SMITH FOR CHRIST PUBLISHING · BEREAN DASHBOARD STUDY

Acts 23

The Lord Stood at His Side — O·I·A, integrated with the Deep Dive

OBSERVATION · INTERPRETATION · APPLICATION · 2026-11-10 · NASB 1995

"Seeking God diligently — examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so." — Acts 17:11

CHAPTER THEME

Paul stands before the highest court in Israel with a clean conscience and the hope of the resurrection, and the court comes apart. That night Jesus stands beside him and promises Rome — and every plot, soldier and letter that follows only carries that promise out.

00 The Text

ACTS 23 (NASB95), MARKED

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

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.'"

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.

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."

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.”

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.

Marked in the text

- **v2** “commanded those standing beside him to strike him on the mouth” — Sin / warning
- **v3** “God is going to strike you” — God — His character & actions
- **v3** “you whitewashed wall” — Sin / warning
- **v3** “in violation of the Law” — Sin / warning
- **v5** “I was not aware, brethren, that he was high priest” — Time / place / contrast
- **v5** “YOU SHALL NOT SPEAK EVIL OF A RULER OF YOUR PEOPLE” — Command / instruction
- **v6** “I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees” — Time / place / contrast
- **v6** “I am on trial for the hope and resurrection of the dead” — Promise / blessing

- **v8** “the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection” — Sin / warning
- **v9** “We find nothing wrong with this man” — Time / place / contrast
- **v11** “the Lord stood at his side” — God — His character & actions
- **v11** “Take courage” — Command / instruction
- **v11** “so you must witness at Rome also” — Promise / blessing
- **v12** “bound themselves under an oath” — Sin / warning
- **v16** “the son of Paul’s sister heard of their ambush” — Time / place / contrast
- **v21** “So do not listen to them” — Command / instruction
- **v23** “two hundred soldiers” — Time / place / contrast
- **v24** “bring him safely to Felix the governor” — Time / place / contrast
- **v27** “having learned that he was a Roman” — Sin / warning
- **v29** “under no accusation deserving death or imprisonment” — Time / place / contrast
- **v31** “by night to Antipatris” — Time / place / contrast
- **v35** “Herod’s Praetorium” — Time / place / contrast
- **v1** “conscience” — Key repeated word (every occurrence)
- **v6** “resurrection” — Key repeated word (every occurrence)
- **v1** “Council” — Key repeated word (every occurrence)
- **v13** “forty” — Key repeated word (every occurrence)

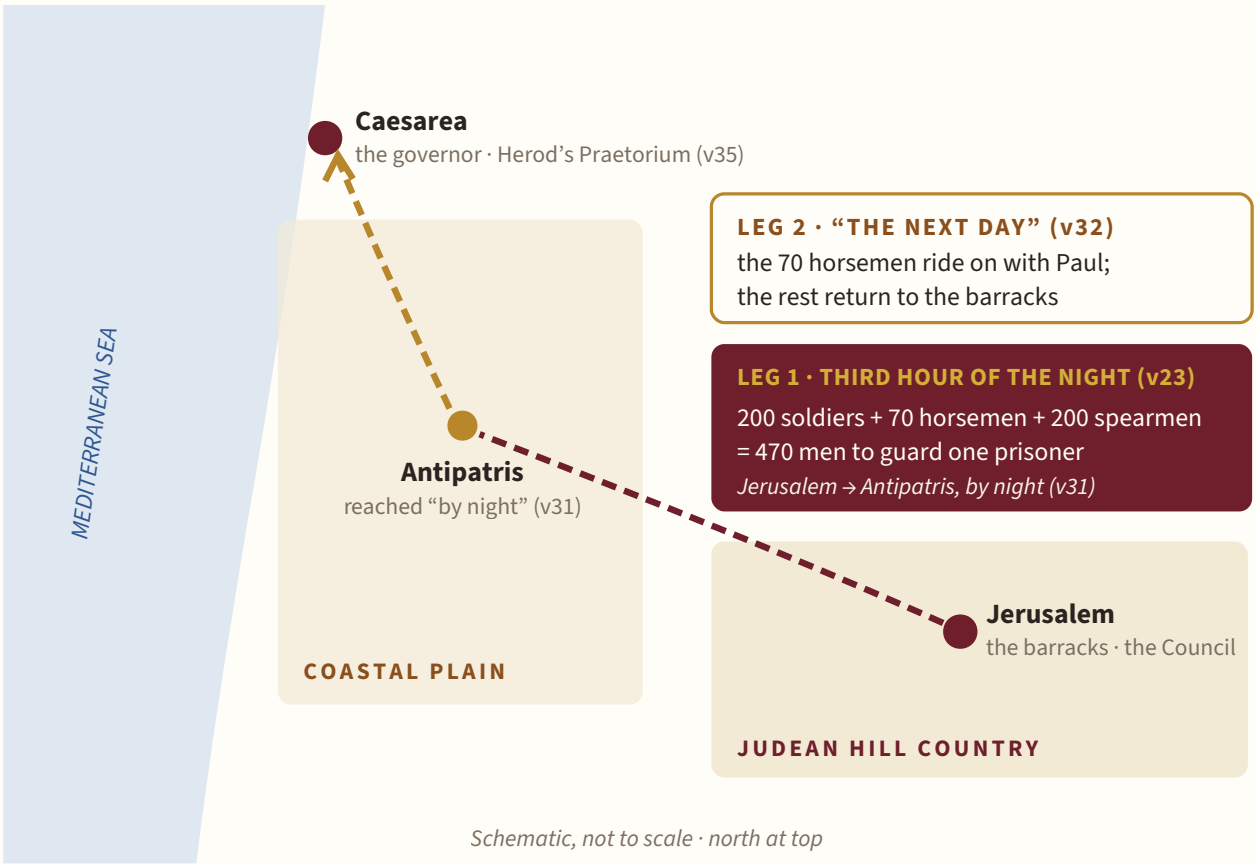
01 Observation

WHAT DOES THE TEXT SAY?

KEY VERSE · ACTS 23:1

"Paul, looking intently at the Council, said, "Brethren, I have lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day.""

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.

Setting. Jerusalem, the day after the temple riot. The Roman commander (named in v26 as Claudius Lysias) has brought Paul before the Council to learn why he is accused (22:30). Paul speaks, is struck, divides the Council over the resurrection, and is taken back to the barracks (vv1–10). That night the Lord appears to him (v11). The next day more than forty men swear to kill him; his nephew warns him; the commander sends him by night under heavy guard to Felix the governor at Caesarea (vv12–35).

Structure:

- vv1–5 — **the blow and the wall:** "a perfectly good conscience before God" (v1); Ananias orders him struck (v2); "you whitewashed wall!" (v3); "Do you revile God's high priest?" (v4); "I was not aware … that he was high priest" — Exodus 22:28 (v5).
- vv6–10 — **the resurrection:** "I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees; I am on trial for the hope and resurrection of the dead!" (v6); dissension (v7); what each party believes (v8); "We find nothing wrong with this man" (v9); the commander takes him by force (v10).
- v11 — **the Lord at his side:** "Take courage; for as you have solemnly witnessed to My cause at Jerusalem, so you must witness at Rome also."
- vv12–22 — **the plot:** more than forty men under an oath (vv12–13); the plan with the chief priests (vv14–15); Paul's sister's son (v16); the centurion and the commander (vv17–21); "Tell no one" (v22).
- vv23–35 — **the escort:** 200 soldiers, 70 horsemen, 200 spearmen at the third hour of the night (vv23–24); Lysias' letter (vv25–30); Antipatris, then Caesarea (vv31–33); "from what province?" — Cilicia (v34); a hearing promised; Herod's Praetorium (v35).

Repeated words, with counts:

- "Paul" ×15 — vv1, 3, 5, 6, 10, 12, 14, 16 (×2), 17, 18, 20, 24, 31, 33.
- "commander" ×6 — vv10, 15, 17, 18, 19, 22.
- "Pharisee(s) / Pharisaic" ×6 — vv6 (×3), 7, 8, 9; "Sadducees" ×3 — vv6, 7, 8.
- "Council" ×5 — vv1, 6, 15, 20, 28.
- "kill / slay / slain" ×5 — vv12, 14, 15, 21, 27; "eat / drink / taste" ×5 — vv12 (×2), 14, 21 (×2).
- "plot / conspiracy / ambush / lying in wait" ×5 — vv12, 13, 16, 21, 30.
- "accuse(d) / accusation / accusers" ×5 — vv28, 29 (×2), 30, 35.
- "spirit / angel" ×4 — vv8 (×2), 9 (×2).
- "strike / struck" ×3 — vv2, 3 (×2); "high priest" ×3 — vv2, 4, 5; "brethren" ×3 — vv1, 5, 6.
- "oath / curse" ×3 — vv12, 14, 21; "forty" ×2 — vv13, 21; "ready" ×3 — vv15, 21, 23.
- "young man" ×3 — vv17, 18, 22; "barracks" ×3 — vv10, 16, 32.
- "night" ×3 — vv11, 23, 31; "governor" ×3 — vv24, 26, 33.
- "Law" ×3 — vv3 (×2), 29; "resurrection" ×2 — vv6, 8; "witness(ed)" ×2 — v11 (×2).

Contrasts: A good conscience (v1) ⟷ a whitewashed wall (v3). Judging by the Law ⟷ in violation of the Law (v3). Sadducees ⟷ Pharisees (vv6–8). A great dissension (v10) ⟷ the Lord standing quietly at Paul's side (v11). Jerusalem ⟷ Rome (v11). Forty men under an oath ⟷ one young man with the truth (vv13, 16). Their lie — "as though … a more thorough investigation" (v15) ⟷ his report (v20). Night escort (vv23, 31) ⟷ "the next day" (v32).

Shape of the chapter: two scenes of chaos (the Council, the plot) on either side of one quiet verse (v11), then a long, orderly Roman procedure (vv23–35). The noise is all human; the one word that matters is the Lord's.

Chapter theme (my words): Men strike, scheme and swear oaths, but the Lord stands beside His servant and says "you must witness at Rome." After that, even His enemies and the Roman army can only move Paul one step closer to the place Jesus named.

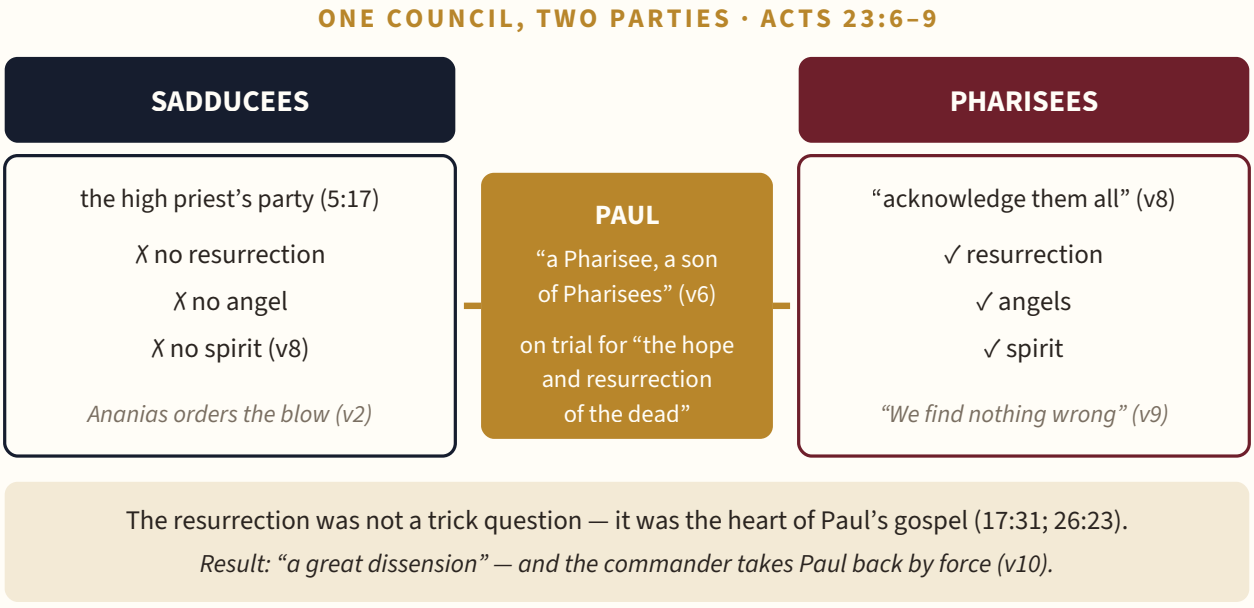
02 Interpretation

WHAT DOES THE TEXT MEAN?

KEY VERSE · 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!""

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.

What did Paul mean by "a perfectly good conscience" (v1)? Not sinlessness. Guzik: "He didn't mean that he was sinlessly perfect and that his conscience had never told him he was wrong." Henry: "He had aimed at nothing but to please God and do his duty." Paul's verb, *pepoliteumai*, is a citizen's word — he had lived his public life under God. He knew he had once persecuted the church (22:4); a good conscience is a forgiven and honest one.

Was Paul wrong to call Ananias a "whitewashed wall" (v3)? The charge was true — Ananias ordered a blow "in violation of the Law" while sitting to judge by it — and Guzik does not fault Paul: "The man who commanded that a defenseless man be punched in the face indeed was a whitewashed wall." But when told it was the high priest, Paul at once quoted Exodus 22:28 against himself (v5).

Did Paul really not know he was the high priest (v5)? Readers have suggested poor eyesight, irony, or that the meeting was informal and Ananias not in his robes. Guzik takes the plain sense: "Probably, he simply didn't recognize the man who gave the command to strike him as the high priest." Henry takes Paul at his word as well. So do I.

Was "I am a Pharisee" a trick (v6)? Guzik calls it strategy — "Paul's course was to divide the Sanhedrin among their party lines" — but not a dodge: the resurrection was the real issue, and "Paul picked the right issue." Henry: "Paul owns himself a Pharisee, so far as the Pharisees were in the right." He never called himself a Pharisee on the question of how a man is justified (Philippians 3:5–9).

What did the Lord's visit mean (v11)? Four things, following Spurgeon: the Master was present; He knew where Paul was; Paul's witness in Jerusalem was accepted ("as you have solemnly witnessed"); and there was more work ahead ("so you must witness at Rome also"). Guzik: "Jesus would not have said be of good cheer unless Paul needed to hear those words." Henry: what disheartened Paul was not death but "being taken off from doing service to Christ."

How did God protect Paul from the forty (vv12–22)? Not by an angel but by a nephew, a centurion, a commander and a cavalry escort. Guzik: "It was no accident that this happened." Henry: "God has many ways of bringing to light the hidden works of darkness." This is providence — God ruling ordinary events to keep His word.

Was Lysias' letter honest (vv26–30)? Mostly. It correctly reports that Paul was charged only "over questions about their Law" and with nothing "deserving death or imprisonment" (v29). But "having learned that he was a Roman" (v27) puts the rescue in a better light than Acts 22:24–29 does: he learned it only after ordering Paul scourged.

Word study (Greek):

- **conscience — *syneidēsis* (G4893):** "knowing-with"; 30 uses; Acts 23:1; 24:16.
- **lived my life — *politeuomai* (G4176):** to live as a citizen.
- **wall — *toichos* (G5109); whitewashed — *koniaō* (G2867):** compare "whitewashed tombs," Matthew 23:27.
- **hope — *elpis* (G1680):** confident expectation; 23:6; 24:15; 28:20.
- **resurrection — *anastasis* (G386):** "a standing up again"; 23:6, 8; 24:15, 21.
- **take courage — *tharseō* (G2293):** Jesus' word (Matt 9:2; 14:27; John 16:33).
- **must — *dei* (G1163):** divine necessity; 19:21; 23:11; 27:24.
- **bound under an oath — *anathematizō* (G332), *anathema* (G331):** to curse oneself; compare Mark 14:71.
- **spearmen — *dexiolabos* (G1187):** a soldier of uncertain kind; only here.
- **Praetorium — *praitōrion* (G4232):** the governor's headquarters; compare John 18:28; Philippians 1:13.

Key insights to carry (from the Deep Dive):

1. **A good conscience is not a sinless record** (Guzik).
2. **A painted wall still falls** — *koniaō*, Matthew 23:27.
3. **Respect the office, name the sin** — Exodus 22:28 (v5).
4. **The resurrection is the dividing line** — "Paul picked the right issue."
5. **The Lord comes at night** (v11).
6. **"Take courage" is Jesus' word** — *tharsei*.
7. **Immortal till your work is done** (Spurgeon).
8. **Providence uses a nephew** (Henry).
9. **Lysias polished his story** (v27; 22:25–29).
10. **Rome carried the promise** — 470 soldiers to Caesarea.

Cross-references: Exod 22:28; Ps 34:7; Isa 54:17; Ezek 13:10–11; Matt 10:18–20; 23:27; 27:27; Mark 14:71; John 16:33; 18:28; Acts 5:17; 9:15; 17:31; 19:21; 21:13, 27–29; 22:25–30; 24:15–16; 26:6–8; 27:23–24; 28:20; Rom 8:28; Phil 1:13; 3:5–9; 2 Tim 4:16–17.

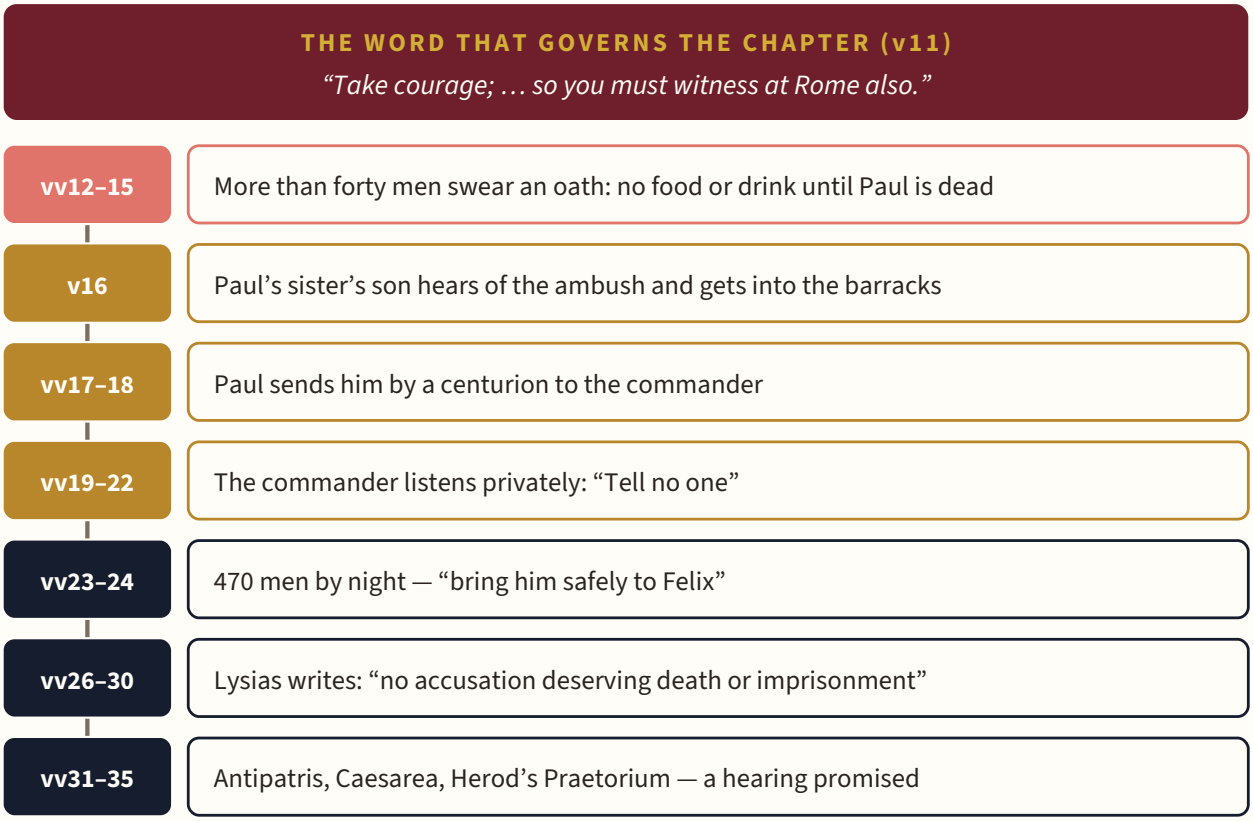
03 Application

HOW DOES IT CHANGE ME?

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.""

FIGURE · 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.

Example to follow — Paul's conscience. Paul could stand in front of the men who wanted him dead and say he had lived "with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day." Not because he had never sinned — he had persecuted the church — but because he had brought all of it to Christ and kept short accounts since. That is possible for me, and for the men I sit with who carry a record. This week I will make one thing right that I have been leaving undone.

Sin to confess — the quick tongue. Paul was right about Ananias, and still he said it in the heat of the moment and had to take a step back (vv3–5). I know that pattern — a sharp word, true enough, said the wrong way to the wrong person. I confess it, and I ask for grace to honor people in authority even when I have to tell them the truth.

Promise to trust — "Take courage." The Lord stood at Paul's side in a barracks at night, after the worst day of his ministry, and told him the work wasn't over. Jesus says the same word to me (John 16:33). Some of the men I serve are in cells tonight. The Lord is not locked out; Spurgeon says He asks no warder's leave to enter. I am immortal till my work is done.

Command to obey — speak up. Paul's nephew heard something and told it to the right people, carefully and privately (vv16–22). Sometimes obedience is that simple: say what you know to the person who can act on it. If I know of someone in danger — from others or from himself — I will not keep it to myself.

Truth to rest in — God works through ordinary things. After verse 11 there are no more visions. Just a boy, a centurion, a commander, a letter and a long road. God kept His promise through all of it. I can stop demanding a sign and start watching for His hand in the ordinary.

Questions for the table (from the Deep Dive):

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? (23:1; 24:16; 1 John 1:9) *A good conscience is not a sinless record but a clean account with God.*
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? (23:2–5; Exod 22:28) *Respect the office, name the sin.*
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? (23:6; 24:15; 1 Cor 15:58) *Paul picked the right issue (Guzik).*
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? (23:11; John 16:33) *Jesus would not have said it unless Paul needed it (Guzik).*
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? (23:16–22) *God has many ways of bringing to light the hidden works of darkness (Henry).*
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? (23:11, 23–35; Rom 8:28) *You are immortal till your work is done (Spurgeon).*

Worship. The risen Lord Jesus, who has all authority, came quietly into a Roman barracks to stand beside one tired prisoner. He knew the oath of the forty before Paul did, and He ruled a nephew's ears, a commander's pen and an army's road to keep His word. His "must" cannot be broken.

Prayer. Lord Jesus, stand at my side tonight as You stood by Paul. Give me a good conscience before You — cleanse what I have hidden and help me make right what I can. Guard my tongue when I am struck. Thank You that no plot against Your people can outlast Your word. Take courage into my heart, and keep me at the work You have given me until it is done. Amen.

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