

Outline

1. Paul before the Jewish leaders
 1. Stopped as he begins his defense
 2. Exchange with high priest
 3. Takes advantage of Pharisee/Sadducee divide
2. Returned to barracks
 1. The Lord tells Paul that he must go to Rome
 2. Plot to kill Paul revealed by his nephew
 3. Paul sent to Felix
3. Standing before Felix
 1. Accused by the high priest and certain elders of
 1. Creating dissension
 2. Profaning the temple
 2. Paul's defense
 1. Only in Jerusalem for 12 days
 2. They cannot prove that Paul was disputing with anyone
 3. Admits to being a Christian
 4. The Jews whose mistake caused the riot were not present at trial
 5. The Jews cannot even point to misdeeds in their council unless it was for his statement regarding the resurrection
4. Paul and Felix
 1. Felix delays until Lysias should come
 2. Allows Paul liberties
 3. Continues to hear Paul regarding Christianity
 1. Caused fear
 2. Brought only procrastination
 4. Felix departs, leaving Paul still in custody

Commentary

Paul was most likely converted in around AD 35 (Hoehner, 198). These events probably take place around 22 years later, in AD 57 (Hoehner, 199). This might provide an underlying reason for Paul's statement in Acts 23:5 that he did not know that the speaker was the high priest. This is not the same high priest from Acts 4:7, but rather an appointee of the Romans who was high priest between AD 48-59. Concerning this Ananias, Josephus says:

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but as for the high priest Ananias, he increased in glory every day, and this to a great degree, and had obtained the favor and esteem of the citizens in a signal manner; for he was a great hoarder up of money; he therefore cultivated the friendship of Albinus, and of the high priest [Jesus], by making them presents; (206) he also had servants who were very wicked, who joined themselves to the boldest sort of the people, and went to the threshing floors, and took away the tithes that belonged to the priests by violence, and did not refrain from beating such as would not give these tithes to them. (Josephus, 538.)

He was not well-liked by the Jews. When they finally rise in revolt, he is murdered.

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He was a brutal and scheming man, hated by Jewish nationalists for his pro-Roman policies. When the war with Rome began in A.D. 66, the nationalists burned his house (cf. Jos. War II, 426 [xvii.6]) and he was forced to flee to the palace of Herod the Great in the northern part of Jerusalem (ibid., 429 [xvii.6]). Ananias was finally trapped while hiding in an aqueduct on the palace grounds and was killed along with his brother Hezekiah (ibid., 441-42 [xvii.9]). (Longenecker, 9530.)

The more difficult task, in my estimation, is found in understanding Paul's history and the wording in Acts 23:6 that he "perceived" a split in the council. Regarding this, Lenski says:

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Since Paul had always known that the Sanhedrin was made up of both Sadducees and Pharisees, Luke's remark that is introduced with γινούς must mean more than that Paul happened to think of these two parties and with quick wit took advantage of that fact and thus caused a division in the Sanhedrin. Something that is not recorded by Luke but is contained in the participle γινούς, etc., had set the two parties against each other. This seems to be substantiated by ἔκραζεν ἐν τῷ συνεδρίῳ; Paul had to shout (descriptive imperfect) at the top of his voice. The Sadducees and the Pharisees were evidently engaged in a loud altercation, and Paul was quite forgotten for the moment. (Lenski, 933.)

It might, therefore, be that what Paul perceived was more than a party-spirit (between Pharisees and Sadducees) was engaged than might have been the case some twenty years previous. No longer was this just "the council" but it was a council composed of those who would seek to preserve their party advantage. This would explain the "loud altercation" that Lenski describes from the Greek text as well as how Paul would not know of the composition of the Sanhedrin, when Gamaliel, the man at whose feet Paul was reared, was a member of the body.

We do not know much concerning Paul's family. We know somewhat of his heritage because he puts it to use in his writing (Romans 11:1, Philippians 3:5), but Acts 23:16ff is the only passage that describes any of Paul's family.

I have always found it interesting that Claudius Lysias takes credit for rescuing the Roman citizen from the clutches of the Jews (Acts 23:27) when we know that he does not learn of Paul's Roman citizenship until some time later (Acts 22:27).

Acts 24:22 indicates that Felix knew more about Christianity than perhaps another Roman in his place might have. This might be because of Drusilla, his Jewish wife. It might have been because of his circumstance. His apparent answer to the issue placed before him was to keep the parties separated “until Lysias the tribune comes” — a trip which we have no record of ever occurring.

In the meantime, Felix was a man in need of the Gospel:

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Antonius Felix was born a slave and freed by Antonia, the mother of the emperor Claudius. He was a brother of Pallas, who was also a freedman of Antonia and became a good friend of the young prince Claudius in the imperial household. Through the influence of Pallas, in A.D. 48 Felix was appointed to a subordinate government post in Samaria under the provincial governor Ventidius Cumanus. In A.D. 52 Claudius appointed him governor of Judea when Cumanus was deposed—an office usually reserved for freemen of the Roman equestrian order but which he obtained through intrigue and the support of the governor of Syria, Quadratus (cf. Tacitus *Annales* 12.54; Jos. War II, 247 [xii.1]; Antiq. XX, 137 [vii.1]). During his governorship, insurrections and anarchy increased throughout Palestine. Try as he would to put down the uprisings and regain control, his brutal methods only alienated the Jewish population more and led to further disturbances (cf. Jos. War II, 253–70 [xiii.2–7]; Antiq. XX, 160–81 [viii.5–8]). Tacitus described him as “a master of cruelty and lust who exercised the powers of a king with the spirit of a slave” (*Historiae* 5.9). (Longenecker, 9539.)

Thus, it is no surprise that Paul’s message of “righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment” would leave Felix alarmed. But, his desire for a bribe keeps him coming back — always putting off a positive response to the Lord’s invitation to eternal riches in hope for

receiving an unrighteous reward in this life.

Thought Questions

Please consider the following thought questions

1. How could Paul have lived “with all good conscience up to this day” (Acts 23:1)
2. Why would Paul take issue with being struck by the servants of the high priest (Acts 23:2)?
3. How was Paul described to Felix by Tertullus? Why would he be described this way?
4. How was the church described by Paul? How was it described by the Jews?
5. What does it mean when we are told that Paul was left imprisoned as a favor to the Jews (Acts 24:27)?