

Paul's next opportunity to defend himself comes in a more official setting when the chief captain of the Roman garrison places him in front of the Sanhedrin council to hear their accusations against him. However, it quickly becomes apparent that a fair hearing is not possible and the meeting quickly degrades into chaos with the chief captain having Paul removed from the council for his safety.

Verses 1-5: The chief captain of the Roman garrison deployed in Jerusalem has discovered that Paul is a Roman citizen and has become afraid because he almost deprived Paul of his rights as a Roman citizen to a trial before being condemned and punished. Motivated to respect Paul's legal rights, he calls for a meeting of the Sanhedrin and brings Paul before it in order to determine the nature of the accusations that have been made by the Jews (Acts 22:29-30). Paul begins to address the council but is interrupted when Ananias the high priest orders that he be struck on the mouth (v. 1-2). Paul criticizes the high priest for this act but once he is informed of the man's office he apologizes, quoting the scripture that forbade speaking evil of one's rulers (vs. 3-5).

6 But when Paul perceived that the one part were Sadducees, and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, *Men and brethren*, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question.

“But when Paul perceived that the one part were Sadducees, and the other Pharisees” – The illegal behavior of the high priest demonstrated to Paul that he was not going to get a fair hearing in front of this council, so he decided to take advantage of the fact that the council was composed of men from opposing religious sects. The Sadducees and the Pharisees were intensely opposed to the beliefs of one another.

“he cried out in the council, Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee” – Apparently Paul decided that pitting the two groups against themselves was better than having them both united against him. Paul appeals to his religious heritage as a Pharisee, knowing that this would cause the Pharisees to side with him against the Sadducees.

“of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question” – Paul preached the gospel of salvation through the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This salvation gives believers the hope of personal resurrection and eternal life. Paul knew that this issue would split the council since the belief in resurrection was a point of contention between the Pharisees and Sadducees. Perhaps he also hoped to gain the support of the Pharisees which were on the council.

7 And when he had so said, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees: and the multitude was divided. 8 For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both.

“And when he had so said, there arose a dissension [disagreement; dispute] between the Pharisees and the Sadducees: and the multitude was divided” – As Paul hoped, his statement caused the council to no longer be united against him but to start to fight among themselves.

“For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both” – The Sadducees were the “liberals” of their day because they did not believe in anything supernatural, including resurrection. Therefore they did not believe in spiritual beings, such as angels or the spirits of people who have died (whom God will later resurrect). However, the Pharisees did believe in these things, putting them at odds with the Sadducees on the council.

9 And there arose a great cry: and the scribes *that were* of the Pharisees' part arose, and strove, saying, We find no evil in this man: but if a spirit or an angel hath spoken to him, let us not fight against God.

“And there arose a great cry [outcry; clamor]: and the scribes that were of the Pharisees' part arose, and strove [fight; contend fiercely]” – Paul's statement had made the matter a religious question, and it provoked a fierce religious argument between the two factions.

“saying, We find no evil in this man” – The question of resurrection was such a point of disagreement with the Sadducees that the Pharisees were willing to defend Paul despite their hatred of him and the Jesus that he preached.

“but if a spirit or an angel hath spoken to him, let us not fight against God” – The Sadducees would not entertain the idea that Paul's gospel might have come from a supernatural source and dismissed it out of hand. However, in defense of their own beliefs in spirits and angels, the Pharisees argue that if Paul had indeed heard from a spirit or an angel (possibly a reference to Paul's testimony of what happened to him on the road to Damascus [Acts 22:6-10]) then his testimony should not be dismissed out of hand lest they should find themselves fighting against God Himself.

10 And when there arose a great dissension, the chief captain, fearing lest Paul should have been pulled in pieces of them, commanded the soldiers to go down, and to take him by force from among them, and to bring *him* into the castle.

“And when there arose a great dissension” – The meeting apparently degraded into a shouting match with the two sides about to come to blows with Paul in the middle.

“the chief captain, fearing lest Paul should have been pulled in pieces of them” – The chief captain, who was accountable to Caesar for maintaining law and order in Jerusalem, had been staying out of the way and observing the proceedings. Now that the meeting was on the verge of becoming violent with Paul being the focal point of the disagreement, the chief captain was becoming concerned for Paul's safety.

“commanded the soldiers to go down, and to take him by force from among them, and to bring him into the castle” – The chief captain sent his soldiers to forcibly remove Paul from the midst of the council members before he could be injured. The soldiers did so and brought Paul back to the castle (headquarters) where they could protect him. This chief captain is to be commended for being neutral in his handling of this situation, although this could be in part due to his fear that he could be accused of violating Paul's rights as a Roman citizen.

11 And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.

“And the night following” – The Greek literally says “the next night.” This likely refers to that evening after Paul had appeared before the council.

“the Lord stood [to be present] by him” – The Lord did not leave Paul to face these things alone. The Greek indicates that Jesus appeared in the room with Paul to encourage him, either physically or in a vision.

“and said, Be of good cheer, Paul” – Paul may have been discouraged because his two earlier attempts to defend himself had both ended in chaos (Acts 22:22-23, 23:10). He may have decided that he was going to die in Jerusalem very soon, but the Lord appeared to tell Paul that this was not the end because He had a purpose for Paul.

“for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome” – Despite the threats to his life, Paul had not refrained from obeying Jesus’ command to be a witness while he has been in Jerusalem (Acts 1:8). The Lord wanted Paul to do the same in Rome, a city where Paul had been wanting to go to preach the gospel for a while (Acts 19:21, Rom. 1:9-15).

12 And when it was day, certain of the Jews banded together, and bound themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. 13 And they were more than forty which had made this conspiracy.

“And when it was day” – Presumably the order of events was: 1) Paul’s appearance before the Sanhedrin council (vs. 1-10); 2) Jesus appearing to Paul that night to encourage him (v. 11); 3) the next morning certain Jews meet and conspire to kill Paul (v. 12).

“certain of the Jews banded together [twisting together; Fig. to form a coalition or conspiracy]” – These Jews are specifically identified, but commentators suggest that they were likely Sadducees since they were in the most disagreement with Paul (vs. 6-8). They meet together with a common goal in mind: to kill Paul.

“and bound themselves under a curse [anathematizō], saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul” – The Greek literally says they “anathematized” themselves. They swore an oath that voluntarily placed themselves under a curse if they did not fulfill their oath by killing Paul. They said that they would not eat or drink until Paul was dead, begging the question of how faithful they were to this oath since Paul did not die until many years later.

“And they were more than forty which had made this conspiracy” – Their hatred of Jesus Christ and Paul for preaching Him caused over 40 men to be willing to take this oath. Perhaps they believed they were doing God and their countrymen a service by getting rid of this man that they believed was misleading other Jews (**John 16:2** [Jesus warning his disciples of the persecution they will have to suffer] “*They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service*”). At one time Paul was one of those who killed with the belief that he was doing God service and now he had become the target of such people.

14 And they came to the chief priests and elders, and said, We have bound ourselves under a great curse, that we will eat nothing until we have slain Paul. 15 Now therefore ye with the council signify to the chief captain that he bring him down unto you to morrow, as though ye would enquire something more perfectly concerning him: and we, or ever he come near, are ready to kill him.

These men who had sworn to kill Paul now bring the chief priests and elders into the conspiracy, enlisting their help and making them accomplices. They ask that the chief priests and elders request that the chief captain of the Roman guard bring Paul back to the council under the guise of interviewing Paul concerning the accusations against him. This would give those who had sworn the oath the opportunity to kill Paul as he was being moved from the castle to the council chamber. With over 40 men ready to kill Paul, they could have distributed themselves all along the route and had many opportunities to kill Paul.

16 And when Paul’s sister’s son heard of their lying in wait, he went and entered into the castle, and told Paul.

Commentators suggest that Paul’s nephew may have been in Jerusalem being educated much like Paul (Acts 22:3). If so, he may have had opportunity to overhear discussions of the plot to kill Paul. When he heard that his uncle’s life was in danger, he went to Paul to warn him. God sovereignly worked things out to protect Paul’s life so that he could go to Rome.

Verses 17-35: Paul asks a centurion to take Paul’s nephew to the chief captain so that he could tell him what he knew about the conspiracy to kill Paul. The chief captain decides the best course of action is to get Paul out of Jerusalem in order to save his life as well as to avoid a confrontation with the Jews. He assembles 200 soldiers, 70 horsemen, and 200 spearmen (470 men in total) to escort Paul under the cover of night to Felix the governor in Caesarea. These men take with them a letter to Felix explaining the situation and that the chief captain (Claudius Lysias – v. 26) was turning Paul’s case over to the governor. He would send the accusers so that they could make their case against Paul in front of Felix. Once he read the letter, Felix ordered Paul to be kept in custody at Herod’s judgment hall until his accusers arrived.