**Introduction – Paul and the Sanhedrin – 22:30–23:35**

* **General Overview:** This section shows how the more the unbelieving Jews come after Paul, the more it propels him on his mission. They just can’t win. With the Roman commander watching, the Sanhedrin attempts to condemn Paul but only ends up proving his innocence and destroying its own credibility. Then, when the Jews try to illegally assassinate Paul (a Roman citizen), it makes the Roman commander more eager to save his life. And beyond that, because the commander knows that the Jewish high court is incompetent to handle this, he sends both parties to appear before the Roman governor in Caesarea—inadvertently bringing Paul one step closer to Rome, where the Lord promised he would go (23:11). In all this, we get to see the Lord’s incredible wisdom in making Paul a Roman citizen.
  + **Day 1:** Paul Before the Sanhedrin, Part 1 (22:30–23:5)
  + **Day 2:** Paul Before the Sanhedrin, Part 2 (23:6–11)
  + **Day 3:** Paul’s Path to Rome, Part 1 (23:11–15)
  + **Day 4:** Paul’s Path to Rome, Part 2 (23:16–22)
  + **Day 5:** Paul’s Path to Rome, Part 3 (23:23–35)

**22:30–23:5 – Paul Before the Sanhedrin, Part 1**

* **Overview:** This section introduces us to Paul’s trial before the Sanhedrin. Luke shows how—irony of irony—it’s Paul who’s the righteous one. The high priest, of all people, is exposed a hypocrite and a fraud. He attempts to try Paul according to God’s law while simultaneously breaking it, and Paul calls him on it.
* **V. 30 –** Verse 30 tells you that this upcoming scene is all part of the Roman commander’s investigation to learn why the Jews hate Paul’s guts and want him dead. And because Paul is a Roman, this is all Rome’s business. If Paul needs to die, that’s Rome’s job to make that happen. And if the Jews are unlawfully attacking him (a Roman), then Rome needs to step in and make sure that didn’thappen. Either way, Rome’s involved.
  + Luke begins by telling us it was “on the next day” that the commander took quick action and “released [Paul].” His hurry makes sense when we remember that, just 1 verse before (22:29), he had the chilling realization that Paul was bound illegally, on his watch.
  + But rather than simply cutting Paul loose and parting ways, the commander sought to get to the bottom of things and “know for certain why [Paul] had been accused by the Jews.” For that reason, “he released him and ordered the chief priests and all the Sanhedrin to come together, and brought Paul down and set him before them.”
  + “The purpose of the meeting was not to allow the Sanhedrin to arrive at a judgment concerning Paul, but to allow the commander to determine the exact nature of the accusations against Paul.”[[1]](#footnote-1)
* **Vv. 1–5 –** The structure of the next five verses can be shown below:
  + 1. **Paul’s Appeal to God’s Law:** Now Paul, looking intently at the Sanhedrin, said, “Brothers, I have lived my life in all good conscience before God up to this day.”
    2. **The High Priest –** And the high priest Ananias commanded those standing beside him to strike him on the mouth.
    3. **Paul Denounces the High Priest -** Then Paul said to him, “God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall!
    4. **Paul Exposes the High Priest’s Hypocrisy against God’s Law**
  + Do you sit to **try me**
    - * + according to the Law,
        + and in violation of the Law
        + **order me** to be struck?”

1. **Paul’s Denunciation Questioned –** But those standing nearby said, “Do you revile the high priest of God?”
2. **The High Priest –** And Paul said, “I was not aware, brothers, that he was high priest;
3. **Paul’s Appeal to God’s Law:** for it is written, ‘YOU SHALL NOT SPEAK EVIL OF A RULER OF YOUR PEOPLE.’

* The flow of the passage goes something like this:

1. **V. 1** – Paul begins by appealing to his brothers, calling them to hear how God’s Law has been his standard for life and conduct from the get-go. Because of that, he’s innocent.
2. **V. 2** – Offended by Paul’s claim, the high priest unlawfully orders Paul to be smacked.
3. **V. 3a** – In response to this illegal strike, Paul fires back, declaring that God will, in a similar way, strike that man for his illegal activity.
4. **V. 3b** – Here at the center point of the passage, Paul raises a question that highlights the high priest’s hypocrisy. Paul asks if he is really so bold as to knowingly sit and try Paul according to the law while simultaneously breaking it.

C) **V. 4** – Since Paul landed such a vicious rebuke against a council member, those around him turned to ask if indeed Paul was really so bold as to knowingly rebuking the high priest.

1. **V. 5a** – Paul responds by saying that he didn’t perceive the man to be the high priest, because, after all, the man’s actions weren’t identifying him as such.
2. **V. 5b** – In the final phrase of Paul’s defense, he indicates that he wouldn’t have said what he did if knew that man’s rank. Why? Because—like he’s been saying—he actually wants to follow God’s laws (unlike, say…71 other people in the room). However, in the bigger scheme of things, God clearly wanted Paul ignorant of the man’s rank so that he could speak so directly to the man’s character. And in God’s wisdom, Paul’s ignorance not only *exposed* the high priest, it also *excused* Paul from further charges.

* **V. 1** – The scene starts with Paul “looking intently at the Sanhedrin,” a phrase which “recalls Paul looking intensely at Elymas and bitterly accusing him of being “a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right” (13:9–10). [This shows that] Through the Spirit, Paul …immediately sees through the high priest’s hypocrisy.”[[2]](#footnote-2)
  + It’s important to see Paul’s loyalty to his countrymen, despite all the madness. He begins by seeking common ground, saying he was one of them. They really were his “brothers.”
  + And beyond that, like a good Jew, he says that “he had nothing on his own mind to condemn him, that he had been faithful in his conduct toward God in every respect.”[[3]](#footnote-3)
  + Notice that when Paul says, “I have lived my life in all good conscience before God up to this day,” he appeals above the Sanhedrin all the way to “God” as his supreme authority, declaring that—even in his days before knowing Christ—he *always* thought he was serving God (even if he wasn’t in fact correct). This is an stunning statement of fact.
* **V. 2** – And while Paul makes a serious case that he’s a good Jew who loves God, the high priest pushes back with a strong and insulting “How dare you!” The reason? Doesn’t really matter. If Paul’s right, “it wrecks their case against him”[[4]](#footnote-4)…and they really hate this Paul guy.
  + So the retaliation comes. “The high priest Ananias commanded those standing beside him [Paul] to strike him on the mouth.” Importantly, catch how *Luke* is the one telling you this is the high priest.We’ll see later that *Paul* wasn’t yet aware of the man’s rank—and that becomes a key detail, but for now, there’s some dramatic irony for the readers.
  + Clearly, the high priest’s command is *way out of line*. Paul says that explicitly in the next verse. Beyond that, though, there’s even some irony in the fact that his name is “Ananias,” which means something like “God is gracious.” You don’t say!
  + Luke only alludes to how the spiritual rot reaches beyond the high priest. From the context, “those standing beside” Paul would refer to either (A) the rest of the Sanhedrin or (B) the chief priests, or (C) both (cf. 22:30). In any case, the high priest remains the focus here.
* **V. 3a** – Because Paul sees this scenario as such an egregious evil before God, he speaks up to stop the madness: “Then Paul said to him, “God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall!” And all God’s people said, “Shots fired!”
  + Notice the play on words with how God will righteously “strike” the high priest who unlawfully had Paul “struck.”
  + It’s important to say that when Paul fires this off, he’s not lost in a fit of rage. He’s actually being measured. Much like Michael the Archangel carefully rebuked Satan by appealing to *God’s* authority and not his own (Jude 9), Paul warns the high priest of *God’s* actions against him, and his restraint demonstrates his continual submission to God.
  + Paul specifically calls the high priest a “whitewashed wall,” which carries some added sting because of how it was used in the Old Testament:
  + “The metaphor recalls Ezekiel 13:8–15. There, God denounces false prophets for misleading the people with comforting announcements of peace in a time when there is no peace, which is like building flimsy walls covered with whitewash to make them appear solid. Whitewashing to conceal reality is an apt metaphor for the hypocrite (Matt. 23:27). Ezekiel promises that God will flatten the crumbly wall, and Paul’s pronouncement that God will strike the high priest is similar. It is both a prophecy and an oath that invokes God’s punishment. The smiting that Paul received from those standing by him is nothing, however, compared to the smiting that God will inflict on these enemies of the gospel (cf. Deut. 28:22).”[[5]](#footnote-5)
* **V. 3b** – After issuing a warning, Paul then tries to awaken that hypocrite to the reality of his sin: “Do you sit to try me according to the Law, and in violation of the Law order me to be struck?” Since this comes as a question, we can see Paul is trying to influence this man for good. He did the same thing to Elymas before (13:10), and here again, the question is ultimately a gracious appeal. If the high priest’s conscience was asleep, Paul’s trying to wake it up.
* **V. 4 –** While Paul is trying to hold one of the judges accountable to the law, others respond to him by seeing if Paul sinned in what he just said. The irony is that the people doing this are very same people who illegally struck him in the first place(cf. v. 2, same word).
  + The bystanders ask a question, “Do you revile the high priest of God?”
  + This would be a serious charge if they could get it to stick. But before Paul responds, it’s helpful to realize that their question itself is rather ridiculous. As Jesus would say, they are straining at gnats while swallowing camels (Matt 23:24). They’re nitpicking Paul’s words while overlooking the fact that their main leader is acting like a demon.
* **V. 5 –** “And Paul said, “I was not aware, brothers, that he is high priest;for it is written, ‘YOU SHALL NOT SPEAK EVIL OF A RULER OF YOUR PEOPLE.’”” – There’s debate as to whether Paul is being tongue-in-cheek about his lack of awareness or whether he genuinely didn’t know the man’s rank. From a close reading, it seems like this is something of a “both/and” situation. Notice two points:
  + First, Paul didn’t choose to say that he didn’t “know” the man was high priest (referring to inner knowledge). Rather, he chose a word that can be literally translated as him saying “I was not perceiving” that this man was high priest. It’s true he didn’t know, but his language draws less attention to Paul and more attention to what Paul would know *according to* *what he—and everyone else—saw the high priest do*. And from the structure of the text, this is referring to the high priest’s illegal command. And because he once again appeals to the men as “brothers,” it seems like he wants others to see the problem he saw. So, if we put all the pieces together, Paul is effectively saying, “Guys, from what I saw back there, that man sure wasn’t acting like a high priest, was he?” And beyond this, Paul had also been out of town for several years.[[6]](#footnote-6) How was he supposed to know who this man was?
  + Second, we can know Paul was genuinely ignorant of the man’s rank by the way he appeals to Scripture in the end of the verse (citing Exodus 22:28).[[7]](#footnote-7)
    - Paul acknowledges that it is against God’s law to speak evil of a ruler of Israel. But the key word here is the word “for.” This is important because the word doesn’t connect directly to the other words in the verse. Instead, it connects to an implied phrase that’s something like, “*I would not have said what I said if I perceived him to be high priest,* for it is written, ‘YOU SHALL NOT SPEAK EVIL OF A RULER OF YOUR PEOPLE.’” In other words, Paul is saying, “Because I follow God’s Law—like I’ve been saying—not only did I not recognize *that* unprincipled man to be high priest, but if I did, I wouldn’t have said what I said.” And because Paul was ignorant, he was not liable to be held guilty for what he didn’t know (also, see below).
    - Why would God design this little showdown this way? Consider two benefits:

1. **Paul’s ignorance helps him expose the high priest’s hypocrisy**. Paul’s ignorance was basically the legal “loophole” through which Paul could deliver a scathing criticism of the high priest and get away with it, fair and square.[[8]](#footnote-8) Were Paul to have been fully aware that the man was high priest, his witness against him could not have been so blunt. But apparently, in this case, God liked it blunt.
2. **Paul’s ignorance helps to excuse him of further charges**. When the people come and accuse him of breaking the Law in reviling their leader, Paul’s admission of ignorance excuses him. We know this because (1) he does not apologize and seek forgiveness from the high priest; (2) he later says that the Sanhedrin could not have condemned him for anything he said (24:20–21); (3) His appeal to Scripture demonstrates—once again—that he’s submitted to God’s law. So, in the end, Paul’s ignorance enables him to affirm “respect for the office of high priest, even if he is critical of the behaviour of the one who currently holds the position.”[[9]](#footnote-9) *That’s* what God wanted to expose: the spiritual hypocrisy at Israel’s highest judicial level.

**Day 1 – Questions**

1. What do you take away from Paul’s testimony that he always lived with a clean conscience before God, even before his true conversion?
2. Why do you think Luke wants to show you that every authority figure who tries to punish Paul is in sin? How does that show the importance of Paul’s mission?
3. If you were in Paul’s shoes, would you have handled the situation differently? Why do you think Paul was so incredibly forceful with his words?

**Day 2 – Paul Before the Sanhedrin, Part 2 (23:6–11)**

* **Overview:** This section gives the second part of Paul’s trial. It illustrates how the broader Sanhedrin—not just the high priest—is deeply unfit to try Paul because they’re deeply divided on God’s law. When a mini civil war breaks out among the Council members, the Roman commander fears Paul’s life could be in danger and steps in to save him. Once again we see that the violence of the unbelieving Jews is what secures Paul the Roman protection he needs to live another day and advance his mission (cf. 21:35). Moreover, we see how the Lord stands by Paul and explicitly promises him safe passage to Rome where, despite all this resistance, he will witness for the Lord’s cause (v. 11). How Paul gets to Rome is then described in the following sections after this one.
* **Literary Structure:** Luke arranged this story so as to highlight the Sanhedrin’s volatility. Paul’s simple profession of faith causes a great outcry and the Council formed against him collapses into shambles.
* **Lead Idea:** “Knowing that one group were Sadducees and the other Pharisees…”

A – Paul ***cries*** ***out*** “in the Sanhedrin” – “I am on trial…”

B – There was “dissention” – the assembly was “divided”

C – Sadducees don’t acknowledge the resurrection or “angels” or “a spirit”

D – Pharisees confess “them all”

E – There was a ***great outcry***

D – Pharisees began to argue heatedly, saying “we find nothing wrong with this man”

C – Pharisees argue that maybe “a spirit” or an “angel” has spoken to Paul

B – There was “great dissention” – the commander feared Paul would be “torn to pieces”

A – Paul was “taken away from them [the Sanhedrin]” – told he would “witness” in Rome

* From the way Luke arranges the passage, we can see it shows Theophilus how Jewish resistance to God’s word ultimately drove Paul’s journey from Jerusalem (A, v. 6) to Rome (A; cf. v. 10b–11). Once again, the mission advances because of Jewish unbelief.
* The general flow of verses is as follows:
  + **V. 6 –** Paul starts by crying out with the essence of his theology—he’s “on trial for the hope and resurrection of the dead.” He says this knowing that, with the way he’s phrased it, the Pharisees will agree with him, and the Sadducees will not.
  + **V. 7** – Luke then tells us that the fault line began to show itself when the Council divides.
  + **V**. **8** – Luke explains the nature of the division as a theological rift. Theophilus would see that the Sadducees don’t even acknowledge the existence of the resurrection, spirits, or angels—all of which have been clearly mentioned thus far in Luke-Acts. But on the other hand, the Pharisees at least have the biblical wherewithal to acknowledge those realities.
  + **V**. **9** – As Paul’s simple statement continues to resonate throughout the room, we see the Pharisees come to join the tune. At this point, things get *loud* (“a great outcry”). This shows that Paul simply had to give a cry of theology and it precipitated a “great outcry.” So, the louder Paul’s testimony, the greater the division in the Sanhedrin.
  + **V. 10** – With everything turned up to 11, the dissention becomes so great that the Roman Commander rushes in to whisk Paul away to safety.
  + **V**. **11** – On the tail end of the narrative, we see that Paul might have been removed from his people and placed in Roman barracks, but nevertheless the Lord stood with him, and encouraged him that his witness would continue even unto Rome. The Sanhedrin have failed to stop Paul.
* **V. 6 –** Luke begins by telling you that despite all the emotions running high, Paul retained his ability to read the room. He tells us that Paul’s next statement came out of his keen knowledge that the Council was already divided in ways they weren’t necessarily showing.
  + Again Paul sought to establish his common bond with the Council members by addressing them as his “brothers.” He also confessed “I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees,” which aims at the sympathies of the Pharisaic party. Then, with all eyes on him, Paul “rolls that little theological grenade in among his opponents and then ducks out of the way”[[10]](#footnote-10)—“I am on trial for the hope and resurrection of the dead.”
    - Like with the previous section, some have thought Paul is going rogue, just trying to throw the room into a senseless chaos. But that’s not the whole picture. Rather, “the hope and resurrection of the dead” amounts to the very core of his Christian beliefs.[[11]](#footnote-11) In other words, Paul just had to be faithful, and that alone created enough friction on its own. And equally important, his Christian beliefs have a lot of common ground with Pharisaical beliefs. That’s why Paul phrased his statement so carefully and cleverly as to show that the core categories of his faith align with the core categories of *Pharisaic* faith too. From a tactical standpoint, then, his statement is tantamount to alerting the other Pharisees, “They’re coming after ***us***.”
  + Notice, Paul “says not that he once *was* a Pharisee, but that he *is* a Pharisee and descended from Pharisees. For Paul, being a Pharisee denotes strict devotion to the law (Phil. 3:5).”[[12]](#footnote-12) Again, he’s on the side of God’s law, and to some degree, so are the Pharisees who are standing there.
    - As an aside, it is interesting that the phrase is not “the hope ***of*** the resurrection.” It’s “the hope ***and*** resurrection of the dead.” Thus, Paul is getting at what is available to “the dead” in the afterlife—which he knew the Sadducees denied outright. That is, after all, why they were so sad, you see.
* **Vv. 7–8 –** Now that Paul has successfully raised the alarm, verse 7 states how what once looked like a united Council quickly dissolved into a partisan feud, and verse 8 supplies the reason for it. Here we see the rift goes deeper than just the resurrection. The Sadducees not only denied the resurrection; they also denied the existence of other realities like angels and spirits. (Once again, Theophilus would see just from reading Luke-Acts up to this point that this is all ridiculous.) The main point is that the Pharisees disagree with them. After Luke lists out the specific denials of the Sadducees, he then says that the Pharisees effectively affirm what the Sadducees deny. Much like how the American government is one entity split between two opposing parties, the Sanhedrin is a two-party mess.
* **V. 9 –** Verse 9 hits a key term when it says that there was a “great outcry.” This is the same root for the term that started all this when Paul began “crying out” (v. 6). And what we see from this is Paul’s cry actually resonated and divided those who initially stood against him.
  + Some of the “scribes of the Pharisaic party”—those who give rigorous attention to the Law—make a heated case for Paul’s innocence. Not only do they defend him, “We find nothing wrong with this man,” but they even support his testimony, “suppose a spirit has spoken to him, or an angel?”
  + The innocence of Paul is a key theme for the remainder of Acts, and perhaps Theophilus would notice a thematic allusion to Luke 23:41, where the thief on the cross says of Jesus, “This man has done nothing wrong.” Interestingly, the Lord soon appears to Paul and reminds Theophilus that Paul is bearing witness to *His* cause (23:11).
* **Vv. 10–11 –** From this point on, things get worse.
  + Like how Paul’s first cry caused a “***great*** outcry,” so too did the initial “dissention” devolve into a “***great*** dissention.” And before, the assembly was “divided,” but here the worry is that *Paul himself* would be “divided” (“torn to pieces”). Thankfully, however, the Roman commander steps in to rescue Paul in the nick of time. Why? He sees enough of what’s happening to be afraid that his fellow Roman could get caught in the crossfire of an intense in-house debate between the Jews and wind up dead. For that reason, he seizes command, calling troops to whisk Paul safely away from the Sanhedrin “by force” and “bring him into the barracks.” And so, this bout with the Sanhedrin is over, and Paul is once again in the hands of Roman troops.
  + Verse 11 closes the scene with the Lord coming to Paul, standing by his side and saying “Take courage, for as you have solemnly borne witness to my cause at Jerusalem, so you must bear witness at Rome also.” Thus, the winds of this thunderstorm are actually driving Paul forward to precisely the place God wants him to be.
    - Importantly, the context would indicate that “My cause” is important language in two respects:
    - 1) In terms of content, it refers to the advancement of resurrection theology (23:6), or, more basically, eternal life, which has come to be realized in Jesus Christ (3:13). After all, the message of the gospel has already been called “the message of this Life” (Acts 5:14), and the gospel isn’t merely a promise of legal forgiveness but a promise of everlasting *life* with God as well.
    - 2) It shows that Paul is simply advancing the Lord’s plan and purpose in the world, not his own. When his witness highlights hypocrisy and divides the Sanhedrin, this is part of what the gospel does. It exposes sin and fractures its enemies. At the same time, there’s some degree of hope here brought by the gospel as the Pharisees started taking Paul’s side, showing that they may be ripe for further discussion.

**Day 2 – Questions**

1. Explain how the phrase “the hope and resurrection of the dead” summarizes the essence of our Christian faith? How does this strengthen how you think about the gospel?
2. In your own words, why are the Sanhedrin unfit to pass judgment on Paul?
3. Why might Paul have been tempted to be discouraged about what happened? Why do you think, of all the ways He could have done it, the Lord chose to stand at Paul’s side and speak to him?

**Day 3 – Paul’ Path to Rome, Part 1 (23:11–15)**

* **Overview:** Thissection describes how the Lord moved Paul one step closer to Rome, like He promised (v. 11). Through a failed assassination attempt by the Jews, God brought Paul deeper into Roman protection and Roman circles. Again, the irony is that Jewish antagonism is actually advancing Paul on his mission. He now gets to testify to a Roman governor!
* **Structure –** Though verse 11 was covered above, it functions like a hinge-introduction into this section, not only closing out the story of verses 6–10, but introducing the story of verses 12–24 as well. The key indications of this are the bookending time references of “night” (vv. 11; 23), and the bookending presence of a figure of high authority speaking for Paul’s safe passage: “the Lord” (v. 11) and “the commander” (vv. 22–24). From the beginning to the end of this section, we see how the Lord’s promise for Paul to “take courage” as he looks ahead to Rome is fleshed out in His providential orchestration of the Roman authorities. For simplicity’s sake, the outline can be shown as follows:

**A** - In the “**night**,” the “Lord” promised Paul safe passage to “Rome” (v. 11)

\*“When it was **day**…”

**B** – The Conspiracy Presented (vv. 12–15)

**B** – The Conspiracy Prevented (vv. 16–22)

**A** – The “commander” arranged Paul’s safe passage to the Roman governor by “**night**” (22–24).

* From the way Luke structured the narrative, you see two parallel groups of people are maneuvering to sway the Roman commander: It’s the Jews vs. Paul. The scene unfolds almost like a race as to who can get to him first.
* **Vv. 12–13 –** After the night that the Lord encouraged Paul (v. 11), Luke shares a story of a conspiracy of the Jews that was sparked the very next “day.”
  + We first see the unbelieving Jews coming after Paul in search for blood.
  + Luke’s description of this shouldn’t be overlooked. The word for “conspiracy” is used earlier in chapter 19 when the city clerk of Ephesus calls the near-riot a “disorderly gathering” (19:40). The word refers to a sort of contorted group or a disorderly “twisting together” (MGLNT, 435).
  + Beyond that, they also “bound themselves under a curse,” a phrase from which we get the word “anathema” and which refers to being devoted to destruction. Fleshing that out, their curse involved the fact that they would effectively be bound to destroy themselves by not eating or drinking unless Paul was destroyed. So the only way to break the curse of self-destruction is to destroy someone else.
  + As one sage put it, “They must have become rather hungry, for it was about nine years before the apostle was put to death!”[[13]](#footnote-13)
  + As further framing of this, Luke tells us that there were “over forty of these who made this scheme,” drawing attention to how Paul was wildly outnumbered.
* **Vv. 14–15 –** These verses describe howthe conspiracy rises and begins to involve higher ranking officials (the chief priests and the elders). The underlings rehearse their plan (“we have bound ourselves under a curse to taste nothing until we have killed Paul”) but there is also instruction for how those in higher positions can assist (“So now you…”). They want the chief priests and elders “along with the Sanhedrin” to “notify the commander to bring [Paul] down to you.” Pay attention to how this is being driven from the bottom and pushing up through different levels of authority—ultimately hoping to sway the Roman commander. (We’ll see a parallel version of this in the following section.) The goal for the Jews is to pull whatever levers they can to lure Paul into a trap. In this case, it’s through feigning the need for “further investigation” (“as though you were going to determine his case more carefully”). Meanwhile, the Jews will be sitting nearby, “ready to slay him before he comes near.” So at this point, the plan’s in place; all that’s left is execution (…literally!).
* **V. 16 –** Here, the story pivots—hard. Luke tells us, “the son of Paul’s sister heard of their ambush,” and all God’s people said, “Who now?” And what we see here is an incredibly obscure and low-ranking person swoops in from nowhere to be the virtual savior of Paul’s life—and that tells us a lot about God. Until now, Paul’s been rather vulnerable, held captive in the barracks while an entire community of hostile individuals conspires to lead him into a death trap, so things don’t exactly look great. But as the Lord promised to bring Paul to Rome (v. 11), we are seeing here how He did that.
  + When it says that Paul’s nephew “came and entered the barracks and told Paul,” this shows two things: (1) the secret’s out, which is something of a relief; but (2) at the same time, Paul now has an uphill battle ahead of him if something’s going to be done about it. He’s not out of the woods yet.
    - When it comes to how the boy gained access to Paul, commentators suggest that Paul’s rank as a Roman citizen meant it wouldn’t be ridiculous to think he would have access to his family.[[14]](#footnote-14) “Perhaps his personal link to Paul, combined with his youth, made him less of a security risk within the prison complex.”[[15]](#footnote-15)
* **Vv. 17–18 –** These verses begin to tell how Paul began “the climb” out of his predicament. In terms of its shape, the flow of the story here is similar to that of the conspirators. Both communities try to climb up the chain of command in order to sway the Roman Commander, and it’s a matter of who can sway him. But while the unbelieving Jews had a rather understandable path to the Commander, Paul’s situation is far more remarkable—and it seems God wants it that way because again it shows us how He likes to work.
  + As Paul begins “the climb,” he “called one of the centurions to him and said, “Lead this young man to the commander, for he has something to report to him.” What’s interesting is that the language here has Paul literally *commanding* the centurion (it’s a Greek imperative) and therefore leading from the bottom—but again, that’s the point, since *the Lord* is with Paul. Verse 18 shows how Paul’s desire was honored and the centurion did what he said—even though the centurion changes things to say that Paul “asked” him to lead the boy forward. Theophilus knows better.
* **Vv. 19–22 –** Verse 19–22 are one unit that centers in on this climactic conversation between—of all people—Paul’s little nephew and a Roman commander.
  + The text is arranged with the following flow:

A – The commander takes Paul’s nephew by the hand and inquired privately (v. 19)

B – Paul’s nephew shares the *apparent* plan of the Jews (v. 20)

C – Paul’s nephew pleads “do not be persuaded by them” (v. 21a)

B – Paul’s nephew shares the *real* plan of the Jews (v. 21b)

A – The commander lets go of Paul’s nephew and tells him to keep this private (v. 22)

* + **V. 19** – The account begins with “the commander” taking control of the situation when he literally “took [Paul’s nephew] by the hand and, stepping aside, began to inquire of him privately.” It should seem remarkable that the commander would be this considerate.
  + **V. 20** – At this point, the boy relays how the Jews were looking for the commander to fulfill their request “tomorrow,” so thankfully we see that this boy got to him in time. He also hints that there’s more than meets the eye with them, since they will come “***as though*** they were going to inquire.”
  + **V**. **21** – This leads to the climactic plea, “So do not be persuaded by them.” And now, he gives the rationale, describing how “more than forty of them” who are “under a curse…until they slay him…are lying in wait for him.” So now the jig’s up. And what’s interesting is that Paul’s nephew ends by saying how the Jews are “waiting for the promise from” the commander. It’s interesting because the root for “promise” is the same as that for “report” which has been used repeatedly as this news was passed along to the commander (vv. 16, 17, 19). So, in that sense, now that the commander is fully read in, the time has come for others to hear what *he* will say.
  + **V. 22 –** The scene closes like it began. The commander now “let the young man go” and instructed him to keep the matter private. The key word here is that the commander tells the young man not to disclose to others how he has “notified” Roman command of these things. It’s the same word for what the Jews were planning to do in verse 15, and in that connection, we see Luke show us that the Roman commander prefers this report to theirs.
* **Vv. 23–24 –** These verses are intentionally connected to the previous episode (“and”) because they form the bookend to close verses 11–24.
  + We see that the commander is a smart man, calling “two of the centurions” to amass a major force to give Paul safe passage to a higher Roman court. Verse 23 deals with the sheer force and direction the commander wants to bring Paul. This includes “two hundred soldiers,” “seventy horsemen,” and “two hundred spearmen.” So, while Paul was under threat by more than 40 people, he now has 470 trained soldiers on his side. And these are all supposed to move “to Caesarea” and leave “by the third hour of the night” (9:00pm). Caesarea is where Paul has escaped from Jewish plots before (9:30), and the fact that they’re leaving at night not only communicates urgency but also bookends the literary unit that started in verse 11.
  + Lastly, verse 24 highlights the blessing of the Roman commander’s plans for the mission. They were going to “provide mounts to put Paul on,” which is the same language Luke used for how Jesus was mounted on a donkey for his entry into Jerusalem (Luke 19:35). Thus, it communicates the priority that Paul has. He won’t even touch the ground. Thematically, this is much like how Roman soldiers actually carried Paul earlier because of the violence of the crowd (21:35). And beyond that, as the Lord promised to bring him to Rome (v. 11), the commander says that Paul will be brought “safely to Felix the [Roman] governor,” who can decide his case.

**Day 3 – Questions**

1. Why do you think God chose to work in such obscure ways to save Paul from death? What does this tell you about the scope of God’s providence / sovereignty over the little things?
2. What comes to mind when you think of how the Lord uses a Roman commander to accomplish His purposes?
3. Why do you suppose that the Roman commander didn’t want news of the conspiracy getting out?

**Day 4 – Paul’s Path to Rome, Part 2 (23:16–24)**

* **Overview:** This section tells Theophilus more about why the Roman commander was acting the way he was. There’s irony here, because, from our vantage point, he looks like an ignorant tool in the hands of the Lord, but from his vantage point, he sees himself like a hero of Rome who’s trying to advance the control and wellbeing of the empire. Moreover, this section serves as a kind of story summary, reminding us that the Jews have no credible reason to kill Paul, and they are incompetent to handle his trial.

**The Letter to Felix (23:25–30)**

* **V. 25–30 –** This section describes how Claudius, the Roman Commander, made the case that the Sanhedrin’s authority wasn’t fit to try Paul, and therefore he must be passed along to a higher authority, that of the Roman Governor. For the commander, “He believes that Paul is innocent, but he is a soldier, not a judge.”[[16]](#footnote-16)
* **Structure:** Verse 25 says that the commander “wrote a letter having this form,” which naturally draws our attention to the structure, which can be presented as follows:

V. 27 – Claudius’ Intervention #1

Vv. 28–29 – Claudius’ Investigation

V. 30 – Claudius’ Intervention #2

* Clearly, Claudius positions himself as the hero, but that aside, the grammatical parallels between the first and second interventions highlight his commitment to the advancing control and wellbeing of Rome. For example:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Intervention 1** | **Intervention 2** |
| **Event:** “When this man was arrested by the Jews | **Event**: “And when I was informed |
| **Threat:** and was about to be slain by them, | **Threat:** that there would be a plot against the man, (same Greek word) |
| **Intervention for Rome:** I came up to them with the troops and rescued him, having learned that **he was a Roman**. | **Intervention for Rome**: I sent him **to you** at once, also instructing his accusers to speak against him **before you**.” |

* The middle section, the investigation, also centers on Claudius’ move, but this time it is to bring Paul to the Sanhedrin, the *Jewish* authority (note how he says, “***their***Sanhedrin”). When this proved unfruitful, Claudius appealed to Felix, the *Roman* authority, to handle things. Note the form below:
* **Search for accusation:** And wanting to ascertain the charge for which they were **accusing** him,
* **His main move:** I brought him down to **their Sanhedrin**; [i.e. their authority]
* **Discovery of accusation:** And I found him to be **accused** over questions about their Law, but under **no accusation** deserving death or imprisonment.
* On the whole, the passage could be summarized as him saying, “This man here is a Roman. His Jewish countrymen want him dead. I found nothing worthy of death in him according to Roman law. Yet, they still want him dead, so here you go. - P.S. I’m really great at my job.”
* **Vv. 26** – Luke remarkably gives the actual content of the letter, including the commander’s personal name (Claudius Lysias). This degree of detail helps Theophilus understand just how thoroughly the Lord was superintending the Roman military. Like with the centurion from the story before, with Paul’s nephew (23:18), the commander paints himself in a great light. But underneath his words, we realize that this commander is doing what the Lord has sovereignly decreed. Rome is unwittingly serving the Lord.
  + Importantly, Claudius calls Felix “the most excellent” (v. 26), which is a term Luke used when greeting Theophilus at the beginning of his Gospel (1:3)—which could indicate Theophilus occupied some sort of government seat.
* **V. 27** – This are rather straightforward in light of what’s mentioned above. This deals with the first time the commander intervened to save Paul’s life back in Acts 21:32*ff*.
* **Vv. 28–29** – These verses recount the commander’s desire to get to the bottom of the issue. What’s important language here is that he calls the Sanhedrin “their Sanhedrin,” since the whole point of this section is to demonstrate to Felix why the authority of the Jews is unfit to decide the case for this Roman citizen. As one in charge of execution, it’s important that Claudius convey that this seemed to be a Jewish feud rather than a capital offense.
* **V. 30** – This verse again puts Claudius in the limelight, demonstrating that Rome must get involved. And because the commander is not a legal official, he explains why things must now go to Felix. What’s important here is that Claudius (1) rescued Paul, but also (2) we now learn that he also instructed “his accusers to speak against him before you.” So we now expect a showdown before Felix at some point in the future.
* “The conclusion that any fair-minded reader of this letter should draw is that Paul is innocent and his Jewish opponents are frenzied extremists. The result of Lysias’s intervention is that Paul is permanently severed from any relationship with Jerusalem and is now embedded in the Roman legal system that will eventually lead him to Rome.”[[17]](#footnote-17)

**Day 4 – Questions**

1. Why does it matter that we would have a first-hand knowledge of Claudius’ letter?
2. How does this passage show you the importance of the fact that God wanted to have Paul born a Roman citizen?
3. Why would Luke want to tell Theophilus that Rome didn’t think Paul was worthy of death?

**Day 5 – Paul’s Path to Rome, Part 3 (23:31–35)**

* **Overview:** This section rounds out Paul’s journey from Jerusalem to Caesarea where he would stand before the governor. We see Paul moved from point A to point B with incredible safety, and then we see the stage being set for his hearing.

**The Travel to Felix (23:31–35)**

* **Vv. 31–35** – Now that papers are in order, we get a travel narrative about the way Paul was moved to Felix. According to the structure (shown below), the focus is on how (1) everything is converging on this upcoming meeting with Felix, and (2) the safety of Paul.
* **Structure:**

A – Soldiers follow “orders” to put Paul in one of Herod’s facilities (Antipatris) (31)

B – Some soldiers “**returned**” to their barracks (32)

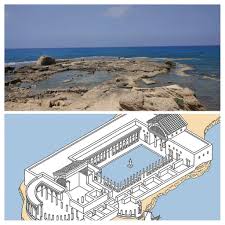
\*C The remaining soldiers “presented Paul to [Governor Felix]” in Caesarea (33)

B – Felix prepares for a hearing after Paul’s accusers “**arrive**” (34–35a)

A – Felix gives “orders” to put Paul in one of Herod’s facilities (Praetorium) (35b)

* **V. 31** – Verse 31 tracks the trip to the governor. Everything here focuses on how Rome’s forces are being wielded for Paul’s benefit. At the start, “the soldiers…took Paul and brought him by night to Antipatris.”
  + A stone building on a hill

    Description automatically generatedWhy mention Antipatris? This is actually the name of a fortress built by King Herod (see picture). Knowing that, we see that it not only communicates the incredible safety Paul enjoyed on his trip, but it also helps us see why Luke would make this a bookend for his story (see structure above). At every checkpoint, Paul is given safe residence at one of Herod’s royal facilities. And on a more logistical note, this facility is basically halfway to Caesarea, so it makes sense why they would see it as a safe stopping point.[[18]](#footnote-18)
* **V**. **32 –** Moving forward, Luke says that, by this point, Paul is “safe enough” and the 400 foot-soldiers accompanying him can leave and return to Jerusalem. After all, being down 400 men puts Jerusalem in a far more vulnerable state, so these men return to their barracks while “leaving the horsemen to go on with” Paul. But aside from what’s wise for the soldiers, Luke’s structure helps us see that the focus is narrowing onto Paul himself. Literarily, most of the soldiers “returned” and soon Felix will wait for Paul’s accusers to “arrive.” Things are moving around Paul, and the climactic point comes in verse 33.
* **V. 33 –** The climactic point of the narrative is given here. There are two circumstantial points and one main point. The two circumstantial points are (1) they “had [finally] come to Caesarea”; (2) they “delivered the letter to the governor.” This is all grammatically subordinated to the main point: “they also presented Paul to him.” So, it’s mission complete. Now we await our meeting.
* **Vv. 34–35a –** These verses describe how Felix prepares for the trial. First, he makes sure that Paul falls under his jurisdiction, so he asks, “from what province [Paul] was.” And when he hears Paul was “from Cilicia,” which fell under “the provincial complex subordinate to the Roman governor of Syria and therefore to the same ultimate jurisdiction,”[[19]](#footnote-19) he can say, “I will give you a hearing.” But that’s not all, because every trial needs two parties. So he also has to wait until the “accusers arrive also.” So the stage is being set.



* **V. 35b –** In the meantime, Felix gives “orders for [Paul] to be kept in Herod’s Praetorium.” This forms the final bookend of this travel narrative, and leaves Paul once again safely residing in one of Herod’s great facilities (this time, his beach house, complete with tide pool, see picture). Of course, “Paul does not get a palatial suite in the governor’s official residence” since “The praetorium has a place for prisoners to be kept under constant watch.”[[20]](#footnote-20) But even so, the main picture Luke gives us is that Paul is being kept safe in royal facilities as he awaits his trial.

**Day 5 – Questions**

1. Why would Luke choose to highlight the two royal facilities where Paul stayed on his way to Felix?
2. In your own words, how does this passage function in the flow of the chapter?
3. What stands out to you most about the lessons from this week in our study?

1. Schnabel, [*Acts*](https://ref.ly/logosres/exegcommacts?ref=Bible.Ac22.30&off=3504&ctx=+the+aorist+tense).+~The+purpose+of+the+m), 925. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Garland, [*Acts*](https://ref.ly/logosres/ttc65ac?ref=Bible.Ac23.1-10&off=9701&ctx=Paul%E2%80%99s+indignation.+~Looking+%E2%80%9Cstraight+at), 245. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Polhill, [*Acts*](https://ref.ly/logosres/nac26?ref=Bible.Ac23.1-2&off=7&ctx=23%3a1%E2%80%932+~Placed+before+the+Sanhedrin%2c+Paul), 467–468. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Garland, [*Acts*](https://ref.ly/logosres/ttc65ac?ref=Bible.Ac23.1-2&off=1011&ctx=ent+to+be+impudent.+~If+true%2c+it+wrecks+t), 242. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Garland, [*Acts*](https://ref.ly/logosres/ttc65ac?ref=Bible.Ac23.3-5&off=292&ctx=%E2%80%9Cwhitewashed+wall.%E2%80%9D+~The+metaphor+recalls), 242. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Peterson, [*The Acts of the Apostles*](https://ref.ly/logosres/pntcacts?ref=Bible.Ac23.5&off=1230&ctx=+from+Jerusalem+for+~some+time+and+on+thi), 615. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Peterson, [*The Acts of the Apostles*](https://ref.ly/logosres/pntcacts?ref=Bible.Ac23.5&off=420&ctx=+of+his+conduct%E2%80%99.14+~However%2c+Paul%E2%80%99s+use+), 614; For the record, he knew he was before the Sanhedrin (23:1, 6), but he admits that he didn’t know the man who gave the command was the high priest. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Schnabel, [*Acts*](https://ref.ly/logosres/exegcommacts?ref=Bible.Ac23.4-5&off=1530&ctx=e+high+priest.%E2%80%9D2254%0a~This+last+interpreta), 927. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Peterson, [*The Acts of the Apostles*](https://ref.ly/logosres/pntcacts?ref=Bible.Ac23.5&off=666&ctx=r+of+your+people%E2%80%99)%2c+~Paul+expresses+respe), 615. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Rigney, *Leadership and Emotional Sabatoge*, 99–100. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Garland, [*Acts*](https://ref.ly/logosres/ttc65ac?ref=Bible.Ac23.1-10&off=10370&ctx=use+that+office.%0a2.+~The+central+issue+in), 245. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Garland, [*Acts*](https://ref.ly/logosres/ttc65ac?ref=Bible.Ac23.6&off=352&ctx=n+the+resurrection.+~He+says+not+that+he+), 242. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Vaughan, [*Acts*](https://ref.ly/logosres/fsgc65ac?ref=Bible.Ac23.12-35&off=557&ctx=until+he+was+dead.+(~They+must+have+becom), 141. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Marshall, [*Acts: An Introduction and Commentary*](https://ref.ly/logosres/tntc65acus?ref=Bible.Ac23.16&off=603&ctx=a+conspirator+also%3f+~But+other+references), 388. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Peterson, [*The Acts of the Apostles*](https://ref.ly/logosres/pntcacts?ref=Bible.Ac23.16-19&off=651&ctx=ss+to+the+prisoner.+~Perhaps+his+personal), 622. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Garland, [*Acts*](https://ref.ly/logosres/ttc65ac?ref=Bible.Ac23.25-30&off=841&ctx=+cover+of+darkness.+~He+believes+that+Pau), 249. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Garland, [*Acts*](https://ref.ly/logosres/ttc65ac?ref=Bible.Ac23.25-30&off=1101&ctx=efore+the+governor.%0a~From+a+Roman+point+o), 250. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Polhill, [*Acts*](https://ref.ly/logosres/nac26?ref=Bible.Ac23.31-33&off=208&ctx=leg+of+the+journey.+~Antipatris+was+a+mil), 475. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Schnabel, [*Acts*](https://ref.ly/logosres/exegcommacts?ref=Bible.Ac23.34-35&off=1297&ctx=cepted+Paul%E2%80%99s+case%2c+~probably+because+at+), 940. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Garland, [*Acts*](https://ref.ly/logosres/ttc65ac?ref=Bible.Ac23.31-35&off=90&ctx=er+to+the+governor.+~Governor+Felix%E2%80%99s+fir), 250. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)