

ACTS CH 23 – A PLOT TO KILL PAUL

23:1-10 – Paul before the council

- The Sanhedrin was the highest Jewish court in the land, made up of both Sadducees and Pharisees.
- “A whitewashed wall was one whose weakness or ugliness might be concealed – but not changed – by a veneer of whitewash.” Jesus famously called the Pharisees and scribes this in Matthew 23:27.
- Ananias was a known for being corrupt and for his temper. It is possible Paul had never seen Ananias and was not aware he was the high priest. It is also possible that Paul was a hint of sarcasm in his apology: He did not recognize Ananias because Ananias was not acting the way the high priest was supposed to act. Either way, Paul shows great restraint and respect by giving an apology for his own outburst in the face of this wrongful trial.
- “Pharisees and Sadducees were notorious for their disagreements, especially over the doctrine of the resurrection.”
- “From the Pharisaic standpoint, if Paul were being condemned for being consistent with his doctrine of the resurrection, then it is natural that the Sadducees want him convicted.”

23:11-35 – A plot to kill Paul

V11 – A promise from God, “take courage, you shall not die. I have a plan and purpose for you.”

V12-15 – A plot. Over forty men pledge not to eat or drink until Paul dies by their hands. The chief priests and elders are in on scheme.

- One commentator makes an important clarification, “If Paul’s enemies eventually broke their oaths to kill him, Jewish law would simply require them to bring atonement (sin) offerings to the temple; thus their oath here does not mean they would literally starve.”

V16-31– A series of unlikely events:

3. A child overhears it all. Not just any child who wouldn’t care, but Paul’s own nephew.

2. The child tells Paul, who calls a centurion over to take the child to tribune, a man of great authority – and the centurion listens.
3. The boy is taken to the tribune, who accepts an audience with the boy.
4. The tribune listens to the report from the boy and actually believes him.
5. The tribune then put together a small army of 470 men – two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen, and two hundred horsemen – to protect Paul as they transfer him to a safe location.

John Piper, *When You Are Immortal*

We have a purpose set forth by God

- Ephesians 2:10; Romans 8:31, 35, 38-39
- Our primary purpose this side of eternity is to know God and make God known.
- 1 Thessalonians 4:3
- Romans 8:28-29a
- John Piper, *Holy Ambition*, “We are made in the likeness of God to exhibit his presence on earth”
- Fulfill your ministry - 2 Timothy 4:1-9

Two more lessons we can learn from this incident with Paul:

First, compared to eternity our life is short:

- Psalm 89:47-48
- Paul knew this, so in speaking to the Ephesian Elders in Acts 20:26-27 he states, “I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.”

Second, it’s prideful and even evil to assume your own plans over God’s:

- James 4:13-16; Luke 12:13-21

Imitate Paul’s understanding of our future glory. Philippians 3:8-16. Paul’s heart and mind was set on proclaiming Christ in word and deed – forsaking all for the surpassing worth of knowing Christ, setting his sight on the prize and goal of eternal fellowship with God. Today, and onward, you have the same choice to make.