

# PAUL'S DEFENSE TO THE SANHEDRIN

Acts 22:30 - 23:11

## STRUCTURE

**Key-persons:** Paul and members of the Sanhedrin Council

**Key-location:** Sanhedrin Council in Jerusalem

### Key-repetitions:

- Conflict: Paul versus the high priest Ananias (Ac 22:2-3); Pharisees versus the Sadducees (Ac 22:6-10); conspiracy to kill Paul versus Roman commander's duty to protect his prisoner (Ac 22:12-23).
- Jews' hatred for Paul: Chief priest ordered men to strike Paul (Ac 22:2); Roman commander was afraid the Sanhedrin Council would tear Paul to pieces (Ac 22:10); forty Jewish men formed a conspiracy to kill Paul (Ac 22:13).

### Key-attitudes:

- Jews' hatred for Paul.
- Conflict.
- Paul's calmness under pressure.
- Sadducees and Pharisees' polarization.
- Roman commander's commitment to duty.

### Initial-situation:

Paul traveled to Jerusalem at the end of his third missionary journey. Jews from Asia saw Paul at the temple and falsely accused him of bringing non-Jews into the temple courtyard. A mob seized Paul and began to beat him. The Roman commander and his officers arrested Paul, and the crowd kept shouting, "Kill him!"

Paul received permission from the commander to speak to the crowd. When Paul said that God sent him to non-Jews, the crowd shouted, "Kill him! He's not fit to live!"

The commander ordered Paul to be whipped. Paul identified himself to the soldiers as being a Roman citizen. Then the commander was alarmed when he realized that he had put Paul, a Roman citizen, in chains.

### Initial-problem:

The commander ordered the chief priests and all the Sanhedrin Council to assemble and explain why Paul was being accused.

### Final-situation:

The commander discovered that more than forty Jews had conspired to kill Paul. Therefore, he sent Paul to Governor Felix in Caesarea.

## BIBLE STORY

### **Paul before the Jewish Sanhedrin Council**

The day after Paul was arrested, the Roman commander ordered the chief priests and the Sanhedrin Jewish Council to assemble and explain why Paul was being accused. The commander put Paul in front of them (Ac 22:30).

Paul told the Sanhedrin Council, "My brothers, I've fulfilled my duty to God in all good conscience to this day." The high priest Ananias ordered those standing near Paul to strike him on the mouth. Paul told him, "God will strike you, you hypocrite! You sit to judge me according to the Law of Moses; however, you yourself tell them to hit me, and that violates the Law!"

Those standing near Paul said, "You dare to insult God's high priest?"

Paul replied, "Brothers, I didn't realize that he was the high priest. It is written, 'Do not speak evil about the leader of your people'" (Ac 23:1-5).

Paul knew that some were Sadducees and others were Pharisees. Paul called out, "Brothers, I'm a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee. I'm on trial because I believe dead people will come back to life." An argument broke out between the Pharisees and the Sadducees; the assembly was divided. Sadducees said that the dead would not come back to life and that angels and spirits did not exist. However, the Pharisees believed in all these things.

The shouting became loud. Some Pharisees argued, "We find nothing wrong with this man. Maybe a spirit or an angel spoke to him!" The dispute became violent. The commander was afraid they would tear Paul to pieces. The commander ordered the soldiers to take Paul away by force and bring him into the barracks (Ac 23:6-10).

The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, "Take courage! You spoke about me in Jerusalem. You must speak about me in Rome" (Ac 23:11).

### **Plot to Kill Paul**

The next morning, more than forty Jewish men formed a conspiracy and swore an oath to neither eat nor drink until they killed Paul. They requested of the chief priests, "Petition the commander to bring Paul out to you on the pretext that you want to ask him more questions. We'll kill him before he gets here."

Paul's nephew heard of this plot and informed the Roman commander (Ac 23:12-22).

The Roman commander ordered a detachment of soldiers to take Paul to Governor Felix in Caesarea. The commander wrote a letter to Governor Felix stating, "This man was seized by the Jews and they planned to kill him. He's a Roman citizen, and I rescued him. I brought him to their Sanhedrin Council. Their accusation had to do with questions about their law, but no charge deserved death or imprisonment. When I was informed of a plot to kill Paul, I sent him to you at once. I also told his accusers to present to you their case against him."

The cavalry arrived in Caesarea, delivered the letter to the governor, and handed Paul over to the governor. The governor ordered for Paul to be kept under guard in King Herod's palace (Ac 23:23-35).

### GENERIC DIALOGUE QUESTIONS

1. What catches your attention in the story?
2. Is there anything in the story that is hard to understand?
3. Who are the main characters in the story?
4. What problems did the characters face?
5. How did the characters face their problems?
6. How have you faced similar problems?
7. Is there someone in the story who is similar to you or who is different from you?
8. What does the story tell about God?

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why could Paul not expect a fair hearing from the Sanhedrin, the Jewish Supreme Council?
2. Why did Paul accuse the high priest of violating the Mosaic Law?
3. What different viewpoints did the Pharisees and Sadducees have about the resurrection?
4. How did Paul take advantage of the polarized positions of the Pharisees and Sadducees?
5. How did God encourage Paul, the prisoner?
6. How has God encouraged you during a crisis?
7. What might be your "Rome," your next opportunity to serve God?
8. Why did the Jews have a fierce determination to kill Paul?
9. How did Paul's nephew help him?
10. What are some ways people take risks by standing up for someone that others hate?

### LIFE-LESSONS

1. **Opposition to the gospel does not prevent the proclamation of the gospel.** The person who is sensitive to the Holy Spirit's leading will see increased opportunities to share his faith in the face of opposition. Those who tried to kill Paul created a platform for him to proclaim the gospel to the entire Sanhedrin, the Jewish Supreme Council (Ac 22:30).
2. **Religious leaders who are intent on protecting their position and privileges will struggle against God.** Five times the Jewish Sanhedrin dealt with a case that was related to Jesus or his followers. Each time the Sanhedrin positioned itself against God:
  - 1<sup>st</sup> Jesus Christ (Jn 18:19-24).
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter and John (Ac 4:5-21).
  - 3<sup>rd</sup> The twelve apostles (Ac 5:17-40).

- 4<sup>th</sup> Steven (Ac 6:12 - 8:1).  
5<sup>th</sup> Paul (Ac 23:1-10).

3. **Spiritual leaders who have their own agenda, will disobey the Bible they claim to defend.** Ananias, the high priest, was the spiritual leader of the Jews. When he didn't agree with Paul, he ordered that Paul be struck in the mouth. That was against the Law of God (Ac 23:1-3). Politics and position became more important to the Jewish spiritual leaders than God. After the Pharisee and Sadducee's controversy, the religious leaders were ready to help murder Paul, just as they had done with Jesus (Ac 23:14-15).
4. **The Holy Spirit gives persecuted Christians insight on what to say.** Paul had sudden insight that the council was a mixture of Sadducees and Pharisees (Ac 23:6-8). Therefore, Paul brought up the question about life after death in order to protect himself. (This is an example of the insight that Jesus promised his believers in Mark 13:9-11.)
5. **Problems can become new opportunities.** The Lord stood near the prisoner Paul and said, "Take courage! You spoke about me in Jerusalem. You must speak about me in Rome" (Ac 23:11). Paul being jailed in Jerusalem would eventually open the door for him to proclaim the gospel in Rome.
6. **Unnamed heroes can have a great impact.** Paul's nephew is unnamed; however, he saved Paul's life by telling the officials of a murder plot against Paul (Ac 23:16-24).

## LEARNING ACTIVITIES

### Interactive Sharing:

- The leader invites listeners to share an experience where polarized religious leaders hated those who disagreed with them.
- The Lord told the prisoner Paul, "You spoke about me in Jerusalem. You must speak about me in Rome" (Ac 23:11). The leader invites listeners to share one of their "Rome" opportunities similar to Paul. Share how an undesirable situation for them became an open door to new opportunities.