

UNSTOPPABLE CHURCH

Then and Now
in 30 Minutes



Episode 37 - Energised

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THE SETTING



We're looking at **the Model of Jerusalem** in the grounds of the Israel Museum in **Jerusalem**. We've come here because the Sanhedrin met in the Lishkat La-Gazit ("Chamber of the Hewn Stones") that was located within the Temple precincts. This was the highest Court in Judaism, comprising 71 spiritual leaders; and it was before this court that the Roman commander now brought Paul to try to get to the bottom of the accusations against him.



The Model of Jerusalem at the Israel Museum showing how the Temple dominated everything



[Acts 22:30-23:11](#)



Paul began by identifying with those before whom he was brought, calling them “my brothers” and insisting he had fulfilled his duty to God with all good conscience ([23:1](#)). Yet Ananias, who, despite being High Priest, was noted for his cruelty and violence, responded by striking Paul - something that violated Jewish Law, as Paul reminded him. Paul didn’t retaliate, but he did tell him that God would strike him - a true prophecy, for within ten years, in the Jewish-Roman war, Ananias would be killed. Yet once Paul was told that this was the High Priest, he immediately apologised, recognising that the Office was greater than the man.

Paul then changed tack. He knew that both Sadducees and Pharisees were present, and they held very different views about resurrection. Pharisees believed in it, for they found it within their Scriptures; but Sadducees rejected it for they only accepted the Torah (the first five books) as Scripture and resurrection wasn’t found there. So, Paul said he was on trial simply because of his belief in resurrection; and this led to such a violent debate that the Roman commander had to intervene and return Paul to the barracks. It was here that God appeared to him and encouraged him ([23:11](#)).

Resurrection and the future hope

For Paul, resurrection wasn’t merely a theological idea; it was something that energised him, especially in difficult times like these. Having grown up as a zealous Pharisee ([Acts 23:6](#); [Php 3:5-6](#)), he had always believed in resurrection; but his encounter with Jesus on the Damascus Road had revolutionised how he thought about resurrection. He had always thought that resurrection would happen at the End; but if he had met the risen Jesus, then the End must be breaking in right now. He now realised that we can experience resurrection life in this life, not simply wait for it in the next. And that energised him.

Resurrection in Paul’s letters

Paul often refers to resurrection in his letters. There are two places in particular where he writes at length about it. First, in 1 Corinthians 1 where he states: Christ surely rose from the dead and appeared to many ([v1-11](#)); if Christ’s resurrection didn’t really happen, then Christians have no hope ([v12-19](#)); Christ is “the firstfruits” of the resurrection, meaning that his resurrection is the guarantee that we too, if we trust in him, will also rise at the End of the Age when he returns ([v20-28](#)); we will then be given our own ‘resurrection body’ ([v35-49](#)) ready for life in God’s renewed world ([v50-58](#)).

The second place where he deals at length with resurrection is in 1 Thess 4:13-5:11. Here he writes that: Christians, of course, grieve when a loved one dies - yet not as people without hope ([4:13](#)); because those who have died trusting in Christ will return with him; they won’t be disadvantaged in any way by death, but, in fact, will be the first to rise ([4:14-16](#)). Those alive then will be “caught up” to meet both them and Christ and so we will all “be with Christ for ever” ([4:17-18](#)). Some Christians think this refers to what they call ‘the secret rapture’ (when Christ, they say, will return secretly and take Christians to heaven to avoid the terrors of the

end time on earth) - though verse 16 seems very clear that this return will be a highly public and dramatic event, not secret ([v16](#)).

What always stands out about Paul's writings about End times is that they never end with speculation but rather with energisation and motivation to mission, out of our great hope in Christ (e.g., [1 Thess 5:1-11](#)).



1. Does your thinking about Christ's return stay theoretical or does it energise you in to action and mission?
2. Why is the idea of a secret rapture and Christians being taken to heaven before things get bad on earth so attractive?
3. How could a renewed vision of Christ's return energise the Church today and make it unstoppable once again?



For a behind-the-scenes glimpse into what was involved to create this podcast series listen to Mike and David recounting their experiences!

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