

Valley Bible Church
Sermon Notes for November 4, 2018

Paul Avoids a Conspiracy
Acts 23:12-22

Paul returned to Jerusalem in Acts 21 after the third missionary journey and soon encountered opposition. Acts 23:11 informed us of God's promise to bring Paul to Rome (cf. Romans 1:9-11; 15:23). Acts 23:12-22 begins to reveal the process by which God will bring this about.

1. The plot against Paul (23:12-15)

The phrase "when it was day" connects the conspiracy to kill Paul with the great uproar in the Council the day before. The plot was a grassroots movement. It was not only explained to the Council, but they also agreed to participate with the plan. This agreement was surely supported by the majority who were Sadducees (cf. 23:6-10).

The oath that was entered into by the assassins placed the person under a curse if they failed in their promise. This is what Peter did in Mark 14:71 in declaring that he did not know who Jesus was. This oath was no longer binding if it became no longer able to be fulfilled. With the swift departure of Paul from Jerusalem to Caesarea (Acts 23:31-33), none of these men suffered starvation.

Their intent was to kill Paul as he was transported only several hundred yards by Roman soldiers from the barracks (the Antonio Fortress) to the Council in the temple area. This ambush required a willingness to battle the Romans, showing the intensity of the hatred of Paul.

Those participating in the conspiracy to kill Paul not only opposed the government but also lied to accomplish their murderous plans. In their opposition to God, they were willing to use any means necessary. Like these forty men, people end up thinking they are serving God while violating His commands because they have wrong beliefs and pride.

2. The providence for Paul (23:16-17)

The mention of Paul's sister and her son, along with the earlier reference to his father being a Pharisee (23:6), completes what we know of Paul's family. We know he was not married from 1 Corinthians 7:8. This plot against Paul was unable to remain secret since Paul's nephew learned of it. The nephew was a youth but the description of him being "taken by the hand" (23:19) may indicate that he was fairly young.

Note how Paul was influential with the centurions, which speaks of the respect these leading Roman soldiers had for him since they first took hold of him in Acts 21:33.

God sovereignly allowed the nephew to learn of the plot, report it to Paul, and for Paul to be delivered to safety. God works out His will through even the most difficult circumstances. Yet

as we saw in cases like Stephen (Acts 7:60) and James (Acts 12:2), His will may not include physical deliverance.

3. The protection of Paul (23:18-22)

The nephew was brought by the centurion to explain the plot to the commander. While Paul was a prisoner, he was not restricted in the way he would be if he were considered to be guilty. This explains why the nephew would have access to Paul.

The secrecy the commander demanded points to the danger the Romans faced in protecting Paul, moving them to amass a large force to take him out of the city by night. The purpose for the commander's order to tell no one was to allow a rapid plan to be executed to safely evacuate Paul to Caesarea.

It is ironic that a Gentile commander was used by God to deliver God's messenger from the wicked plot of the Jews. The means by which the Jews sought to stop Paul ended up being used by God to deliver him as a witness to Rome. The Lord uses the actions of people opposing His will to accomplish His ends.