

Having given his defense before the Jewish Council (vv1-9), the Roman commander fearing that the Jews would pull him to pieces, "commanded the soldiers to go down and take him by force from among them and bring him into the barracks" (v10). Thus, within vv11-35 we have described for us a plot of the Jews to kill the apostle Paul, and I want to examine it under three headings: Its Conception, Discovery, and Defeat.

- I. Its Conception (vv11-15)
- II. Its Discovery (vv16-22)
- III. Its Defeat (vv23-35)

I. Its Conception (vv11-15)

1. V11—"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.'"
2. Having been taken back to the Roman barracks (v10), Paul no doubt was in a down and discouraged mood.
3. Twice he had spoken to his beloved Jews—first to the mob (22:1-21) and Council (23:1-10), both of which were followed by their attempts to kill him, and now he finds himself under the custody of the Romans.
4. V11—"But the following night"—that is a day later—"the Lord stood by him and said"—by way of vision.
5. This is the third time this has happened, and yet, it seems likely this was a rather consistent occurrence.
6. I understand this to mean—the resurrected and glorified Savior came to him by vision in a bodily form.
7. The phrase "be of good cheer" is a single Greek word that means "to have courage, encouragement, or comfort."
8. It implies the presence of fear or discouragement—Paul was no doubt downcast about various things.
9. And while we are not told what exactly he was discouraged about, what our Savior says next provides a clue—"for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome."
10. Thus, by way of inference, our Savior's appearance to Paul was intended to encourage him about two things.
11. (1) Christ was with him in his afflictions—Paul has come close to death twice, beaten, and imprisoned (all within the last few weeks).
12. Thus, Christ doesn't promise Paul deliverance from prison or affliction but merely reminds him of His presence.
13. If you remember, when Christ initially came to Paul on the road to Damascus He asked him—"Why are you persecuting Me?"
14. The point being—Christ and His people are so closely related that to persecute the one is to persecute the other.
15. And so, our beloved Savior stood by his needy servant to encourage him that he was far from being alone.

16. John Calvin—"The Lord does not promise to deliver him; He only says, that while those troubles and afflictions, wherewith he was sorely oppressed shall continue, He has respect unto him in all his miseries."
17. (2) Christ would ensure his arrival at Rome—according to his letter to the Romans, it was his constant desire to visit them.
18. Rom.1:9-10—"For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers, making request if, by some means, now at least I may find a way in the will of God to come to you."
19. Our Savior in essence says—"Do not fear Paul—you will of necessity testify of Me at Rome both to the church and others."
20. "Just as you testified of Me in Jerusalem (both to the church and others) you will testify of Me at Rome."
21. This brings us more formerly to the conception of their plot—consider three things about it (their identity, oath, plan).
22. (1) Their identity, v12—"And when it was day, some of the Jews banded together" v13—"there were more than forty who had formed this conspiracy."
23. Luke merely tells us "some of the Jews banded together" and that "there were more than forty who formed this plot" (v13).
24. Thus, they could have been a part of the earlier mob that sought to kill Paul (22:22) or else they were Sadducees who heard about the recent meeting.
25. Bruce Milne—"The Jews, frustrated in their open attack upon Paul at the temple, and no doubt also by the internal bickerings of the Sanhedrin, hatch a clever plot to finally exterminate the man they clearly perceive as their dangerous enemy."
26. (2) Their oath, v12—"they) bound themselves under an oath, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul."
27. As these men were Jews, there is little doubt this was a religious oath or vow made in the presence of God.
28. Literally, they "anathematized themselves"—they placed themselves under a curse if they failed to fulfill their oath.
29. In short, they promised neither to eat or drink until they killed Paul which underscored their fervency.
30. Darrell Bock—"This oath is a commitment to swear to do something or to underwrite a statement by placing oneself under a curse if it fails."
31. (3) Their plan, v14—"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. 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.'"
32. They directly approached "the chief priests and elders" as representatives of the Council (Sanhedrin).
33. They simply wanted the Council to deceive the Roman Commander and have him bring Paul down to them.
34. And then, as Paul would be guarded by a few soldiers, they would be able to overpower them and kill Paul.

II. Its Discovery (vv16-22)

1. V16—"So when Paul's sister's son heard of their ambush, he went and entered the barracks and told Paul."
2. At this point, we are introduced to Paul's nephew, who somehow or way heard about the plot of the Jews.
3. We are never told anything else about him, his mother, or any other family member of the apostle Paul.
4. Thus, Paul had one of the centurions take him to the commander—"for he has something to say" (v17).
5. And so, from vv18-21, Paul's nephew recounts to the commander the plot of the Jews to ambush Paul.
6. V22—"So the commander let the young man depart, and commanded him, 'Tell no one that you have revealed these things to me.'"
7. The commander wisely sought to keep this news secret as he then planned a way to defeat their ambush.
8. Now, there has been some who've questioned how Paul's nephew would access to him while in Roman custody.
9. But remember, while Paul is in custody, the Romans themselves know he is innocent of any serious crime.
10. Furthermore, it appears that Paul was under a house arrest that allowed for visitors (especially family).

III. Its Defeat (vv23-35)

1. We read about the commander's plan in vv23-24 and I want to examine it under three questions: Where did he send Paul, How did he send Paul, and Why did he send Paul?
2. (1) Where did he send Paul? He says in v23 that they were to bring Paul to Caesarea to Felix the governor.
3. Caesarea was a coastal city about 60 miles Northeast of Jerusalem where the closest Roman governor dwelt.
4. As governor, Felix would have had charge over all of Judea (a territory covering hundreds of square miles).
5. (2) How did he send Paul? v23—"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; and provide mounts to set Paul on, and bring him safely to Felix the governor.'"
6. Let me simply say—the commander spared no expense in ensuring that Paul would arrive safely at Caesarea.
7. The commander gathered 470 soldiers as an escort—200 foot soldiers, 70 horsemen, and 200 spearmen.
8. We learn from vv31-32, that the infantry (the foot soldiers and spearmen) travelled with Paul half way.
9. V31—"Then the soldiers, as they were commanded, took Paul and brought him by night to Antipatris (an-tipi-tris).
10. This was a city about halfway between Jerusalem and Caesarea (it was about 30 miles to Antipatris and another 30 to Caesarea).

11. Thus, Paul was protected by 470 soldiers the first half of the way, and the 70 horsemen the latter half.
12. It seems evident the Roman commander took his responsibility of protecting a Roman citizen seriously.
13. Furthermore, while being told there were only 40 zealous Jews, there was always the chance of being more.
14. (3) Why did he send Paul? This brings us to the letter written to Felix the governor as found in vv26-30.
15. In 26 we have the name of the Roman Commander (Claudius Lysias) and "the most excellent governor Felix."
16. The body of the letter is rather short and straightforward—it recounts the events of the previous few days.
17. He had rescued Paul from the hands of the Jewish mob (v27), placed him before the Jewish Council (v28), found out he was innocent of any Roman crime (v29), and was the object of a Jewish plot to end his life (v30).
18. And thus, Paul was sent to Felix to be examined by the highest Roman court in the whole region of Judea.
19. And having received Paul and the letter (v33) and having understood where he was from (v34), Felix holds Paul in Herod's Praetorium until his accusers came.
20. According to the letter (v30), the Roman Commander (Claudius Lysias) had commanded the Council to send representatives to state their case against Paul.
21. And as we shall see next week, according to 24:1, after five days, Ananias the high priest and the elders arrive in Caesarea.

IV. Lessons

1. Here I want to summarize this plot of the Jews by suggesting three broad and personal (practical) lessons (2Tim.3:16 – 'All Scripture is God-breathed, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness').
2. (1) An encouragement for every Christian—and here I'm referring to the encouragement given to Paul by vision.
3. While it's true as an apostle Paul was in many ways unique, but we learn something about Paul true of us all.
4. Our Savior ensured Paul that he would be preserved safe until he completed the task assigned to him.
5. "Paul, it's true these people are trying to kill you and at present you're under arrest, but I have work for you to do."
6. "It's my will (purpose) for you to testify of Me in Rome, and it's impossible for anyone to hinder this."
7. In other words, Paul was ensured that he would finish the task assigned him regardless of opposition.
8. Think about it—he was rescued twice from a mob; beaten once (almost twice); struck on the mouth; and imprisoned.
9. But the Lord Jesus was not finished with him yet—and nothing would keep him from his divine task.

10. But how is this an encouragement for every Christian—well, let me briefly suggest two ways this is true.
11. (a) Every Christian has been assigned a specific task by Christ and they will be preserved until they finish it.
12. Perhaps I can put it this way—every Christian is indestructible until they finish their earthly purposes.
13. For example, let me use myself as an example—I have called to be a pastor, husband, father, grandfather, etc.
14. I have work to do and while I don't know the extent of these callings, I'm indestructible until I'm finished.
15. (b) Every Christian has a beloved Head who is intimately concerned for and connected with His people.
16. The fact that every Christian has a specific task they will finish doesn't deny they will suffer fulfilling it.
17. Remember, Paul just endured all manner of mistreatment—he was maligned, beaten, slapped, and imprisoned.
18. But Christ comes to him (by way of vision) and speaks comfort and encouragement to him—"Be of good cheer, Paul."
19. And so, just because Christ no longer speaks to us by way of vision, He still speaks to us by His word and Spirit.
20. Remember brethren, every Christian is in union with Christ, who while He is bodily in heaven, is in us on earth by His Spirit.
21. This is why He could say to Paul on his way to Damascus—"Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me."
22. Put another way, Christ is in everyway concerned with the pain, suffering, fear, and affliction of His people.
23. Gordon Keddie—"Paul's experience touches the lives of all of God's people in that it assures us that the encouragement afforded to Paul that night is promised to every believer in the exercise of his calling as a follower of Jesus. He is as surely with us now as He was with Paul that night. Paul say Him with his eyes. We see Him with the opened eyes of Spirit-filled understanding. The promises of our Lord never to leave us and never to let anyone pluck us out of His hand are as fresh and real today as they were to Paul."
24. (2) A tragic display of demonic religious zeal—here of course, I am thinking about these 40-plus Jews.
25. Remember, dear brethren, these were religious zealots who believed they were doing the will of God.
26. Jn.16:2—"They will put you out of the synagogues; yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service."
27. They were going to be filled with such rage they will be deceived in thinking that God was pleased with them.
28. And remember, dear brethren, the hatred of these first-century Jews was leveled at the true people of God.
29. But tragically such demonic deception continues past the Christian and God-hating Jews of the first-century.

30. We see it from the eighth-century onward, in the way Islam kills Christians supposed in the name of God.
31. We see it throughout the history of the church in what's now called Roman Catholicism's hatred of Christians.
32. But I want to suggest we also see it today in what's commonly called social and theological liberalism.
33. You find an example of this in a gay woman minister who turns red in the face when confronted about abortion.
34. Or else think about the trans teacher turning red in the face, when a student wears a shirt that says, "there are two genders."
35. Without social and legal restraints, such people as these would pull Christians apart with their bare hands.
36. But here's the tragedy of all this—both of the people in these two examples are professing Christians.
37. They both attend church and they both have the same bumper sticker on their car that says, "God is Love."
38. Thus, here's the question I want to answer—Why have such people specifically and uniquely hated Christians?
39. Think about it dear brethren—this hated is never leveled toward any other religion but the Christian religion.
40. (a) Because of what we believe—that is, such people hate the truth about God, man, sin, salvation, and eternity.
41. This was true of the Jews back in our passage, who were likely Sadducees who were theological liberals.
42. If you remember, they not only denied the bodily resurrection but also the spiritual realm (angels and spirits).
43. Furthermore, they hated the truth about salvation by faith apart from works (they boasted in themselves).
44. In addition to this, they boasted in the flesh (that is, in their nationality)—the fact that they were Jews.
45. This is why such people as I have mentioned hates Christians today and breathe hateful fire against them.
46. Because they hate what we teach—they hate the truth about creation, morality, salvation, and judgment.
47. (b) Because of who we represent—by this I mean, the true reason they hate the truth is because they hate God.
48. (3) A reminder that God's ways are not our ways—here I am referring to the way He spoiled the plot.
49. A young boy (that we've never heard of before or since), somehow catches wind of this plot (conspiracy).
50. And thus, will have his desire fulfilled, in that he will be able to bear witness of Christ in the city of Rome.
51. But he will not make it there as a missionary travelling with his friends (Barnabas and Silas) but as a prisoner accompanied by Roman soldiers (thus, God protects His beloved servant through the knowledge of a boy and takes him to Rome with the protection of the Romans).