

Acts Chapter 23 Handout

The Sovereign Providence of God

Important names: Claudius Lysias, Chief Captain; Ananias, High Priest; Felix, Military Governor of Judea. Some unnamed actors: The council (Sanhedrin) made up of Sadducees and Pharisees; Paul's sister's son; centurion; 200 spearmen and 70 horsemen.

v.1-5 - While Paul was declaring that he lived in good conscience with God, the high priest commanded that he be smacked in the mouth. Paul responded "God smite thee thou whited wall, meaning he was a decrepit, old wall with white paint on it to hide the defects. When Paul was rebuked for saying such a disrespectful thing, he says he didn't know that he was the high priest—or did he? Maybe he meant that such a man couldn't possibly be the high priest.

v.6-11- Perceiving that the council was divided into Sadducees and Pharisees, he cleverly asserted his identity as a Pharisee, being partially being persecuted for his ideas about resurrection. This set the two factions against each other with the Pharisees now defending Paul. Because of the level of disorder, Paul was removed into the castle where at night the Lord stood by him and told him to be of good cheer because he was going to bear witness in Rome.

v.12-22 - When it was day 40 Jews banded together and took an oath that they would neither eat nor drink until they have killed Paul. Then they conspired with the chief priests that they would ask that Paul be brought before them for some points of clarification. Then those who had taken the oath would kill him. But through God's providence, Paul's nephew finds out and warns Paul, who directs him to the chief captain.

v.23-33 - The chief captain, wanting to protect this Roman citizen, and maybe wanting to correct the mistake of arresting him unlawfully in the first place, orders 200 spearmen and 70 horsemen, and a mule or donkey to transport Paul to Caesarea. The captain, Claudius Lysias, writes a letter to Felix, the military governor of Judea, located in Caesarea. In the letter he tells of his own actions (pat on the back) and exonerates Paul saying that Paul is brought up not for any violation of civil law, but of some laws of the Jews. They get Paul through the most dangerous part of the 60 mile journey, which was very mountainous where ambushes could occur, and got him within 25 miles of Caesarea, a place called Antipatris. Less dangerous, the spearmen went back to Jerusalem, and the 70 horsemen took him the rest of the way. Felix, the governor, asks Paul, after reading the letter, from what province he is from. Paul answers Cilicia, but Felix still decides he will hear the case. (Normally Paul would have to be tried in the province from which he was. Tarsus was a colony of Rome, which means it was like a little part of Rome.

Through these last few chapters of Acts we keep seeing the sovereign providence of God. He makes sure that his end will be accomplished despite the actions of man.