

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

Acts 23:1-11 | Session 64 | Paul's Defense Before the Sanhedrin | A.D. 60

Paul is in Jerusalem, under arrest because of false accusations by the believing Jews. In our passage today he will make his defense in front of the Sanhedrin, made up of 70 Jewish leaders of the Sadducees and Pharisees.

Verse 1—

If you want to model your Christian life after someone bold, look no further than the apostle Paul. **Earnestly**, Greek: *atenizo*, means steadfast attention. He looked them in the eyes. **Men**, similar to our *gentlemen*. **In all good conscience before God**. From the start, Paul believes he has acted and lived blamelessly. Even before his conversion on the Damascus Road, he acted with zeal (Philippians 3:4-6), and had a good conscience before God (1 Timothy 1:13; Luke 23:34).

Verses 2,3—

Ananias, a Sadducee, was known for his wickedness and exploiting the use of violence. According to the historian Josephus, Ananias was a hoarder of money in order to use it for bribing allies. He exploited his wealth to get his way both with Roman officials and with his own people (Antiquities 20.205,213). Not surprising, there was a lot of corruption and abuse of power among the aristocratic priests in Jerusalem. It shouldn't surprise us that the nature of people is the same today. Abraham Lincoln said, "*Human nature will not change. In any future national trial, compared to the men of this (the Civil War), we shall have as weak, and as strong, as silly and as wise, as bad and as good.*" As a point of interest that may have some bearing in a moment, Ananias was of the Sadducees sect. **Smite him on the mouth**. Paul seems to recognize this was against the law. We often hear the phrase, "What would Jesus do?" Notice Paul does not turn the other cheek, rather he rebuked the one who commanded he be stuck. **Whited wall** refers to a sepulcher, a place above ground where the dead were laid. These burial places were often freshened up on the outside with white paint, but inside the stench of death still permeated the place. In other words, *You might look holy on the outside, but you're nothing but rotting flesh on the inside*. God, of course, looks on the heart (1 Samuel 16:7).

Verses 4,5—

It seems unlikely Paul didn't know Ananias was the high priest. And, Paul knew the Law, **not to speak evil of the ruler of thy people** (See Exodus 22:28). It is possible for this to be translated "I should have had more regard for the high priest...". Speculation: Maybe he was thinking he should have turned the other cheek and so he apologizes?

Verses 6—

Having known (Not **perceived**. Greek *ginosko*, a word that means *to have knowledge of*) **that the one part were Sadducees, and the other Pharisees**. With that, he proceeds to divide and conquer by his next statement. **I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee**, this should probably be taken literally, that his father was a Pharisee (perhaps in Tarsus), and sent Paul to train at the feet of Gamaliel. **...of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called into question**. We might say the Sadducees were the more liberal of the two *parties*. The Sadducees rejected the spiritual and the supernatural, such as the resurrection. The Pharisees accepted the spiritual and the supernatural even though most of them had rejected Jesus as their Messiah. The Pharisees did, however, believe in the resurrection of the dead in the last day. The Pharisees were perhaps more concerned with the rule of Law. As evidenced by Ananias, a Sadducee commanding Paul to be struck on the mouth which was against the Law. **The hope and resurrection of the dead I am called into question**. Because the Pharisees accepted the resurrection, they could, in principle, agree that Paul had met the risen Jesus (although they did not believe he was Messiah).

Verses 7,8—

There arose a dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees. Paul's strategy was brilliant. **The multitude** (or, the whole number) **was divided**.

Verse 9—

The **Scribes of the Pharisees' part...we find no evil in this man**. **Scribes** (Greek, *grammateus*) wrote or copied Scripture, but were also well versed in legal matters. They determined there was **no evil in this man**. **Let us not fight against God**, this phrase is not found in modern translations.

Verses 10,11—

The **dissension** was so fierce, for fear of Paul being **pulled in pieces of them**; We should take this literally as hostile mobs sometimes tore people apart (Example: See Josephus, Antiquities, 15.289). Paul had to **be taken by force from among them** back to the fortress for protection. This is the second time Lysias, the chief captain has had to rescue Paul, and it won't be his last. Likewise, Paul had met the Lord 20 plus years prior, and now he meets him a second time. **The Lord stood by him**. Since this occurs in the period of the transition from the apostolic dispensation and the Law to the dispensation of Grace, apostolic miracles and signs were still in effect. Failure to understand this transition is the reason many people claim visions.

Should we question visions people claim to experience today? I think so.