

Acts 23:10: *'And there arose a great cry: and the scribes that were of the Pharisees' part arose, and strove, saying, We find no evil in this man: but if a spirit or an angel hath spoken to him, let us not fight against God. And when there arose a great dissension, the chief captain, fearing lest Paul should have been pulled in pieces of them, commanded the soldiers to go down, and to take him by force from among them, and to bring him into the castle. ¹¹ And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.'*

Now, the free-for-all riot is not even directed toward Paul but it, rather, between the two factions, the Pharisees and the Sadducees; ready to fight each other at the drop of a hat! There is a saying among Jews: 'ask 2 Jews, you'll get 3 opinions!' It's in this riot that the chief captain fears for Paul's life which, by the way, is the life of a Roman citizen under his protection; his own life would be at risk.

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

...over and over and over again! The scribes of the Pharisees just said, '*We find no evil in this man: but if a spirit or an angel hath spoken to him, let us not fight against God!*' But here, the next morning, we have, again, 40 more Jews drooling for Paul's blood! You'd think they'd've learned by now that Paul is unkillable. God's Hand has always been upon him! Nothing the Jews have ever planned or done against Paul has ever succeeded; it's like Wiley Coyote desperately living for the day he can finally destroy Roadrunner... we, the audience, know it will never happen but Wiley and the Jews remain blissfully, or viciously, ignorant. Both are shown as tragic comedy, theater of the absurd.

The tragedy lies with the Jews; they have set themselves against God and His Anointed and apart from God's Gracious intervention, every one of them will eventually spend eternity in the Lake of Fire and yet Paul continues to love them and to hold out hope for their salvation because he always remembers that he had been just like them toward Christians before God Graciously and Miraculously intervened into his own tragic comedy of the absurd.

The comedy lies with God, Himself. He sees it all, He directs it all and He laughs at those who hate Him: '*Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? ² The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, saying, ³ Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. ⁴ He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the LORD shall have them in derision.'* Psalm 2

And, of course, the absurdity lies within anyone who would fight against God because the reality is that anytime we resist God's Sovereign Rule over our lives, when we recoil against any trial, no matter how large or small, we do, in fact, set ourselves against God and, so, Paul, after his conversion and, of course and especially, the Lord Jesus Christ, throughout His Earthly Life are given to us as examples of those who did never set themselves against God's Sovereign Rule.

The tragedy, the comedy and the absurdity are all for our example, that we would constantly examine our own lives: '*But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. ²⁹ For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.'* 1 Cor 11:28 So, next time you watch Roadrunner and Wiley Coyote with your grandchildren, you can teach them that these are set forth as spiritual examples after which we can pattern our lives.

Verse 14: *'And they (the 40 assassins) 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. 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.'*

And so we see that this is not simply a conspiracy among 40 deranged killers but also includes all the chief priests and elders of Jerusalem although certainly some among them were 'closet' believers or, at the least, open to knowing and following the True God: *'And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.'* Acts 6:7 and remember Gamaliel, Paul's teacher, who stood up in the council: *'Then stood there up one in the council, a Pharisee, named Gamaliel, a doctor of the law, had in reputation among all the people, and commanded to put the apostles forth a little space; ³⁵ And said unto them, Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what ye intend to do as touching these men... And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: ³⁹ But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God. ⁴⁰ And to him they agreed...'* Acts 5:34

Remember, Paul had told this same crowd that he had grown up under the tutelage of Gamaliel and doubtless Paul would have made a real effort to reach Gamaliel with the Gospel who may have still been alive and among this ruling group of Jerusalem.

But, also, it very well could be true that any priest or scribe who openly confessed the Lord Jesus Christ as Messiah would have been expelled from the ruling company and so we see this wretched band conspiring together against the Lord and His Anointed; the chief priest and the elders are right in the thick of it while they refuse to see God's Hand on Paul, Whose Eternal Plan and Purpose will never be thwarted or diverted...

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

What a coincidence! Paul's nephew just 'happened' to be in listening distance or, perhaps more likely, someone in the council, a 'closet' believer, sought out Paul's nephew because he could not get to Paul directly in order to warn him... God is always in control.

Verse 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.'*

Paul is locked up but the centurion is directed by the Holy Spirit to acquiesce in 'bothering' to take the nephew to the chief captain. He possibly would never have even paid attention to what Paul, a locked up Jew, had to say but they were all 'on edge' because Paul was, in fact, as revealed, a freeborn Roman citizen and they were all afraid that they might be reported to have tied him up with the plan to scourge him.

Verse 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. 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?'*

We see also that Paul 'prayed' the centurion, the meaning of which is 'to ask in a humble manner;' he does not demand or command, he asks humbly, knowing that God is in control; he does not need to try to direct the circumstance in any way and notice that the chief captain has the wherewithal to understand the necessity to hear the nephew's tale privately as anything said in the hearing of others is subject to repetition, especially for a monetary bribe. Either that or he was simply moved by the Holy Spirit to do so.

Verse 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. 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.'*

And so we see that it really is that the chief captain understands the necessity of not allowing anyone else to hear of this, that the conspirators not be forewarned of his having been forewarned. And, we can discern that the chief captain is also angry that these wicked Jews would imagine to use him unwittingly in their evil scheme. He knows that against 40 unarmed Jews (there was no 2nd Amendment there) even a small

contingent of Roman soldiers would forestall any attack on Paul, whatsoever, but we'll see that he is actually hoping that they will attack to trigger their own massacre:

Verse 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.'*

The chief centurion is the centurion of centurions, captain over 1000; he orders, made ready, 200 soldiers, 70 horsemen and 200 spearmen, ready to go at 9 pm: 470 Roman soldiers to guard against 40! I think he is just itching for a fight; it's what soldiers live for!

Also, the chief captain just wants this whole thing to be out of his hands; his main mission is to keep the peace: the famous 'Pax Romana,' Roman Peace.

The Caesars were those generations' antichrists; they conquered to forcefully install peace throughout the Empire which was the necessity for maintaining control; the final Antichrist will come on the scene during the time of wars and rumors of wars, when people are crying out for 'Peace and Safety!' sorta-like now...

Of the final Antichrist, Daniel tells us: *'And his power shall be mighty, but not by his own power: and he shall destroy wonderfully, and shall prosper, and practise, and shall destroy the mighty and the holy people. ²⁵ And through his policy also he shall cause craft to prosper in his hand; and he shall magnify himself in his heart, **and by peace shall destroy many**: he shall also stand up against the Prince of princes; but he shall be broken without hand. 'Dan 8:24*

'He will be broken without hand!' Remember that earlier in Daniel, he interprets Nebuchadnezzar's dream of a mighty statue of gold, silver, bronze, iron and iron mixed with clay, representing all the successive World Empires, headed by successive antichrists, when a stone, cut without hands, drops upon its feet and destroys it all as it becomes as dust carried away by the wind while that stone, the Lord Jesus Christ's Eternal Kingdom, fills the whole Earth and, as we read in Isaiah, continues to expand and increase without end... forever.

So, in order to maintain that Pax Romana, the chief captain orders to muster 470 Roman soldiers to escort one Paul to the Provincial Governor, Felix at Caesarea, about 75 miles. Thankfully, for Paul, he also ordered a horse or mule for him to ride upon.

Verse 25: *'And he wrote a letter after this manner: ²⁶ Claudius Lysias unto the most excellent governor Felix sendeth greeting. 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. 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**. 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 chief centurion's name is Claudius Lysias; he wants to make certain Felix knows to whom thanks is due; perhaps he could later be stationed away from this dusty backwater hole they call Jerusalem, perhaps a place with more of a nightlife... I was wise enough to understand that this man is a Roman: like you and me, Felix... and not like those 'Jews!' Their accusations were nothing more than questions concerning their silly and indiscernible law but having nothing to do with our noble Roman Law, certainly nothing deserving of death to a noble Roman, such as you and me, Felix... in fact, nothing even worthy of 'bonds;' so, whatever you might have heard, I never even tied him up, his being a noble Roman, such as you and me, Felix... I'm the one who rescued him! And so, I've also commanded that the Jews come before you to give their accusations and I wash my hands of the whole matter! Farewell Felix, noble Roman, such as I... and, of course, Claudius Lysias never mentions the fact that he is only a 2nd class Roman whose citizenship was merely purchased with a large sum of money which would have probably been in the form of a bribe coupled with a threat; he is, after all, a Roman centurion of centurions in command of 1000 Roman soldiers... he could back up his unspoken threat and, so, the money would have been also offered to soften but confirm the deal.

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

³² On the morrow they left the horsemen to go with him, and returned to the castle.'

All the soldiers, with Paul, marched and rode the 30 miles from Jerusalem to Antipatris; from there, the foot soldiers all left to return to Jerusalem, leaving the 70 horsemen to accompany Paul the final 45 miles to Felix whose seat of government was in Caesarea.

Verse 33: *'Who, when they came to Caesarea and delivered the epistle to the governor, presented Paul also before him. 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 70 horsemen deliver Paul to Felix along with the letter from Claudius Lysias. Felix asks Paul where he is from and he tells him, from Cilicia wherein lies Tarsus, Paul's hometown thereby telling Felix that Paul is, in fact, under his jurisdiction and so he determines to hear the case but not until the accusers arrive which is one of the Roman laws handed down to us: the accused has the right to face his accusers.

Acts 24:1: *'And after five days Ananias the high priest descended with the elders, and with a certain orator named Tertullus, who informed the governor against Paul. ² And when he was called forth, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying, Seeing that by thee we enjoy great quietness, and that very worthy deeds are done unto this nation by thy providence, ³ We accept it always, and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness. ⁴ Notwithstanding, that I be not further tedious unto thee, I pray thee that thou wouldest hear us of thy clemency a few words.'*

Paul is kept for 5 days until finally the priests and elders make their way 'down' to Caesarea but not before they've hired the 'great orator' Tertullus who immediately begins to suck up to Felix: blah, blah, blah... Oh Felix, you're so great and we're so blessed to have you in charge here... but I don't want to bore you... as I already am... hear our worthy complaint against this horrid pestilent fellow...

Verse 5: *'For we have found this man a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes: ⁶ Who also hath gone about to profane the temple: whom we took, and would have judged according to our law. ⁷ But the chief captain Lysias came upon us, and with great violence took him away out of our hands, ⁸ Commanding his accusers to come unto thee: by examining of whom thyself mayest take knowledge of all these things, whereof we accuse him.'*

What a slime-ball! Everything wrong in all your wonderful rule is caused by this pestilent fellow! We would have taken care of it ourselves if not for that Lysias who violently took him from us... its his fault you even have to bother with this... just give him to us... we'll handle it from here...

Verse 9: *'And the Jews also assented, saying that these things were so.'*

All the Jews nodding and affirming yes! yes! whatever he said!

Finally Paul is called upon to speak for himself:

Verse 10: *'Then Paul, after that the governor had beckoned unto him to speak, answered, Forasmuch as I know that thou hast been of many years a judge unto this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself:*

¹¹ Because that thou mayest understand, that there are yet but twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem for to worship. ¹² And they neither found me in the temple disputing with any man, neither raising up the people, neither in the synagogues, nor in the city: ¹³ Neither can they prove the things whereof they now accuse me.'

All that they accuse is patently false! Let them prove these charges... they cannot!

Since Paul's defense is longer than we now have time, we'll pick it back up next time.