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Acts 23-24 Chapter Study

INTRO

III. Launching Out • Chs. 13-28

F. & nbs= p; Paul Arrested & Jailed • 21:15-Ch. 28

1. & nb= sp; The plan to prove Paul's devotion • 21:15-26

2. & nb= sp; Paul arrested • 21:27-22:29

3.&n= bsp; Face-off with the Sanhedrin • 22:30-23:10

As we come to ch. 23, Paul is being held by the Romans= in the Antonia fortress next to the temple mount.

The day before a mob incite= d by false accusations against Paul had started a riot in their attempt to beat = him to death.

Claudius Lysias, the Roman commander, led his troops into the fray & rescued Paul.

Hauling him back to the Ant= onia, he gave orders for Paul to be interrogated by scourging.

When Paul told the centurio= n in charge of the interrogation that he was a Roman citizen, the soldiers freak= ed.

Scourging a Roman citizen = was punishable by death.

So the centurion told Lysia= s, & Lysias came to verify form Paul's own lips that he was indeed a Roman= .

Now – Lysias has a big problem.

As the commander of the tro= ops who guard the temple – he's responsible to keep the peace, the fame= d Pax Romana.

Any disturbance had to be a= ccounted for & the trouble-makers punished.

But Lysias didn't have the foggiest idea what had caused the riot over Paul.

In order to make his report to his superiors, he needed to discover the root of the dispute.

So he sent for the Sanhedrin to appear & file their charges against Paul.

¹Then Paul, looking earnestly at the council, said, "Men *and* brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day." ²And the high priest Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth. ³Then Paul said to him, "God will strike you, *you* whitewashed wall! For you sit to judge me according to the law, and do you command me to be struck contrary to the law?" ⁴And those who stood by said, "Do you revile God's high priest?" ⁵Then Paul said, "I did not know, brethren, that he was the high priest; for it is written, '*You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.*'"

The high priest Ananias was really something!

Appointed by one of the Herods 12 years before, he was about as corrupt as they come.

Actually, he was the godfather of a crime syndicate; an ancient form of the Jewish Mafia.

Anyone who dared to stand up to him was either beaten up or killed.

So when Paul didn't just plead guilty in the face of his charges, he ordered some of his cronie/thugs to smack him.

This was so unexpected, so totally outside the realm of right conduct, Paul was stunned!

Imagine a court case where the defendant is sitting in the box.

The prosecuting attorney accuses him of crimes then says, "So, what do you have to say for yourself?"

The defendant says, "I'm innocent & I can prove it if you'll give me a chance."

Then the prosecutor signals the bailiff, who runs over and punches the defendant in the mouth.

That's what's happening here.

Besides this being just very WRONG – it was against both Roman & Jewish Law.

Paul is so stunned & appalled, his anger rises in = reply & he let's loose with a curse.

It's not a profane cu= rse – he's not cussing here – but his anger is hot & he f= ires off a pronouncement of divine judgment.

“God's gonna&#= 8217; get you for that you hypocrite!”

His use of the term “whitewashed wall” as a label for Ananias reveals that Paul was aware of Jesus' reference to the religious leaders as whitewashed tom= bs.

They looked good on the outs= ide but inside are full of rottenness & corruption.

Now - The Sanhedrin had been convened so quickly at Lysias' order, they weren't wearing their official garments.

Paul knew they were the high council, but he didn't recognize Ananias as the high priest because he wasn't wearing his uniform as the rulers of the Sanhedrin.

All he saw was someone who = was supposed to be a defender of the law b= ut had just violated it in the most high-handed & heinous way.

When rebuked for cursing the high priest, he apologized – explaining that he hadn't realized who he was speaking to.

Ananias deserved no respect = or honor from Paul or anyone else – but his office did & Paul showed deference to the office even though the man himself was a corrupt creep.

And then it occurred to Paul – If the Jewish high council was presided over by a guy that was so evil he would order a man standing trial to be abused, there was no way= to appeal for justice with them.

The best he could hope for = was a diversion; something to move Lysias to his s= ide.

⁶ But when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, “Men *and* brethren, I am a Pharisee, = the son of a Pharisee; concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead I am be= ing judged!” ⁷ And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees; and the assembly was divided. ⁸ For Sadducees say that there is no resurrection—and no angel or spirit; b= ut the Pharisees confess both. ⁹ Then there arose a loud outcry. An= d the scribes of the Pharisees' party arose and protested, saying, “We find no evil in this man; but if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him, le= t us not fight against God.” ¹⁰ <= span lang=3DEN style=3D'mso-ansi-language:EN'>Now when there arose a great disse= nsion, the commander, fearing lest Paul might be pulled to pieces by them, command= ed the soldiers to go down

and take him by force from among them, and bring him into the barracks.

Paul knew this would be the result of his remark – that’s why he made it.

The debate between the Pharisees & Sadducees was epic & endless.

Before Paul identified himself as a Pharisee, the hostility of the council was all focused on him.

But as soon as he called himself a Pharisee, the council members lined up according to their party & renewed their age old dispute.

Suddenly now Paul had a whole bunch of supporters.

As the debate grew, it broke out into violence & the Romans again had to rescue Paul.

Did you see the news a couple days ago? The Taiwanese congress erupted in a riot & a few lawmakers had to be taken to the hospital to be treated for injuries.

Imagine the House of Representatives in DC in a debate over the Iraq War, when they start rioting.

That’s what’s going on here – this was the Jewish high council!

4. The plot to assassinate Paul • 23:11-22

¹¹ But the following night the Lord stood by him and said, “Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome.”

It was Paul’s great zeal & desire to preach Christ at Jerusalem.

It hadn’t worked out as he’d hoped, though it had as he’d been warned again & again.

Jesus appears & tells him his work in Jerusalem is done; God has a new destination for him – Rome!

So Paul now knows where he’s going. What God didn’t tell him was when or how he would get there.

¹² And when it was day, some of the Jews banded together and bound themselves under an oath, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul.

These guys were serious! Their hatred was so intense, they vowed a total fast

until they'd assassinated Paul.

¹³ Now there were more than forty who had formed this conspiracy. ¹⁴ They came to the chief priests and elders, and said, "We have bound ourselves under a great oath that we will eat nothing until we have killed Paul. ¹⁵ Now you, therefore, together with the council, suggest to the commander that he be brought down to you tomorrow, as though you were going to make further inquiries concerning him; but we are ready to kill him before he comes near."

Their plan was to ambush the soldiers escorting the Apostle, overwhelm them, & kill Paul.

¹⁶ So when Paul's sister's son heard of their ambush, he went and entered the barracks and told Paul.

Remember as we saw Sunday, prisoners were provided for by visitors, not the State.

Paul's friends & family had access to him to bring him food and supplies.

His nephew comes with news about the conspiracy to ambush Paul..

¹⁷ Then Paul called one of the centurions to *him* and said, "Take this young man to the commander, for he has something to tell him." ¹⁸ So he took him and brought *him* to the commander and said, "Paul the prisoner called me to *him* and asked *me* to bring this young man to you. He has something to say to you." ¹⁹ Then the commander took him by the hand, went aside, and asked privately, "What is it that you have to tell me?" ²⁰ And he said, "The Jews have agreed to ask that you bring Paul down to the council tomorrow, as though they were going to inquire more fully about him. ²¹ But do not yield to them, for more than forty of them lie in wait for him, men who have bound themselves by an oath that they will neither eat nor drink till they have killed him; and now they are ready, waiting for the promise from you." ²² So the commander let the young man depart, and commanded *him*, "Tell no one that you have revealed these things to me."

Claudius Lysias, the commander, would find this news deeply distressing.

An attack on Roman troops showed a level of defiance that was extremely troublesome.

This thing with Paul had grown too hot for him to handle.

Each day he remained in Jerusalem only increased the danger & volatility of the sitch, so he made plans to get Paul out of the City.

5. &nb= sp; Sent to Felix • 23:23-35

²³And he called for two centurions, saying, “Prepare two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen, and two hundred spearmen to go to = Caesarea at the third hour of the night; ²⁴= and provide mounts to set Paul on,= and bring *him* safely to Felix the governor.”

Lysias had heard that the conspiracy to assassinate Pa= ul was over 40 guys.

He knew that number might g= row, so he sent 200 light infantry, 200 heavy infantry, & 70 cavalry to accompa= ny Paul to the Roman administrative Capital of Caesarea, 60 miles west.

They left at about 9 PM, when most people had gone to = bed.

²⁵He wrote a letter in the following manner: = ²⁶ Claudius Lysias, To the most excel= lent governor Felix: Greetings. ²⁷ This man was seized by the Jews an= d was about to be killed by them. Coming with the troops I rescued him, having learned that he was a Roman. ²⁸ And when I wanted to know the reas= on they accused him, I brought him before their council. ²⁹ I found out that he was accused concerning questions of their law, but had nothing charged against = him deserving of death or chains. ³⁰ <= span lang=3DEN style=3D'mso-ansi-language:EN'>And when it was told me that the J= ews lay in wait for the man, I sent him immediately to you, and also commanded his accusers to state before you the charges against him. Farewell.

Lysias recognized Paul had done nothing deserving of d= eath according to Roman law.

The problem was some disput= e over the internal affairs & beliefs of the Jews Rome had no jurisdiction ove= r.

All <= st1:place w:st=3D"on">Rome was concerned about was making sur= e an innocent man wasn't wrongly executed.

That concern was all the m= ore real in Paul's case because he was a Roman.

Lysias ended his letter by saying the sitch had grown = beyond his capacity to deal with; it needed Felix's authority as the governo= r to settle.

³¹ Then the soldiers, as they were commanded, took Paul and brought *him* by n= ight to Antipatris.

About 35 miles from Jerusalem – that's quite a haul. This was a forced march with the infantry doing double time the whole way.

³²The next day they left the horsemen to go on with him, and returned to the barracks.

The road from Jerusalem to the coastal plain ran through several narrow gullies & ravines where an ambush could be kept well hidden until the very last moment.

But once out on the plain at Antipatris, there's no place for men to hide in wait.

The infantry was no longer needed, so they returned to Jerusalem & the cavalry went on with Paul who was also mounted, the rest of the way to Caesarea.

³³When they came to Caesarea and had delivered the letter to the governor, they also presented Paul to him. ³⁴ And when the governor had read it, he asked what province he was from. And when he understood that *he was* from Cilicia, ³⁵ he said, "I will hear you when your accusers also have come." And he commanded him to be kept in Herod's Praetorium.

Felix asked what province Paul was from because Lysias' letter had identified Paul as a Roman citizen.

He wanted to know if he had jurisdiction in this matter.

When Paul said that he was from Cilicia, Felix realized he did indeed have authority to hear the case.

He turned Paul over to the guard of the military headquarters next to the palace.

G. Paul at Caesarea • Ch. 24-26

1. The trial before Felix • 24:1-23

¹Now after five days Ananias the high priest came down with the elders and a certain orator *named* Tertullus. These gave evidence to the governor against Paul.

Though Ananias was old, he made the trip because he was determined to see Paul dead.

To that end, he hired Israel's most eloquent & persuasive attorney – Tertullus.

²And when he was called upon, Tertullus began his accusation, saying:

Stop there – before we read further, keep in mind Felix's character was what we saw Sunday – he was a lecherous, brutal knave.

There wasn't an ounce of nobility, refinement, or fairness in his entire being.

He used his role as governor to one end – maximizing pleasure.

He hired street thugs to assassinate his opponents.

He was married 3 times – his 3rd wife was Drusilla, the daughter of Herod Agrippa, the one who'd killed James and imprisoned Peter.

She was only 19 & the wife of the King of Syria when Felix seduced & convinced her to leave her husband to marry him.

Felix's reputation as a knave was well-known with Tacitus, the Roman historian saying that his name had become a byword for political corruption.

Now let's read Tertullus' remarks to Felix . . .

"= Seeing that through you we enjoy great peace,

It's his abuses & gross mis-management that will lead to the revolt that destroys Israel!

and prosperity is being brought to this nation by your foresight,

The economic condition of Israel was pretty lousy at this time.

³ we accept *it* always and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness.

Most noble Felix???? The words 'noble' & 'Felix' should be in the same book, let alone the same sentence!

⁴ Nevertheless, not to be tedious to you any further,

Oh, Felix was eating it up! He would have much preferred Tertullus go on & on about how wonderful he was.

But even Tertullus had to halt the flattery lest he puke from the nausea building within.

Friends, beware flattery! Be on guard against those who come to you with flowery words of praise.

Telling you how wonderful, how great you are.

Inevitably, flattery is merely prelude to manipulation.

Prov 29:5 - A man who flatters his neighbor spreads a net for his feet.

The one heaping praise wants something & hopes to butter you up by saying nice things that will make you like them.

It's difficult not liking someone who's stroking your pride, massaging your ego.

Proverbs has several warnings about the danger of flattery, of insincere praise.

It's right & proper to compliment someone or to render appropriate praise as a simple expression of appreciation & respect.

But whenever praise is used for some end other than expressing respect, it's flattery & ought to be resisted.

If you're the object of praise – be careful! Treat it like perfume.

It's okay to take a whiff, but don't drink it.

After this, Felix ought to have been on guard but this was over the top flattery that had no basis in reality.

The problem was, Felix was so wrapped up in himself, he ate it up.

I beg you to hear, by your courtesy, a few words from us. ⁵ For we have found this man a plague, a creator of dissension among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes.

Ouch! Tertullus was going right for the throat.

He was appealing to the Roman knee-jerk resistance to sedition.

By labeling Paul a creator of dissension among the Jews, he was playing to what he hoped was Felix's concern to keep the often contentious Jews pacified.

You see, the Jews had earned a reputation in the Roman Empire as contentious trouble-makers.

Rome was constantly dealing with some new brouhaha the Jews had stirred up.

Tertullus was laying the blame for much of that at Paul's feet.

The implication was – get rid of Paul, & Felix would rise as a hero among his peers.

Tertullus also appealed to the Roman suspicion of new religious movements when he accused Paul of being a leader of the Nazarenes.

This is another label given the first Christians because they followed Jesus of Nazareth.

It was a despised label, a put-down.

Remember what kind of reputation Nazareth had: bad, real bad!

When told Jesus was from there, Nathaniel asked, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”

Because Nazareth was little more than a work camp for the city of Sepphoris a few miles north, it had a reputation as a rough place where uneducated, common day laborers lived.

“Nazarene” came to mean uncouth, uncultured, & ignorant.

And this was the label attached to the followers of Jesus by their enemies.

⁶ He even tried to profane the temple, and we seized him, and wanted to judge him according to our law. ⁷ But the commander Lysias came by and with great violence took *him* out of our hands, ⁸ commanding his accusers to come to you. By examining him yourself you may ascertain all these things of which we accuse him.” ⁹ And the Jews also assented, maintaining that these things were so.

Tertullus repeats the same lie the original rioters had used in whipping up the temple crowd into an uproar – that Paul had brought Gentiles into the sacred precincts.

It was a lie & they knew it. Furthermore, they didn't have one shred of proof!

Then Tertullus lie about the actions of Lysias; he didn't use great violence – he stopped the mob from its great violence on Paul.

Luke says when the Romans first entered the temple mount the crowd stopped & backed away.

It wasn't till they began taking Paul up the stairs to the Antonia that the real violence broke out, and that was the mob's doing; the Romans merely defended themselves.

Tertullus has given nothing but a pack of lies – all of it from beginning to end is false.

¹⁰ Then Paul, after the governor had nodded to him to speak, answered:

Will Paul follow Tertullus' example & flatter Felix? Let's hope not.

“= Inasmuch as I know that you have been for many years a judge of this nation,

Paul speaks the truth without flattery.

There's nothing he can say in praise of Felix except that he's got some years in office.

I do therefore more cheerfully answer for myself,

Paul thanks Felix for the opportunity to respond to the charges. He's respectful without being fake.

¹¹ because you may ascertain that it is no more than twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem to worship.

Paul had spent a week going to the temple to worship, accompanying those 4 men who were ending their Nazarite vow to the Lord.

It was on the 7th day the riot had broken out, and it was now 5 days since then.

¹²And they neither found me in the temple disputing with anyone nor inciting the crowd, either in the synagogues or in the city. ¹³Nor can they prove the things of which they now accuse me.

They'd accused Paul of sedition & creating dissension all over the world – yet what he was on trial for was the events in Jerusalem of 5 days prior.

Regarding that – where was the evidence?

An accusation isn't enough – there needs to be evidence.

Where were the witnesses?

Where were the guys who originally claimed Paul had defiled the temple?

They weren't there! As a matter of fact, there wasn't one ounce of evidence against Paul.

¹⁴But this I confess to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect, so I worship the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets. ¹⁵I have hope in God, which they themselves also accept, that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust.

¹⁶This *being* so, I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men.

Paul admits that he's a Christian, but he wants Felix to understand that what he believes **ISN'T** a new religious movement Rome needed to worry about.

It's what real Judaism had always been meant for.

¹⁷“Now after many years I came to bring alms and offerings to my nation, ¹⁸in the midst of which some Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with

a mob nor with tumult. ¹⁹They ought to have been here before you object if they had anything against me.

Yeah, where are those guys who'd originally claimed Paul had defiled the temple by bringing Gentiles there?

Paul wanted to face them to ask them, "Who'd I bring? And if I had, why did you raise a cry against me instead of laying hands on the Gentiles? They were your proof & the object of greater concern.

"But you guys didn't grab them BECAUSE THEY WEREN'T THERE! You're lying!"

But these guys aren't even in Caesarea – because they knew their accusations were bogus.

²⁰Or else let those who are here themselves say if they found any wrongdoing in me while I stood before the council, ²¹unless it is for this one statement which I cried out, standing among them, 'Concerning the resurrection of the dead I am being judged by you this day.'

Paul admits to creating one disturbance – the bomb he dropped before the Sanhedrin when he claimed to be a Pharisee who believed in the Resurrection of Jesus.

Paul admits to this because he rightly assumes that as the governor of Israel, Felix had to know about the age-old rift between the Sadducees & Pharisee.

Before we go on, something want to mention – Paul's original accusers aren't the only ones who aren't there at his trial before Felix.

Who else isn't there who should be?

Where are the Leaders of the Church in Jerusalem who'd suggested Paul go through the whole week long temple rigmarole in the first place?

Why aren't they there at Paul's side, saying how they'd counseled him to take those 4 Jewish men to end their vow and pay their way?

Why aren't they there to verify Paul had brought a huge financial gift to relieve the poor?

If they were so concerned for him as they'd originally claimed, where are they now that his life's on the line?

In fact, why hadn't THEY gone with Paul to the temple that first week, or stood with him before Lysias?

They failed Paul in his time of need.

We covered vs. 22-27 Sunday so we'll just read over them tonight.

²²But when Felix heard these things, having more accurate knowledge of the Way, he adjourned the proceedings and said, "When Lysias the commander comes down, I will make a decision on your case."²³So he commanded the centurion to keep Paul and to let him have liberty, and told him not to forbid any of his friends to provide for or visit him.

2. Felix procrastinates • 24:24-27

²⁴And after some days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, he sent for Paul and heard him concerning the faith in Christ. ²⁵Now as he reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and answered, "Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you." ²⁶Meanwhile he also hoped that money would be given him by Paul, that he might release him. Therefore he sent for him more often and conversed with him. ²⁷But after two years Porcius Festus succeeded Felix; and Felix, wanting to do the Jews a favor, left Paul bound.

We considered the tragedy of Felix's procrastination Sunday.

He wasn't the only one who failed to respond; his wife Drusilla was there with him for many of these interviews with Paul and she delayed as well.

After 2 years, Felix was recalled to Rome to answer for his gross mismanagement.

His brother Pallas was barely able to keep him from being executed.

Felix lived out what was left of his short life in shame & humiliation.

Drusilla went on a shopping trip to Pompey.

She was there when Vesuvius erupted. She was one of the thousands who perished.

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