

Jerusalem to Caesarea

ACTS 23:12 *And when it was day, certain of the Jews banded together, and bound themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. 13 And they were more than forty which had made this conspiracy.*

The Lord Jesus Christ knew of this plot to kill Paul, and that is why He appeared unto Paul in verse 11 and told him to *...Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.* In other words Jesus was telling Paul that he wouldn't be in Jerusalem very long before starting his journey toward Rome. As we discussed previously, the Apostle Paul didn't know exactly when he would be going to Rome, he only knew that the Lord had told him he was going to Rome. Rome was the capital of the world during Paul's day, and means "strength." We know that the Apostle Paul was not counting on the strength of Rome to get him out of Jerusalem, but rather was relying on the strength of the Lord to move him beyond Jerusalem. Perhaps Paul recalled these words from PSALMS 27:1 during this trying time: *The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?* Certainly Paul recalled the story of the children of Israel being brought out of Egypt by the mighty hand of God, for EXODUS 13:3 in part records: *...by strength of hand the LORD brought you out from this place:* Even though the words of REVELATION were not yet penned, the thought behind REVELATION 3:8 applied to the Apostle Paul in his current circumstance, where Jesus states: *I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name.*

ACTS 23:12 *And when it was day,...* is a phrase found five (GRACE) times in scripture, indicating a change of situation. And here in Jerusalem Paul's situation is about to change because *...certain of the Jews banded together, and bound themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. 13 And they were more than forty which had made this conspiracy.* At the present time, *...when it was day,...* Paul had no idea that there were more than forty men who had taken this oath to murder him. "Forty" we know is the number of PERFECT TESTING, and certainly these were very testing times in the life of the Apostle Paul. Note when this conspiracy was hatched; *...when it was day.* The Lord was way ahead of them, and had already warned Paul the night before, not of their plan, but of the fact that he was going to Rome. The Lord didn't tell Paul how he was going to get to Rome, or when he was going to Rome, nor did the Lord fill in any details of this pending journey. The Lord wanted Paul to believe Him, and trust Him to get Paul to Rome. Paul did believe the Lord, and knew after this midnight visit that the Lord would do just what he said, and get him to Rome in His time. Paul already knew in his heart these words that he would pen later in COLOSSIANS 1:17 *And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.* The plan of the conspirators then was in the hands of the Lord before they even had a plan, and the Lord used their plan as a means of starting Paul on his journey, as we will see when we get into the rest of ACTS 23.

Who these certain Jews were that banded together placing themselves under this curse we are not told. By examining the word "curse" here in verse 12 we can get a better glimpse of who these men may have been associated with. The word "curse" here is number 332 in the Strong's Greek Concordance, and means: to devote to destruction. These Jews were different than today's terrorists who are willing to blow themselves up in order to kill others. The Jews who banded together under this oath were only interested in killing the Apostle Paul, not themselves. Their determination in this effort is summed up with these words: *...saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul.* It was fairly common for certain Jews to take similar vows of not eating or drinking until they had fulfilled their oath, for they also had a way out of their vow if not being able to accomplish it. If these Jews under such vows were not able to fulfill their vow, they simply would go to a rabbi explaining their difficulty in fulfilling their vow, and in turn be absolved from their vow. It is thought that the men who took upon themselves this vow to kill the Apostle Paul were of the sect of the Sadducees, who didn't really believe much, they didn't believe in angels, or the resurrection, and were

embarrassed by the Apostle Paul during his Sanhedrin Council meeting a couple of days past. Remember it was the Sadducees that were filled with indignation back in ACTS 5:17 when Peter and John's ministry was so powerful in Jerusalem, and had the Apostles arrested. And it no doubt was the Sadducees who led the charge to kill Stephen when he told them of the "disposition of angels," which they didn't believe in, back in ACTS 7:53. So it is thought that the majority of these conspirators bound under this curse in ACTS 23 were of the sect of the Sadducees.

The plan of the conspirators is revealed in ACTS 23:14-21, and simply boils down to the following. They wanted members of the Jewish Sanhedrin council to present themselves before Claudius Lysias and request another meeting with the Apostle Paul present in their quarters, so they could enter into further questioning of him. Their real intention was to momentarily overpower the Roman soldiers as Paul was to be led down the stairs of Fort Antonia, and kill him. Claudius Lysias probably would have met their request, for he still was unsure of who Paul was, or what he had done. However God wasn't yet done with the Apostle Paul, by a long ways, so the Lord used Paul's nephew, whom we didn't even know existed before this time, to come to Paul's rescue, and inform Claudius Lysias of this murder plot. Here is how the scripture records these events.

ACTS 23:14 And they came to the chief priests and elders, and said, We have bound ourselves under a great curse, that we will eat nothing until we have slain Paul. 15 Now therefore ye with the council signify to the chief captain that he bring him down unto you to morrow, as though ye would enquire something more perfectly concerning him: and we, or ever he come near, are ready to kill him. 16 And when Paul's sister's son heard of their lying in wait, he went and entered into the castle, and told Paul. 17 Then Paul called one of the centurions unto him, and said, Bring this young man unto the chief captain: for he hath a certain thing to tell him. 18 So he took him, and brought him to the chief captain, and said, Paul the prisoner called me unto him, and prayed me to bring this young man unto thee, who hath something to say unto thee. 19 Then the chief captain took him by the hand, and went with him aside privately, and asked him, What is that thou hast to tell me? 20 And he said, The Jews have agreed to desire thee that thou wouldest bring down Paul to morrow into the council, as though they would enquire somewhat of him more perfectly. 21 But do not thou yield unto them: for there lie in wait for him of them more than forty men, which have bound themselves with an oath, that they will neither eat nor drink till they have killed him: and now are they ready, looking for a promise from thee.

This is a real life thriller-murder-mystery story. Part of the mystery here is Paul's nephew, who becomes the main character in foiling this murder plot. In verse 16 we find that Paul had a sister, which we have not read, or heard anything about until this point in time. We know nothing about her after this point in time also. We do know that she had a son, who was in Jerusalem at this point in time, and obviously knew his uncle Paul, and his current circumstance. Paul's sister would have been raised under the roof of the same Pharisee Father who raised Paul. Perhaps her son followed in these same Pharisee footsteps, however scripture does tell us one way or another. This nephew may have been a student in Jerusalem just like his uncle Paul once was. Or he may have been in Jerusalem to observe the feast of Pentecost, like thousand of other Jews from all over the world. There must have been some affection between Paul and his nephew, for his nephew diligently sought Paul out while Paul was being held prisoner in the Roman castle. There would have been some degree of risk involved here in visiting a prisoner. And we learn here that prisoner Paul did now have certain privileges granted him because of his Roman citizenship, one being granted visitors. And if you think about it, there were really no formal charges brought against Paul up to this point in time, and the only reason the Romans now held him was because of the riot, and uproar surrounding him. Paul's nephew came to the castle, and sought out his uncle Paul to warn him of the plot against him by this rather large band of Jewish conspirators. Apparently this murder plot was fairly well know, and the men responsible for it couldn't keep their collective mouths shut in talking about it.

We are not told what else Paul and his nephew talked about, if anything. The urgency of this murder plot was what brought them together, and the Lord had Paul's nephew in Jerusalem for this one purpose, to reveal this plot unto Paul.

Verse 17 tells that Paul knew what to do with this information. ACTS 23:17 *Then Paul called one of the centurions unto him, and said, Bring this young man unto the chief captain: for he hath a certain thing to tell him.* Paul here showed a great deal of wisdom, and no doubt, the Holy Ghost aided him in this regard. Had Paul told the centurion of this murder plot, his officers may have also been informed, and somewhere along the line, word may have leaked unto the conspirators that their plot had been found out. So Paul kept this information from the centurion, and requested that his nephew, who is noted to be a young man, be brought unto the chief captain, and inform him of this murder plot. We are told in verse 18 that the centurion followed Paul's instructions. ACTS 23:18 *So he took him, and brought him to the chief captain, and said, Paul the prisoner called me unto him, and prayed me to bring this young man unto thee, who hath something to say unto thee.*

Verse 19 reveals some more of Claudius Lysias character. Claudius Lysias ...*the chief captain took him by the hand, and went with him aside privately, and asked him, What is that thou hast to tell me?* How Luke knew that Lysias, the chief captain, took Paul's nephew by the hand isn't told us, but certainly this young nephew must have revealed this detail unto Luke during subsequent interviews with him. This gesture of taking the young nephew by the hand by Claudius Lysias shows his professionalism, and how he conducted his business with great integrity, fatherly humanity, and prudence. Perhaps Paul's nephew was very nervous, and he probably was considering the kind of information he was revealing, and Lysias was just putting him at ease. Thus, in an effort to put Paul's young nephew at the greatest comfort level, Lysias took him by the hand, and led him to a private setting, ...*and asked him, What is that thou hast to tell me?*

Paul's nephew now has the greatest freedom to tell what he knows. *And he said, The Jews have agreed to desire thee that thou wouldest bring down Paul to morrow into the council, as though they would enquire somewhat of him more perfectly. But do not thou yield unto them: for there lie in wait for him of them more than forty men, which have bound themselves with an oath, that they will neither eat nor drink till they have killed him: and now are they ready, looking for a promise from thee.* {ACTS 23:20 & 21}. Lysias doesn't doubt Paul's nephew's story, and knew by looking at him, and listening to him, that Paul's life was indeed in danger.

Perhaps Claudius Lysias had been used of the Jews before to help execute one of their plans. Maybe not. Lysias loyalty was to the Roman Empire, not to the Jewish Sanhedrin, so he knew exactly how to handle this information, and at the same time protect Paul's nephew, and Paul himself. ACTS 23:22 shows Lysias consideration: *So the chief captain then let the young man depart, and charged him, See thou tell no man that thou hast shewed these things to me.* Lysias may have felt that if something bad happened unto his high profile prisoner, Paul, during his watch, that the same fate may be due him, considering that Paul was already known to him to be a Roman citizen. Lysias was also smart enough not to reveal this plot to all his soldiers either, for had any of them found this information out, they may have accepted a bribe to deliver Paul into the hands of these Jewish conspirators.

By now we have observed that Claudius Lysias was a reasonable business man, and fit to be chief captain of the Roman soldiers here at Jerusalem. Lysias also had considerable resources available unto him here in Jerusalem. So Lysias devised a plan to move Paul, seeing that it was now too risky to hold him prisoner in Jerusalem any longer. Lysias' plan is told us in verse 23 & 24. ACTS 23:23 *And he called unto him two centurions, saying, Make ready two hundred soldiers to go to Caesarea, and horsemen threescore and ten, and spearmen two hundred, at the third hour of the night; 24 And provide them beasts, that they may set Paul on, and bring him safe unto Felix the governor.* So we see that only two centurions, for now, were privy to the purpose of this journey.

Normally a Roman centurion commanded between 60 and 100 men. Apparently these two centurions commanded more than 100 men, for they were to get ready two hundred soldiers, seventy horse men, and two hundred spearmen, for a grand total of four hundred seventy soldiers to escort Paul safely out of town! Wow. Note this part of their charge in verse 24, that they were to bring Paul safe unto Felix the governor. With such a well armed garrison, and a rapid mode of transportation available unto the

Apostle Paul, his safety in departing Jerusalem seemed assured. It would have been nearly impossible for the forty plus Jewish conspirators to have any chance to kill Paul during this covert operation. One other detail that we might miss here in verse 24 is that more than one horse (*beasts*) was available unto the Apostle Paul in case there was a break down. Claudius was doing everything possible to bring Paul safe unto Felix the governor.

As for Paul, he already knew from his meeting with the Lord Jesus the night before that he was going to Rome. The details of his trip were not revealed unto him, but we now begin to see *...the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!* {ROMANS 11:33}.

Claudius Lysias also had another matter to deal with here, and that was the actual transfer of the safe custody of Paul unto the governor Felix. Lysias needed to explain why he wasn't able to provide Paul safe keeping, since that would have been his duty as commander in charge there in Jerusalem. So Claudius Lysias had some explaining to do unto the governor Felix as to why he was transferring the Apostle Paul unto his care. Thus Claudius Lysias wrote a letter after this manner. ACTS 23:25 *And he wrote a letter after this manner: 26 Claudius Lysias unto the most excellent governor Felix sendeth greeting. 27 This man was taken of the Jews, and should have been killed of them: then came I with an army, and rescued him, having understood that he was a Roman. 28 And when I would have known the cause wherefore they accused him, I brought him forth into their council: 29 Whom I perceived to be accused of questions of their law, but to have nothing laid to his charge worthy of death or of bonds. 30 And when it was told me how that the Jews laid wait for the man, I sent straightway to thee, and gave commandment to his accusers also to say before thee what they had against him. Farewell.*

Let me give you the translation of this letter found in Conbeare and Howson's book on Paul. "Claudius Lysias sends greeting to the most Excellent Felix the governor. This man was apprehended by the Jews, and on the point of being killed by them, when I came and rescued him with my military guard: for I learnt that he was a Roman citizen. And wishing to ascertain the charge which they had to allege against him, I took him down to their Sanhedrin: and there I found that the charge had reference to certain questions of their law, and that he was accused of no offence worthy of death or imprisonment. And now having received information, that a plot is about to be formed against the man's life, I send him to thee forthwith, and I have told his accusers that they must bring their charge before thee. Farewell."

Before we examine the contents of this letter a little closer, there is an interesting point to note found in verse 26, which revolves around the greeting Lysias sends to the governor Felix. Claudius Lysias greets the governor as "*the most excellent governor Felix.*" The term "most excellent" also is translated "most noble" in ACTS 24:3, and ACTS 26:25, and is used in addressing men of prominent rank or office, showing them honour and respect. Luke is the only New Testament author in scripture to use the Greek adjective *kratistos* {krat'-is-tos}, (number 2903 in the Strong's Greek Concordance), translated "most excellent," and "most noble." The interesting thing about this term is that Luke uses it in addressing his gospel letter of LUKE to *...most excellent Theophilus...* in LUKE 1:3. Thus we see the kind of prominent man C Theophilus was in the church that was at Antioch, the church who sponsored all of Paul's main missionary journeys. Since Paul never got a chance to return to Antioch after his third missionary journey because of his arrest in Jerusalem, and since they had sponsored Paul on his missionary journeys, Luke no doubt felt compelled to write Theophilus of the events we read of here in ACTS to help fill in the blanks as to what happened to Paul, who called the church in Antioch, Syria his home church, or base of operation. Remember from ACTS 11:26 that the believers were first called Christians in Antioch. And, no doubt, Theophilus was one of the most prominent men in the church at Antioch, worthy of the title *...most excellent Theophilus.*

We have talked about one of the points in this letter before, found in verse 27, which reads: *This man was taken of the Jews, and should have been killed of them: then came I with an army, and rescued him, having understood that he was a Roman.* {See page 729 of these notes.} When Claudius first came upon the Apostle Paul he had no idea

that he was a Roman citizen, or an Apostle either for that matter. In ACTS 21:33 we find that Claudius Lysias bound Paul, which was an illegal thing to do to a Roman citizen. Later in ACTS 22:25 when he was about to be scourged, Paul made known that he was a Roman citizen, and Claudius Lysias was again summoned, and there he quizzed Paul about his Roman citizenship. We found that Claudius Lysias was in violation of Roman law by having Paul bound with chains in the first place. In verse 27 above Claudius Lysias gives the impression to governor Felix that the reason he rescued Paul in the first place was because he *...understood that he was a Roman...* a fact he didn't learn until ACTS 22:26-29. This is why we read in ACTS 22:29 *...and the chief captain also was afraid, after he knew that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him.* Perhaps this was also the main reason why Claudius Lysias took so much extra care in dealing with the Apostle Paul after this time.

So in his letter unto the governor, Claudius Lysias does his best to make himself look good by making a misleading statement. Of course Claudius Lysias didn't want to be punished for his earlier illegal actions against the Apostle Paul either. In verse 30 Lysias makes another misleading statement, stating: *I sent straightway to thee, and gave commandment to his accusers also to say before thee what they had against him.* Do you think that by the time Lysias wrote this letter, that he had informed the Jewish Sanhedrin council *...to say before thee what they had against him...?* Claudius hadn't even informed his own troops as to why they were making this quick overnight journey towards Caesarea. However, in Lysias defense, by the time governor Felix would have a chance to read this letter, Roman commander Claudius Lysias would have made sure the Jewish accusers of Paul here in Jerusalem knew that Paul was now in the custody of governor Felix, and if they wanted to question him further, they would have to go to Caesarea to do so. The way this came about, no doubt, was when Paul's accusers came unto Fort Antonia the next day to request further questioning of Paul, Lysias would simply tell them that he was no longer there, and had been sent unto Caesarea. This way their plot to kill Paul would still have been perceived to be a secret unto Lysias, and any confidence he had developed amongst the Jews wouldn't have been compromised.

This was the last time Lysias would have dealings with the Apostle Paul, but it won't be the last time we hear of Claudius Lysias. Lysias is again reference in ACTS 24:7 when the Jews mentioned to governor Felix how Lysias came and took Paul from their hands with great violence. Governor Felix later mentioned in ACTS 24:22 that he would hear more of this matter when Lysias shall come down to see him. However Felix never really did intend to quiz Claudius Lysias on the matter of the Apostle Paul, nor did it ever seem important to him. And there is no further records showing whether governor Felix ever made any attempt to speak to Lysias.

Claudius Lysias goes down in history because of his dealings with the Apostle Paul here in Jerusalem, which are recorded for us in the book of ACTS. Yet we never read that Lysias ever did know who the Apostle Paul was! Lysias held prisoner the Apostle unto the Gentiles, the Apostle for this church age, the man who could have changed his own life for the better, and never did question him further as to who he was, other than to find out that Paul was a Roman citizen. It seems Lysias was afraid of Paul, somewhat, knowing he was a Roman citizen whom he, Lysias, had mistreated. Remember that our text in ACTS 23 relates how Paul was taken to Caesarea in secret by night, so Luke and the others who traveled with Paul had no idea either what happened to him for a while, and they may have later found out this information later from Lysias himself. Perhaps, and this is just speculation on my part, Luke later made an effort to tell Lysias who Paul was. Put yourself in Claudius Lysias shoes for a minute. Don't you suppose he wanted to learn who Paul was also? I bet he did, and Luke may have later been the one to fill in the details, but scripture doesn't give us this information. Some how, and we are not told this in scripture either, Luke found out what Lysias wrote in his letter to governor Felix, which we have recorded for us in scripture in ACTS 23:26-30. Did Lysias tell Luke this information himself, or did Luke learn the text of this letter by other means? This is one of the questions we will have to wait until we get to heaven for the answer. Let's hope that we get to see Claudius Lysias there also. Some suggest that the letter Claudius wrote to governor Felix may have been read when Paul's case was heard before Felix. If this was true then Paul himself would have known what the letter said, and could have related this information to Luke.

Here are a couple of more thoughts concerning Lysias. How did Luke know what Lysias “privately” asked Paul’s nephew in ACTS 23:19? There are two possible answers to this question. Either Paul’s nephew told Luke this information, or Lysias himself told Luke this information. Now Lysias had charged Paul’s nephew in ACTS 23:22 not to tell any man the information he had related unto Lysias, so if Paul’s nephew had told this information to Luke, he technically would have been in violation of Lysias request. Now let’s suppose that Paul’s nephew did tell this information to Luke, then how did Luke learn that Lysias called unto him two centurions in ACTS 23:23 to make ready this large escort for Paul? Perhaps Paul later found this information out, and related it to Luke, but to my way of thinking it seems that Lysias would have been the logical source for the kind of information we have been talking about. Luke would have been in the area of Jerusalem, and Caesarea for about two years in our time frame of ACTS 23, and could have interviewed Lysias after the events recorded in ACTS 23 had taken place to get these kind of details. Again scripture doesn’t give us answers to these kinds of questions, because it really isn’t all that important for us to know these answers either. Luke was writing OTheophilus about the Apostles, and what took place in their lives, so his focus wasn’t on giving us details on all the characters Paul came in contact with during his journeys.

We do know from ACTS 23:29 that Lysias had already concluded in his own mind that the Apostle Paul had not done anything worthy of death, or even being retained in bonds, but essentially was holding Paul in custody to keep the peace in Jerusalem, and protect Paul from the Jews who were so intent on his being killed. No doubt the Apostle Paul, by his calm words, and actions, was a testimony unto Lysias, and because of this, as time went on I am sure Lysias himself wanted to know more about this man he once held prisoner. No matter what happened to Lysias from this point forward it will always be remembered that the Lord used Lysias as a means to get Paul on his way towards Rome.

Recall back in ACTS 23:23 & 24 Lysias told two of his centurions: *...Make ready two hundred soldiers to go to Caesarea, and horsemen threescore and ten, and spearmen two hundred, at the third hour of the night; And provide them beasts, that they may set Paul on, and bring him safe unto Felix the governor.* The narrative continues in ACTS 23:31 *Then the soldiers, as it was commanded them, took Paul, and brought him by night to Antipatris.* So we see that Paul left Jerusalem under the cover of darkness, basically in secret, except for the Roman escort of 470 soldiers! Essentially what we have here is a Roman motorcade of enormous proportions, the likes of which were reserved for very few important people.

But think about this for a moment, how important are the sons of God? How important are you? Paul helps us answer such questions. In ROMANS 8:32 Paul has already penned: *He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?* LUKE 1:37 also tells us: *For with God nothing shall be impossible.* The point here being, is that God freely provided for us all things through His Son Jesus Christ, which, if need be, may include a motorcade of enormous proportions to brings us to the point where He wants us to be! We will see, Lord willing, in future lessons, the importance of the Apostle Paul being at Caesarea for about two years. Could the Lord have kept Paul safe in Jerusalem? Sure He could, but that wasn’t in His plan. God wanted Paul in Caesarea for two years to teach several people, including Paul, important eternal lessons, the results of which we will see when we get to heaven ourselves.

In verse 31 we find Paul brought *...by night to Antipatris.* Antipatris got this name from Herod, who rebuilt the original city Capharsaba, and renamed it in honor of his father, Antipater. The distance from Jerusalem to Antipatris is about thirty-five miles. So Paul left Jerusalem around 9:00 PM with this large Roman escort, and traveled by night this thirty-five miles to Antipatris, probably arriving there in the early hours before sunrise. For now, the threat of the Jerusalem Jews would be behind them, and when it was full day light the following events happened. ACTS 23:32 *On the morrow they left the horsemen to go with him, and returned to the castle: 33 Who, when they came to Caesarea, and delivered the epistle to the governor, presented Paul also before him.*

Here we see Paul safely arriving in Caesarea, and delivered into the hands of the governor Felix, who will assume the care of Paul for the next couple of years.