

BIB204 NT2 Early Church

Unit 6b

Paul's Jerusalem Trial and Transfer to Caesarea

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So in this segment, we're going to be dealing with chapter 23 and going forward. And again, I remind everyone, this is the year AD 58, arguably. So when Paul and the religious leaders, chief priests, council, the Sanhedrin, when they are brought together in the barracks, 23:1, Paul, looking intently at the council, said, "'Brothers, I have lived my life before God in all good conscience up to this day.' And the high priest Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth." Punch him out. So that was probably a blow from the fist. "Then Paul said to him, 'God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall! Are you sitting to judge me according to the law, and yet contrary to the law you order me to be struck?' Those who stood by said, 'Would you revile God's high priest?'" Paul didn't know that that was a high priest. So Paul responds. He says, "I did not know, brothers (verse 5), that he was the high priest, for it is written, 'You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.'"

But Paul takes advantage of the divisions that he perceives in the group. You have Sadducees. You have Pharisees. And so he reaches for the support of Pharisees. If you look at verse 6, "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.'" And he's right, but not for the reasons they think. I mean, the Gospel is tied in with that idea. So he uses that to his advantage and there is a dissension that arises between the Pharisees and the Sadducees because the Sadducees do not believe in the resurrection (verse 8). They don't believe in angels or spirits. But the Pharisees believe in all of those things. Verse 9, there's a great clamor. Some of the scribes of the Pharisees stand up and they contend that they find nothing wrong with Paul. "What if a spirit or an angel spoke to him?" And the dissension actually became violent. Take a look at verse 10. "And when the dissension became violent, the tribune, afraid that Paul would be torn to pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go down and take him away from among them by force and bring him into the barracks." So they actually have to go in there, probably swinging staffs, shoving men aside, so that Paul is not beaten to death. And they bring Paul into the barracks. And look at verse 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.'"

So Paul is in the cradle, dare I say crucible, of the Lord's purpose for him. This is what the Lord had said to him. "Trials and afflictions await you in Jerusalem." And so here he is. He's gone to Jerusalem. He reported about his work among the Gentiles. He goes to temple to show good faith. He's nearly beaten to death. The crowd does not want to hear that the Gentiles received anything from Yahweh. The Gentiles, for most of the Jewish populace in the second temple period, are not worthy of eternal life. There is that. That is of varying strength. That opinion is of varying strength. You have some Jews that judge Gentiles to be worthy of eternal life. Some of them can get in. But then you have a lot of Jews thinking that Gentiles can never have eternal life. And of course, even though Paul successfully divides the Pharisees and the Sadducees, he quickly becomes the focus of their ire again. And so he's rescued from that tumult forcefully, put into the barracks. He is assured by the Lord that he is with him and that he, in fact, will testify at Rome.

Take a look at the next verse. Verse 12, the Jews make a plot. They bound themselves by an oath, a vow to not eat or drink until they killed Paul. Forty of them, more than forty, agreed to do this. They went to the chief priests and elders, and they said, "We have strictly bound ourselves by an oath to taste no food till we have killed Paul." And so they basically ask for the help of the chief priests and the elders to go to the tribune, to bring Paul down, and as soon as Paul comes near, they will kill him. Now, Paul's nephew (verse 16), the son of Paul's sister, heard of this, so he went into the barracks and he told Paul. Paul then called one of the centurions and told that centurion to notify the tribune. So the tribune eventually

hears about this plot to kill Paul, and that occupies verses 16 to 22. In particular, verse 22, we see the tribune dismissing Paul’s nephew and telling him to tell no one that he has informed the tribune. Verse 23, the tribune calls two of the centurions, says, “Get 200 soldiers ready, 70 horsemen, 200 spearmen.” So you’re dealing with 470 people guarding Paul. The intent is to go as far as Caesarea. And that would be Caesarea Maritima, Caesarea on the coast. And they are to leave at the third hour of the night, so in the middle of the night. “Also provide mounts for Paul to ride and bring him safely to Felix the governor.”

And we see this tribune write a letter to Felix the governor at Caesarea. And that’s what you see in verses 26 to 30. And so, of course, we learn the name of the tribune at this point. His name is Claudius Lysias and he writes to the governor Felix. So here we go. I’m going to read this letter. It’s a short letter. “Claudius Lysias, to his Excellency the governor Felix, greetings. This man was seized by the Jews and was about to be killed by them when I came upon them with the soldiers and rescued him, having learned that he was a Roman citizen.” You will notice that there is an omission there of the fact that he was about to flog Paul. “And desiring to know the charge for which they were accusing him, I brought him down to their council. I found that he was being accused about questions of their law, but charged with nothing deserving death or imprisonment. And when it was disclosed to me that there would be a plot against the man, I sent him to you at once, ordering his accusers also to state before you what they have against him.”

So what this tribune did then was he kicked the problem upstairs. He sent Paul with 470 soldiers: 200 soldiers, 200 spearmen, 70 other individuals, horsemen to guard Paul. So the soldiers (verse 31) take Paul. They take him by night to Antipatris, and the next day, they return to the barracks. They let the horsemen go on with him. They go to Caesarea (verse 33). They deliver the letter to Felix the governor. They present Paul before him. He reads the letter, Felix does, and asks Paul where he is from. Paul tells him he’s from Cilicia, and he says, “I will give you a hearing when your accusers arrive.” The reason he asks what province Paul is from is to determine whether or not the jurisdiction from which Paul just came, Judea, has first rights. And as it turns out, because Paul is not from the province of Judea. He is from the province of Cilicia in the north, in Syria, actually. So he can take Paul. “I will give you a hearing,” he said in verse 35, “when your accusers arrive.” And he commanded him to be guarded in Herod’s praetorium, Herod’s palace. So that’s chapter 23.

Now, chapter 24, after five days, the high priest Ananias comes down with elders and a spokesman. They lay their case before the governor. This is all in chapter 24 verse 1. Tertullus begins to accuse Paul in verse 2. And the basic content of this accusation, verse 4, “I beg you in your kindness to hear us briefly.” Verse 5, “We have found this man a plague, one who stirs up riots among all the Jews throughout the world and is a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. He even tried to profane the temple, but we seized him. By examining him yourself you will be able to find out from him about everything of which we accuse him.” Tertullus is probably a legally trained scribe. He’s a speaker and he knows something of Greco-Roman rhetoric perhaps, and so he uses this kind of language to present his case. And then you have a chiming in, of course, of the Jews (verse 9), joining in the charge, affirming that these things are so. So Tertullus presents the case. The Jews give their assent, their affirmation of the charges, until the governor looks to Paul and nodded him to speak (verse 10).

And so Paul defends himself. And what he says is interesting. It’s worth reading. Paul says, “Knowing that for many years you have been a judge over this nation,” he speaks to the governor in this fashion, “I

cheerfully make my defense.” So Paul knows something about rhetoric too, so he speaks up. “You can verify that it is not more than twelve days since I went up to worship in Jerusalem, and they did not find me disputing with anyone or stirring up a crowd, either in the temple or in the synagogues or in the city. Neither can they prove to you what they now bring up against me. But this I confess to you, that according to the Way, which they call a sect, I worship the God of our fathers, believing everything laid down by the Law and written in the Prophets.” (“I’m not a law violator. I believe the word of God.”) “Having a hope in God, which these men themselves accept, that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust.”

So this party that has come to Felix in Caesarea, we now find out their makeup. Their makeup is Pharisees. He is being set upon legally at Caesarea by other Pharisees. That’s why he says what he says. They accept. They have a hope in God “that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust.” The Pharisees believe this too. “So I always take pains to have a clear conscience toward both God and man. Now after several years I came to bring alms to my nation and to present offerings. While I was doing this, they found me purified in the temple, without any crowd or tumult. But some Jews from Asia—they ought to be here before you and to make an accusation, should they have anything against me.” He places the blame squarely on the Jews from Asia who know of Paul, know of his ministry, and stirred up the crowd so that he might be killed. “Or else (verse 20) let these men themselves say what wrongdoing they found when I stood before the council, other than this one thing that I cried out while standing among them: ‘It is with respect to the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you this day.’”

So Paul takes it all the way back to what happened in the Jerusalem barracks where he cried out about the resurrection of the dead, setting the Pharisees and the Sadducees against one another. So basically, what you see here are the outlines of sort of a legal strategy. Whether it is deliberate or not, we do not know. Felix has an accurate knowledge of Christianity, the Way. And you see that in verse 22. Felix had a rather accurate knowledge of the Way. He put them off, saying, “‘When Lysias the tribune comes down, I will decide your case.’ Then he gave orders to the centurion that he should be kept in custody but have some liberty, and that none of his friends should be prevented from attending to his needs.” So Paul is basically under arrest, but he is allowed to have visitors. Some scholars think that Paul, during this period, which will turn out to be about two years in Caesarea, taking him from about the year AD 58 to the year 60, some scholars think that Paul may have written the letter to Philemon, the letter to the Colossians, and the letter to the Ephesians at this time. So again, we see more of the development of the New Testament. And of course, Matthew is not going to be written for another five to seven years. Same thing with Luke’s Gospel. Luke is in the process of compiling his notes and the records of the earliest history of the church. And of course, John is not going to be written until well after Paul has passed on from the scene. So you see how these documents are coming about on a chronological trajectory.

So we’re in AD 58, but this next passage here, verse 22 to 27 basically summarize, encapsulate the time period there. So Felix has a knowledge of the Way. He says that he will decide Paul’s case when tribune Lysias comes down. Paul is placed under arrest, but he is able to have visitors. Verse 24, “After some days Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish.” He sent for Paul. He heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus. Paul reasoned about righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment, and he affected Felix to a point where Felix was alarmed. And Felix sent him away just so he could get his bearings. “When I get an opportunity I will summon you (verse 25).” Verse 26, “At the

same time he hoped that money would be given him by Paul.” Historically, we know that Minucius Felix (that’s his full name) was someone who loved money. He loved bribes. We know about this primarily from the works of Josephus. And he doesn’t last too long after this. “So he sent for him often (verse 26) and conversed with him. When two years had elapsed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus.” And he wanted to do the Jews a favor, so Felix left Paul in prison. At this point, Paul has not appealed to Caesar. Felix could have released Paul, but he does not because he’s looking to do the Jews a favor to keep Paul bound in prison because the Jews are looking for an opportunity to get Paul alone to somehow bring him to Jerusalem so they can end him. So the opposition is sharpened against Paul at this point. That opposition is largely Pharisaic. In the next segment, our attempt is to finish the Book of Acts.