

Part 56 Murder Plot

A sermon series by Pastor Byron Chesney Wednesday, Nov. 02, 2016

† Acts 23:12-35

We left off last week with verse 11 and Paul being visited by the Lord Jesus after the huge ordeal with the Sanhedrin court system and high priest. Paul had divided the court because he was a Pharisee and the Pharisees sided with him and said that didn't find anything wrong in him. But the Sadducees' did not agree and after a melee' broke out the Romans take Paul out for his own protection and confine him to the castle.

Tonight we are going to cover the rest of this chapter which deals with the murder plot against Paul and also his appearance before Felix the Governor.

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

"**certain Jews**" We know from our previous study that the "council" or Sanhedrin court was comprised of 71 men made up with both Pharisees and Sadducees and they were divided concerning Paul.

I briefly mentioned the Sanhedrin court system last week but didn't go into much detail. Let me briefly give you a little background on who these men were.

First of all the Sanhedrin Court was made up of 71 men, 70 on the council and 1 High Priest. They were considered the Jewish Supreme Court of that day. It is believed that they modeled themselves after the 70 men that the Lord told Moses to appoint to help him with legal matters. We find that in **Numbers 11:16-17: And the LORD said unto Moses, Gather unto me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom thou knowest to be the elders of the people, and officers over them; and bring them unto the tabernacle of the congregation, that they may stand there with thee. 17 And I will come down and talk with thee there: and I will take of the spirit which is upon thee, and will put it upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with thee, that thou bear it not thyself alone.**

History tells us that the Sanhedrin court system began after the second temple was built in Jerusalem in 349 B.C. It lasted until the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. So for about 420 years the Sanhedrin Court was a powerful court, of course it did not have as far reaching power after the Romans began ruling in 63 B.C. but for the Jews it was still very powerful. They dealt with any matters concerning Jewish laws and religion, which the Romans cared nothing for.

In Paul's day this court was divided by the two most powerful sects of Jews, Pharisees and Sadducees. The Sadducees were wanting Paul to be sentenced to death but the Pharisees sided with Paul. So, I believe that these "**certain Jews**" were made up of those Sadducees, though the Bible does not say that for certain. It is obvious that they have some influence because they go to the Chief Priests and elders with their murderous plans.

"**bound themselves under a curse**" This is another way of saying that they swore an oath among themselves. From calling it a "**curse**" it means that they are swearing if they do not keep their oath then they are invoking a curse upon themselves. **Albert Barnes** in his commentary says they are "*devoting themselves to destruction.*"ⁱⁱⁱ

"**they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul.**" They mean serious business here. They assumed they would have Paul killed that very night because they sure wouldn't want to go without eating and drinking very long. This shows just how urgent it was to them that he be killed.

13 And they were more than forty which had made this conspiracy.

"**forty**" men. This is a fairly large hit squad they have formed. I am sure they assumed out of 40 men they could accomplish killing one little Jew. But they didn't know who they were going up against!

14 And they came to the chief priests and elders, and said, We have bound ourselves under a great curse, that we will eat nothing until we have slain Paul.

These guys aren't even going to pretend to have any mercy about them. They just blatantly state that they intend to murder Paul. They obviously feel that they are justified in doing this since they come before the high priest to make this .

15 Now therefore ye with the council signify to the chief captain that he bring him down unto you to morrow, as though ye would enquire something more perfectly concerning him: and we, or ever he come near, are ready to kill him.

The plot is hatched. The plan is to fool the Chief Captain of the Romans into believing that they just want to speak with Paul about something but they are really going to jump Paul when they bring him out and kill him.

16 And when Paul's sister's son heard of their lying in wait, he went and entered into the castle, and told Paul.

Immediately someone might say, "*Boy, it sure was lucky that Paul's nephew was there.*" No, it was not luck, it was God's providence. The Lord has placed Paul's nephew here for just this reason. Remember, the Lord told Paul that he would get to go to Rome and be a witness, so you know the Lord is going to protect him.

It is interesting to know that Paul had a Sister and a nephew. This is the only information we have about Paul's family other than his father being a Pharisee and Roman citizen. Nowhere in the Scripture do we read of Paul having a wife or children or brothers. In fact, from Paul's own writings it appears that he was single because he writes to the Church at Corinth: **1 Corinthians 7:7-9: For I would that all men were even as I myself. But every man hath his proper gift of God, one after this manner, and another after that. 8 I say therefore to the unmarried and widows, It is good for them if they abide even as I. 9 But if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn.**

Some believe that Paul's sister either lived in Jerusalem or had traveled there because she heard of Paul's arrest and had come to see him, but I believe that Paul's nephew (whom the Bible calls a "**young man**" three different times in this chapter), was most likely living there himself and going to rabbi school like his Uncle Saul did. Now, of course I cannot say that for a fact but when I study the Bible I like to try and put pieces together so my little finite mind can comprehend it and that is the way I do it here.

Whatever reason or way Paul's nephew is in Jerusalem, he has somehow heard about the murderous plot against him. He was somehow close enough to these men and the elders and council to hear about their plan. It could have been some loud mouth bragging Sanhedrin he heard it from but either way, Paul's nephew was able to be close to this group of men, close enough to know how many there were.

17 Then Paul called one of the centurions unto him, and said, Bring this young man unto the chief captain: for he hath a certain thing to tell him. 18 So he took him, and brought him to the chief captain, and said, Paul the prisoner called me unto him, and prayed me to bring this young man unto thee, who hath something to say unto thee.

Notice that Paul was able to call a centurion to help here. The Romans were protecting Paul in the castle. No doubt there were several guards stationed around Paul's room. A centurion is a special soldier. These men were veteran soldiers that had proved themselves in war and they held high rank. To be a centurion meant that you were the captain of 100 men. You could identify a centurion because they wore a special helmet with a large harness mounted to the top with bright feathers.

19 Then the chief captain took him by the hand, and went with him aside privately, and asked him, What is that thou hast to tell me?

The Chief Captain was also a centurion but has the rank of senior officer. He is the leader or Captain of the centurions. He has a private conversation with Paul's nephew. It says that he "took him by the hand," that means that he was showing kindness and civility to this young man. It would have been very intimidating to come before the Chief Captain of the Roman guard, these were the toughest of the tough; usually very large intimidating men of great strength.

20 And he said, The Jews have agreed to desire thee that thou wouldest bring down Paul to morrow into the council, as though they would enquire somewhat of him more perfectly. 21 But do not thou yield unto them: for there lie in wait for him of them more than forty men, which have bound themselves with an oath, that they will neither eat nor drink till they have killed him: and now are they ready, looking for a promise from thee.

Paul's nephew just lays it all out for them, telling of the murderous plot just as the 40 men had vowed.

22 So the chief captain then let the young man depart, and charged him, See thou tell no man that thou hast shewed these things to me.

The chief captain obviously believes Paul's nephew and tells him to not speak about this to anyone else. He doesn't want anyone to find out that he knows about the plot so they can't make other plans .

23 And he called unto him two centurions, saying, Make ready two hundred soldiers to go to Caesarea, and horsemen threescore and ten, and spearmen two hundred, at the third hour of the night; 24 And provide them beasts, that they may set Paul on, and bring him safe unto Felix the governor.

Wow, talk about a show of strength! Two hundred foot soldiers to accompany Paul through the streets of Jerusalem. Then threescore and ten horsemen (a score is 20 so that is 3 x 20 + 10=70). And two hundred more spearmen. That is a total of 470 soldiers protecting Paul! They march out of the city at the third hour of the night which is 9:00 PM. They even put Paul upon a horse or some kind of animal so that he doesn't have to walk. A beast could have been a horse, camel, or donkey.

25 And he wrote a letter after this manner: 26 Claudius Lysias unto the most excellent governor Felix sendeth greeting.

Of course there were no phones, faxes, or email in those days so the Chief Captain writes a letter to the governor, Felix. We are even told the name of the captain here,

Claudius Lysias. Claudius was a Roman name so he took it when he bought his citizenship, but Lysias is his family Greek name.

27 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.

Now, I like this captain but he isn't exactly being truthful here. He did, in fact, rescue Paul from being killed by the Jews, however, he had no idea Paul was a Roman citizen until later on when Paul informed him. But I guess he was trying to make himself look good for the governor.

28 And when I would have known the cause wherefore they accused him, I brought him forth into their council: 29 Whom I perceived to be accused of questions of their law, but to have nothing laid to his charge worthy of death or of bonds.

He explains the reason why he had the council try Paul because he assumed it was something to do with the Jews laws that he had broken.

30 And when it was told me how that the Jews laid wait for the man, I sent straightway to thee, and gave commandment to his accusers also to say before thee what they had against him. Farewell.

The captain ends his letter. It was short and to the point. Just an explanation to why all of these soldiers were bringing one man in to see him.

31 Then the soldiers, as it was commanded them, took Paul, and brought him by night to Antipatris.

The plan was to get Paul far out of town that night. So instead of going all the way to Caesarea where Felix was, they travel 42 miles and stop at Antipatris for the rest of the night. There is still another 26 miles to travel to Caesarea.

32 On the morrow they left the horsemen to go with him, and returned to the castle: 33 Who, when they came to Caesarea, and delivered the epistle to the governor, presented Paul also before him.

The next day the 400 foot soldiers head back to Jerusalem. They protected Paul and got him safely out of the city. Then the 70 horsemen go with Paul on to Caesarea to meet with Felix.

34 And when the governor had read the letter, he asked of what province he was. And when he understood that he was of Cilicia; 35 I will hear thee, said he, when thine accusers are also come. And he commanded him to be kept in Herod's judgment hall.

The first thing that Felix does is read the letter and then ask Paul what province he was from. Of course Paul is from Tarsus which is in Cilicia. Cilicia happens to be in Syria which has a different governor. However, since the alleged crime was committed in Judea, Felix agrees to hear it, but not until after the Jewish accusers come and participate in the trial. Paul is incarcerated and kept in Herod's judgment hall which was a palace that was built by Herod the Great. Paul will have to wait for 5 days until his trial begins. Which we will cover in our next Bible study.

ⁱ All Scripture from the Authorized King James Version of the Bible

ⁱⁱ Albert Barnes' Notes on the Bible, Acts 23:12