SMITH FOR CHRIST

TEACHING THE WORD · WATCHING THE TIMES



DEEP DIVE

Acts

Chapter Twenty-Three, Verses 1–35

The Lord Stood at His Side — a slap in the Council, a split over the resurrection, a night visit from Jesus, and a nephew who overheard a plot

NASB 1995 | VERSE BY VERSE | FOUR VOICES | WITH DIAGRAMS

Paul stands before the Sanhedrin with a good conscience and is struck on the mouth; he cries out for the hope of the resurrection and the Council tears itself apart. That night the Lord stands at his side — "Take courage" — and by morning forty sworn assassins are outrun by a boy, a centurion and four hundred seventy Roman soldiers. Read through four teachers — **David Guzik**, **R.C. Sproul**, **C.H. Spurgeon** and **Matthew Henry** — with the Greek behind Luke's key words.

THE PASSAGE

Acts 23:1–35

conscience · resurrection · courage · plot · Caesarea

THE METHOD

Verse by Verse

Color-coded by teacher

WHAT'S INSIDE

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Five movements from the Council chamber in Jerusalem to Herod's Praetorium in Caesarea

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"Brethren, I have lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day." — Acts 23:1

SECTION I · THE PASSAGE

Acts 23:1–35

The Lord Stood at His Side — Forty men swore to kill Paul; one word from the Lord said he would see Rome — and the word won

† How to Read This Study

This study walks Acts 23 in 5 movements, in Luke's own order. Each movement opens with the full NASB 1995 text of those verses, marked with the Berean colors and shapes; then the Greek behind the key words; then the teachers, each in his own color — **David Guzik**, the pastor who walks the text verse by verse; **R.C. Sproul**, the theologian who presses every word for its doctrine; **C.H. Spurgeon**, the preacher who turns the doctrine into a call to the heart; and **Matthew Henry**, the Puritan commentator who gathers it into plain, practical counsel. The figures draw the passage so you can see where Luke is going. Read the Scripture first; then let each voice add its angle.

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word — R.C. SPROUL · Ligonier · St. Andrew's
C.H. SPURGEON · Metropolitan Tabernacle — MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary on the Whole Bible

HOW THIS STUDY IS MARKED — God — His character & actions; Command / instruction; Key repeated word; Sin / warning; Promise / blessing; Time / place / contrast

KEY VERSE · ACTS 23:11

"But on the night immediately following, △ the Lord stood at his side and said, "▯ Take courage; for as you have solemnly witnessed to My cause at Jerusalem, ☆ so you must witness at Rome also.""

† Before the Passage

Paul had said he was ready "not only to be bound, but even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus" (21:13). In Jerusalem he went into the temple to complete a vow, and "the Jews from Asia, upon seeing him in the temple, began to stir up all the crowd" (21:27). They supposed he had brought Trophimus the Ephesian, a Gentile, past the barrier (21:29). The Roman commander rescued him from the mob, let him speak from the barracks steps (chapter 22), and then — learning he was a Roman citizen (22:25–29) — brought him before the Council "wishing to know for certain why he had been accused by the Jews" (22:30). Acts 23 opens in that room.

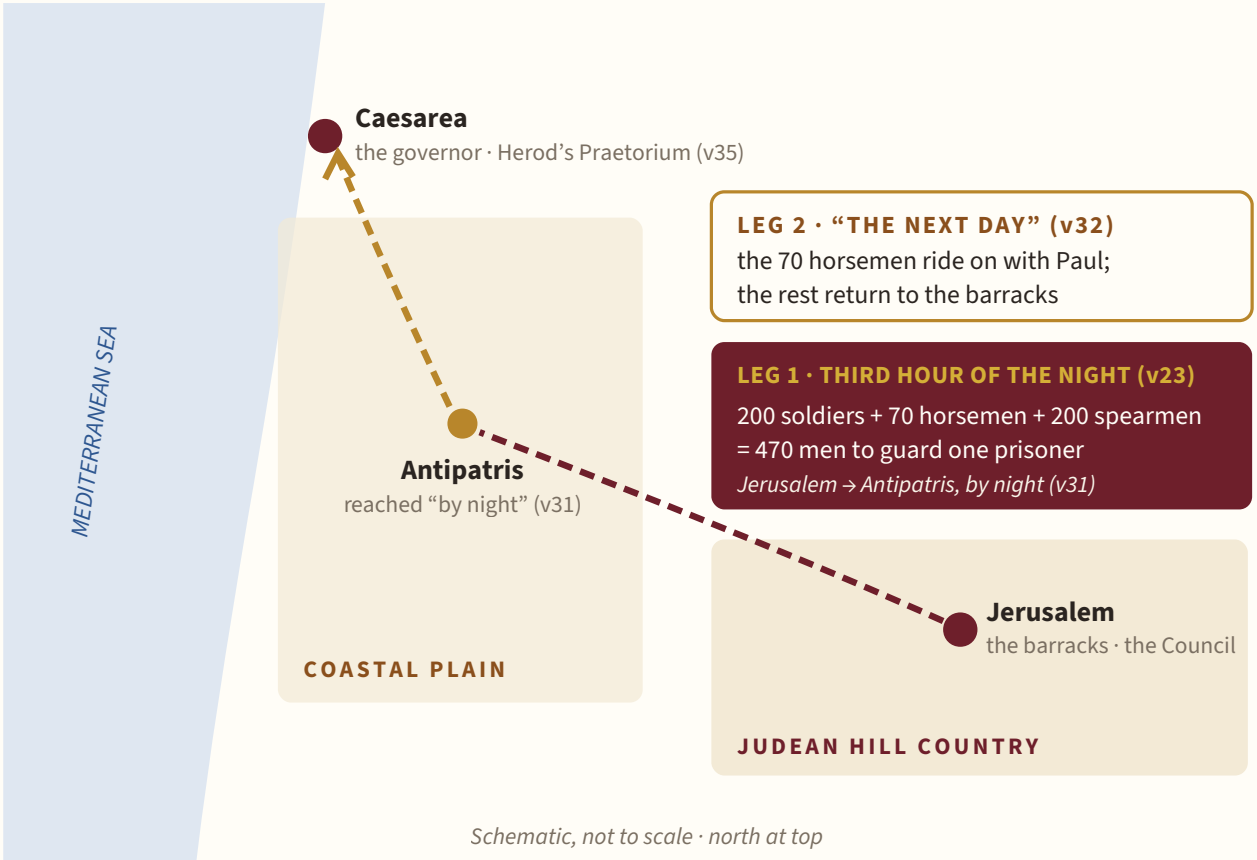
The Council (the Sanhedrin) was Israel's supreme court, made up of two parties who agreed on little. The high-priestly families were Sadducees (5:17), who "say that there is no resurrection, nor an angel, nor a spirit" (23:8); the Pharisees "acknowledge them all." Paul had been one of the Pharisees (Philippians 3:5). The

high priest that day was Ananias, whom Guzik describes from Josephus as a greedy man who took the tithes meant for ordinary priests and who was later killed by Jewish nationalists for his pro-Roman politics.

The commander is named for the first time in this chapter: Claudius Lysias (v. 26). The governor he writes to is Felix, a freedman who rose to rule Judea. Spurgeon: “Felix was originally a slave; he was freed by Claudius, and became one of the infamous favorites of the emperor.” Henry: “The Roman historians speak much of this Felix, as a man of mean extraction.” The road from Jerusalem runs down out of the hill country to Antipatris on the coastal plain and then north along the coast to Caesarea, the Roman capital of the province, some sixty miles in all.

Above all the scheming stands one sentence from the risen Lord. Jesus had told Ananias of Damascus that Paul was “a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel” (9:15), and Paul had said, “After I have been there, I must also see Rome” (19:21). Now, on the worst night of his ministry, the Lord stands beside him and turns that hope into a promise: “so you must witness at Rome also” (23:11). Everything else in the chapter — the oath of the forty, the nephew, the escort, the letter — serves that word.

FIGURE · JERUSALEM TO CAESAREA BY NIGHT



Follow the dashed line: the whole escort marches through the night to Antipatris, and the next day the horsemen alone bring Paul up the coast to the governor at Caesarea.

I
MOVEMENT

ACTS 23:1–5

A Good Conscience and a Whitewashed Wall

Paul's first sentence, the high priest's blow, and an apology to the office

> [1] *Paul, looking intently at the Council, said, "Brethren, I have lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day."* [2] *The high priest Ananias commanded those standing beside him to strike him on the mouth.* [3] *Then Paul said to him, "God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall! Do you sit to try me according to the Law, and in violation of the Law order me to be struck?"* [4] *But the bystanders said, "Do you revile God's high priest?"* [5] *And Paul said, "I was not aware, brethren, that he was high priest; for it is written, 'YOU SHALL NOT SPEAK EVIL OF A RULER OF YOUR PEOPLE.'"*
>
> ACTS 23:1–5

> *"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness."*
>
> MATTHEW 23:27

συνείδησις · πεπολίτευμαι

SYNEIDĒSIS · "CONSCIENCE" · G4893 · POLITEUOMAI · "LIVED MY LIFE" · G4176

Syneidēsis is a "knowing-with" — the inner witness that knows what I have done and judges it. Thirty New Testament uses, two of them in these back-to-back trials: "a perfectly good conscience before God" (23:1) and "a blameless conscience both before God and before men" (24:16). Paul's verb is unusual: *pepoliteumai*, "I have lived as a citizen" — from *politeia*, citizenship. Facing Israel's highest court, he says he has conducted his public life as a citizen under God. Guzik: "He didn't mean that he was sinlessly perfect."

τοῖχε κεκονιαμένε

TOICHE KEKONIAMENE · "WHITEWASHED WALL" · G5109, G2867

Toichos is a wall; *koniaō* is to whitewash with lime. The same verb gives Jesus' "whitewashed tombs" in Matthew 23:27 — clean outside, dead inside. Ezekiel had pictured false prophets plastering a flimsy wall with whitewash so it looked solid until the storm came (Ezekiel 13:10–11). Henry gives the plain sense: "Thou whited wall; that is, thou hypocrite." A judge who orders a blow "in violation of the Law" (v. 3) while sitting to judge by the Law is a painted wall.

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik reads Paul's opening claim carefully: "He didn't mean that he was sinlessly perfect and that his conscience had never told him he was wrong." He thinks Paul meant it as a mild beginning — "Paul probably thought this was an innocent enough way to begin his preaching." Ananias, a greedy man by Josephus' account, answered with a blow, and Guzik does not fault the retort: "The man who commanded that a defenseless man be punched in the face indeed was a whitewashed wall." On Paul's apology he takes the simplest reading: "Probably, he simply didn't recognize the man who gave the command to strike him as the high priest."

MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary on the Whole Bible

Henry admires Paul's composure before the court: "He was not at all put out of countenance upon his being brought before such an august assembly." A good conscience meant one thing for Paul: "He had aimed at nothing but to please God and do his duty." When the blow came, Paul named the man for what he was — "Thou whited wall; that is, thou hypocrite." And when told he had reviled God's high priest, Paul answered as Henry's King James text has it, "I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest," and at once quoted the Law against himself: "You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people" (v. 5).

II
MOVEMENT

ACTS 23:6–10

The Hope and the Resurrection

"I am a Pharisee" — and the Council splits over the dead

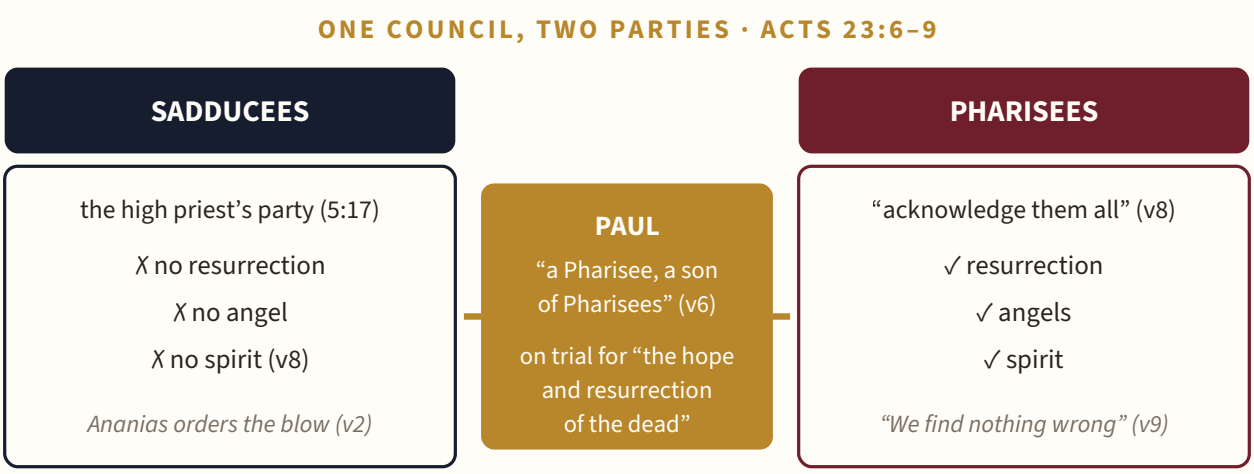
6 *But perceiving that one group were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, Paul began crying out in the Council,*
"Brethren, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees; I am on trial for the hope and resurrection of the dead!"
7 *As he said this, there occurred a dissension between the Pharisees and Sadducees, and the assembly was divided.*
8 *For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor an angel, nor a spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all.*
9 *And there occurred a great uproar; and some of the scribes of the Pharisaic party stood up and began to argue heatedly, saying, "We find nothing wrong with this man; suppose a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?"*
10 *And as a great dissension was developing, the commander was afraid Paul would be torn to pieces by them and ordered the troops to go down and take him away from them by force, and bring him into the barracks.*

ACTS 23:6–10

"circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee;"

PHILIPPIANS 3:5

FIGURE · ONE COUNCIL, TWO PARTIES



Paul stands between the two parties of the Council and names the doctrine that divides them — the resurrection of the dead.

ἐλπίς · ἀνάστασις

ELPIS · "HOPE" · G1680 · ANASTASIS · "RESURRECTION" · G386

Paul joins the two words: "the hope and resurrection of the dead" (v. 6) — literally "concerning hope and resurrection of the dead," one thing seen two ways. *Elpis* (53 New Testament uses) is confident expectation, not a wish; *anastasis* (42 uses) is a "standing up again." The pair returns before Felix (24:15, 21) and before Agrippa (26:6–8), and in Rome Paul says he wears his chain "for the sake of the hope of Israel" (28:20). The resurrection of Jesus was the proof of that hope (17:31).

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik sees a deliberate move: "Paul's course was to divide the Sanhedrin among their party lines." He explains the parties for modern readers — "Sadducees were the theological liberals of their day" — and notes the irony of their history: "Usually the Sadducees and the Pharisees were bitter enemies, but they were able to unite in opposition against Jesus." Paul's cry was not a dodge. The resurrection really was what he was on trial for, and as Guzik puts it, "Paul picked the right issue." The division that followed put Paul back in Roman hands.

MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary on the Whole Bible

Henry is blunt about the Sadducees: "The Sadducees were deists—no friends to the scripture, or divine revelation." Paul could honestly stand with the other side on this point: "Paul owns himself a Pharisee, so far as the Pharisees were in the right." That honest claim "occasioned a division in the council," and the commander pulled Paul out, for "he saw he could make nothing of them towards the understanding of the merits of his cause." The court that was meant to judge Paul could not agree on the most basic question of all.

III
MOVEMENT

ACTS 23:11

Take Courage

The night after the Council, the Lord stands at Paul's side

> 11 *But on the night immediately following, △ the Lord stood at his side and said, "Take courage; for as you have solemnly witnessed to My cause at Jerusalem, ☆ so you must witness at Rome also."*
>
> ACTS 23:11

> *"But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was rescued out of the lion's mouth."*
>
> 2 TIMOTHY 4:17

> *"For this very night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood before me, saying, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar; and behold, God has granted you all those who are sailing with you.'"*
>
> ACTS 27:23–24

θάρσει

THARSEI · "TAKE COURAGE" · G2293

One word in Greek, an imperative of *tharseō*, "be of good courage." Guzik says it is "used five times in the New Testament"; Biblehub's concordance lists seven forms — Matthew 9:2, 22; 14:27; Mark 6:50; 10:49; John 16:33; Acts 23:11. Every one is Jesus' word or (Mark 10:49) His call passed along by the crowd. It is what He said to the paralytic, to the woman who touched His cloak, to the disciples on the sea, and in the upper room: "take courage; I have overcome the world." Now the risen Lord says it to a prisoner in a barracks.

δεῖ

DEI · "MUST" · G1163

"So you *must* witness at Rome also." *Dei* (104 New Testament uses) is Luke's word for divine necessity — what has to happen because God has said it. Paul had said, "I must also see Rome" (19:21); now the Lord says the same "must," and He will say it again in the storm: "you must stand before Caesar" (27:24). Forty men swore an oath that Paul would die; Jesus said Paul must live to testify in Rome. The rest of the chapter shows which oath held.

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik notes the timing: "It was in the darkness of that night that Jesus came to Paul and stood by him." The words were not decoration — "Jesus would not have said be of good cheer unless Paul needed to hear those words." He points out that the command is a single Greek word, and that the Lord came to encourage, not to rebuke: "Jesus was there to cheer His faithful servant after he had spent himself for Jesus' sake." Paul's witness in Jerusalem was finished and accepted; Rome was next.

R.C. SPROUL · Ligonier · St. Andrew's

Sproul preached Acts 23:11–35 at St. Andrew's as "Paul Sent to Felix" (22 May 2005). Ligonier posts the audio without a transcript; its summary says he considers "the offense that comes with the faithful teaching of God's Word, underscoring the high cost of obedience." Tabletalk's study of this verse quotes him on Paul: "If anybody had ever been constant in ministry from the day he was called, it was Paul." Even so, Tabletalk adds, he needed the Lord's word that night — and "If Paul needed encouragement, we should not be surprised when we need it as well." Its study of verses 12–15 borrows Sproul's phrase for the forty men's vow: a "hunger strike."

C.H. SPURGEON · Metropolitan Tabernacle

Spurgeon's sermon on this verse (No. 3153) begins where every tired believer lives: "Paul was like the rest of us, made of flesh and blood, and therefore liable to be cast down." He finds four comforts. First, the Master's presence — "The Lord stood by Paul despite doors and locks, he asked no warder's leave to enter," and "If all else forsook him, Jesus was company enough." Second, the Lord knew where he was. Third, his past work was accepted: "Herein is good cheer, for if the Lord accepts, it is a small matter if men condemn." Fourth, there was more work ahead — "You are immortal till your work is done."

MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary on the Whole Bible

Henry hears the Lord's greeting personally — "Be of good cheer, Paul" — and draws the lesson for every servant under pressure: "Whoever is against us, we need not fear if the Lord stand by us." He also sees what Paul feared most that night. It was not death: "Nothing disheartened Paul so much as the thought of being taken off from doing service to Christ and good to souls." So the Lord answered that very fear with a commission: he would testify in Rome.

IV
MOVEMENT

ACTS 23:12–22

Forty Men and a Nephew

An oath not to eat until Paul is dead, and a young man who overheard

12 When it was day, the Jews formed a conspiracy and bound themselves under an oath, saying that they would neither eat nor drink until they had killed Paul. 13 There were more than forty who formed this plot. 14 They came to the chief priests and the elders and said, "We have bound ourselves under a solemn oath to taste nothing until we have killed Paul. 15 "Now therefore, you and the Council notify the commander to bring him down to you, as though you were going to determine his case by a more thorough investigation; and we for our part are ready to slay him before he comes near the place." 16 But the son of Paul's sister heard of their ambush, and he came and entered the barracks and told Paul. 17 Paul called one of the centurions to him and said, "Lead this young man to the commander, for he has something to report to him." 18 So he took him and led him to the commander and said, "Paul the prisoner called me to him and asked me to lead this young man to you since he has something to tell you." 19 The commander took him by the hand and stepping aside, began to inquire of him privately, "What is it that you have to report to me?" 20 And he said, "The Jews have agreed to ask you to bring Paul down tomorrow to the Council, as though they were going to inquire somewhat more thoroughly about him. 21 "So do not listen to them, for more than forty of them are lying in wait for him who have bound

> *themselves under a curse not to eat or drink until they slay him; and now they are ready and waiting for the promise from you.”* [22] *So the commander let the young man go, instructing him, “Tell no one that you have notified me of these things.”*
>
> ACTS 23:12–22

FIGURE · HOW THE PROMISE WAS KEPT

THE WORD THAT GOVERNS THE CHAPTER (v11)

“Take courage; … so you must witness at Rome also.”

vv12–15	More than forty men swear an oath: no food or drink until Paul is dead
v16	Paul’s sister’s son hears of the ambush and gets into the barracks
vv17–18	Paul sends him by a centurion to the commander
vv19–22	The commander listens privately: “Tell no one”
vv23–24	470 men by night — “bring him safely to Felix”
vv26–30	Lysias writes: “no accusation deserving death or imprisonment”
vv31–35	Antipatris, Caesarea, Herod’s Praetorium — a hearing promised

Red: the plot · gold: ordinary people doing ordinary things · navy: Rome, unknowingly carrying out the promise

Read down the chain: no angel and no miracle appear after verse 11, yet every link — a plot, a nephew, a soldier, a letter — moves Paul one step nearer Rome.

ἀνεθεμάτισαν ἑαυτούς

ANETHEMATISAN HEAUTOUS · “BOUND THEMSELVES UNDER AN OATH” · G332, G331

From *anathema*, a thing devoted to destruction — a curse. The men called down a curse on themselves if they ate or drank before Paul was dead (vv. 12, 21), and told the priests, literally, “With a curse we have cursed ourselves” (v. 14, *anathemati anethematisamen*). The verb occurs only four times in the New Testament: here three times, and once of Peter in the courtyard, cursing himself as he denied that he knew Jesus (Mark 14:71). Men who swear oaths against God’s purpose bind only themselves.

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik connects the conspirators with the zealot assassins of the day: “They were dagger-men, because they often concealed daggers and stabbed Roman soldiers as they walked by.” Their plan used the priests and a lie about a fuller inquiry: “Their lie was a sin; and men who should have been committed to the law of God were instead happy to sin against Him.” Then a nephew happens to overhear — and Guzik will not call it luck: “It was no accident that this happened.” The reason is verse 11: “God had to protect Paul because Jesus promised that he would go to Rome to testify of Him.”

C.H. SPURGEON · Metropolitan Tabernacle

In the same sermon Spurgeon sets the night vision beside the morning plot. When the Lord came to Paul, “he did not know that certain Jews, to the number of forty, had banded together to kill him” — but the Lord knew. Christ “had heard the cruel oath, and arranged to disappoint the bloodthirsty ones.” The comfort came before the danger was even known. Spurgeon turns it to every worker for Christ: “Dear friend, if you are a worker for the Lord Jesus, depend upon it he will not desert you.”

MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary on the Whole Bible

Henry describes the plotters as “certain Jews that had the utmost degree of indignation against him,” and he names the source of such hatred: “Satan had filled their hearts.” But he delights in the way the plot was undone, through a boy and a soldier rather than a miracle: “Note, God has many ways of bringing to light the hidden works of darkness.” Forty men swore and fasted; one young man spoke, and their oath came to nothing.

V
MOVEMENT

ACTS 23:23–35

Four Hundred Seventy Men to Caesarea

A night escort, a commander’s letter, and a governor who will hear the case

23 And he called to him two of the centurions and said, “Get two hundred soldiers ready by the third hour of
the night to proceed to Caesarea, with seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen.” 24 They were also to
provide mounts to put Paul on and bring him safely to Felix the governor. 25 And he wrote a letter having this
form: 26 “Claudius Lysias, to the most excellent governor Felix, greetings. 27 “When this man was arrested by the
Jews and was about to be slain by them, I came up to them with the troops and rescued him, having learned
that he was a Roman. 28 “And wanting to ascertain the charge for which they were accusing him, I brought him
down to their Council; 29 and I found him to be accused over questions about their Law, but under no
accusation deserving death or imprisonment. 30 “When I was informed that there would be a plot against the
man, I sent him to you at once, also instructing his accusers to bring charges against him before you.” 31 So the
soldiers, in accordance with their orders, took Paul and brought him by night to Antipatris. 32 But the next
day, leaving the horsemen to go on with him, they returned to the barracks. 33 When these had come to Caesarea
and delivered the letter to the governor, they also presented Paul to him. 34 When he had read it, he asked from
what province he was, and when he learned that he was from Cilicia, 35 he said, “I will give you a hearing after
your accusers arrive also,” giving orders for him to be kept in Herod’s Praetorium.

ACTS 23:23–35

δεξιολάβοι

DEXIOLABOI · "SPEARMEN" · G1187

The word means something like "right-hand-takers," and no one is certain what kind of soldier it named — spearmen, slingers, or a light-armed guard. It appears in Scripture only here (v. 23). Whatever they were, two hundred of them marched with two hundred soldiers and seventy horsemen to keep one prisoner alive. Guzik: "470 trained Roman soldiers would escort Paul out of Jerusalem." The Lord who promised Rome used Rome's own army to get him there.

πραιτώριον

PRAITŌRION · "PRAETORIUM" · G4232

A Latin loanword: the headquarters of a Roman commander or governor. In Caesarea it was the palace Herod the Great had built, now the governor's residence (v. 35). The same word names Pilate's headquarters where Jesus was mocked (Matthew 27:27; Mark 15:16; John 18:28), and later the "praetorian guard" in Rome who heard about Paul's chains (Philippians 1:13). Paul is kept where his Lord was tried.

DAVID GUZIK · Enduring Word

Guzik counts the escort: "470 trained Roman soldiers would escort Paul out of Jerusalem." He explains the turnaround at Antipatris — "The 200 soldiers only went as far as Antipatris because the most dangerous part of the road was only up to this point"; beyond it the country was open, flat and mostly Gentile, and the horsemen could finish the trip. He also notes what waited at the end of the road: "This would be Paul's first opportunity to speak to someone at this level of authority (the governor)." The prisoner was being carried toward his commission.

MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary on the Whole Bible

Henry walks through the commander's orders — "They must get ready two hundred soldiers" — and the letter, noting that its "most excellent" was a matter of form: "He is the most excellent governor Felix, this title being given him of course." The man himself was another matter: "The Roman historians speak much of this Felix, as a man of mean extraction." Henry even finds an open door in Paul's new prison: "There he had opportunity of acquainting himself with great men that attended the governor's court."

VI
THEME

CROSS-REFERENCES

The Passage in the Whole Bible

The Lord who stands by His servants, from the Psalms to the Pastoral Letters

"The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear Him, And rescues them."

PSALM 34:7

"No weapon that is formed against you will prosper; And every tongue that accuses you in judgment you will condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, And their vindication is from Me," declares the LORD."

ISAIAH 54:17

> *“and you will even be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles. But when they hand you over, do not worry about how or what you are to say; for it will be given you in that hour what you are to say.”*
>
> MATTHEW 10:18–19

> *“These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.”*
>
> JOHN 16:33

> *“But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel;”*
>
> ACTS 9:15

> *“And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.”*
>
> ROMANS 8:28

> *“At my first defense no one supported me, but all deserted me; may it not be counted against them. But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was rescued out of the lion’s mouth.”*
>
> 2 TIMOTHY 4:16–17

MATTHEW HENRY · Commentary on the Whole Bible

Henry’s one-line summary of the chapter’s comfort fits every one of these texts: “Whoever is against us, we need not fear if the Lord stand by us.”

SECTION II · STUDY HELPS

At a Glance

Four voices, one chapter

Guzik walks the trial step by step and fills in the history — Ananias, the parties, the road; Spurgeon preaches the night vision as comfort for weary workers; Henry draws a rule of life from nearly every verse. Sproul's sermon on the chapter survives only as audio, so he appears through the Tabletalk studies that quote him. All four agree on the main thing: Jesus' word to Paul in verse 11 governs everything that follows.

THE MOVEMENT	GUZIK · the text	SPROUL · the doctrine	SPURGEON · the heart	HENRY · the counsel
I · The blow and the wall	Not sinless perfection; probably did not recognize the high priest.	— (no Sproul material on these verses sourced here)	— (no Spurgeon sermon on these verses sourced here)	Unshaken before the court; "whited wall" means hypocrite.
II · The resurrection	Paul divided the Council on party lines — and picked the right issue.	— (no Sproul material on these verses sourced here)	— (no Spurgeon sermon on these verses sourced here)	Sadducees were deists; Paul a Pharisee where Pharisees were right.
III · Take courage	Jesus came in the dark, because Paul needed to hear it.	Constant in ministry, and still in need of encouragement (via Tabletalk).	Flesh and blood, cast down; four comforts; immortal till your work is done.	No fear if the Lord stand by us; Paul feared idleness, not death.
IV · The plot	Dagger-men and a lie — and "no accident" that the nephew heard.	The forty men's vow was a "hunger strike" (via Tabletalk).	The Lord had heard the cruel oath before Paul knew of it.	Satan filled their hearts; God brings hidden works to light.
V · The escort	470 soldiers; Antipatris ended the danger; first hearing before a governor.	— (sermon "Paul Sent to Felix" covers these verses; no transcript)	— (no Spurgeon sermon on these verses sourced here)	"Most excellent" was mere form; Felix a man of mean extraction.

ACTS 23:1–35 · A COMPARATIVE READING

† Key Insights to Carry

- **A good conscience is not a sinless record.** Guzik: "He didn't mean that he was sinlessly perfect." Paul's word is *pepoliteumai* — he had lived his public life as a citizen under God, and he says the same before Felix (24:16). THE GREEK
- **A painted wall still falls.** *Koniaō* is the verb of Jesus' "whitewashed tombs" (Matthew 23:27). Ananias sat to judge by the Law and broke it in the same breath (v3). THE TEXT
- **Respect the office, name the sin.** Paul apologized to the office he had not recognized and quoted Exodus 22:28 against himself (v5) — without taking back the truth about the man. HENRY
- **The resurrection is the dividing line.** Paul was not playing politics; "Paul picked the right issue" (Guzik). The hope of the resurrection is the hope of Israel and the heart of the gospel (24:15; 28:20). GUZIK
- **The Lord comes at night.** "It was in the darkness of that night that Jesus came to Paul and stood by him" (Guzik). The Lord's presence does not wait for the danger to pass. GUZIK
- **"Take courage" is Jesus' word.** *Tharsei* is on His lips across the Gospels — to the paralytic, to the frightened disciples, in the upper room (John 16:33) — and now from glory to a prisoner. THE GREEK
- **Immortal till your work is done.** Spurgeon: the Lord's "must" (v11) meant that no oath of forty men could end Paul's life before Rome. SPURGEON

- **Providence uses a nephew.** After verse 11 there are no angels and no miracles — only a boy who overheard, a centurion, a commander and a letter. "God has many ways of bringing to light the hidden works of darkness" (Henry). HENRY
- **Lysias polished his story.** His letter says he rescued Paul "having learned that he was a Roman" (v27); Acts 22:25–29 shows he learned it only after he had ordered Paul examined by scourging. THE TEXT
- **Rome carried the promise.** Four hundred seventy soldiers and a governor's palace — the empire unknowingly delivered Jesus' witness toward Rome. THE TEXT

† Questions for the Table

1 **Paul could say he had lived "with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day." What would have to be made right for me to say that honestly?**

A good conscience is not a sinless record but a clean account with God.

23:1; 24:16; 1 John 1:9

2 **When Paul was struck, he answered sharply — then apologized when he learned who it was. How do I handle it when I have said the right thing the wrong way?**

Respect the office, name the sin.

23:2-5; Exod 22:28

3 **Paul was on trial "for the hope and resurrection of the dead." How does the resurrection change the way I face my own trouble today?**

Paul picked the right issue (Guzik).

23:6; 24:15; 1 Cor 15:58

4 **The Lord stood by Paul at night, after the worst day of his ministry. Where do I most need to hear Jesus say "Take courage" right now?**

Jesus would not have said it unless Paul needed it (Guzik).

23:11; John 16:33

5 **A young man overheard a plot and was brave enough to speak up. What do I know that I should be telling the right person?**

God has many ways of bringing to light the hidden works of darkness (Henry).

23:16-22

6 **No miracle happens after verse 11, yet every event moves Paul toward Rome. Where can I see God's hand in the ordinary events of this past year?**

You are immortal till your work is done (Spurgeon).

23:11, 23-35; Rom 8:28

Acts 23 is a chapter of human schemes — a high priest's blow, a divided court, forty sworn assassins, a commander covering himself — and one sentence from Jesus that outlasts them all. The Lord stood at Paul's side in the dark and said "Take courage," and then He kept His word through a nephew, a centurion and a Roman road. He stands by His servants still.

Teaching the Word. Watching the Times. — Smith For Christ

† Sources

Each teacher's section summarizes the pages below in our own words; short quotations are verbatim from them. Matthew Henry (1662–1714) completed his *Commentary* himself through the Gospels and Acts. Henry's Commentary and C.H. Spurgeon (1834–1892) are in the public domain; Guzik and Sproul are summarized — consult each author's own work.

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