

Paul attempted to show the Jews in Jerusalem that he was not opposed to Jewish believers in Jesus as Messiah living in accord with the laws of Moses, not to earn salvation, but out of respect for the covenant God made with Moses and the Jewish nation. We see in other passages that Paul knew they were not bound to those laws, as Christ had fulfilled the law for us (Galatians 5:6<sup>i</sup>). We can be led by the Spirit (Galatians 5:25<sup>ii</sup>). Romans chapter seven is all about trying to live in a way that is in accord with the law by one's own strength. He concluded that it was impossible (Romans 7:18<sup>iii</sup>). In Romans eight Paul explained <sup>2</sup> *For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.* <sup>3</sup> *For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh,* <sup>4</sup> *in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.* Romans 8:2-4 We can live in the Spirit that gave the laws for the good of the descendants of Israel. He wrote to the Galatians, <sup>18</sup> *But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.* Galatians 5:18 But that does not mean that Jews should avoid doing the things written in the law. If they want to eat kosher food to honor the covenant made with them, they do so not to earn salvation, but to honor God.

While Paul was participating in a cleansing ritual called a Nazarite vow, some Jews from Asia recognized Paul and stirred up the worshipers with the false claim that Paul had brought a Gentile into the temple. They began beating Paul until the Roman soldiers came in and rescued him. Paul asked to speak to the Jews and was given permission. Even after being beaten by them, he loved them enough to try to share his testimony of how Jesus turned him around. They listened up until he told them he was sent to the Gentiles and the uproar began again. When brought before the Jewish council Paul declared the real issue was the resurrection, in other words, Jesus had risen. A shouting match between the Pharisees and Sadducees erupted (See Acts 22:27-23:10).

Our last passage ended with Jesus appearing to Paul to speak encouragement to him. <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."* Acts 23:11 Our days are planned by God. We can trust Him to intervene as needed to guide us to His good plans for our lives *if* we will surrender to His will.

<sup>12</sup> *When it was day, the Jews made a plot and bound themselves by an oath neither to eat nor drink till they had killed Paul.* <sup>13</sup> *There were more than forty who made this conspiracy.* Acts 23:12-13 Jesus had just encouraged Paul that there was a plan in all this. The very next morning the enemy of our souls counter attacked by inspiring a group of forty men to plot to kill Paul. What did they think of the eighth commandment? Thou shall not commit murder (Exodus 20:13<sup>iv</sup>)! Or perhaps they were so convinced Paul was deceiving people that they thought Leviticus 24:14<sup>v</sup> applied, that

a person who curses God should be stoned. Why were these forty Jews even willing to risk their lives to murder Paul? Were they trying to earn favor with the Sadducees of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish power brokers of that time, or simply zealous to defend their religion of works?

*14 They went to the chief priests and elders and said, "We have strictly bound ourselves by an oath to taste no food till we have killed Paul. 15 Now therefore you, along with the council, give notice to the tribune to bring him down to you, as though you were going to determine his case more exactly. And we are ready to kill him before he comes near."* Acts 23:14-15 First thing I thought when I read this was, "Great! The longer he is protected, the weaker they will get. What a stupid oath!" But from a Jewish perspective, it just shows that they held their faith so dear and believed Paul was turning fellow Jews away from what they thought was true Judaism. The Sanhedrin was supposed to fast before delivering a death sentence because life is a gift from God. Paul did say they were all zealous for the Law just as he was (Acts 22:3<sup>vi</sup>).

Their plan needed cooperation of the rulers, and so they invited them to be co-conspirators in a murder and urged them to lie in the process. This is evidence of the corruption that Jesus had addressed in Matthew 23 (Matthew 23:5-6<sup>vii</sup>, 13<sup>viii</sup>). Last week I told you of the historical account of the hypocrisy of the high priest Ananias. No wonder God had enough of them. How gracious of God to give them until A.D. 70 with warning signs the whole time! That was twelve years after this event. God is not willing that any should perish (2 Peter 3:9<sup>ix</sup>). His patience is so much greater than ours.

*16 Now the son of Paul's sister heard of their ambush, so he went and entered the barracks and told Paul.* Acts 23:16 Paul's nephew surely was a Christian. I can't imagine him hearing his uncle's conversion and not coming to faith. If he wasn't converted before this, hearing the evil of the leaders would have pushed him to make the right decision. The tribune, Lysias, allowed Paul's relatives to visit him. Paul's Roman citizenship and patience to not mention it until just the right time worked together with the nephew's coincidental hearing about the plot. Again, we see that Paul was anointed when he wrote that all things work together for good to those who love God and are called according to his purpose (Romans 8:28<sup>x</sup>).

It doesn't matter how the enemy schemes against us. God can easily thwart the most determined efforts of Satan (Isaiah 54:17<sup>xi</sup>). Their greatest efforts to stop Paul will result in him testifying to rulers, to the whole Praetorium guard, and time to write some of the letters of the New Testament that have taught the church in the right doctrines for millennia! You would think that Satan would eventually see the futility of his efforts and how they backfire on him and just give up, but his pride won't allow it.

When you think the enemy is prevailing against you, call on the name of the Lord and trust Him to turn things around for His glory (Psalm 50:15<sup>xii</sup>). It's never about us being

proved right or winning for our own goals, but rather that God be glorified through whatever comes against us.

*17 Paul called one of the centurions and said, "Take this young man to the tribune, for he has something to tell him."<sup>18</sup> So he took him and brought him to the tribune and said, "Paul the prisoner called me and asked me to bring this young man to you, as he has something to say to you."* Acts 23:17-18 The boy was risking his life, for if he was seen entering the barracks, those forty men might try to murder him as well. Paul's favored Roman status worked to his advantage again, as the centurion granted Paul's request.

*19 The tribune took him by the hand, and going aside asked him privately, "What is it that you have to tell me?"* Acts 23:19 The tribune discerned the young man had a secret that should not leak out. It looks like there were leakers for personal gain even back then.

*20 And he said, "The Jews have agreed to ask you to bring Paul down to the council tomorrow, as though they were going to inquire somewhat more closely about him.*

*21 But do not be persuaded by them, for more than forty of their men are lying in ambush for him, who have bound themselves by an oath neither to eat nor drink till they have killed him. And now they are ready, waiting for your consent."* Acts 23:20-21 Paul's nephew relayed the details of the plot to the tribune, along with a plea to not let it happen. This was a serious threat. Something had to be done to keep the peace, which was the responsibility of the tribune.

*22 So the tribune dismissed the young man, charging him, "Tell no one that you have informed me of these things."* Acts 23:22 It had to be kept quiet to avoid a conflict and for the young man's safety.

*23 Then he called two of the centurions and said, "Get ready two hundred soldiers, with seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen to go as far as Caesarea at the third hour of the night."* Acts 23:23 It was also the tribune's responsibility protect Paul, a Roman citizen. He wasted no time. This was no small force he put together. It consisted of 470 soldiers. They were to leave at 9 p.m. that very night and go to Caesarea Maritima. If there were just 40 who pledged to kill Paul, the tribune was making extra sure his fellow Roman was safe. He believed Paul's nephew and acted to keep peace.

*24 Also provide mounts for Paul to ride and bring him safely to Felix the governor."* Acts 23:24 It appears he trusted Paul to not try to flee by letting him have a horse to ride which would hasten the last portion of the journey. Paul is going in style with a huge military escort.

*25 And he wrote a letter to this effect:<sup>26</sup> "Claudius Lysias, to his Excellency the governor Felix, greetings.<sup>27</sup> This man was seized by the Jews and was about to be killed by them*

*when I came upon them with the soldiers and rescued him, having learned that he was a Roman citizen.* Acts 23:25-27 The Greek implies that Luke was relaying the charges word for word. Lysias had to explain the charges against Paul. He slightly distorted the account by saying he rescued him because he was a Roman. Perhaps he wanted his version recorded in case Paul should mention he was bound and about to be scourged contrary to Roman law (Acts 22:25<sup>xiii</sup>).

*<sup>28</sup> And desiring to know the charge for which they were accusing him, I brought him down to their council. <sup>29</sup> I found that he was being accused about questions of their law, but charged with nothing deserving death or imprisonment.* Acts 23:28-29 There is no crime according to the standards of Roman law. Paul should have been released upon arriving in Caesarea.

*<sup>30</sup> And when it was disclosed to me that there would be a plot against the man, I sent him to you at once, ordering his accusers also to state before you what they have against him.* Acts 23:30 Caesarea was the Roman capital of the region, more heavily armed and protected than the fortress of Antonia in Jerusalem. Jews would have to be in full revolt to try to take Paul from the palace there. Rooms where he could have been held were only recently excavated and to the archeologist's amazement, Paul's name was found to be etched on a wall. During the second Jewish revolt, Caesarea was destroyed and the rooms were buried. God has seen fit to preserve enough clues that sincere seekers will see evidence to believe.

Since the high priest worked so closely with the Romans, Lysias was walking a tightrope. He had to protect a fellow Roman, but he also had to give political favor to the Jewish leader, Ananias. Paul's imprisonment was a compromise of the Roman legal system to keep peace in Jerusalem.

*<sup>31</sup> So the soldiers, according to their instructions, took Paul and brought him by night to Antipatris. <sup>32</sup> And on the next day they returned to the barracks, letting the horsemen go on with him.* Acts 23:31-32 Antipatris is a little past the halfway point. The forty men were not likely to follow, and even if they did, the horsemen could out pace them on the last portion of the journey. Besides, they would first meet the soldiers on foot who were returning. This is a detail that the historian Luke didn't have to include, but does for the sake of an accurate historical record (Luke 1:1-3<sup>xiv</sup>).

When you read the gnostic gospels or other non-canon books supposedly written around the end of the first and into the second century, you will find the authors wrote in generalities, giving few names and almost no locations. They don't have the same feeling of an historical account.

*<sup>33</sup> When they had come to Caesarea and delivered the letter to the governor, they presented Paul also before him. <sup>34</sup> On reading the letter, he asked what province he was from. And when he learned that he was from Cilicia, <sup>35</sup> he said, "I will give you a*

*hearing when your accusers arrive.” And he commanded him to be guarded in Herod’s praetorium.* Acts 23:33-35 Governor Felix was over Judea from A.D. 52 to 59. He asked which Roman province Paul was from? Accusers were to face the defendant and Cilicia would have been too far for the Jewish leaders to be expected to travel.

We’ll pick up the narrative from here next week. We should note that this has set up Jesus’ assignment to Paul at Paul’s conversion, to testify to Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel (Acts 9:15<sup>xv</sup>). He had testified to Jews and Gentiles throughout the Roman empire, and now even in the temple itself and before the Sanhedrin. God is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to the saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus had recently told Paul that he must testify in Rome. The sovereign God of all creations is laying the ground work for Paul to testify to kings.

When we consider all the so called “coincidences,” such as the Jews from Asia recognizing Paul in the temple (Acts 21:27<sup>xvi</sup>), the rescue before he was killed (21:32<sup>xvii</sup>), Paul’s Roman citizenship, his chance to witness two times to the Jews, his nephew overhearing a secret conversation, the tribune’s wise decision to keep it secret and have Paul immediately escorted out to Caesarea by a heavily armed unit, we can only conclude that God is in the details (Psalm 139:16<sup>xviii</sup>).

God has a plan for each of our lives. If we will let Him prepare our hearts, and fill our hearts with His Word, and then make ourselves available and watch for His leading, we will find God do so much more than we could ask or imagine for His glory and our eternal good (Ephesians 3:20-21<sup>xix</sup>). Don’t limit God by thinking He must work the way we expect or how He has worked in the past. Look at all the different ways God worked in Scripture! God will work uniquely in each of our lives if we will let Him. It will always be in line with His Word and full of the fruits of the Spirit, but the details always include His creativity. Will you prepare your hearts to surrender to what He has planned for you? It is God’s work. He is the One working in you both to will and to do His good pleasure (Philippians 2:13<sup>xx</sup>). Is He your Lord? Are you surrendering each day to the Holy Spirit within you? It is only then that His life can be manifest through you.

## Questions

- 1 How did Paul end up in this situation?
- 2 What secret was uncovered and by whom?
- 3 Why did the nephew have access to Paul and the Centurion yield to Paul’s request?
- 4 How does the tribune show wisdom?
- 5 Why did he not just suggest Paul be released?
- 6 What commission for Paul was God bringing to pass?
- 7 List some of the “coincidences” that made this possible.
- 8 What good was coming out of this?
- 9 How can we be prepared to be God’s servants?
- 10 Did the forty men starve to death? 😊

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**i Galatians 5:6 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.

**ii Galatians 5:25 (ESV)**

<sup>25</sup> If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.

**iii Romans 7:18 (ESV)**

<sup>18</sup> For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.

**iv Exodus 20:13 (ESV)**

<sup>13</sup> "You shall not murder.

**v Leviticus 24:14 (ESV)**

<sup>14</sup> "Bring out of the camp the one who cursed, and let all who heard him lay their hands on his head, and let all the congregation stone him.

**vi Acts 22:3 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated at the feet of Gamaliel according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God as all of you are this day.

**vii Matthew 23:5-6 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> They do all their deeds to be seen by others. For they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long,

<sup>6</sup> and they love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues

**viii Matthew 23:13 (ESV)**

<sup>13</sup> "But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. For you neither enter yourselves nor allow those who would enter to go in.

**ix 2 Peter 3:9 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

**x Romans 8:28 (ESV)**

<sup>28</sup> And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

**xi Isaiah 54:17 (ESV)**

<sup>17</sup> no weapon that is fashioned against you shall succeed, and you shall refute every tongue that rises against you in judgment. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD and their vindication from me, declares the LORD."

**xii Psalm 50:15 (ESV)**

<sup>15</sup> and call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me."

**xiii Acts 22:25 (ESV)**

<sup>25</sup> 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?"

**xiv Luke 1:1-3 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us,

<sup>2</sup> just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us,

<sup>3</sup> it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus,

**xv Acts 9:15 (ESV)**

<sup>15</sup> But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel.

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<sup>xvi</sup> **Acts 21:27 (ESV)**

<sup>27</sup> When the seven days were almost completed, the Jews from Asia, seeing him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd and laid hands on him,

<sup>xvii</sup> **Acts 21:32 (ESV)**

<sup>32</sup> He at once took soldiers and centurions and ran down to them. And when they saw the tribune and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul.

<sup>xviii</sup> **Psalm 139:16 (ESV)**

<sup>16</sup> Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.

<sup>xix</sup> **Ephesians 3:20-21 (ESV)**

<sup>20</sup> Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, <sup>21</sup> to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

<sup>xx</sup> **Philippians 2:13 (ESV)**

<sup>13</sup> for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.