



ACTS 22:30-23:11 ESV

30 But on the next day, desiring to know the real reason why he was being accused by the Jews, he unbound him and commanded the chief priests and all the council to meet, and he brought Paul down and set him before them. 1 And looking intently at the council, Paul said, "Brothers, I have lived my life before God in all good conscience up to this day." 2 And the high priest Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth. 3 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?" 4 Those who stood by said, "Would you revile God's high priest?" 5 And Paul said, "I did not know, brothers, that he was the high priest, for it is written, 'You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.'" 6 Now when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, 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." 7 And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. 8 For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor angel, nor spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all. 9 Then a great clamor arose, and some of the scribes of the Pharisees' party stood up and contended sharply, "We find nothing wrong in this man. What if a spirit or an angel spoke to him?" 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. 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."

STRUCTURE

- I. **Setup: Roman Confusion About a Jewish Dispute (22:30)**
 - a. Gentiles seeks truth in a world of distortion (22:30a)
 - b. Jewish officials convene about the fate of Paul—and the gospel (22:30b)
- II. **The Conscience of the Righteous and the Corruption of the Court (23:1–5)**
 - a. Paul stands with courage and a clear conscience (23:1)
 - b. The high priest strikes with unjust authority (23:2)
 - c. Paul rebukes hypocrisy with prophetic boldness (23:3)
 - d. Bystanders rebuke Paul's perceived offense (23:4)
 - e. Paul submits to Scripture with humble restraint (23:5)
- III. **The Hope of Resurrection and the Exposure of Hypocrisy (23:6–10)**
 - a. Paul reframes the trial around resurrection hope (23:6)
 - b. The council divides along doctrinal lines (23:7)
 - c. Luke exposes the spiritual bankruptcy of the Sadducees (23:8)
 - d. The Pharisees defend Paul for partisan reasons (23:9)
 - e. The trial descends into chaos, revealing their blindness (23:10)
- IV. **The Risen Christ and Paul's Calling to Rome (23:11)**
 - a. Jesus stands beside Paul in his loneliness and fear (23:11a)
 - b. Jesus speaks courage into Paul's calling (23:11b)
 - c. Jesus reaffirms that Rome is not a detour but a destination (23:11c)

GENERAL COMMENTARY:

This passage reads like the first scene of a courtroom drama—but instead of truth and justice, what we see is distortion, violence, and religious hypocrisy. The Roman tribune is confused. He doesn't understand why Paul has stirred such violent opposition, so he arranges for a formal hearing before the Jewish council. But this setup (22:30) tells us more about the world than about Paul. Roman power is puzzled by spiritual conflict. It's a reminder that the gospel defies political categories and worldly analysis—it must be spiritually discerned. Luke frames the Sanhedrin not as a court of justice but as a theater of confusion, one that cannot make sense of Paul, the gospel, or the resurrection.

When Paul opens his mouth (23:1–5), he puts *conscience* front and center. That one word reframes the entire conflict. Paul is being judged by men who've silenced their own consciences and seared them shut. Yet even when Paul speaks with prophetic fire, he remains tethered to Scripture. He rebukes the high priest, then quotes the law in

repentance. This is not weakness. It's what strength looks like when shaped by the Word. By contrast, Ananias orders violence while pretending to defend the law—he's the "whitewashed wall." Luke subtly upholds Paul not as anti-law, but as one who lives in fulfillment of it, is shaped by it, and even corrected by it.

In the next scene, Paul shifts his strategy, realizing that he won't receive a fair trial (23:6–10). He turns the courtroom into a theological battleground by naming the issue that's actually on trial: *resurrection*. The Pharisees side with Paul for political reasons; the Sadducees fume with disbelief. But Luke's aim is not partisan—it's prophetic. He exposes the spiritual bankruptcy of both sides. They are more loyal to their tribes than to truth. The Sadducees, who deny resurrection and spirit, cannot fathom the gospel. The Pharisees, who should have recognized resurrection hope, see only an opportunity to one-up their rivals. Truth is weaponized. Paul reveals it, but they twist it. The trial devolves into chaos, because truth always fractures false unity.

And then comes the still, quiet voice (23:11). Jesus shows up in the dark of night—not to the court, but to Paul. Rather than removing Paul's suffering, Jesus stands beside him in it. "Take courage," He says. Jerusalem isn't the destination—Rome awaits the apostle. In a world ruled by propaganda, kangaroo courts, and political maneuvering, Jesus reminds Paul—and us—that He's not just building His church; He's guiding every step. The gospel will go to the heart of the empire. And Paul, in chains, will carry it there. Because in God's hands, even imprisonment becomes a vehicle of proclamation.

What begins as a trial of Paul becomes something far bigger. By the end, it's the gospel itself on trial—the hope of resurrection standing in the dock. The religious leaders are exposed, not just for rejecting Paul, but for rejecting the very hope their Scriptures proclaim. Yet while Jerusalem's courtroom erupts in chaos, the risen Jesus appears. He stands beside Paul, just as He once stood up to receive Stephen. Because resurrection is not just a doctrine—it's a Person: "I am the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25). In a world where truth is trampled and mobs mock eternal hope, Jesus stands by Paul as living proof: resurrection is real, the gospel is true, and Rome is next.

VERSE-BY-VERSE COMMENTARY:

30 *But on the next day, desiring to know the real reason why he was being accused by the Jews, he unbound him and commanded the chief priests and all the council to meet, and he brought Paul down and set him before them. 1 And looking intently at the council, Paul said, "Brothers, I have lived my life before God in all good conscience up to this day." 2 And the high priest Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth.*

—"But on the next day":

- After Paul shares his testimony, the mob erupts—particularly when he shares about his calling to reach Gentiles. The Jews have become so racist that—like Jonah—they resist God's calling upon Israel to be a light to the nations (Isa. 49:6).
- Sweeping Paul away from the mob, the Romans intended to "examine" Paul with flogging—only to discover it would be illegal. Paul is a Roman citizen, and Roman law prohibited such treatment. The Romans show greater respect for their pagan laws than the unbelieving Jews in the next section show for divine law.
- "the next day" introduces the Roman solution to the Paul predicament in v. 30.

—"desiring to know the real reason why he was being accused by the Jews":

- It's hard to discern the will of a mob. Throughout Acts, mobs have characterized the reaction of unbelievers to the gospel. The church is unified; the world is unruly.
- The motive for flogging was not punishment but examination. People tend to leak truth when they are being tortured. Having been prohibited by Roman law from torturing Paul, the centurion is forced to "examine" him in another way: by submitting him to the Sanhedrin's judgment.

—"chief priests and all the council":

- This was the Sanhedrin—a council of religious leaders who comprised a Jewish Supreme Court. Paul is on trial. This is the first of the trial narratives. Later, Paul will provide his defense before Festus, Felix, and Agrippa.
- When Paul stands before one court after another, it symbolizes "Christianity on trial." Consistently, the mob rules against him, but reasonable Gentiles declare him innocent. A sober assessment of facts requires one to side with "the Way."

—"And looking intently at the council":

- In the past, Paul “looked intently” at Elymas the sorcerer when he opposed the Way, calling down temporary blindness upon him (13:9); he also looked intently at the crippled man and pronounced healing (14:9).
- The Greek word denotes an intense stare. Paul is staring down his accusers. He’s not looking down at his feet, ashamed. His eyes do not wander in fear. The look of his face conveys courage. I’m reminded of Ezekiel 3:8-9: “Behold, I have made your face as hard as their faces, and your forehead as hard as their foreheads. Like emery harder than flint, I have made your forehead. So fear them not, nor be dismayed by their looks, for they are a rebellious house.”
- Like the prophets of Israel, Paul’s prophetic declarations come with a divine stare down. His gaze reflects the Lord. His eyes speak courage.

—“Brothers, I have lived my life before God in all good conscience up to this day.”

- “Brothers”: Despite his prophetic declaration of doom, Paul relates to them as Jewish brothers, his kin according to the flesh. The heart of the prophet is not bitterness, acrimony, or revenge. When the face and forehead are hardened against rebellion, the heart remains soft.
- In my own prophetic confrontations, I have often prayed, “Lord, make my forehead harder than their hearts,” based on Ezek. 3:8-9.
- Paul is on trial for rebellion against Judaism, but he affirms his own clear conscience. Christianity is not anti-law; it fulfills the law.
- “good conscience”: Paul often speaks of the importance of conscience.
 - 2 Cor. 1:12: “For our boast is this, the testimony of our **conscience**, that we behaved in the world with simplicity and godly sincerity, not by earthly wisdom but by the grace of God...”
 - 1 Tim. 1:5: “The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good **conscience** and a sincere faith.”
 - 1 Tim. 1:19: “...holding faith and a good **conscience**. By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith.”
 - 1 Tim. 3:9: “They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear **conscience**.”
 - 2 Tim. 1:3: “I thank God whom I serve, as did my ancestors, with a clear **conscience**, as I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day.”
- “conscience” is not the same as the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is never wrong, but our conscience can mislead us. Some people have their conscience “seared” (1 Tim. 4:2) or “defiled” (Titus 1:15). If we disobey our conscience enough, it becomes dull and insensitive, leading us astray.
- Even when our “conscience” convicts us on matters that would not be otherwise sinful—such as eating non-kosher food—Paul requires that we obey our conscience (Rom. 14:14, 22-23; 1 Cor. 8:7, 10-12).
- Put differently, even when the action is not sinful in itself, to act against conscience is to sin, because conscience governs whether we are acting “from faith” (Rom. 14:23). Paul calls believers to obey conscience—even if it’s weak—while also working toward an informed and strengthened conscience.

—In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Atticus Finch stands up for Tom Robinson, a black man. His young daughter Scout inquires about his willingness to do so, considering the rest of the town thinks he’s in the wrong. Atticus responds, “They’re certainly entitled to think that... but before I can live with other folks I’ve got to live with myself. The one thing that doesn’t abide by majority rule is a person’s conscience.” (See Storms’ blog about this, enjoyinggod.org.)

—We must all seek to align our conscience with the Word of God. Since we are all born sinners (Eph. 2:1-3), and the human heart is wicked (Jer. 17:9), this is a process. The more we grow with God, the more our conscience aligns with His Word. This process of alignment comes both by dwelling on God’s Word and refusing to suppress our conscience.

—All of us are growing in either a Word-shaped conscience or a world-shaped conscience.

—“the high priest Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth”:

- “the high priest Ananias” was known for his wickedness. The ancient Jewish historian Josephus writes, “Ananias was a great hoarder of money; he also cultivated relationships with Roman officials, using bribes. He was so bold as to confiscate the tithes that belonged to the ordinary priests and beat those who refused to give them up.”
- Paul is in good company, being struck in the mouth for his prophetic testimony:
 - “Then Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah came near and struck Micaiah on the cheek and said, ‘How did the Spirit of the Lord go from me to speak to you?’” (1 Kgs. 22:24).
 - “Pashhur the priest ... beat Jeremiah the prophet and put him in the stocks that were in the upper Benjamin Gate of the house of the Lord” (Jer. 20:1-2).

- "When he had said these things, one of the officers standing by struck Jesus with his hand, saying, 'Is that how you answer the high priest?'" (John 18:22).
- Paul's story bears the most resemblance to Christ's, for both were struck by an official of the high priest, and both pushed back against the unjust violence.
 - Christ was struck because He subtly challenged the secrecy of their illegal trial that did not bring in witnesses.
 - Paul was struck because he claimed to have a clean conscience while serving Jesus—an offense and blasphemy to the unbelieving Jews.
- Jesus did not literally "turn the other cheek" when struck. His teaching in Matthew 5 employs hyperbole to make a point: don't return violence for violence.

3 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?" 4 Those who stood by said, "Would you revile God's high priest?" 5 And Paul said, "I did not know, brothers, that he was the high priest, for it is written, 'You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.'"

—This section of verses is debated: did Paul *sin* by prophesying judgment and condemnation against the wicked high priest? Some say yes—his answer in verse 4 sounds like an apology. Some say no—Jesus and the prophets say similar things against leaders. Therefore, they argue, Paul is speaking sarcastically in what sounds like an apology but isn't.

—I believe Paul sinned: not because of his speech's content but because of its tone and reactionary nature. But he quickly catches himself and self-corrects. Let's unpack this:

- *Paul sinned:* He quotes a Bible verse condemning his form of speech, and we have no evidence that he was being sarcastic. In the parallel story of Jesus being struck by the high priest's servant, our Lord does not pronounce judgment in a reactionary way. He pushes back forthrightly, but gently. Christ alone is our perfect model.
- *The content of Paul's words was not sin:*
 - "God is going to strike you": Prophets often pronounce judgment upon wicked leaders, and in fact, this is one of their primary callings. The Old Testament is filled with this behavior, and it is always considered righteous.
 - Paul is not cursing his enemies—in violation of his own command (Rom. 12:4)—but rather predicting what will soon happen like he did with Elymas the sorcerer (Acts 13:11) and Alexander the metalworker (2 Tim. 4:14).
 - Jesus Himself referred to the Pharisees as "whitewashed" (Matt. 23:27), as did Ezekiel with the religious leaders of his day (Ezek. 13:10-12).
 - When Jesus pronounced the seven "woes" on the Pharisees, He said offensive things—but not in a sinful way.
 - It was fully appropriate for Paul to identify the sin of the high priest and predict the consequences.
 - It is likewise appropriate for any of God's people to call out sin in others, including leaders. At first, and under normal circumstances, this should be practiced gently (Gal. 6:1). But in the case of obstinance and rebellion, our words can be stronger. In fact, they must be.
- *The tone and reactionary nature of Paul's words was sinful:*
 - Verse 5 reads like an apology, which suggests that Paul felt conviction over the inappropriateness of his words. Given that the rest of the Scriptures affirm the content of his words, he must have felt conviction for a different reason: the tone and reactionary nature.
 - When Jesus confronted the Pharisees, it was not a knee-jerk reaction to being struck in the face. It was a carefully calculated moment of rebuke.
 - In contrast, Paul pronounces judgment as a direct and immediate result of being struck. It reads like a knee-jerk, angry reaction. Pronouncements of God's judgment must never be made as knee-jerk, angry reactions. Prophets must be careful to calculate the timing and tone of their declarations.
 - Again contrasting with Jesus: when He cleanses the moneychangers with a whip, our Lord carefully crafts his own whip, which would have taken time. This was not a knee-jerk outburst but a sober-minded prophetic act. John 2:15: **"And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables."**
 - When Paul's enemies accuse him of reviling the high priest, their charge echoes the very Scripture Paul immediately quotes: "You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people" (Exodus

22:28). His unqualified appeal to that verse—offered without defense, clarification, or protest—suggests that he accepted the charge and felt conviction. Though his words were accurate, Paul seems to recognize that his tone crossed the line into reviling. The Greek verb for “revile” (katalaleō), used here in Acts 23:5 and in the Septuagint version of Exodus 22:28, conveys the sense of abusive or contemptuous speech—not merely dispute. In other words, Paul knew that what he said may have been true, but how he said it violated the standard of respect owed even to corrupt leaders.

- I think this makes the most sense of all the data: parallel passages where similar declarations are considered righteous; Paul’s apparent apology; the lack of evidence for sarcasm; the contextual evidence of a fleshly reaction.

—There are two notable contrasts between Paul and the high priest:

- The high priest violates God’s law by staging a kangaroo court without witnesses and marked by violence; in contrast, Paul twice refers to God’s law (vv. 3, 5). Ironically, the one who judges Paul for breaking the law cares nothing about it. Luke thus upholds Paul, not as anti-law, but as pro-law—but with Jesus as the fulfillment of it.
- Paul self-corrects, but the high priest doubles down. Abusive leaders lack the ability to self-correct. They can’t admit error. In contrast, Paul—in the heat of the moment!—maintains the sobriety to compare his actions with God’s perfect law.
- As James puts it, “The one who looks into the perfect law... and perseveres” (James 1:25) is not just a hearer, but a doer. Paul allows the law to function as a mirror—revealing his misstep—while Ananias refuses to see his own reflection.
- The law enables us to self-reflect—and self-correct.

—“I did not know, brothers, that he was the high priest”:

- How could Paul not have known? Surely, the high priest would have been decorated with ornamental garb. Some argue that the scene was so chaotic, and Paul had been so long absent from Jerusalem, that he somehow missed it in all the fuss.
- I don’t think that’s it. Even amidst the chaos, Paul would have been able to identify him. A better explanation is that Paul had famously terrible eyesight.
- In Galatians 4:13–15, Paul reminds the Galatians that it was because of a bodily ailment that he first preached to them, and he praises them for their compassion, saying: “if possible, you would have gouged out your eyes and given them to me.” This strongly implies a problem with Paul’s eyes, likely serious enough to be visible and debilitating. Later in the same letter, Paul signs off with this unusual remark: “See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand” (Galatians 6:11). This reinforces the idea that Paul had difficulty seeing and had to write in oversized script, possibly because of impaired vision.
- More importantly, Paul’s apology and appeal to Scripture teach us that spiritual leaders— even those who are hypocritical—are to be shown respect by virtue of their office. Elsewhere, Paul commands believers to honor pagan governing authorities (Romans 13:1–7) and to show respect within the household structure, including toward unbelieving husbands (1 Peter 3:1–2; cf. Ephesians 5:22–24). Similarly, Jesus, just before pronouncing woes on the Pharisees, acknowledges their authority, saying, “The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat; so do and observe whatever they tell you” (Matthew 23:2–3). In both cases, the office is honored—even when the person occupying it is not.
- Given that the role of the prophet is to confront abuses of power and violations of Scripture, and yet Scripture also commands us to honor authority, how do we hold these tensions together? We do so by anchoring our words in Scripture, as Paul did, and by maintaining a tone of respect—even when calling out sin. Truth must be spoken, but it must be spoken in a way that reflects both boldness and honor.
- Tannehill (qtd. by Schreiner): “Not only does Paul respect the temple... but also the office that controls its operations. This scene is a good example of the lengths to which the narrator will go to show that Paul is not anti-Jewish.”

6 Now when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, 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." 7 And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. 8 For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor angel, nor spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all. 9 Then a great clamor arose, and some of the scribes of the Pharisees' party stood up and contended sharply, "We find nothing wrong in this man. What if a spirit or an angel spoke to him?"

—“Now when Paul perceived...”:

- This begins a new section. We move from Paul’s mistreatment, initial reaction, and biblical fidelity on the one hand, to a strategic solution on the other hand.
- Paul knows he needs a strategic solution because he’s already been smacked in the face for nothing. The high priest has shown his colors—his concern is not for God’s law but destroying Paul. Abandoning hope for a fair trial, Paul looks for a remedy.
- Sometimes God delivers through miracles such as angelic and even seismic jail breaks (Acts 5; 12). At other times, as here, God delivers through strategic wisdom.
- When you’re stuck, consider that God can deliver you in one of two ways: a supernatural change in circumstances or a supernatural revelation of escape. Don’t limit God to one or the other.
- Perceiving the deep theological divide between Pharisees and Sadducees who comprise the Sanhedrin, Paul wisely reframes the issue around the hope of the resurrection, a core part of the gospel and a belief that divides his accusers. He shifts the spotlight from himself to the truth, exposing their hypocrisy and sparking a debate that reveals the unjust nature of the trial. Paul isn’t sowing chaos—he’s revealing the conflict that already exists and using it to advance the cause of truth.

—“I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees”:

- The label “Pharisee” applies not just to Paul’s own history, but his family history. He has a storied pedigree.
- “Pharisee” applies to both his heritage and his theological training. Elsewhere, Paul describes Pharisees as the “strictest sect” of Judaism (26:5) and an indicator of scrupulous adherence to God’s law: “as to the law, a Pharisee” (Phil. 3:6).
- Paul doesn’t say “I was a Pharisee” but rather “I am a Pharisee.” Paul still identified with the Pharisaical devotion to Moses as well as their theological particulars.
- Johnson on the Pharisees (qtd. by Schreiner): “though their theology tends to be the right one, their attitude toward the prophet is always the wrong one.”

—“it is with respect to the hope of resurrection from the dead that I am on trial”:

- Since the Pharisees share in this hope, but the Sadducees do not, Paul’s clever strategy causes the Pharisees to side with him. A divided enemy will not stand.
- The core of the gospel message is the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Without resurrection, *the cross of Christ* is tragic, and *the return of Christ* is a fairy tale.
- Paul uses the general term—“resurrection from the dead”—rather than specifically naming Christ’s resurrection. The Pharisees believed in a general resurrection, but not in the resurrection of Jesus. By generalizing the term, Paul exposes their division while simultaneously bearing witness to the Christian hope. As Christians, we believe that Christ rose as the “firstfruits”—just as the first crops of a harvest point to a greater harvest still to come. His resurrection is the first installment of the full resurrection we await—the future harvest to which His rising testifies.
- Paul’s wording highlights what is truly on trial: not Paul, but hope in resurrection. Can Christian theology withstand the ruling of a kangaroo court? It does.

—“For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor angel, nor spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all.”

- The Sadducees only affirmed the first five books of the Old Testament (the Pentateuch), which did not contain verses such as Daniel 12:2 that clearly articulate a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked.
- Elsewhere, Jesus says that the Sadducees knew neither God’s Word nor God’s power (Matt. 22:23ff).
- Notably, the Pentateuch contains many angelic appearances, which raises a question: did the Sadducees really deny the existence of angels or spirits? N.T. Wright points out that we have no historical evidence that the Sadducees rejected belief in angels or spirits. So what do we make of Acts 23:8, which says, “The Sadducees say there is no resurrection, nor angel, nor spirit”? Wright argues that all three terms—resurrection, angel, and spirit—should be read together as describing the Pharisaic belief in a post-mortem spiritual existence, in which a person continues in a spirit-like or angel-like form in an intermediate state, awaiting bodily resurrection. This parallels the Christian view of heaven: when believers die, their spirits enter God’s presence, awaiting the return of Christ and the resurrection of the body. The Pharisees affirmed both this intermediate state and the final resurrection. The Sadducees denied both. Christians, like the Pharisees, affirm the intermediate state and bodily resurrection, but with one crucial distinction: we believe that Christ has already risen as the firstfruits of the resurrection to come (1 Cor. 15:20–23).

—“We find nothing wrong with this man”: I’m reminded of those on the political right who say, “No enemies on the right”—to mean, we never oppose conservatives even if they believe differently about, for instance, the role of the state in matters of morality. I haven’t heard the same slogan on the left, but I see it practically. My point is that the Pharisees’ discernment is not rooted in Scripture, but politics. They are more interested in taking sides than in discovering truth. A partisan spirit blinds us to spiritual truth.

—“What if a spirit or an angel spoke to him?”:

- People don’t turn into angels when they die, but this contemporary misconception has ancient roots. Pharisees believed that when people die, they become either a spirit or an angel (see Wright: *The Resurrection of the Son of God*). This could be why in Acts 12, the praying church assumed that Peter’s “angel” had visited them. In light of their belief, the Pharisees entertain the possibility that a deceased person’s spirit or angel had visited Paul. This possibility assumes the reality of resurrection because nobody at that time believed in a merely spiritual afterlife.
- On one side, you had the Pharisees, who believed in a two stage post-mortem reality: first, you become a disembodied spirit in God’s presence; then, you are raised to life bodily on Judgment Day. On the other side, you had Sadducees who believed in no post-mortem future: once you die, you’re done. No “spiritual” continuance. At best, your memory survives. You don’t.
- Again, Christians do not believe that we become angels after we die. But we do affirm the Pharisaical “two stage” view of resurrection: first, our spirits soar to heaven when we die; then, we receive glorified bodies at Christ’s return. In my (debated) opinion, this is what John intends when he speaks of a “first resurrection” in Revelation 20, followed by an implicit second resurrection—a bodily one.

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. 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.”

—The only sensible people in this story are Paul and the unbelieving Romans. The Pharisees and Sadducees become violent toward each other, with Paul caught in the middle.

—“The following night the Lord stood by him”:

- In a dispute about resurrection, the risen Christ—not a mere angel or spirit—appears to Paul and strengthens him. Jesus is alive to encourage His people.
- In 23:2, the high priest commands those “standing” around him to strike Paul; in 23:11, Jesus “stood” by Paul to support him.
- When people stand against you, Christ stands with you.

—We are reminded of other occasions where the Lord appears in Acts to strengthen:

- In Acts 7:55–56, as Stephen is being martyred, he looks up and sees “the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.” Jesus, normally depicted seated at God’s right hand, stands to honor and receive His faithful witness.
- In Acts 18:9–10, while Paul is in Corinth facing opposition, the Lord speaks to him in a vision at night: “Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you... for I have many in this city who are my people.”

—Can we expect Christ to appear to us and strengthen us?

- More often than not, Christ will encourage us through a dream (as in Corinth) or a vision, through prophecies like in Acts 21:1–14, and through the church. These are all Spirit-empowered means by which the risen Christ strengthens His people.
- But we cannot discount that Jesus might literally appear to people from time to time—especially in moments of deep suffering, calling, or persecution. While such appearances are rare, they are not unscriptural, and the same Jesus who stood by Paul is still alive and able to draw near to His servants today.

—“Take courage”:

- This parallels Christ’s message to Paul in Acts 18:9: “Do not be afraid...” Jesus does not promise Paul comfort; He encourages him in suffering.
- Courage is not the *absence* of fear; it is *facing* your fears.

—“as you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem”: Christianity is not myth; it is fact-based. Paul is on trial for “the hope of resurrection.” Our hope is grounded like an anchor in the resurrection of Jesus—not just a religious proposition but a fact of history.

—“so you must also testify in Rome”:

- Acts 19:21: “Now after these events Paul resolved in the Spirit to pass through Macedonia and Achaia and go to Jerusalem, saying, ‘After I have been there, I must also see Rome.’”

- Paul has already cooperated with the Spirit's unction to testify in Jerusalem, but his journey has not reached its destination. God has ordained that not only the center of Jewish rule, but also the center of Gentile dominion, must hear the good news.
- God's means of moving Paul from one place to the next is incarceration. It's unlikely Paul imagined that Christ's words—"He is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before... kings" (Acts 9:15)—would be fulfilled through chains and courtrooms. If God told me I would testify before kings, I might picture the Oval Office or Buckingham Palace, not a prison transport. Paul wasn't part of Caesar's Evangelical Advisory Board—but his light shone just as brightly, perhaps even more so, precisely because it burned in the darkness.
- Schreiner: "Ironically, Roman justice will bring the message of a new Lord to the heart of the empire."