

## Woodland Baptist Church

July 24, 2013 - Wednesday Night in the Word

Acts 23:12-35 Paul's Midnight Run to Caesarea

### 1) OPENING REMARKS

- a) Following his three epic journeys Luke describes the five trials Paul had to endure.<sup>1</sup>
  - i) Jewish crowd at the northwest corner of the temple area (22:1)
  - ii) Supreme Jewish Council in Jerusalem (23:1)
  - iii) Caesarea before Felix (24:1)
  - iv) Caesarea before Festus (25:1)
  - v) Caesarea before King Herod Agrippa (26:1)
- b) Tonight, we pick up at Acts 23, where Paul has just been saved again by the Roman army from the Jews that became furious at him when he started a debate about the resurrection during his trial with them. Paul escapes with the help of the Roman Tribune and is put under guard at the barracks. That night Christ comes to him with some encouraging news.
  - i) **Acts 23:11** - 11 That night **the Lord appeared to Paul** and said, "Be encouraged, Paul. Just as you have been a witness to me here in Jerusalem, you must preach the Good News in Rome as well."

### 2) Transitions:

- a) **12-15** - the plot to kill Paul and who it involved and the oath they took.
- b) **16-22** - God's providential rescue of Paul from the plot through Paul's nephew and the Roman army.
- c) **22-35** - Paul's midnight run to Caesarea with the Romans and his meeting with Governor Felix to start his trial.

### 3) READ ACTS 23:12-22

#### 4) **Verses 12-15** - The Plot to KILL the Apostle PAUL

- a) **12** The next morning a group of Jews got together and bound themselves with an oath not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul. **13** There were more than forty of them in the conspiracy. **14** They went to the leading priests and elders
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and told them, “We have bound ourselves with an oath to eat nothing until we have killed Paul. 15 So you and the high council should ask the commander to bring Paul back to the council again. Pretend you want to examine his case more fully. We will kill him on the way.”

i) The assassination plot:

- (1) More than forty in the conspiracy, they vowed to not “eat or drink” until they had killed him. So, they were “fasting” until they killed Paul.
  - (a) The Greek word used to express their oath is particularly strong (**anathematizō**). They placed themselves under an anathema, a curse, probably in some such form as “May I be cursed/ eternally damned if ...” (Polhill). Galatians 1
  - (b) This verb is also used in **Mark 14:71** - 71 Peter swore, “A curse on me if I’m lying—I don’t know this man you’re talking about!” 72 And immediately the rooster crowed the second time.
  
- (2) *They included the leading priests and elders in on it* - they wanted to get Claudius Lysias to bring Paul back to the high council to “examine his case more fully.” This sounds quite merciful, as they have reconsidered and perhaps they wish to give him another chance, but in fact they have moved to conspire murder.
  - (a) At a narrative level, the high priests’s involvement in this conspiracy shows the truth of Paul’s insult in verse 3 that the priest is a *whitewashed wall*. This is because the priest agrees to deception and violates the law he is supposed to defend. His undercutting of a legal process entails injustice and potential murder (Bock).
  
- (3) Then, supposedly in some small alleyway in between the two locations (Barracks and temple), they planned to ambush Paul and murder him, silencing him forever.
  - (a) Their plan bespeaks their fanatical devotion, for Paul would be guarded by Roman soldiers, and an attempt to assassinate him, whether it succeeded or not, would inevitably involve the assassins in heavy loss of life (F.F. Bruce)
  - (b) Despite their numbers and their rage, the mob is powerless because God’s plan involves a witness for Paul in Rome and, more fundamentally, because Paul’s life belongs to God’ (Polhill)

5) Verses 16-22 - God's providential CARE of Paul's LIFE

- a) **16 But Paul's nephew—his sister's son—heard of their plan and went to the fortress and told Paul. 17 Paul called for one of the Roman officers and said, "Take this young man to the commander. He has something important to tell him." 18 So the officer did, explaining, "Paul, the prisoner, called me over and asked me to bring this young man to you because he has something to tell you." 19 The commander took his hand, led him aside, and asked, "What is it you want to tell me?" 20 Paul's nephew told him, "Some Jews are going to ask you to bring Paul before the high council tomorrow, pretending they want to get some more information. 21 But don't do it! There are more than forty men hiding along the way ready to ambush him. They have vowed not to eat or drink anything until they have killed him. They are ready now, just waiting for your consent." 22 "Don't let anyone know you told me this," the commander warned the young man.**

(1) Has a family member ever saved you from trouble? What about an obscure family member that you have not seen or heard from for years?

ii) **16 But Paul's nephew—his sister's son—heard of their plan and went to the fortress and told Paul...**

(1) Verse 16 is one of the only references to any family that we know about that Paul had...where has this relative been? How did he learn about the plot?

(a) Prisoners of high rank, such as Paul with his Roman citizenship, were often given a great deal of liberty for visits from family and friends (Polhill).

(2) We do not know if his sister lived in Jerusalem; perhaps she did, but perhaps she lived in Tarsus, and her son had come to Jerusalem for his education, as his uncle Paul had done in years gone by (F.F. Bruce).

(a) \*Verse 18 - **Paul, the prisoner** - this is the first mention that Paul is a prisoner (Bock).

iii) Paul immediately calls for one of the Roman officers that is overseeing his confinement and gets him to take his nephew to Claudius Lysias so he could explain the information he had heard.

**(1) 19 The commander took his hand, led him aside, and asked, “What is it you want to tell me?”** It is very interesting that the commander treated this child’s information with such seriousness.

**(a)** Despite his youth, anonymity and apparent lack of special social status, Paul’s nephew surprisingly enjoys a certain intimacy and assumes a certain authority with the high-ranking Roman tribune.’ (Pillar commentary).

**iv) 22 “Don’t let anyone know you told me this,” the commander warned the young man.**

**(1)** This is the last time in Acts we see Paul in Jerusalem (Bock).

**6) Verses 23-35 Paul is PROTECTED by the Roman Army and given REFUGE**

**a) 23 Then the commander called two of his officers and ordered, “Get 200 soldiers ready to leave for Caesarea at nine o’clock tonight. Also take 200 spearmen and 70 mounted troops. 24 Provide horses for Paul to ride, and get him safely to Governor Felix.” 25 Then he wrote this letter to the governor: 26 “From Claudius Lysias, to his Excellency, Governor Felix: Greetings! 27 “This man was seized by some Jews, and they were about to kill him when I arrived with the troops. When I learned that he was a Roman citizen, I removed him to safety. 28 Then I took him to their high council to try to learn the basis of the accusations against him. 29 I soon discovered the charge was something regarding their religious law—certainly nothing worthy of imprisonment or death. 30 But when I was informed of a plot to kill him, I immediately sent him on to you. I have told his accusers to bring their charges before you.” 31 So that night, as ordered, the soldiers took Paul as far as Antipatris. 32 They returned to the fortress the next morning, while the mounted troops took him on to Caesarea. 33 When they arrived in Caesarea, they presented Paul and the letter to Governor Felix. 34 He read it and then asked Paul what province he was from. “Cilicia,” Paul answered. 35 “I will hear your case myself when your accusers arrive,” the governor told him. Then the governor ordered him kept in the prison at Herod’s headquarters.**

**i)** The number of soldiers that protected Paul: 200 soldiers, 200 spearman and 70 mounted troops. Total of 470 troops to protect Paul from a mob of 40?

- (1) Paul's life was plainly not safe in Jerusalem. The tribune could not afford to incur responsibility for the assassination of a Roman citizen whom he had taken into custody, or to expose himself to any of the other risks that he must inevitably run so long as Paul was in his charge (Bruce).
  - (2) Only a large force traveling secretly at night can hope to deliver Paul from what, in Luke's portrait, is a city set upon his destruction.' (Pillar NT)
  - (3) The total company of infantry, cavalry, and light-armed troops was twelve times larger than the band of forty terrorists! (Pillar NT)
  - (4) The over ten-to-one ratio of soldiers to plotters will guarantee that they reach Caesarea (Bock).
- ii) They would take Paul to Governor Felix in Caesarea accompanied with a letter explaining the situation: litterae dimissoriae - letter sent in the case of an appeal.
- (1) **Greeting:** "From Claudius Lysias, to his Excellency, Governor Felix: Greetings!
- (a) What do we know about Governor Felix? (Bruce)
    - (i) Full name: Marcus Antonius Felix - born a slave
    - (ii) Advancement: Owed the majority of his unprecedented advancement into the equestrian order to the influence of his brother, Pallas who was closely connected to RE Claudius. Pallas was a freedman of Claudius' mother Antonia, and was for a number of years head of the imperial civil service.
    - (iii) Character of Rule - He became procurator of Judea in AD 52 and his term of office was marked by increasing insurgency throughout the province, and by the emergence of Jewish assassins known as *sicarii*. The ruthlessness with which he put down these risings alienated many of the more moderate Jews and led to more chaos.
    - (iv) Historically known - His character is noted by the Roman historian Tacitus: "he exercised the power of a king with the mind of a slave."
    - (v) Family life - He was married three times, all to royalty:
      1. Granddaughter of Antony and Cleopatra
      2. Name unavailable
      3. Drusilla, youngest daughter of Herod Agrippa I

(vi) End of Rule - Felix's administrative ineptitude was bound to catch up with him sooner or later, and he was finally removed from office for his total mismanagement of a dispute between the Jews and Gentiles of Caesarea (see 24:27) (Polhill).

**(2) Situation:**

- (a) 27 "This man was seized by some Jews, and they were about to kill him when I arrived with the troops.
- (b) When I learned that he was a Roman citizen, I removed him to safety.

(i) *Is this true or did Claudius Lysias omit something?* Read Acts 21:37-40 and Acts 22:22-29

- (c) 28 Then I took him to their high council to try to learn the basis of the accusations against him. 29 I soon discovered the charge was something regarding their religious law—*certainly nothing worthy of imprisonment or death.*

(i) Acts 22:30-23:11

- (d) 30 But when I was informed of a plot to kill him, I immediately sent him on to you. I have told his accusers to bring their charges before you."

iii) How did Luke get this letter to include in Acts?

- (1) Possibly read aloud in court
- (2) Felix read it to Paul at some point

**b) 31 So that night, as ordered, the soldiers took Paul as far as Antipatris. 32 They returned to the fortress the next morning, while the mounted troops took him on to Caesarea. 33 When they arrived in Caesarea, they presented Paul and the letter to Governor Felix. 34 He read it and then asked Paul what province he was from. "Cilicia," Paul answered. 35 "I will hear your case myself when your accusers arrive," the governor told him. Then the governor ordered him kept in the prison at Herod's headquarters.**

- i) As far as Antipatris - 35 miles from Jerusalem
- ii) Mounted troops continued on - the 70 troops on horseback continued with Paul to Caesarea.

- iii) They arrive in Caesarea, Governor Felix discerns that Paul is within his jurisdiction and decides to confine Paul until his accusers show to bring the case before him.

## 7) CLOSE

- a) Even the most careful and cunning of human plans cannot succeed if God opposes them. No weapon forged against him will prevail. On this occasion God's providential intervention involved Paul's nephew (Stott).
- b) Johnson suggests that the message of the chapter for Luke's first readers is clear. 'If the Christians are to argue what they regard as their legitimate claims to represent the authentic Israel, it will not be possible within the context of direct confrontation with the Jewish leadership, which has shown itself not only unwilling to hear those claims but unwilling to let those making them continue to live. Any debate or defense can take place only within the protection offered by the Roman order.' (Pillar)
- c) Acts 23 suggests the need to recognize God's sovereign hand in all such experiences, and to trust that he is working out his saving purpose through the negative, as well as the positive consequences of Christian witness. (Pillar)
- d) On the one hand, the Jewish persecutors were prejudiced and violent. On the other, the Romans were open-minded and went out of their way to maintain the standards of law, justice and order of which their best leaders understandably proud (Stott).
- e) Between these two powers, religious and civil, hostile and friendly, Jerusalem and Rome, Paul found himself trapped, unarmed and totally vulnerable and the source of his serene confidence was in the truth of Jesus Christ.
- f) What of the oath the forty took to not eat or drink until they killed Paul? It is safe to assume that they broke it.