

Acts of the Apostles

Week 29: Acts 23:12-35

The Plot to Kill Paul (23:12-22)

- **The morning after the Lord promised Paul he would go to Rome to testify about Jesus, some Jews formed a conspiracy to kill him as soon as possible (v 12).**
 - o The conspiracy involved more than forty men including the chief priests and elders (v 13).
 - o This would not have involved the whole Sanhedrin since the Pharisees were at least somewhat sympathetic to Paul.
 - o The plan involved having the Sanhedrin asking to interview Paul for more information. They would then assassinate Paul as he was being transported from the barracks to the court room (v 15).
 - o The likely method of assassination would be to stab him with a dagger.
 - o The fact that they swore an oath not to eat until he was dead indicates a desire to kill him within the next day or two.
 - o Their oath is mentioned three times (23:12, 14, 21) reminding the reader of the seriousness of such action in the ancient world. The belief was that the men would be accursed if they did not follow through with their plan. Luke likely saw this as a fit punishment for their rash and misguided zeal.
 - o Luke means to contrast the violent intentions of these zealots with the way of Christ.
 - Zealots like these will lead to the Temple's destruction.
 - Christ calls his followers in a different direction.
- **Miraculously, Paul's nephew overhears the plan and reports what he had heard to Paul (v 16).**
 - o In the ancient world, family members would bring food to prisoners and would have a chance to speak with them when they did (see Philippians 2:25, 2 Timothy 1:16-17 for examples).
 - o Paul is in jail, in part, to protect him from the crowds, and as a Roman citizen he would have had at least some rights even in the jail since he had not yet been found guilty.
- **Luke stretches out the drama by having Paul request that one of his guards take his nephew to the commander.**
 - o The guard introduces the boy to the commander as a messenger of "Paul, the prisoner."
 - o The commander listens to the boy, who recounts the plot which includes both the deception and the size of the force the vigilantes will employ.
 - o The commander commands the boy to remain silent about their visit.

The Transfer to Caesarea (23:23-35)

- **The commander orders half of his force to escort Paul to Governor Felix in Caesarea that very evening.**

- The 470 soldiers seem like a lot, but the commander would not want to take any chances with a force of 40 men who meant to create such a disruption.
- Transferring Paul by horse makes it more difficult for him to be stabbed in an ambush.
- Caesarea was the seat of Roman authority in Judea.
- The commander sends a letter to Felix explaining the situation (vv 25-30).
 - We learn the commander's name: Claudius Lysias.
 - Claudius Lysias paints himself and Paul in a favorable light.
 - Lysias describes how he rescued Paul, a Roman citizen, from Jews who were trying to kill him.
 - There is no mention of the fact that he almost tortured said Roman citizen because he mistook him for a terrorist.
 - Lysias says that the conflict was over Jewish law and that nothing they accused Paul of doing merited death or imprisonment.
 - Lysias notes the continued plot to have Paul killed.
 - Lysias is transferring the case to Felix for the governor to make a judgment of the case.
 - The governor's office would be the proper venue for a trial of a Roman citizen.
 - Lysias was a soldier, not a judge.
 - Lysias's opinion is clear, Paul is innocent, and his accusers are violent extremists.
- Once it's clear that they have moved Paul beyond the immediate threat of the mob, most of the force turns back to Jerusalem, while the calvary takes him on to Caesarea (v 31-33).
- Felix's first question is one about jurisdiction. Cilicia was under the jurisdiction of Syria, which was governed by Felix's superior, therefore, Felix decides to take the case (vv 34-35).
- Paul is kept under guard in Herod's palace until the accusers get there (v 35).
 - Paul is not in the penthouse.
 - The palace had a prison where prisoners could be kept under guard.
- Paul's life reminds us that some forms of captivity may also serve as a means for God to achieve his ends.
 - Paul's captivity in Caesarea saves him from being murdered in Jerusalem.
 - Paul's captivity in Caesarea will stretch out for two years. Some of the New Testament will be penned during this time.

Sources

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