

Acts Chapter 23

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[0 : 00] Well, we welcome you to our September 12 class. We are moving along in rather rapid fashion compared to what we have been doing. Does anybody recall offhand when we started the Book of Acts?

Anybody remember that? It's probably been about... I think it's been about three years, something like that, but it's a big book, you know.

And you've got to keep in mind that it encompasses a period of 30 years from Acts 1 through Acts 28, or three decades that go by, and you have to keep these time factors in mind.

Currently, we are in Acts chapter 23, and on page 602, down in the lower left-hand corner, we see that a rather intriguing incident has happened here.

The Apostle Paul has been literally attacked in the temple area by Jewish compatriots, whom they believe Paul had actually led or taken a Gentile into the Jewish court area, which of course would be a no-no, penalty of death.

[1 : 14] And it started a big ruckus, a big riot, when some of the people there had been in Asia Minor, where Paul had preached before, and they saw Paul there. They identified him as one who had preached, they said, against the law of Moses in their land.

And of course, the crowd converged upon him in a feeding frenzy, and they were ready to tear him limb from limb. And when the Roman authorities saw what was happening, because they have a vantage point being up high on the fortress of Antonia, they dispatched a number of soldiers down there to break up the riot and the fuss and everything.

Make a long story short, they were ready to tear Paul limb from limb. He was rescued by the Romans because they wanted to keep order, and they were ready to beat him, to make him confess as to whatever it was they thought he had done.

And he'll talk when we give him a few lashes. And as they were preparing to lay stripes on Paul, he simply turned to the Roman officer and says, is it lawful for you to do this to a Roman citizen?

And the guy stopped in his tracks and said, you're a Roman? Yes, I'm a Roman. Oh, well, excuse me.

[2 : 36] Because a Roman citizen was protected from that kind of thing. And when they found out that he was a Roman, immediately they backed off, and they were going to turn him loose, set him free.

And Paul looked at that angry crowd out there of Jews that were just waiting for the Romans to set him free, and they'd see to it that he never got out of that place alive.

So what he did is he invoked his Roman citizenship and said to this Roman army officer, I appeal unto Caesar. And what that did is it immediately obligated these Romans to place Paul in protective custody under their authority because he was a Roman citizen.

And it was then their responsibility to see to it that he got to Rome to be able to present his case before the Roman court, which would be presided over, of course, by the Caesar.

So that meant that the Romans now became his protectors against the Jews. And if you were under the protection of Roman authorities and you allowed something to happen to that person who was in protective custody, then you were in big trouble from the Roman authorities higher up.

[3 : 56] So they were committed to seeing to it that Paul would be able to get to Rome. And, of course, you've got to remember, they're not in Rome. They're in Jerusalem.

And Rome is a long way off. So that's going to involve a voyage to Rome. And all the while, Paul, under protective custody, will be handcuffed to a Roman soldier 24-7 until they get to Rome.

And that's what he's got awaiting him. This will be his final trip to Rome, of course. And meanwhile, the Jews get together and they learn that the Romans are going to be transporting Paul over to

Caesarea.

And 30 of them get together and take a vow. 30 of these Jews. And they say, We are not going to eat or drink anything until this man's blood runs cold.

They were determined to kill him. And word of that got around so much so that Paul's nephew got wind of it.

[5 : 04] And Paul's nephew went to the Roman army officer and said, The Jews plan to ambush you when you are transporting Paul to Caesarea.

They've got 30 men who have taken a vow that they wouldn't eat or drink until they killed Paul. And they are going to wait until tomorrow morning, which probably would have been about 9 o'clock in the morning. And they are going to lay and wait for you and ambush you and see to it that Paul was killed.

So, this nephew takes this message to the Roman army officer and he in turn gives the order that we find at the top of the page. Here, page 602.

This Roman army officer called unto him two centurions saying, Make ready 200 soldiers. Now that's a pretty good sized compliment. Especially in light of the fact that there are only 30 Jews who have taken this pledge.

Was it 30 or 40? That escapes me now. But anyway, he's got a large contingency here. Get 200 soldiers to go to Caesarea and horsemen three score and ten.

[6 : 13] That's 70. And spearmen 200 at the third hour of the night. That's 3 o'clock in the morning. So all of these soldiers are going to be roused out of their barracks at about 2 a.m. in the morning and be prepared to march and to mount up to escort Paul.

Now this just goes to show you the kind of importance that Rome placed upon the protection of a Roman citizen who was in their custody.

this would appear to be overkill. But he's taking no chances because this guy's neck his neck will be in the noose if something happens to Paul because he's a Roman citizen.

So, at 3 o'clock in the morning excuse me, verse 24 and provide them with mounts beasts that they may set Paul on and bring him safe unto Felix the governor.

And Felix is a Roman governor who is in charge of this particular area. And he wrote a letter after this manner. This is this Roman army officer and he is writing a letter to Felix his superior explaining this situation and what he is doing to fulfill the responsibility.

[7 : 29] And it says in verse 26 Claudius Lysias which is obviously the name of this Roman army officer unto the most excellent governor Felix sendeth greeting.

This man referring of course to Paul the apostle 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.

And when I would have known the cause wherefore they accused him I brought him Paul forth unto their council.

This is that body of Jews shakers and movers seventy members of the Sanhedrin and he brought Paul before the Jews. This is after everything had died down cooled down a little bit and he is going to this Roman army officer is going to allow Paul to explain his situation to this body of Jews.

And we are told that whom I perceived to be accused of questions of their law. Now he is talking about the Jewish law.

[8 : 42] The Roman army officer could care less about the Jewish law. But he knew it was important to them. And he says but to have nothing laid to his charge worthy of death or of bonds.

In other words it became apparent to me that there was some kind of a ruckus over their understanding or their belief that Paul had somehow violated or broken the law of Moses. and he didn't care anything about that. But he did care about keeping the order and about any kind of political involvement that might involve law breaking under the Roman law.

So he says that he has done nothing as there is nothing laid to his charge worthy of death or of bonds. So there was just no way that I could stand by and allow them to take the life of a Roman citizen without intervening.

And that's of course exactly what I did. And verse 30 says And when it was told me how that the Jews laid wait for the man that is they were preparing an ambush I sent straightway to thee that is this superior Felix and gave commandment to his accusers also to say before you what they had against him.

[10:08] Farewell. And he closes the letter. And then the soldiers as it was commanded took Paul and brought him by night to Antipatris and on the morrow they left the horsemen to go with him and return to the castle.

Okay? That's the fortress Antonia. Let's turn the page here. Who when they came to Caesarea and Caesarea be reminded is on the Mediterranean coast it is the center of Roman government in Israel.

It's not Jerusalem. Caesarea named of course after one of the Caesars. And this is still a big tourist attraction today. You can go to Caesarea by the sea and see the ancient pillars that held up the temples that were there.

Fascinating place archaeologically. So he says who when they came to Caesarea and delivered the epistle to the governor they presented Paul also before him.

Now Paul is going to stand before this local Roman authority whose name is Felix. So he is going to be given like a preliminary hearing.

[11:28] But you've got to remember because he said those magic words as a Roman citizen I appeal unto Caesar that automatically gave him entry into the Roman court in Rome presided over by Caesar himself.

That's how seriously Rome regarded Roman citizenship and that's how they cared for it. So he is actually en route but the first stop is here at Caesarea. And we read in verse 34 that when the governor had read the letter and when he understood that he was of Cilicia that is Paul was from Cilicia because that's where that's actually where he was born.

He was born in Tarsus the city of Tarsus. I will hear thee said he when your accusers are also come. In other words he's saying I don't want to get just your side of the story I want to get the side of the story of those who are accusing you of these things.

So I want to get the pro and the con of this which of course is an admirable thing to do. When your accusers are also come and he commanded him to be kept in Herod's judgment hall.

This is the government house. So that takes us into the next chapter chapter 24. And after five days Ananias the high priest descended with the elders.

[12:58] What does that mean? Descended simply means Ananias and the high priest was where they always were. They were in Jerusalem. And Jerusalem represents the highest elevation in the area.

So when they descended it means they came down from Jerusalem losing altitude all the way to the coast to the Mediterranean coast.

And of course you know that the coast is where the sea line is. We talk about a place being so many feet above sea level. When you get to the Mediterranean coast in Caesarea that is sea level. And Jerusalem was located high above that. So they are traveling down. They are actually going west and down to the city of Caesarea.

And we read that he descended with the elders. That is a contingency of fellow Jewish authorities. And with a certain orator named Tertullus who informed the governor against Paul.

[14:01] This orator named Tertullus is actually an attorney. He is a prosecuting attorney. He is the one who is going to represent these Jews before the Roman authorities and he is going to level and make the accusations against Paul.

He probably was a very glib, well-spoken individual representing the law, etc. And he is going to present the information against him, inform the governor, against Paul.

And when he was called forth, in other words, they are convening this kind of court now, and Paul is there, the Roman soldiers are there, Felix, the Roman authority is there, and the Jews have arrived from Jerusalem, and they are all together ready to hear this case.

And we are told that in verse 2, when he was called forth, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying, saying, seeing that by thee we enjoy great quietness, and that very worthy deeds are done unto this nation by thy providence, what's he doing here?

He is doing nothing but sucking up. Yeah. He is buttering up, he is buttering up this Roman authority. If you want to see a real gross example of sucking up and buttering up, take a King James version of the Bible, and read the preface that those wrote in honor of King James who authorized the translation of the Bible, and all they are doing is throwing kisses and bouquets to this king, and as much as to say, it was such a wonderful day, your majesty, when God appointed you to reign over us.

[16:02] We have never had it so good, blah, blah, blah, blah. It is just kind of sickening really as you read it. Much as I enjoy the King James Bible, I do not enjoy the introduction that they gave to the king.

So that's exactly what this guy, he's trying to butter up the judge before he makes the case. And that very worthy deeds are done unto this nation by thy providence.

We accept it always, and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness. Notwithstanding that I be not further tedious unto thee, I pray thee that thou wouldst hear us of thy clemency a few words. For we, that is, we Jews, we have found this man, meaning, of course, Paul, a pestilent fellow. Some translate it a public pest.

We found this man a source of mischief to be a veritable plague, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout.

[17:14] This guy is nothing but a class A troublemaker, and he is a pain everywhere he goes. He needs to be brought to justice, and we are confident that bringing him to your court, justice, of course, will prevail.

He is a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world. Well, he had been in Asia Minor, he had even been in Europe on his two previous missionary journeys, and now we go to page 606 on our next sheet, moving right along, and he is a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes, and of course that is referring to the followers of Jesus of Nazareth, whom many identified as the Nazarene, who also has gone about to profane the temple.

He has defiled the temple. He has corrupted the temple. This most holy site of all of Israel, he has defiled it. And the implication, of course, is he brought a Gentile into the temple area, which is off limits to everyone except the Jews.

Truth of the matter is, he didn't do that. He never did do that. But that was the accusation that was made. And he says, whom we took and would have judged according to our law.

What's he saying? We would have judged him according to Jewish law. Well, we all know how that would have turned out. You talk about a kangaroo court, that's exactly what it would have been, and they would have torn him limb from limb.

[18:48] And he says in verse 7, we would have judged him according to our law, but the chief captain, now he's talking about a Roman, Lysias came upon us, and with great violence, took him away out of our hands.

We were going to administer Jewish justice to this guy, and we would have, except this Roman army officer, Lysias, stepped in and prevented us from doing that, and he took him out of our hands, commanding his accusers to come unto thee, by examining of whom thyself mayest take knowledge of all these things whereof we accuse him.

And the Jews also assented, that is, this body of Jews representing the Sanhedrin, we don't know how many there were, they're all saying, Amen, yes, that's right, that's right, and they're egging Tertullus on, and they are supporting this argument, and in verse 9, the Jews also assented, saying that these things were so, that's right, that's exactly how it happened, he's telling the truth, this guy is nothing but a scourge on society, he needs to be dealt with, and we would have taken care of him, except your officers intervened, and short circuited the justice we were going to carry out, and that's why we're here now, so now we know that you will give justice to this case, and then Paul, after that the governor had beckoned unto him to speak, answered, and here is what

Paul says, for as much as I know that thou hast been of many years a judge unto this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself, because that thou mayest understand that there are yet but twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem for to worship, and they, meaning referring to the Jews, and they neither found me in the temple, disputing with any man, nor raising up the people, neither in the synagogues, nor in the city, neither can they prove the things whereof they now accuse me, but this I confess unto thee.

Now it should become apparent to you that what I'm doing is just reading the bold type of these verses, and the bold type is the King James, you can fill in at your leisure, the other translations that are listed below that worded a little bit differently, so we're in verse 14, but this I admit, or I confess to you, that after the way which they call heresy, what's he talking about?

[22:05] He's talking about Christianity, he's talking about the faith of Christ, in Christ, this is the way which they, the Jews, call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets.

I don't dispute anything that is written in the law and in the prophets, and I have hope toward God which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust, and herein do I exercise myself to have always a conscience void of offense toward God and toward men.

In other words, Paul says, I don't have any trouble at all sleeping at night based on what I have said and how I have served God and what I have told men. I have no cause for guilt or a guilty conscience.

My conscience is clear. It's clean. I want you to understand that. Now, verse 17, After many years, I came to bring alms to my nation.

That is, he'd collected alms on his missionary journey from other people in other churches in Asia Minor and in Europe and he collected these alms to bring the money back for the poor saints of Jerusalem because things were pretty destitute there.

[23 : 34] I came to bring alms to my nation of Israel and offerings whereupon certain Jews from Asia, that's Asia Minor, found me purified in the temple neither with multitude nor with tumult who ought to have been here before you and object if they had ought against me or else let these same here say if they have found any evil doing in me when I stood before the council except it be for this one voice that I cried standing among them touching the resurrection of the dead, I am called in question by you this day.

And what Paul is saying here is bottom line, this is the issue. This is what this whole rhubarb started about. When I proclaimed the resurrection of the dead, the Pharisees and the Sadducees were of course immediately divided and a great tumult was raised.

And he says it's concerning the resurrection of the dead that I am called in question by you this day.

And, verse 22 says, when Felix heard these things, having more perfect knowledge of that way, in other words, he had gotten more complete information about the whole thing, he deferred them and said, when Lysias the chief captain shall come down, I will know the uttermost of your matter.

Then, I will decide the case and render a verdict. And, our food is here and we've ended that page,

so, as I've said, we are really ripping through these and we've got just a couple more seats to go and we'll be finished with the book of Acts, but we've got to give attention to Paul's trip to Rome.

Any questions or comments before we enjoy our breakfast? Anyone? I trust that you were able to visualize somewhat the setting that was taking place here because this is a very important thing when Paul is presenting his case and the Romans are listening to it and, of course, this is going to be the talk throughout the whole area and it is simply more publicity for the gospel.

[25 : 50] Okay, Roger. Paul had not been a Roman citizen. Oh, yeah. It was Paul's being a Roman citizen was providentially used of God to spare his life because, you know, one of the things that God had promised to Paul was that Paul would bear witness to Christ in Rome.

Well, he knew, Paul knew for whatever means was used, he was indestructible until he got to Rome at least because God had already appeared to him and told him that he was going to bear witness to him in Rome.

Well, there is no way he could do that if the Jews killed him in Jerusalem. So, he knew that he was safe and he knew that he could use and did use his Roman citizenship to actually prolong his life and it's a very strategic factor in the whole case.