

Acts Chapter 23 Continued

Acts 23:21 "But do not thou yield unto them: for there lie in wait for him of them more than forty men, which have bound themselves with an oath, that they will neither eat nor drink till they have killed him: and now are they ready, looking for a promise from thee."

In the last lesson, we saw Paul brought before the council. The council really did not find anything they could convict him of. Forty men banded together and took an oath not to eat until they killed Paul. Paul's nephew overheard and came and told Paul. Paul sends this nephew to the captain, so the captain can protect Paul from these forty men.

These men were going to try to get the captain to bring Paul out to be questioned. While he is out, they plan to kill him. Remember, the captain is afraid for any harm to come to Paul, because he is a Roman citizen.

Acts 23:22 "So the chief captain [then] let the young man depart, and charged [him, See thou] tell no man that thou hast shewed these things to me."

This chief captain has to live in this area, so he cannot let these people know that he knew about this plot. He is getting Paul out of this, but he cannot let the people know why he is taking Paul out. It would look like he had taken sides with Paul against them.

Verses 23-24: To foil the conspirators' plot, avoid a potentially explosive confrontation with the Jews, and save Paul's life, Lysias realized he had to get the apostle out of Jerusalem and to his superior, Governor Felix in Caesarea.

Acts 23:23 "And he called unto [him] two centurions, saying, Make ready two hundred soldiers to go to Caesarea, and horsemen threescore and ten, and spearmen two hundred, at the third hour of the night;"

"Soldiers ... horsemen ... spearmen": The "soldiers" were legionnaires, the elite soldiers of the Roman army; the "horsemen" were from the garrison's cavalry detachment; and the "spearmen," or javelin throwers, were soldiers less heavily armed than the legionnaires. Lysias sent almost half of his 1,000 man garrison, showing how seriously he viewed the plot against Paul.

"Third hour of the night": 9:00 p.m.

This is a very large group to guard this one man. This is about the same number that would go to guard a king. This captain was going to make sure no one would kill Paul on the way. Seventy horsemen went with them. They left at 9 p.m.

Acts 23:24 "And provide [them] beasts, that they may set Paul on, and bring [him] safe unto Felix the governor."

“The governor” (Greek hegemon), technically refers to Felix’s office as Roman procurator. Third-rate provinces received men from the equestrian order rather than men of nobility. By contrast, the proconsuls were noblemen. (See the note on 13:7).

Other procurators who governed Judea were Pontius Pilate and Festus, though technically in Judea procurators were called prefects before A.D. 44.

Felix means happy. Felix was a Roman procurator. Felix had been a slave, but was freed by Claudius Caesar and was elevated to governor in Judea.

Acts 23:25-26 "And he wrote a letter after this manner:" "Claudius Lysias unto the most excellent governor Felix [sendeth] greeting."

“Governor Felix” (see note on 24:3).

Up until this point, we have just heard him spoken of as captain. Now we are told that the captain's name was Claudius Lysias.

Acts 23:27 "This man was taken of the Jews, and should have been killed of them: then came I with an army, and rescued him, having understood that he was a Roman."

“Having understood that he was a Roman”: Actually, Lysias did not find this out until after he arrested Paul (22:2-26). Lysias sought to portray himself in the best possible light before the governor. For that reason, he also neglected to mention his order to have Paul scourged (22:24), and his mistaken assumption that he was the notorious Egyptian assassin (21:38).

Notice that the commander alters the facts. The truth is that he learned of Paul’s “Roman” citizenship later when he was about to scourge him (22:24-26).

This captain is just sure that it will put him in good favor that he saved a Roman citizen from being killed by a mob of Jews.

Acts 23:28 "And when I would have known the cause wherefore they accused him, I brought him forth into their council:"

We really see the divine providence of God in all of this. God caused this captain really, to get Paul out of danger. The captain said they wanted to kill him, because of a technicality in their Jewish law.

Acts 23:29 "Whom I perceived to be accused of questions of their law, but to have nothing laid to his charge worthy of death or of bonds."

“Questions of their law”: Lysias’ failure to mention any crimes against Roman law was tantamount to declaring Paul innocent.

He also says, that Paul has not done anything to warrant punishment.

Acts 23:30 "And when it was told me how that the Jews laid wait for the man, I sent straightway to thee, and gave commandment to his accusers also to say before thee what [they had] against him. Farewell."

“To say before thee what they had against him”: The plot against Paul’s life rendered any further hearings at Jerusalem unsafe, thus requiring Lysias to burden Felix with the case.

Part of this was not true, when the captain sent Paul away by night unknown to the Jews. The captain waited until after Paul was safe, before he tells them that they will have to bring their complaints to Felix. This letter was explaining why he sent Paul to Felix.

Acts 23:31 "Then the soldiers, as it was commanded them, took Paul, and brought [him] by night to Antipatris."

“Antipatris”: A Roman military post about 40 miles from Jerusalem. Travelers from Jerusalem to Caesarea often rested there. To get there from Jerusalem in one night (verse 32), would have been an exhausting forced march for the foot soldiers.

Antipatris was thirty-eight miles away from Jerusalem. Paul was sent by night to keep from arousing these forty men who were sworn to kill him.

Acts 23:32 "On the morrow they left the horsemen to go with him, and returned to the castle:"

“Horsemen” Since there was much less danger of ambush in the largely Gentile region of Samaria, the foot soldiers were no longer needed.

This just means that somewhere between six and nine hours later, they came to Antipatris. The horsemen left the soldiers, and they took Paul the last part of the journey. They would leave Paul with Felix and go back to the castle in Jerusalem.

Acts 23:33 "Who, when they came to Caesarea, and delivered the epistle to the governor, presented Paul also before him."

“Caesarea” (see note on 9:30).

These soldiers had orders to turn Paul over to no one except Felix. Along with Paul, they gave the letter from their captain to Felix.

Acts 23:34 "And when the governor had read [the letter], he asked of what province he was. And when he understood that [he was] of Cilicia;"

“What province he was”: Felix needed to determine whether he had jurisdiction to hear Paul’s case.

“Of Cilicia”: Judea and Cilicia were at that time both under the legate of Syria, so Felix had the authority to hear his case.

What appeared to Paul to be a safe haven, is now far from that. Instead of Felix protecting Paul from these forty Jews, Felix just orders Paul held until they can catch up and accuse Paul before Felix. This is just a delay, not a reprieve.

Really, all of this is actually taking Paul closer to Rome. We must remember that the Lord had appeared to Paul and told him be of good cheer, because he would bear witness of Him in Rome as he had in Jerusalem.

Acts 23:35 "I will hear thee, said he, when thine accusers are also come. And he commanded him to be kept in Herod's judgment hall."

“Herod’s judgment hall”: Felix’s official residence in Caesarea.

Felix perhaps, did not take his word for Paul's innocence. He wanted to be thought of as being just, so he was going to wait and hear both sides of this argument, before he makes up his mind. His inquiry about where Paul was from was to make sure that he fell within his jurisdiction.

Acts Chapter 23 Continued Questions

1. How many men lay in wait for Paul?
2. What had they done to show how serious they were about killing Paul?
3. What were they not going to do, until they killed Paul?
4. What had the council found Paul guilty of?
5. Who had overheard their plot to kill Paul?
6. Why was the captain afraid for Paul to be killed?
7. What did the captain warn the young man of?
8. Why did he not want the people to know what he had told the nephew of Paul?
9. Who did the captain call to him to give orders to about what to do with Paul?
10. How many soldiers would go and guard Paul?
11. How many horsemen went?
12. What time did they leave Jerusalem?

13. How did Paul travel?
14. What does Felix mean?
15. Who was Felix?
16. Who had freed Felix?
17. What was the captain's name?
18. Who had Paul been taken of?
19. Why had the captain sent soldiers in to protect Paul?
20. What did the captain perceive Paul to be accused of?
21. What was the captain's verdict of what Paul had done?
22. What small untruth did the captain tell in verse 30?
23. Where did the soldiers take Paul?
24. How far was this from Jerusalem?
25. Where did they deliver Paul to Felix?
26. What did Felix ask Paul, to see if Paul was in his jurisdiction?
27. What unpleasant decision did Felix make?
28. Where was Paul held until court day?