

Paul's "Fourth Missionary Journey" (Acts 23:11-35)¹

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1. Context

- Date is *circa* 55 A.D., about 22 years after the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2).
- Paul accused of bringing a Gentile into the temple in Jerusalem, a riot ensues.
- Rescued from a Jewish mob by the authority of Rome.
- Roman commander arranged for Paul to testify before the Chief priests and their council.
- Dissension arose between the Pharisees and Sadducees over Paul's testimony concerning the resurrection.
- Fearing for Paul's safety, the Roman commander has Paul brought back to safety in the barracks.

2. Passage (Acts 23:11-35)²

¹¹ But the following night the Lord stood by him and said, "Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome." ¹² And when it was day, some of the Jews banded together and bound themselves under an oath, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. ¹³ Now there were more than forty who had formed this conspiracy. ¹⁴ They came to the chief priests and elders, and said, "We have bound ourselves under a great oath that we will eat nothing until we have killed Paul. ¹⁵ "Now you, therefore, together with the council, suggest to the commander that he be brought down to you tomorrow, as though you were going to make further inquiries concerning him; but we are ready to kill him before he comes near." ¹⁶ So when Paul's sister's son heard of their ambush, he went and entered the barracks and told Paul. ¹⁷ Then Paul called one of the centurions to *him* and said, "Take this young man to the commander, for he has something to tell him." ¹⁸ So he took him and brought *him* to the commander and said, "Paul the prisoner called me to *him* and asked *me* to bring this young man to you. He has something to say to you." ¹⁹ Then the commander took him by the hand, went aside and asked privately, "What is it that you have to tell me?" ²⁰ And he said, "The Jews have agreed to ask that you bring Paul down to the council tomorrow, as though they were going to inquire more fully about him. ²¹ "But do not yield to them, for more than forty of them lie in wait for him, men who have bound themselves by an oath that they will neither eat nor drink till they have killed him; and now they are ready, waiting for the promise from you." ²² So the commander let the young man depart, and commanded *him*, "Tell no one that you have revealed these things to me." ²³ And he called for two centurions, saying, "Prepare two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen, and two hundred spearmen to go to Caesarea at the third hour of the night; ²⁴ "and provide mounts to set Paul on, and bring *him* safely to Felix the governor." ²⁵ He wrote a letter in the following manner: ²⁶ Claudius Lysias, to the most excellent governor Felix: Greetings. ²⁷ This man was seized by the Jews and was about to be killed by them. Coming with the troops I rescued him, having learned that he was a Roman. ²⁸ And when I wanted to know the reason they accused him, I brought him before their council. ²⁹ I found out that he was accused concerning questions of their law, but had nothing charged against him deserving of death or chains. ³⁰ And when it was told me that the Jews lay in wait for the man, I sent him immediately to you, and also commanded his accusers to state before you the charges against him. Farewell. ³¹ Then the soldiers, as they were commanded, took Paul and brought *him* by night to Antipatris. ³² The next day they left the horsemen to go on with him, and returned to the barracks. ³³ When they came to Caesarea and had delivered the letter to the governor, they also presented Paul to him. ³⁴ And when the governor had read *it*, he asked what province he was from. And when he understood that *he was* from Cilicia, ³⁵ he said, "I will hear you when your accusers also have come." And he commanded him to be kept in Herod's Praetorium. (Acts 23:11-35)

3. Paul's "Fourth Missionary Journey"

¹¹ But the following night the Lord stood by him and said, "Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in **Jerusalem**, so you must also bear witness at **Rome**." (Acts 23:11)

- Paul has a guarantee of safety since Jesus has commissioned him to reach Rome. Jesus has already told him . . .
 - Acts 9, When receiving his sight, But the Lord said to him [Ananias], "Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine **to bear My name** before **Gentiles**, kings, **and** the **children of Israel**." (Acts 9:15)
 - Acts 13, ⁴⁷ For so the Lord has commanded us [Paul and Barnabas]: 'I have set you as **a light to the Gentiles**, That you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.' (Acts 13:47)
 - Acts 18, at Corinth, ⁹ Now the Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision, "Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; ¹⁰ "for **I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you**; for I have many people in this city." ¹¹ And he continued *there* a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them. (Acts 18:9-11)
 - Acts 22, ²¹ Then He said to me, 'Depart, for **I will send** you far from here **to the Gentiles**.' (Acts 22:21)
 - Acts 26, ¹⁵ "So I said, 'Who are You, Lord?' And He said, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. ¹⁶ 'But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you. ¹⁷ '**I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you**, ¹⁸ 'to open their eyes, *in order* to turn *them* from darkness to light, and *from* the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.' (Acts 26:15-18)
- Protected in the future storm at sea
 - Acts 27, On a ship in a storm near Crete, ²³ "For there stood by me this night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve, ²⁴ "saying, '**Do not be afraid, Paul; you must be brought before Caesar**; and indeed God has granted you all those who sail with you.' (Acts 27:23-24)
- Paul witnesses to both Jews (first) and Gentiles.
 - Jesus had said, ⁸ . . . you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem [Jews] . . . and to the end of the earth [Gentiles] (Acts 1:8)
 - Paul continues this pattern wherever he goes—testifying in synagogues, where found, first.³
- Paul is under arrest and exactly where God wants him—in the center of God's will. (We cannot accurately infer whether we are in God's will by merely looking at external circumstances.)
- Paul's "Fourth Missionary Journey"

4. Attempt to Murder Paul

¹² And when it was day, some of the Jews banded together and bound themselves under an oath, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. ¹³ Now there were more than forty who had formed this conspiracy. ¹⁴ They came to the chief priests and elders, and said, "We have bound ourselves under a great oath that we will eat nothing until we have killed Paul. ¹⁵ "Now you, therefore, together with the council, suggest to the commander that he be brought down to you tomorrow, as though you were going to make further inquiries concerning him; but we are ready to kill him before he comes near." (Acts 23:12-15)

- OT basis underlying their plan to murder Paul
 - Law of Moses concerning the penalty for Idolatry: ⁶ If your brother, the son of your mother, your son or your daughter, the wife of your bosom, or your friend who is as your own soul, secretly entices you, saying, 'Let us go and serve other gods,' which you have not known, neither you nor your fathers, ⁷ of the gods of the people which *are* all around you, near to you or far off from you, from *one* end of the earth to the *other* end of the earth, ⁸ you shall not consent to him or listen to him, nor shall your eye pity him, nor shall you spare him or conceal him; ⁹ but you shall surely kill him; your hand shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hand of all the people. ¹⁰ And you shall stone him with stones until he dies, because he sought to entice you away from the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. ¹¹ So all Israel shall hear and fear, and not again do such wickedness as this among you. (Deuteronomy 13:6-11)
 - However, this was within a public judicial framework—the result of open judgment, sentencing, and formal execution—murders by vigilantes at night was never sanctioned!
- A potential danger when misreading OT as marching orders for the Church today
 - Freedom of conscience, so highly valued and taken for granted in the west, could be overthrown by attempts to misapply parts of Old Testament law to society today!
 - This is one of many reasons why the Bible must be carefully handled—especially the distinction between commands orders originally given within the context of the Old Testament theocracy of Israel vs. the present age of the Church.
 - Some forms of Christian Nationalism seek to institutionalize Old Testament law: a potentially slippery-slope since freedom of conscience was a capital offense in the Old Testament theocracy of Israel.
 - A complex topic in relation to the history of the United States, which was undeniably founded on Christian principles—drawn from both Old and New Testaments.
 - ⚠ The Bible is a powerfully-motivating book—*which must be carefully handled*. The cost of Biblical illiteracy is not just moral decline among non-believers, but incorrect interpretation and application of Scripture by believers.

5. God's Sovereignty over The Present

¹⁶ So when Paul's sister's son heard of their ambush, he went and entered the barracks and told Paul. ¹⁷ Then Paul called one of the centurions to *him* and said, "Take this young man to the commander, for he has something to tell him." ¹⁸ So he took him and brought *him* to the commander and said, "Paul the prisoner called me to *him* and asked *me* to bring this young man to you. He has something to say to you." ¹⁹ Then the commander took him by the hand, went aside and asked privately, "What is it that you have to tell me?" ²⁰ And he said, "The Jews have agreed to ask that you bring Paul down to the council tomorrow, as though they were going to inquire more fully about him. ²¹ "But do not yield to them, for more than forty of them lie in wait for him, men who have bound themselves by an oath that they will neither eat nor drink till they have killed him; and now they are ready, waiting for the promise from you." (Acts 23:16-21)

- What a "coincidence!" Paul's nephew *happens* to hear about the plot. 😊
 - We are not told how the nephew came by this information.
 - "Young man" (v. 17) is from νεανίας [*neanias*], which can describe a man in his 20s or 30s.
 - Was Paul's sister visiting Jerusalem or did she live there?⁵ We are not told.
 - No other mention of them.
- Jesus will not permit Paul to be killed before his time. God is always in control!
 - "Though his discovery of the plot might seem as if it were "a stroke of good luck," it was the providence of the sovereign Lord in protecting Paul."⁶

6. God's Sovereignty over The Past

- ²² So the commander let the young man depart, and commanded *him*, "Tell no one that you have revealed these things to me." ²³ And he called for two centurions, saying, "Prepare two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen, and two hundred spearmen to go to Caesarea at the third hour of the night; ²⁴ "and provide mounts to set Paul on, and bring *him* safely to Felix the governor." ²⁵ He wrote a letter in the following manner: ²⁶ Claudius Lysias, to the most excellent governor Felix: Greetings. ²⁷ This man was seized by the Jews and was about to be killed by them. Coming with the troops I rescued him, having learned that he was a Roman. ²⁸ And when I wanted to know the reason they accused him, I brought him before their council. ²⁹ I found out that he was accused concerning questions of their law, but had nothing charged against him deserving of death or chains. ³⁰ And when it was told me that the Jews lay in wait for the man, I sent him immediately to you, and also commanded his accusers to state before you the charges against him. Farewell. (Acts 23:22-30)
- Claudius Lysias is said to be a commander (Ξιλιαρχος [*xiliarxos*]) which means "ruler of a thousand."
 - "A *tribune* was a Roman military officer commanding a cohort, a unit of from 600 to 1000 men."⁷
 - "The cognomen *Lysias* indicates that Claudius was of Greek birth. His Roman name would probably have been obtained after he purchased Roman citizenship (Acts 22:28)."⁸
- ²⁷ . . . I rescued him, having learned he was a Roman. (Acts 23:27)
 - The commander implies a motivation for the rescue was his knowledge that Paul was a Roman—which is not true.
 - Even so, Paul's Roman citizenship (Acts 22:25, 28) was used by God to protect him from subsequent danger at the hands of his countrymen, the Jews.
 - God uses our background for His sovereign purposes.
 - We generally do not understand why certain things happened in our past: when we were born, where we were born, where we grew up, our family situation, our gifting, our experiences.
 - But it is not lost on God. Unbeknown to us, He intends to make use of our past in our future service to Him.
- ²⁹ . . . he was accused concerning questions of their law, but had nothing charged against him deserving of death or chains. (Acts 23:29b)
 - This may have been true from a Roman perspective — he was not deserving of death under Roman law.
 - But, as we have seen (above), Paul could have been found deserving of death had the Jewish religious council held a suitable trial.
- Felix - the procurator (governor) of Judea (A.D. 52-58), known as an unscrupulous ruler
 - Having three wives, ". . . he considered himself capable of committing any crime and avoiding punishment because of his influence with the courts."⁹
 - His tyranny motivated the Sicarii ("assassins"), a group of Jewish revolutionaries.
 - Will subsequently hold Paul for a period of two years, all the while hoping to bribe Paul (Acts 24:26-27).

7. Testifying before Kings

- ³¹ Then the soldiers, as they were commanded, took Paul and brought *him* by night to Antipatris. ³² The next day they left the horsemen to go on with him, and returned to the barracks. ³³ When they came to Caesarea and had delivered the letter to the governor, they also presented Paul to him. ³⁴ And when the governor had read *it*, he asked what province he was from. And when he understood that *he was from Cilicia*, ³⁵ he said, "I will hear you when your accusers also have come." And he commanded him to be kept in Herod's Praetorium. (Acts 23:31-35)
- Antipatris is northwest of Jerusalem, about 26 miles south of Caesarea, from which the soldiers returned home while the horsemen continued on to Caesarea.
- Paul was born in Tarsus, the capital of Cilicia.
- "Evidently a case could be tried in the province of the accused or in the province in which his alleged crime took place. . . . At this time Cilicia was not a full province but was under the legate of Syria, for whom Felix was a deputy. The legate would not want to be bothered with such a small case as this. Furthermore, Felix would not want to incur the Jews' wrath by forcing them to present their case against Paul in his hometown Tarsus, a city so far away. Felix could make only one decision and that was to hear the case."¹⁰
- Paul's situation seems ominous: having been arrested, transported away from Jerusalem, and soon to stand trial. But he is exactly where God wants him.
 - Paul is being afforded opportunities to testify before key leaders, **But the Lord said to him [Ananias], "Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel."** (Acts 9:15)
 - As we shall soon see, ²⁵ **Now as he [Paul] reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid** and answered, "Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you." (Acts 24:25)
- We can be confident, in situations which may appear foreboding, that God knows exactly where we are and has allowed it for His sovereign purposes (Romans 8:35-39).

8. Closing Prayer

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Endnotes:

1. https://spiritandtruth.org/teaching/Acts_by_Tony_Garland/80_Acts_23_11-35/index.htm
2. Unless indicated otherwise, all Scripture references are from the *New King James Version*, copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.
3. To the Jew first: Acts [3:26](#); [10:36](#); [13:5](#), [14](#), [46-47](#); [14:1](#); [17:1-2](#), [10](#), [16-17](#); [18:4-6](#), [19](#); [28:17](#), [28](#); Rom. [1:16](#); [2:9-10](#).
4. [Ref-0100](#), 471
5. "Paul may have stayed with his sister in Jerusalem while he was studying at the feet of Rabban Gamliel. . . . it may very well be that Paul's nephew was with the conspirators when the plot was hatched. This, in turn, would imply that Paul's nephew was a member of the Zealot Party."⁴
6. [Ref-1411](#), 1729
7. [Ref-0650](#), Lysias, Claudius
8. [Ref-0131](#), 173
9. [Ref-0650](#), Felix
10. [Ref-0038](#), 2:421

Sources:

- Ref-0038** John Walvoord and Roy. B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (Wheaton, IL: SP Publications, 1983).
- Ref-0100** Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *Book of Acts (GB-325)* (Fort Worth, TX: Tyndale Theological Seminary, n.d.). [www.tyndale.edu].
- Ref-0131** Paul J. Achtemeier, *Harper's Bible Dictionary* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1985.).
- Ref-0650** Youngblood, R. F. (1997, c1995). Nelson's new illustrated Bible dictionary : An authoritative one-volume reference work on the Bible with full color illustrations (F. Bruce, Ed.) (electronic ed. of the revised ed. of Nelson's illustrated Bible dictionary.). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.
- Ref-1411** Michael A. Rydelnik, J. Spencer, eds. *The Moody Bible Commentary* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2014).

Links Mentioned Above

a - See <https://spiritandtruth.org/id/tg.htm>.

b - See <https://spiritandtruth.org>.

c - See <mailto:contact@spiritandtruth.org>.