ACTS 23

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

> *"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

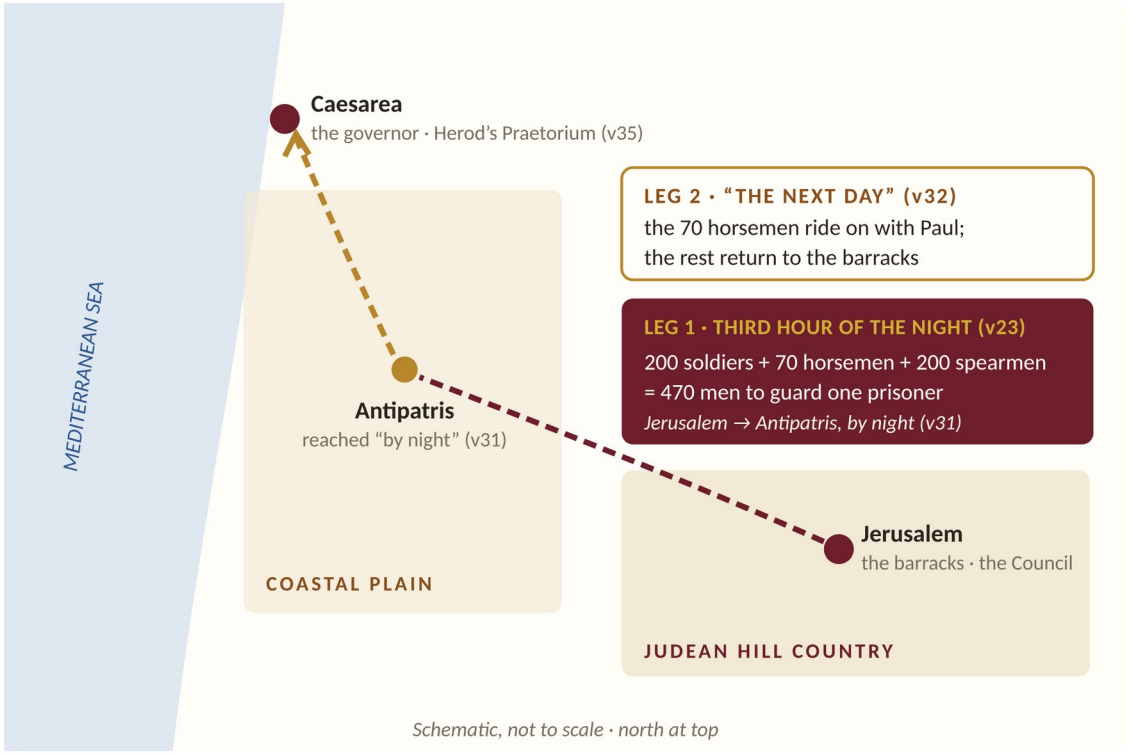
A SMITH FOR CHRIST STUDY · FOUR VOICES: GUZIK · SPROUL · SPURGEON · HENRY

Where Luke has brought us

1. 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).

2. The Council (the Sanhedrin) was Israel’s supreme court, made up of two parties who agreed on little.

3. The commander is named for the first time in this chapter: Claudius Lysias (v. 26).



A Good Conscience and a Whitewashed Wall

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

ACTS 23:3

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?"

DAVID GUZIK

Not sinless perfection; probably did not recognize the high priest.

MATTHEW HENRY

Unshaken before the court; "whited wall" means hypocrite.

συνείδησις · πεπολίτευμαι

SYNEIDĒSIS · "CONSCIENCE"

Syneidēsis is a "knowing-with" — the inner witness that knows what I have done and judges it.

The Hope and the Resurrection

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

ACTS 23:6

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!"

DAVID GUZIK

Paul divided the Council on party lines — and picked the right issue.

MATTHEW HENRY

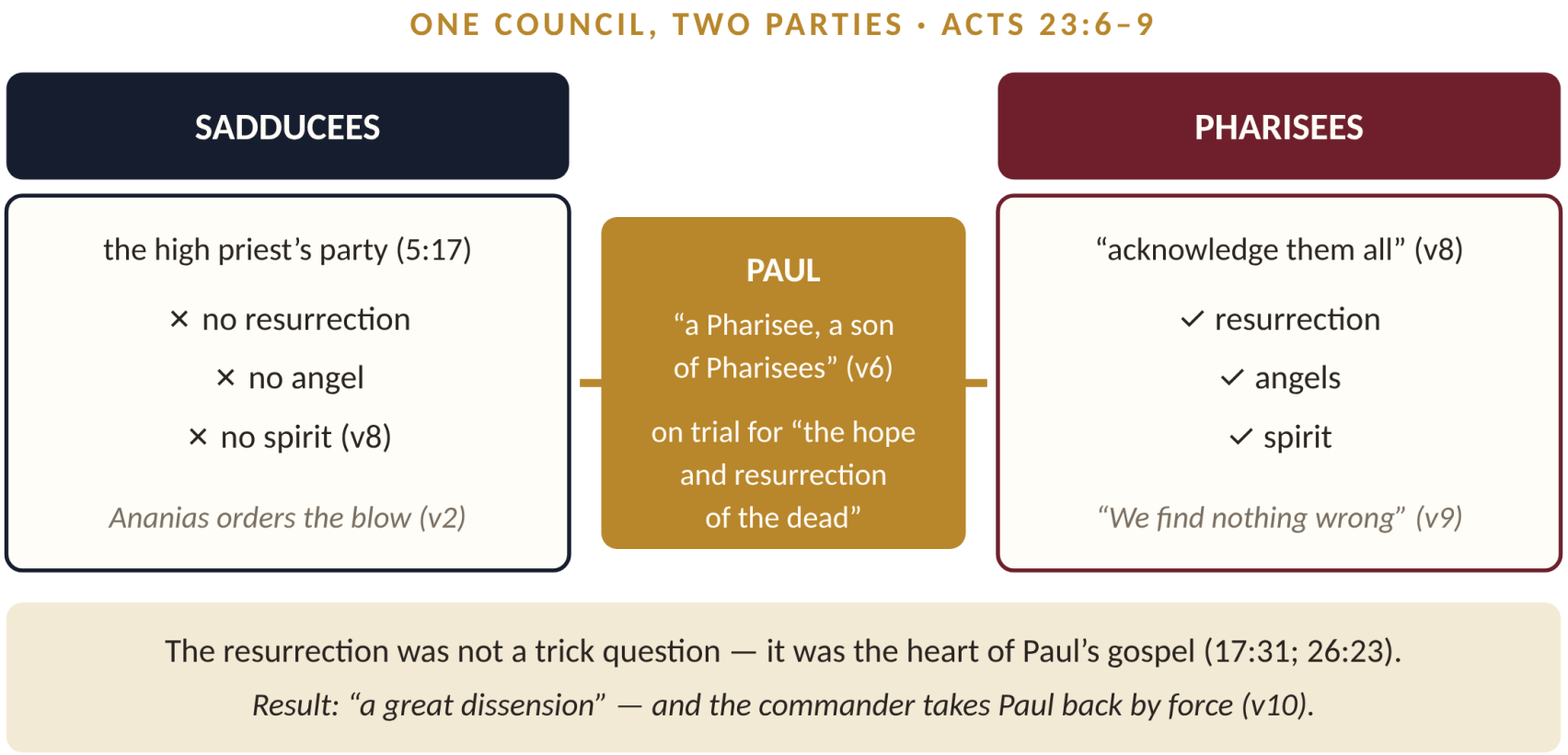
Sadducees were deists; Paul a Pharisee where Pharisees were right.

ἐλπίς · ἀνάστασις

ELPIS · "HOPE"

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.

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.

Take Courage

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

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."

DAVID GUZIK

Jesus came in the dark, because Paul needed to hear it.

R.C. SPROUL

Constant in ministry, and still in need of encouragement (via Tabletalk).

C.H. SPURGEON

Flesh and blood, cast down; four comforts; immortal till your work is done.

MATTHEW HENRY

No fear if the Lord stand by us; Paul feared idleness, not death.

θάρσει

THARSEI · "TAKE COURAGE"

One word in Greek, an imperative of tharseō, "be of good courage."

Forty Men and a Nephew

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

ACTS 23:12

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.

DAVID GUZIK

Dagger-men and a lie — and "no accident" that the nephew heard.

R.C. SPROUL

The forty men's vow was a "hunger strike" (via Tabletalk).

C.H. SPURGEON

The Lord had heard the cruel oath before Paul knew of it.

MATTHEW HENRY

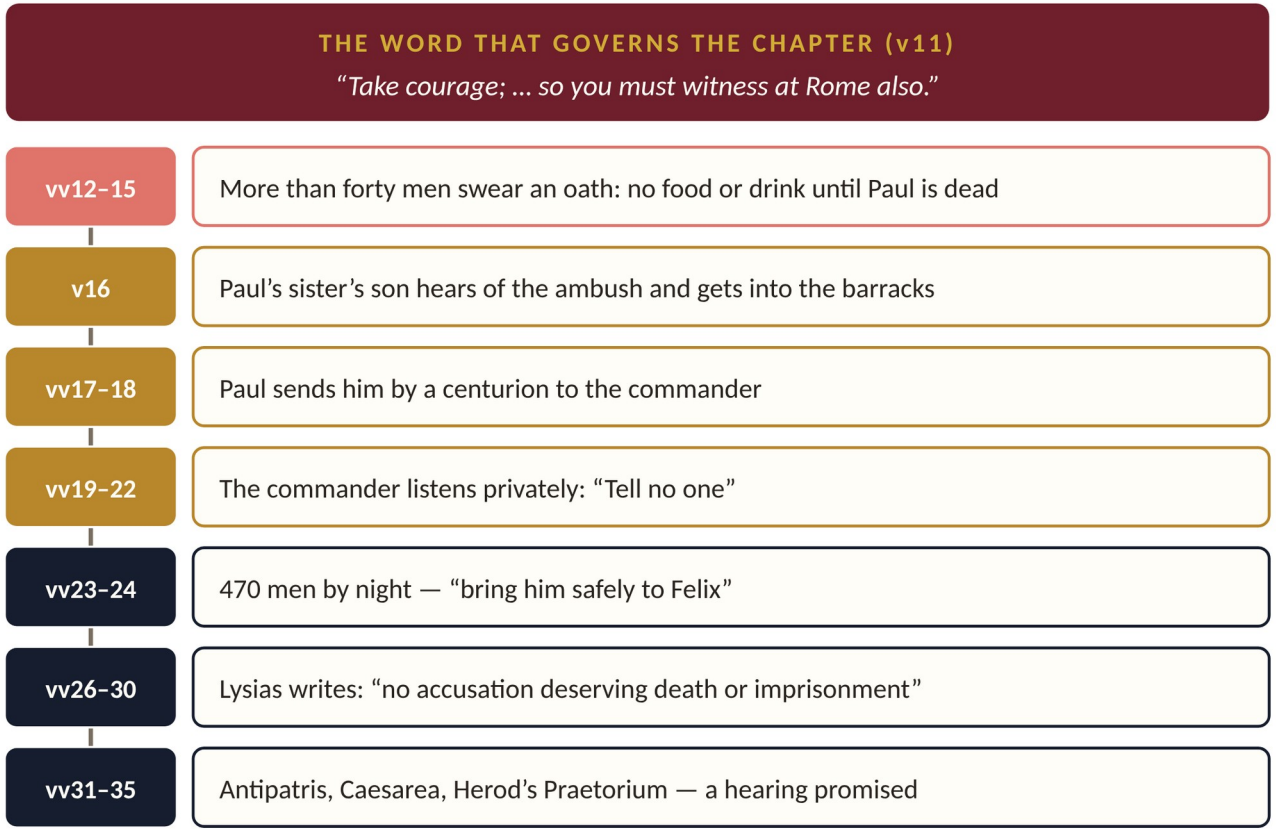
Satan filled their hearts; God brings hidden works to light.

ἀνεθεμάτισαν ἑαυτούς

ANETHEMATISAN HEAUTOUS · "BOUND THEMSELVES UNDER AN OATH"

From anathema, a thing devoted to destruction — a curse.

How the promise was kept



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.

Four Hundred Seventy Men to Caesarea

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

ACTS 23:23

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."

DAVID GUZIK

470 soldiers; Antipatris ended the danger; first hearing before a governor.

MATTHEW HENRY

"Most excellent" was mere form; Felix a man of mean extraction.

δεξιολάβοι

DEXIOLABOI · "SPEARMEN"

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.

What to carry from this chapter

1

A good conscience is not a sinless record.

Guzik: “He didn’t mean that he was sinlessly perfect.”

2

A painted wall still falls.

Koniaō is the verb of Jesus’ “whitewashed tombs” (Matthew 23:27).

3

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.

4

The resurrection is the dividing line.

Paul was not playing politics; “Paul picked the right issue” (Guzik).

More to carry

5

The Lord comes at night.

“It was in the darkness of that night that Jesus came to Paul and stood by him” (Guzik).

6

“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.

7

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.

8

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.

Talk it through

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?

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?

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?

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?

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?

CLOSING

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

Full Deep Dive, O·I·A study and reflection journal: see the Acts study page.