

Acts Week 48

Chapter 22

1 “Brethren and fathers, hear my defense before you now.” 2 And when they heard that he spoke to them in the Hebrew language, they kept all the more silent.

There is a moment here when all are silent, and Paul is given the freedom to address those who were there to persecute him. Speaking both Greek and Hebrew seemed to stymie the people. Those of the Roman garrison failed to realize Paul may have been a Roman citizen, which he claimed to be (Acts 21:39) (Acts 22:25–27) (22-28). Brethren here is referring to the Jews, **Verse 23:3, “I am indeed a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, taught according to the strictness of our fathers’ law, and was zealous toward God as you all are today.”** Paul clearly made his point not just in claim but more so in his ability to use the Greek language in such a natural form. It also raised eyebrows among the Jews, so much so that they became silent. Gamaliel was the pharisee who stood up against the rest of the council and reasoned that they should not persecute the apostles but instead allow them to go on; if what they are doing is not of God, their work would come to nothing, Acts 5:30-38.

We find brothers used as fellow Jews, a common reference, but it also has multiple meanings. There is also a difference between the use of ‘father’ in our opening verses in chapter 22; we first see “father’s, πατέρες, patēr, G3962” in verse one, which implies the members of the Sanhedrin, “whose prerogative it was, by virtue of the wisdom and experience in which they excelled, to take charge of the interests of others: Acts 7:2; Acts 22:1.”¹ Now we look back at verse 3 and see “fathers” used differently, “πατρώος patrōios, pat-ro'-os; from G3962; paternal, i.e. hereditary:—of fathers.”² Why is this important? Again, as we read in English, we miss far too much on the application, which changes how we view and understand what often has an intentionally different meaning, but in English, we see it the same. Let’s look at why.

How did the Sanhedrin handle all the chaos, and why do I feel there must have been chaos? We are really without any vast number of specific verses demonstrating the chaos amongst the council, so we must look at the makeup of the Sanhedrin itself. If we even consider it, we might believe they were a separate sect from the Sadducees and Pharisees, but you would be wrong. It is written that this council was like the supreme court in America, and they kept the rule of law meeting daily in Jerusalem. The council of 71 men in Jerusalem was the main body of this powerful group. They had the power to judge and punish and to request a death sentence against someone, while others did not. They were the keepers of the laws and traditions in communities throughout the

¹ <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g3971/nkjv/tr/0-1/>

² <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g3971/nkjv/tr/0-1/>

land; smaller councils were present in many small towns. What stopped me in this place of Acts was the need to understand more about the Sanhedrin. They played an important part in Israel's magistrates and history.

Although we see the Sanhedrin's structure more as our supreme court, theirs was different in that religion is the foundation of all laws in a theocracy. However, when there are two and sometimes three different councils mixed with differences in opinions, there are bound to be disgruntled members. The Sanhedrin was a mixture of Sadducees, Pharisees, and sometimes Essenes. All three had different beliefs and practices, which we find prevalent within our own government, religious houses, and denominations today. So, as we look at these verses below, think of how they must have addressed these with different mindsets. Remember, the Sadducees did not believe in the afterlife.

Matthew 3:7: But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, “Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?”

Matthew 16:11: “How is it you do not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread?—but to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.”

Mark 12:18: Then some Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to Him; and they asked Him, saying:

Acts 5:16-17: Then the high priest rose up, and all those who were with him (which is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with indignation, Also a multitude gathered from the surrounding cities to Jerusalem, bringing sick people and those who were tormented by unclean spirits, and they were all healed.

The power and gifting of the apostle's ability to heal was seen as a threat to the Jewish authorities and must be put to an end. Here, we find a lack of morals and disrespect for truth. Independent prestige and control ruled the hearts of the nation's leaders, not the moral fabricate of the law they had been taught. The Sanhedrin comprises Pharisees and Sadducees, the Pharisees living by the oral teachings and the Torah and Sadducees by the written Law and traditions.

Josephus writes of three controlling sects: the Pharisees, Sadducees, and the Essenes (Antiquities 13:5:9). We read much about the Pharisees, some about the Sadducees, and nothing from our Bibles about the Essenes. The Essenes sect is said to have been established during the mid-second century B.C. and remained active until the first Jewish Revolt in 66-70 A.D.³

³ The Anchor Bible Dictionary, Volume 2, Published by Double Day, New York, New York, Page 619.

The Essenes branch off on their own because they are disgusted with the other two sects. Believed to have settled in the Qumran area, research shows more about their way of life and beliefs. Some now believe the Dead Sea Scrolls were part of an Essene Library.

What is the importance of this history as we read in our Bibles? Why do we need to study any of this? Studying helps us better understand some of the events that took place and the driving forces behind the actions. As we learn more about those who sought to kill Paul, we can better see why and who, and what effect it has had on Christianity, even up to today's modern time. Not all history is forgotten, nor does it fail to enlighten us to see the attitudes and temperament of those who were and are part of what we believe today.

In this attack on Paul, we find that traditions run deep, and power brings about fear of one day not having the authority once secured. There is jealousy, resentment, hate, bias, and a desire to eliminate the threat. As we look at this and our world today, we find not much has changed, and this is the point of our focus. When do we realize the real threat to man is man himself? The Politicians back then are still the politicians of today. Paul and all the apostles knew Jesus; they learned a better way, a way of true unity. We still find differences amongst even the truest of men back then, but the one truth they all shared with others is that our Christ Jesus died for our sins. Jesus tells us in.

Matthew 23:1-5, Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples, 2 saying: “The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. 3 Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do. 4 For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. 5 But all their works they do to be seen by men.

This had to have been a frightening appeal given in front of the leaders who looked more to their own prestige, comfort, and power than actually teaching the ways of our Lord. Those representing God were nothing more than stumbling stones placed in the path of the faithful.

A once proud individual with a favorable reputation for the persecution of the Way, Paul now humbly speaks out against the wrong he did.

4 I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women, 5 as also the high priest bears me witness, and all the council of the elders, from whom I also received letters to the brethren, and went to Damascus to bring in chains even those who were there to Jerusalem to be punished.

Out of eighteen Bible versions, fourteen capitalize the Way, and four do not. Remember, the Way was the first name given to Christianity; the Way refers to Jesus as the way to

the Father. **John 14:6: Jesus said to him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”**

Paul says here that the High Priest and all other in authority bears witness to the fact that he persecuted Christians. He is claiming this in the presence of those who permitted him to persecute Jesus' faithful. It is no wonder they sought to kill him. We should not overlook that those he pointed the figure at never thought to stop and receive the truth Paul was claiming. Pride is our enemy when it suits man's desires to be more than he is, **Galatians 6:3: For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself.** It is not difficult to see the change in Paul's life; he is the near-perfect example of living to our Lord, the opposite of the rulers and teachers standing by seeking to kill him.

Next, Paul gives his testimony as to his conversion on the road to Damascus, verse 22:6-21.

6 “Now it happened, as I journeyed and came near Damascus at about noon, suddenly a great light from heaven shone around me. 7 And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’ 8 So I answered, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ And He said to me, ‘I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.’

9 “And those who were with me indeed saw the light and were afraid,[fn] but they did not hear the voice of Him who spoke to me. 10 So I said, ‘What shall I do, Lord?’ And the Lord said to me, ‘Arise and go into Damascus, and there you will be told all things which are appointed for you to do.’ 11 And since I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of those who were with me, I came into Damascus.

12 “Then a certain Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good testimony with all the Jews who dwelt there, 13 came to me; and he stood and said to me, ‘Brother Saul, receive your sight.’ And at that same hour I looked up at him. 14 Then he said, ‘The God of our fathers has chosen you that you should know His will, and see the Just One, and hear the voice of His mouth. 15 For you will be His witness to all men of what you have seen and heard. 16 And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.’

17 “Now it happened, when I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, that I was in a trance 18 and saw Him saying to me, ‘Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, for they will not receive your testimony concerning Me.’ 19 So I said, ‘Lord, they know that in every synagogue I imprisoned and beat those who believe on You. 20 And when the blood of Your martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by consenting to his death,[fn] and guarding the

clothes of those who were killing him.’ 21 Then He said to me, ‘Depart, for I will send you far from here to the Gentiles.’ ”

At this the silence is broken.

22 And they listened to him until this word, and then they raised their voices and said, “Away with such a fellow from the earth, for he is not fit to live!” **23** Then, as they cried out and tore off their clothes and threw dust into the air, **24** the commander ordered him to be brought into the barracks, and said that he should be examined under scourging, so that he might know why they shouted so against him. **25** And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said to the centurion who stood by, “Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman, and uncondemned?”

Paul, now, after all the suffering he has endured, asks the centurion if it is right to scourge him without a trial. This is a very important comment he makes here. These men are guilty of breaking the law should they scourge him, and death may be the sentence.

We leave this chapter to carry on with further accusations to come from the Jewish authorities.

Resources,

<https://www.biblestudy.org/maturart/new-testament-high-priests.html>

<https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/pharisees-sadducees-and-essenes>

<https://www.bibleversestudy.com/acts/acts22-paul-the-roman-citizen.htm>

<https://www.raydowning.com/blog/2016/3/3/pharisees-sadducees-herodians-scribes-and-high-priests>

<https://www.crosswalk.com/faith/bible-study/things-to-know-about-the-sadducees-in-the-bible.html>

<https://www.biblestudy.org/beginner/new-testament-groups/sanhedrin.html>

The Anchor Bible Dictionary, full set.

The Moody Bible Commentary

The Acts of the Apostles, William Barclay

Thayer’s Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament

William MacDonald, Believers Bible Commentary.

