

## *Fact Sheet for "The Circle"*

### **Acts 22:22-23:11**

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Paul had just addressed the mob from the steps of the Antonia Fortress. They quietly listened to him up until Acts 22:21. Preaching to the Gentiles was not the issue. Even the Pharisees were actively involved in that (Matt. 23:15). It was Paul's message to the Gentiles that they objected to (see Eph. 2:11-22).

**ESV 22 ¶ Up to this word they listened to him. Then they raised their voices and said, "Away with such a fellow from the earth! For he should not be allowed to live."**

Such was the intensity of their reaction. What do you think? Did Paul realize what their reaction was going to be? Of course!

**23 And as they were shouting and throwing off their cloaks and flinging dust into the air, 24 the tribune ordered him to be brought into the barracks, saying that he should be examined by flogging, to find out why they were shouting against him like this.**

Consider the tribune's thoughts for a moment. He likely didn't understand Aramaic. He certainly didn't understand the reaction of the mob. But, he was determined to find out and ordered that Paul should be examined by flogging.

"This flogging is different from Paul's beating with rods at Philippi and on two other occasions (2 Cor. 11:25; Acts 16:22-23). Nor was it the same as the Jewish 39 lashes administered with the long whips, a punishment Paul had received five times (2 Cor. 11:24). The Roman scourge was inflicted with shorter whips embedded with pieces of metal or bones and attached to a strong wooden handle. It could kill a man or leave him permanently crippled. This was the punishment Christ received (Matt. 27:26), leaving Him unable to carry His cross."<sup>1</sup>

**25 But when they had stretched him out for the whips, Paul said to the centurion who was standing by, "Is it lawful for you to flog a man who is a Roman citizen and uncondemned?"**

A Roman citizen who was not guilty of a crime could not be flogged. Could Paul have stopped this process earlier than he did? Yep! But he didn't.

**26 When the centurion heard this, he went to the tribune and said to him, "What are you about to do? For this man is a Roman citizen." 27 So the tribune came and said to him, "Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?" And he said, "Yes." The tribune answered, "I bought this citizenship for a large sum." Paul said, "But I am a citizen by birth."**

During the reign of Emperor Claudius (A.D. 41-54) it was possible to purchase Roman citizenship. Paul was born a citizen because both of his parents were citizens.

**29 So those who were about to examine him withdrew from him immediately, and the tribune also was afraid, for he realized that Paul was a Roman citizen and that he had bound him.**

The tribune had violated Roman Law by binding Paul, and he was afraid of the consequences. Paul was unbound and the tribune took another approach.

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<sup>1</sup> The Bible Knowledge Commentary, New Testament, pp. 418-419.

<sup>30</sup> ¶ 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.

23:1 ¶ And looking intently at the council, Paul said, "Brothers, I have lived my life before God in all good conscience up to this day." (*a bold claim*) <sup>2</sup> And the high priest Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth.

Ananias reigned as high priest from A.D. 48 to A.D. 58 or 59 and was known for his avarice and liberal use of violence.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>3</sup> 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?" <sup>4</sup> Those who stood by said, "Would you revile God's high priest?" <sup>5</sup> 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.'"

Paul really did not recognize that Ananias was the high priest and replied by quoting Exodus 22:28, acknowledging the respect that should be given to him by virtue of his office.

<sup>6</sup> ¶ 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." <sup>7</sup> And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. <sup>8</sup> For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor angel, nor spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all. <sup>9</sup> 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?" <sup>10</sup> 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.

<sup>11</sup> ¶ 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."

As we apply this scripture lets reflect on something that's common to every one of us, and bring it up against Paul's example here. Take a piece of paper, draw a circle on it. Each of us is motivated in what we think, what we feel, what we say, how we react, what we do by who is most important to us ... the one in the circle. It is usually ourselves. The one in the circle should be Jesus Phil. 2:9-11). I find all too often that the one in my circle is me, not Him. Think about Paul's example here... going to Jerusalem... addressing the mob... threatened with flogging... before the Sanhedrin... what he would later experience. Did Paul willingly experience these things for what he could get... career advancement... material gain... bragging rights... personal honor Who was in Paul's circle, Jesus or Paul? Paul almost was enjoying what was happening. But it wasn't Paul in his own circle. It was the Savior.

Think about the litany of evils that are common to us humans. When Jesus is in our circle do we experience any of these? There is wisdom in one of God's ancient commands (Deut. 6:5). When we do this we experience fulfillment, satisfaction, delight, love, joy, peace, etc. It is easy to fall in love with the academics of Bible interpretation... good theology... Christian friends... the routine of a daily Christian walk... uplifting church programs... and at the same time find that we have lost our first love for Jesus. Paul kept his first love. This is what motivated him to do what he did, react the way that he did, and say what he did (see Phil 3:8; 2 Tim 4:6-8).

Keep you love for Jesus in the center of your circle. We often will fail at this. I certainly do. But with practice we will find ourselves being more consistent in this.

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<sup>2</sup> The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Vol. 9, p. 530.