

## THE LIFE OF THE APOSTLE PAUL

### A PLOT TO KILL PAUL, ACTS 23:12-35

- A. A plot to kill Paul (12-22)
1. A Jewish plot against Paul (12-15)
    - a. Forty men made an oath to kill Paul (12-13), *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. There were more than forty who made this conspiracy.*
      - 1) The word used for taking an oath is *anathema*, they were binding themselves under a curse if they did not fulfill the oath.
      - 2) Forty men hated Paul so and what he stood for that they took an oath to kill him.
      - 3) It is assumed that many of these men included Asia Jews who believed Paul had rejected Judaism and was turning Jews away, as well.
    - b. The Sanhedrin was included in the plot (14-15), *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. 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."*
      - 1) The group enlisted the aid of the chief priests and elders to have Paul drawn out from the protection of Roman guards so they could kill him.
      - 2) Lack of a case against Paul brought the religious leaders to this place, K. Gangel, *So much for law and justice in the Sanhedrin. We should see here how hatred confuses people's minds. They based efforts to do away with Paul on religion, on their great love for the law and their desire to protect its purity. They were quite prepared to break one of the Ten Commandments to achieve that "religious" goal.*
      - 3) It appears that the men had a way out if they were unsuccessful, according to Neil, *The oath was not so suicidal as it seems, since provision was made by the rabbis for releasing participants from the consequences of failure to carry out their purpose if external circumstances had made it impossible.*
  2. The plot was reported to the tribune (16-22)
    - a. Paul's nephew told him of the plot (16), *Now the son of Paul's sister heard of their ambush, so he went and entered the barracks and told Paul.*
      - 1) Paul's nephew told him of the plot. This is the only reference to Paul's immediate family.
      - 2) Roman citizens held in custody were permitted to receive visitors.
      - 3) Even when Paul was chained to guards in Rome, visitors came to visit him. 2 Timothy 1:16, *May the Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains,*
    - b. Paul sent his nephew to the tribune to report the plot (17-19), *Paul called one of the centurions and said, "Take this young man to the tribune, for he has something to tell him." 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." The tribune took him by the hand, and going aside asked him privately, "What is it that you have to tell me?"*
      - 1) A Roman citizen had the right to make requests to a centurion. So, Paul asked that his nephew be taken to the tribune to hear what had just been told to Paul.
      - 2) Based on the wording, Paul's nephew was either a teenager or was in his early twenties.
      - 3) The tribune met Paul's nephew in private.
    - c. The tribune acts on the report from Paul's nephew (19-21)
      - 1) The details of the plan (20-21), *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. 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."*
        - a) Paul's nephew reported the same account to the tribune.
        - b) The boy emphasized that the conspirators wanted to use the tribune to accomplish their purposes.

- 2) The tribune ordered Paul's nephew to tell no one of their meeting (22), ***So the tribune dismissed the young man, charging him, "Tell no one that you have informed me of these things."***
  - a) They young man was told by the tribune to tell no one that he had spoken to him about the conspiracy.
  - b) It will be seen in the next verses that the tribune believed the report of the young man, but why?
  - c) Kenneth Gangel, *Why would a Roman commander take the word of a young man, possibly a teenager? Because this particular commander was a seasoned veteran of Jerusalem duty! After what he had seen, even just in the past few days, he could believe the Jews capable of anything. Remember the Roman law about losing a prisoner. Lysias could not afford to ignore this piece of espionage and had every intent of acting upon it immediately.*

B. The tribune ordered that Paul be sent to Felix the Governor (23-32)

1. The tribune gave instructions for Paul's transport to Caesarea (23-24), ***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. Also provide mounts for Paul to ride and bring him safely to Felix the governor."***
  - a. The tribune decided to send Paul Caesarea because it was unsafe for Paul in Jerusalem and unthinkable to allow the situation to escalate to more riots.
  - b. Caesarea was the Roman provincial capital of Judea.
  - c. J. Vernon McGee, *The size of the escort is not excessive, in view of the troubled times and Jewish fanaticism.*
  - d. Paul continued to be shown respect as a Roman citizen as seen in the provision of a horse for him to ride.
2. The tribune's letter to Felix concerning Paul (25-30)
  - a. Introduction (25-26), ***And he wrote a letter to this effect: "Claudius Lysias, to his Excellency the governor Felix, greetings.***
    - 1) The tribune had to send background information concerning Paul's case.
    - 2) The fact that the escort was so large would have surprised Felix.
    - 3) Felix was probably not considered excellent except in a formal letter.
      - a) According to the Roman historian, Tacitus, *He is a master of cruelty and lust who exercised the power of a king with the spirit of a slave.*
      - b) Felix was a freed slave who was violent.
  - b. The plot against Paul (27), ***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.***
    - 1) The tribune's account of the story was not quite accurate since he had almost flogged a Roman citizen.
    - 2) Paul's rescue was the result of speaking of Roman citizenship to a centurion who went to the tribune.
  - c. The reason why Paul was being held (28-29), ***And desiring to know the charge for which they were accusing him, I brought him down to their council. I found that he was being accused about questions of their law, but charged with nothing deserving death or imprisonment.***
    - 1) Lysias explained that he took Paul to the Sanhedrin to determine their charges against him.
    - 2) He said Paul was being accused concerning Jewish religious laws.
    - 3) None of their charges deserved death or even imprisonment as was determined by Gallio earlier, note Acts 18:14-15, *But when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, "If it were a matter of wrongdoing or vicious crime, O Jews, I would have reason to accept your complaint. But since it is a matter of questions about words and names and your own law, see to it yourselves. I refuse to be a judge of these things."*
    - 4) Again, Christianity was not on trial because it had already been determined by Roman authorities that it was a part of Judaism which was an approved religion in the Roman Empire.

- d. A request that Felix examine the case against Paul (30), *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.*
    - 1) On the basis of what Lysias had just written, he sent Paul to stand before Felix.
    - 2) Also, he ordered the Jewish leaders to stand before Felix to give evidence against Paul.
    - 3) The order to the Sanhedrin had to be made to them the next day while Paul was already out of Jerusalem and on his way to Caesarea.
3. Paul's safe arrival in Caesarea (31-33)
- a. The first night Paul was held in Antipatris (31), *So the soldiers, according to their instructions, took Paul and brought him by night to Antipatris.*
    - 1) Antipatris are 37 miles northwest of Jerusalem.
    - 2) The area outside of Antipatris was suitable for an ambush so all the soldiers were needed.
  - b. The next day Paul was at Caesarea (32), *And on the next day they returned to the barracks, letting the horsemen go on with him.*
    - 1) It was 27 miles from Antipatris to Caesarea and was open and level terrain.
    - 2) Since there was less danger, the soldiers returned to the barracks in Jerusalem with only the horsemen accompanying Paul to Caesarea.
  - c. Paul was presented to Felix (33), *When they had come to Caesarea and delivered the letter to the governor, they presented Paul also before him.*
    - 1) Paul and the letter from Lysias were handed over to Felix.
    - 2) Felix was the first slave to become the governor of a Roman province.
    - 3) Thomas Constable, *He normally dealt very severely with Jews, especially the dagger-men, the terrorists who sought to overthrow Roman rule by assassinating key Romans and pro-Roman Jews (cf. 21:38).*
  - d. Felix agreed to give Paul a hearing (34-35), *On reading the letter, he asked what province he was from. And when he learned that he was from Cilicia, he said, "I will give you a hearing when your accusers arrive." And he commanded him to be guarded in Herod's praetorium.*
    - 1) After reading the letter, Felix asked of Paul's home province to determine the jurisdiction for the case.
    - 2) Thomas Constable, *If Paul had come from an area in the empire that had its own ruler in addition to a Roman governor, that local authority had a right to witness the proceedings (cf. Luke 23:6-12).*
    - 3) Since Paul was from Cilicia, Felix agreed to grant a hearing once the Jewish accusers arrived in Caesarea.
    - 4) Paul was ordered to be kept in Herod's praetorium which was the governor's palace built by Herod the Great. By this time, it had become a civic building which housed the governor's headquarters and cells for prisoners.

<b>CONCLUSION</b>
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- A. Homer Kent, *The delivery of the prisoner Paul to Caesarea marked the beginning of a two-year imprisonment in that city. During this period he stated his case, and also the case for the Christian gospel, to two provincial governors and a king, fulfilling one aspect of the Lord's prediction about his ministry (9:15).*
- B. Acts 9:15, *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.*
- C. When we allow God to have control of our lives, He will accomplish His purposes in and through us.