conscience up to this day.'" (ESV)

- Paul now has an audience—not with an angry mob—but with the council of elders
 - "Brothers" assumes equal level of authority
 - "Good conscience" offends because of the charges he is facing
 - Paul is not wrong in either assertion, but the High Priest, Ananias, takes issue

ACTS 23:2, "And the high priest Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth." (ESV)

- Ananias was known for his cruelty and violence, as well as his greed.
 - Historian Josephus records that he stole tithe money that belonged to common priests
- Paul outraged by command
 - "God will strike you"
 - "whitewashed walls" similar to Jesus' accusations of hypocrisy; "whitewashed tombs" (Matthew 23:27)
 - History records that Ananias was assassinated by his own people



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- The order was illegal; striking a prisoner before he is found guilty was forbidden in Deuteronomy 25:1-2
 - Regardless, Paul apologizes for his insult, "And Paul said, "I did not know, brothers, that he was the high priest, for it is written, 'You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.'" (Acts 23:3)
 - Referencing Exodus 22:28

ACTS 23:6, "Now when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, 'Brothers, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees. It is with respect to the hope and the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial.'" (ESV)

- Paul knows his audience
 - The Sadducees do not believe in the resurrection, an afterlife or angels or spirits
- This immediately calls into question Paul's authority and where it comes from, "Then a great clamor arose, and some of the scribes of the Pharisees' party stood up and contended sharply, 'We find nothing wrong in this man. What if a spirit or an angel spoke to him?'"
- The dispute turns violent and the commander decides to remove Paul



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ACTS 23:11, "The following night the Lord stood by him and said, 'Take courage, for as you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem, so you must testify also in Rome.'" (ESV)

- In other words, "well done!"
- For Paul, it might not have seemed like a victory until this word from God
 - Paul later writes that he regrets his approach, but God remains present with him in it all

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES: Kelly Leslie, *Philosophers, Jews and Christians in the Roman Empire: authority, text and tradition*, F.F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, R. Kent Hughes, *The Church Afire*

