

Resurrection Hope

Acts 22:23 – 23:35 on November 14, 2021

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Last week we didn't have time to look at the very end of Acts 22. Verses 23-29 are actually pretty interesting! Acts 22:23-24 says that this crowd of Jews "...were shouting and throwing off their cloaks and flinging dust into the air, the commander ordered that Paul be taken into the barracks...." All of this shouting, throwing off their cloaks, and flinging dust into the air were part of a severe response to Paul's statement in verse 21: that God had sent him to minister to the Gentiles.¹ I'm guessing that, at this point, the commander is regretting his decision to allow Paul to speak, to this angry crowd from the top of the steps. Acts 22:24 continues "...He directed that he (Paul) be flogged and interrogated in order to find out WHY the people were shouting at him like this."^{2 3}

When the Jews had someone whipped, they set a limit to the number of lashes that anyone could receive: "the 40 lashes minus 1."⁴ In other words, they stopped at 39 lashes, just in case there was a miscount. Paul endured this kind of pain, many times in his ministry. By the time he wrote 2 Corinthians 11:24-25, Paul reports, "Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods...." The Romans, however, didn't have any set limit, so their victims sometimes didn't survive flogging.⁵ Paul was now facing a BRUTAL interrogation: being flogged with the scourge. The scourge was "a merciless instrument of torture....The scourge consisted of a whip of leather [straps] with pieces of bone or metal attached to the ends."⁶ For the Romans, flogging was an efficient form of torture and interrogation, which helped them get the answers they wanted.⁷ Last Sunday was the Int'l Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church. We've made some materials available in the Connection Café. The fact is, there are still many Christians in our own day and age, who are facing persecution for their faith in Jesus Christ. We need to pray for them.

¹ Expressing their sorrow and rage over Paul's supposed blasphemy. *The NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2268 footnote on Acts 22:23.

² So the commander figures, "enough is enough, it's time to get to the bottom of this once and for all!" So we might say that Paul has now been pulled "out of the frying pan" only to get tossed "into the fire!" Pulled out of the angry mob only to be tossed into a flogging. One author notes that this is probably the same location where Jesus Himself was flogged. Darrell L. Bock citing Williams, *Acts*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2007, p. 656. So there is probably some very sobering, historical association with this particular location.

³ This flogging would be far more severe than the beating that Paul and Silas had received back in Philippi in Acts 16:22-24. Back then they were beaten with rods before being placed in the stocks.

⁴ See Deuteronomy 25:3.

⁵ *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1691 footnote on Mark 15:15.

⁶ *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, pp. 1871-1872 footnote on Acts 22:24.

⁷ "Flogging...was a cruel and gruesome method of Roman interrogation." *The NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2268 footnote on Acts 22:24.

The brutality of these Roman scourgings, helps us understand why Paul mentioned his rights as a Roman citizen.⁸ Acts 22:25 says, “As they stretched him out to flog him, Paul said to the centurion standing there, ‘Is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen who hasn’t even been found guilty?’”⁹ Personally, I think I would have mentioned my rights as a citizen, a **WHOLE LOT** sooner, like right when the commander first gave the order back in verse 24.^{10 11 12 13 14 15} In any case, Acts 22:29 says, “Those who were about to interrogate him withdrew immediately. The commander himself was alarmed when he realized that he had put Paul, a Roman citizen, in chains.” Paul’s Roman citizenship turns out to be a significant detail in God’s plans for him. This will come up in our text again later. For now, the Roman Commander has to figure out a different way to get an answer to his question in verse 30: **WHY** was Paul being accused by the Jews? Today’s passage will show us how he **TRIES** to do that.

Please read Acts 22:30 – 23:11 before going further in this transcript.

Last week, Paul had to be physically hoisted up into the air and carried out by the Roman soldiers. Now, once again, in verse 10, the troops had to be sent in to remove Paul by force, so that he wouldn’t be torn to pieces. What a **CRAZY** series of events! It makes us wonder what in the world God is up to...? Acts 22:30 says, “The commander wanted to find out exactly **WHY** Paul was being accused by the Jews. So the next day he released him and ordered the chief priests and all the members of the Sanhedrin to assemble [*made up of 71 Jewish men!*]. Then he brought Paul and had him stand before them.” So the commander tries an alternate approach to

⁸ “It was legal to use it to force a confession from a slave or foreigner but never from a Roman citizen.” *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1872 footnote on Acts 22:24.

⁹ “Stretched him out” is referring to when they tied Paul to the post upon which he would be flogged. *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1872 footnote on Acts 22:25.

¹⁰ Paul may have been waiting until no Jews were around because appealing “to Roman citizenship might not sit well with Jews who refused to compromise with Rome.” Darrell L. Bock citing Witherington, *Acts*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2007, p. 665.

¹¹ It’s worth noting that back in Acts 16, Paul could have also reminded them of his rights before being beaten with rods. You see, “According to Roman law, all Roman citizens were assured exclusion from all degrading forms of punishment,” (*NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1872 footnote on Acts 22:25) **INCLUDING** scourging as well as beating with rods. However, for whatever reason, Paul did not exercise this right in Acts 16. Now, in Acts 22, he does.

¹² The text doesn’t tell us how Paul proved his citizenship, but apparently, he had some kind of a registration card. Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2007, bottom of p. 664.

¹³ “There were three ways to obtain Roman citizenship: (1) receive it as a reward for some outstanding service to Rome; (2) buy it at a considerable price; (3) be born into a family of Roman citizens. How Paul’s father or an earlier ancestor had gained citizenship, no one knows.” *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1872 footnote on Acts 22:28.

¹⁴ There may be a note of despicable sarcasm here in the commander’s voice, as in “Rome must really be desperate for money, if they’re selling citizenship to lowly Jews like Paul!” *The NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2268 footnote on Acts 22:28.

¹⁵ “Citizenship by birth was viewed as the most noble” way of getting it. (*The NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2268 footnote on Acts 22:27-28). So when Paul tells says, “But I was born a citizen,” it was probably even more impactful!

getting an answer to his question.^{16 17 18} The Sanhedrin was “the ruling body of the Jews” and respected by the Roman government.^{19 20} But let’s not kid ourselves here, ROME was in charge. When the Roman Commander ordered them to assemble, they didn’t delay. What the Commander never really quite understands, is what was actually on trial here. What continues to be on trial, in each and every one of Paul’s defenses, is the gospel. So...

1) Paul continues to give his Gospel Defense. Acts 23:1 says, “Paul looked straight at the Sanhedrin and said, ‘My brothers, I have fulfilled my duty to God in all good conscience to this day.’” Paul looked them right in the eye, with a gleam of intensity.²¹ He wasn’t intimidated by this sizable group of imposing Jewish leaders.²² Paul proclaims that he is “not guilty,” but rather that he has a clear conscience before God; he has faithfully carried out his duty before God; the duty of boldly proclaiming the gospel, to Gentiles/Jews!^{23 24 25} Paul’s confidence in Christ is rewarded with a slap in the face. Paul’s response to this slap, is NOT very politically correct. Acts 23:3 says, “Then Paul said to him, ‘God will strike you, you whitewashed

¹⁶ “The tribune is trying to get to the bottom of this, as in his view he cannot release Paul until he figures out what has caused the disturbance.” Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2007, p. 669.

¹⁷ The last thing the commander wants to do is leave this unresolved and then have to deal with yet another disturbance of the peace in Jerusalem. Keeping the peace was his job! Paul is no longer bound with chains, but he wasn’t free to go either.

¹⁸ After all of the chaos that’s gone on leading up to Acts 22:30, do ANY of us remember WHY Paul was being accused? Back in Acts 21:27, the ones stirring up trouble in Jerusalem, were the Jews who’d traveled from the province of Asia. What initially stirred up the crowd in Jerusalem, was not Paul’s comment about God sending him to the Gentiles. What initially stirred them up were the false claims they made against Paul back in Acts 21:28, “...This is the man who teaches everyone everywhere against our people and our law and this place. And besides, he has brought Greeks into the temple and defiled this holy place.” Now, all of these claims were false, but that didn’t mean they didn’t cause a LOT of trouble for Paul. Interestingly enough, NONE of these claims are even recorded as discussed by the Sanhedrin in Acts 23:1-11. And frankly, the Roman Commander won’t ultimately get an answer to his question. These false charges against Paul in Acts 21:28, were really just another part of the ongoing resistance to the gospel.

¹⁹ *The NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1872 footnote on Acts 22:30.

²⁰ Back in Acts 4:5 it mentions the rulers, elders, and teachers of the law; this is a reference to the Sanhedrin. Consider Numbers 11:16-17, possibly the origin of the Sanhedrin, where 70 men come alongside Moses (making 71) to share the workload AND the power of the Holy Spirit.

²¹ ἀτενίζω “look intently at, stare at something or someone.” Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000). *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature* (3rd ed., p. 148). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

²² This group was “the high court of the Jews... Its total membership numbered 71... Under Roman jurisdiction the Sanhedrin was given a GREAT deal of authority.” *The NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1689 footnote on Mark 14:55.

²³ Indeed, other than the gospel itself, what greater thing could there be for a Christ-follower to be convinced of? See 2 Timothy 4:7-8.

²⁴ There may actually be a bit of a play on words here. The force of this particular verb could be translated, “I have lived as a good citizen before God.” πολιτεύομαι = “to be a citizen, have one’s citizenship/home. (Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000). *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature* (3rd ed., p. 846). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.)

²⁵ In other words, Paul’s Roman citizenship means nothing to him compared to the importance of living rightly before God. “He has lived as a good citizen before God; this is the force of the perfect-tense verb.” Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2007, p. 669.

wall! You sit there to judge me according to the law, yet you yourself violate the law by commanding that I be struck!” Calling someone a “whitewashed wall” was a way of calling them a hypocrite. Whitewashing a wall is a way of making the outside look REALLY good, but it does nothing to actually repair the integrity of the wall or to clean up the contents on the other side of the wall.²⁶ Paul is basically saying that commanding him to be struck, is an unfair act of injustice, since he hasn’t even presented his case yet.²⁷ But the fact is, Ananias had a reputation for acting unfairly. (*This is NOT the godly Ananias from Damascus that we learned about back in Acts 9; This is Ananias the high priest from Jerusalem.*)

You see, most of the people at this time in history knew something about Ananias, that you and I may not know: Ananias had a reputation for cruelty and violence. He was also known for his greed and for collaborating with the Romans.²⁸ So Ananias was NOT a nice guy, nor was he a godly guy. In fact, history records that this high priest, ended up being assassinated by his own fellow Jews!²⁹ Paul’s frank assessment of Ananias, results in him being chastised for insulting God’s high priest. Paul responds in Acts 23:5, “...Brothers, I did not realize that he was the high priest; for it is written: ‘Do not speak evil about the ruler of your people.’” Now, this response might reflect that Paul lost his temper here.³⁰ And if that’s the case, he offers an apology and admits that he was wrong, which is always the right thing to do when we’re wrong.

It does seem odd though, that Paul wouldn’t realize who the high priest was. After all, Paul was a fellow Jew, not to mention an actual Pharisee himself. It seems strange that he wouldn’t have realized that Ananias was the high priest. Scholars have offered several possible explanations for this. It’s possible that Paul simply couldn’t see very well. Other places in Scripture seem to hint at the idea that Paul had poor eyesight.³¹ Some have suggested that Paul had been away from Jerusalem for SO long that he simply didn’t recognize the high priest.³² However, another possibility is that Paul was using sarcasm.³³ In other words, Paul calls him out, not just once, but twice. First, by calling him a hypocritical, whitewashed wall. Then,

²⁶ See *The NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1872 footnote on Acts 23:3. In his Gospel, Luke records Jesus’ similar sentiment toward the Pharisees in Luke 11:39, “...Now then, you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness.”

²⁷ Note Leviticus 19:15.

²⁸ *The NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2268 footnote on Acts 23:2.

²⁹ *The NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1872 footnote on Acts 23:2. Ananias was high priest from AD 47-59.

³⁰ Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2007, p. 669.

³¹ Tied in with this is the possibility that Paul thought someone else was presiding that particular day, which did happen at times.

³² *The NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2269 footnote on Acts 23:4-5.

³³ See discussion in *The NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1872 footnote on Acts 23:5.

by highlighting that Ananias was an EVIL ruler. If this is the case, then verse 5 has a sarcastic tone to it: "...Brothers, I did not realize that HE was the high priest; for it is written: 'Do not speak EVIL about the ruler of your people.'" So Paul's saying, I didn't recognize him because a legitimate high priest shouldn't have an evil reputation!³⁴ ³⁵ Well, whatever the explanation may be, Paul continues with his gospel defense. Now...

2) Paul proclaims the gospel's Resurrection Hope! Acts 23:6 says, "Then Paul, knowing that some of them were Sadducees and the others Pharisees, called out in the Sanhedrin, "My brothers, I am a Pharisee, descended from Pharisees. I stand on trial because of the hope of the resurrection of the dead." Paul seizes this opportunity to highlight a key gospel distinction: Resurrection Hope! The Sadducees and the Pharisees served alongside each other in the Sanhedrin.³⁶ However, they had some significant theological differences, one of the most prominent, being their difference of opinion concerning the resurrection of the dead. Verse 8 clarifies that the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, but the Pharisees absolutely believed that there was. Paul explains the resurrection to the Corinthian believers in 1 Corinthians 15:12-20, "But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep."

Now, as important as this teaching about the resurrection of the dead is, and as fiercely as Paul believed it, it's not clear whether he was actually trying to teach about it, in Acts 23. Verse 6 explicitly points out that Paul KNEW that he had a mixed audience of Sadducees and Pharisees. So he KNOWS what he's doing, and he seems to intentionally stir up this long-running conflict between them. Apparently, Paul isn't interested in spending

³⁴ "More likely, the statement is sarcastic and ironic: 'I didn't recognize him because he is not acting like a high priest.' If so, Paul's quoting from Exodus 22:28 means that he respects the office but not the man." *The NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2269 footnote on Acts 23:4-5.

³⁵ God's high priest wouldn't have ordered me to be unjustly struck. *The NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2011, p. 1872 footnote on Acts 23:5.

³⁶ Even though the Pharisees and the Sadducees were often at odds with each other, they collaborated together with the Sanhedrin in order to get Jesus killed. Merrill C. Tenney, Gen. Ed., *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible: Vol. 5*, Grand Rapids, MI, 1976, pp. 215-216.

much time before the Sanhedrin. So he efficiently moves things along, and it's BACK to the barracks for Paul! Acts 23:10 says that "The dispute became so violent that the commander was afraid Paul would be torn to pieces by them. He ordered the troops to go down and take him away from them by force and bring him into the barracks."

Once again, God uses the Roman soldiers to rescue Paul from further harm, and possibly even death. They put him safely behind bars in the Roman barracks, and that's where we get a much clearer glimpse, of what GOD is up to. Acts 23:11 says, "The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, "Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome." You see, in one sense, we could refer to these final chapters of the book of Acts, as Paul's 4th Missionary Journey. Unlike his first three journeys, Paul isn't officially sanctioned or sent out by a local church. Nonetheless, GOD is sending him out, to Rome.^{37 38 39} In other words...

3) God's sovereign gospel plans are unstoppable! In fact, we'll see God's sovereignty play out in Acts 23:12-35. In the rest of chapter 23, in verses 12-35, we're given a rare glimpse into the details of God's sovereign workings behind the scenes. Notice how God is at work as you read through these verses. Just because it was God's will to send Paul to Rome, that didn't mean that the people around him were going to make it easy for him. Acts 23:12-15 begins, "The next morning some Jews formed a conspiracy and bound themselves with an oath not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul.⁴⁰ More than forty men were involved in this plot. They went

³⁷ **Can you imagine thinking of your own life and travels this way?** "What did you guys do last week?" "Oh us? Well, we traveled to South Dakota to see some family, and ended up getting a few chances to share the gospel along the way." Or, you ask someone, "how has your week been?" "Oh you know, pretty good. I ran a bunch of errands around town yesterday and got an opportunity to share about Jesus with someone while we were waiting in line together." You see, this was just Paul's natural bent. He didn't need an official mission's trip commissioning in order to go forth and spread the gospel. He just lived it, wherever he was, whenever he saw an open door! **I've got a friend who does stuff like this all the time.** I'll ask him how his week was, and he'll often say "Really good! Remember I told you I needed to go down to the Cities for my dental checkup? Well, while I was down there, I saw some protestors and I felt the Lord prompt me to go and pray for them. I was pretty nervous about it, but I went over there and introduced myself and asked if I could pray for them and they said, 'yes.' So I prayed for them and then ended up giving this one guy my Bible. And it sounds like the Lord has really been convicting another guy that he needs to start going to church again, so I'm going to follow up with him next week and make sure that he went – he gave me his number."

³⁸ Apparently, Paul has been aware of this for some time now, at least as far back as the end of his 3rd Missionary Journey. Acts 19:21 says, "After all this had happened, Paul decided to go to Jerusalem, passing through Macedonia and Achaia. 'After I have been there,' he said, 'I must visit Rome also.'" Note also what Paul writes to those in Rome in his book titled Romans, 1:11-13, as well as Acts 28:11-31.

³⁹ Although Acts 21:17-28:31, the end of the book, "is not an intentional outreach planned and implemented by Paul, it is appropriately called a 'missionary journey' since (1) Paul continues to take every opportunity to share the gospel, and (2) Luke uses the narrative of Paul's arrest and journey to Rome to show that the gospel continues to advance despite opposition and apparent setbacks." *The NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2265 footnote on Acts 21:17-28:31.

⁴⁰ "The irony is that they take an oath before God that actually violates God's standards and will." Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2007, p. 677.

to the chief priests and the elders and said, “We have taken a solemn oath not to eat anything until we have killed Paul. Now then, you and the Sanhedrin petition the commander to bring him before you on the pretext of wanting more accurate information about his case. We are ready to kill him before he gets here.”

Now the text doesn’t expressly say that the high priest, Ananias, and the rest of the Sanhedrin went along with this plan, but the context implies that they did.⁴¹ Agreeing to this unjust plot, confirms that Paul’s insult, back in verse 3, was spot on. They’ve now gone WAY past slapping Paul in the face. The high priest has now agreed to both bearing false witness AND to murder, thus breaking 2 of God’s 10 Commandments.⁴² The Sanhedrin continues its historical precedent of conspiring against God’s appointed messengers.⁴³ Little did they know that God would use their conspiring, to accomplish His own divine will.

Acts 23:16-24 goes on, “But when the son of Paul’s sister heard of this plot, he went into the barracks and told Paul. Then Paul called one of the centurions and said, “Take this young man to the commander; he has something to tell him.” So he took him to the commander. The centurion said, “Paul, the prisoner, sent for me and asked me to bring this young man to you because he has something to tell you.” The commander took the young man by the hand, drew him aside and asked, “What is it you want to tell me?” He said: “Some Jews have agreed to ask you to bring Paul before the Sanhedrin tomorrow on the pretext of wanting more accurate information about him. Don’t give in to them, because more than forty of them are waiting in ambush for him. They have taken an oath not to eat or drink until they have killed him. They are ready now, waiting for your consent to their request.” The commander dismissed the young man with this warning: “Don’t tell ANYONE that you have reported this to me.”^{44 45 46} Then he called two of his centurions and ordered them, “Get ready a detachment of two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen to go to Caesarea at nine tonight. Provide horses for Paul so that he may be taken SAFELY to Governor Felix.”

⁴¹ Later on, in verse 21, these 40 men stand ready and waiting; all they needed was the commander’s consent. So, apparently the Sanhedrin had agreed to the ruse.

⁴² See discussion by Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2007, top of p. 678.

⁴³ Similar to how they had conspired against Christ, they now conspire against Paul. *The NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2269 footnote on Acts 23:12.

⁴⁴ One potential application for this text is to be nice to your nieces and nephews!

⁴⁵ This nephew was likely either a teen or a 20 something young adult. Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2007, p. 674.

⁴⁶ “This reference to Paul’s nephew is all we learn of his relatives from the book of Acts or Paul’s letters. Though born in Tarsus, Paul was educated in Jerusalem (22:3), perhaps while living with his uncle and aunt.” *The NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2269 footnote on Acts 23:16.

In verse 24, Paul is now officially on the first leg of his long journey to Rome. He rides out of Jerusalem for the last time, in style, on horseback, through the night, to a place of greater safety.⁴⁷ This is now the 3rd time that God uses the Roman forces to rescue Paul in Jerusalem!⁴⁸ Again we see the Lord's sovereign protection and provision for Paul. Right in the face of more than 40 men plotting against him, God summons 10x that amount! Paul now has 470 soldiers protecting him, so if God wants to get Paul to Rome, then HE will get Paul to Rome!⁴⁹ I really appreciate how Darrell Bock summarizes this passage: "In [summary], this passage is rooted in God's providence...although the means are not always [as well known to us], as they are here.... It is ironic that Roman justice will bring [Paul to Rome] as a prisoner, so that Paul will arrive safely, and immediately be speaking to the highest levels of Roman society. It is unlikely that if Paul had journeyed as part of a missionary outreach to Rome on his own, such a high-level audience would be possible. It is one of the mysteries of God, and his providence, that many times we cannot see why things are happening as they are. Yet God is surely at work, in ways we could not have planned for ourselves."⁵⁰

Acts 23:25-35 concludes, "He wrote a letter as follows: Claudius Lysias⁵¹, To His Excellency, Governor Felix: Greetings. This man was seized by the Jews and they were about to kill him, but I came with my troops and rescued him, for I had learned that he is a Roman citizen. I wanted to know why they were accusing him, so I brought him to their Sanhedrin. I found that the accusation had to do with questions about their law, but there was no charge against him that deserved death or imprisonment.^{52 53 54} When I was informed of a plot to be carried out against the man, I sent him to you at once. I also ordered his accusers to present to you their case against him. So the soldiers, carrying out their orders, took Paul with them during the night and brought him as far as

⁴⁷ I really like how one author summarizes this: "God's sovereign care for Paul is underscored in this discovery.... Paul now departs Jerusalem for the final time in Acts, with the Roman tribune as his unwitting, just protector." Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2007, p. 676.

⁴⁸ See Acts 21:32-36; 23:10. Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2007, p. 676.

⁴⁹ To put this in context, these 470 soldiers were almost half of the entire Jerusalem garrison! *The NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, Grand Rapids, MI, 2015, p. 2270 footnote on Acts 23:23-24.

⁵⁰ Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2007, pp. 678-679.

⁵¹ "LISS ih uhs" Severance, W. M., & Eddinger, T. (1997). In *That's easy for you to say: your quick guide to pronouncing Bible names* (p. 106). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

⁵² This statement "there was no charge against him that deserved death..." reminds us of similar words spoken by the Roman leaders during Jesus' trial. See Luke 23:13-16 and comments by Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2007, p. 683.

⁵³ Luke continues to record these details to help the Most Excellent Theophilus see that Christians are law-abiding citizens. "There is no real threat to Rome, only an internal Jewish religious debate." Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2007, p. 683.

⁵⁴ "Paul's innocence is something consistently affirmed from here on (Acts 23:29; 25:18-20, 25; 26:31-32)." Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2007, p. 674.

Antipatris.⁵⁵ The next day they let the cavalry go on with him, while they returned to the barracks. When the cavalry arrived in Caesarea, they delivered the letter to the governor and handed Paul over to him. The governor read the letter and asked what province he was from. Learning that he was from Cilicia, he said, “I will hear your case when your accusers get here.” Then he ordered that Paul be kept under guard in Herod’s palace.”

This Roman citizenship thing, is REALLY coming in handy for Paul! Paul is now some 60 miles NW of Jerusalem being kept safe “under guard in Herod’s Palace.” I wonder how long it took for the 40 some men who’d been plotting against Paul, to realize that they might as well go ahead and eat/drink something, because there was NO WAY that God was ever going to let them get to Paul!⁵⁶ God kept His promise to Paul from back in...

Acts 23:11: “...Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome.” Way back in Acts 5:38-39 Gamaliel stood before this same Sanhedrin, with Peter and the Apostles, and warned them... “Therefore, in the present case I advise you: Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God.” Back in Acts 1:8 Jesus declared, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” **God’s sovereign gospel plans are UNSTOPPABLE!** Pastor Eric will pick up on Paul’s gospel journey, next week, in Acts 24. Until then let’s marvel at the faithfulness of God to keep His promises and to ensure that His sovereign gospel plans are fulfilled. ***Just as Paul was confident in God’s promise to Him, so also you and I can be confident in God’s promises to us!***

⁵⁵ **Antipatris** = “antee PAHT triss” based on Severance, W. M., & Eddinger, T. (1997). In *That’s easy for you to say: your quick guide to pronouncing Bible names* (p. 25). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

⁵⁶ “One could escape from such a vow if it became unfulfillable.” Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 2007, p. 677.