

God at Work!

Paul had been arrested in Jerusalem and was now in chains. Having spent the night in Roman custody, Paul awakened to find that he was to be brought before the Sanhedrin, the highest religious Jewish court. In spite of intense physical danger, Paul was so sure of God's hand in his life that he continued to speak out boldly with the message of Jesus Christ.

Read Acts 23:1-10 several times, until you feel a part of the scene.

1. After making solid eye contact with his audience—what claim did Paul make as he began his defense before the Sanhedrin?
2. Why would the high priest have objected to Paul's statement?
3. Discuss the exchange between Paul and the high priest. Why would Paul have made such strong statements?
4. What do we learn about Paul's attitude toward authority?
5. What were the doctrinal differences in the council, and how did Paul use them to his advantage? (Review the handout "Understanding Jewish Leadership.")
6. Finally, the disagreement became so heated that the Roman commander had to step in. In your own words tell what happened in verses 9-10.
7. **Read** and meditate on Acts 23:11. Consider the richness of the encouragement of the Lord. We might imagine that after this visit—another in a long line of God's encouragement appearances to Paul (Acts 16:9; 18:9-10; 22:17-21; 27:22-24; 2 Timothy 4:16-17), the apostle rolled over and drifted off to the kind of restful sleep that only a child safe within his Father's strong arms can experience. *In what ways does Acts 23:11 speak to you personally?*

Bow in Prayer: “Precious Lord Jesus, thank You for Your magnificent hand of protection in Paul’s life, in order that Your will might be accomplished. Enable us to become more astute at seeing Your hand of protection and encouragement in the circumstances of our lives.”

Read Acts 23:12-15.

8. How deep was the Jews’ hatred of Paul? Give evidence for your answer.

Keeping ahead of the Jews was a real challenge for the Roman authorities. They were responsible for Paul who was a Roman citizen. And now they were about to make a sudden change in their plans. **Read** Acts 23:16-35 for the details.

9. How did a young man (Paul’s nephew) play an important human part in protecting the apostle’s life (verses 16-22)?

Note: This is the only biblical reference to Paul’s family. Some scholars believe that Paul’s family disowned him when he became a Christian.

Instead of returning Paul to the Jewish Council, the commander would send him to Caesarea, which was the Roman administrative and judicial center for Judea. There the judicial process would be continued before the Roman court by *Governor Felix*, a process that began when Paul exercised his rights as a Roman citizen.

10. Note the amazing precautions that were taken to transport *one* prisoner! How many Roman soldiers, horses, etc., were dispatched for Paul’s transfer to Caesarea (Acts 23:23-24)? Explain the significance.

11. There was a slight twisting of the facts in the first sentence of the letter commander Claudius Lysias sent to Governor Felix. Compare with Acts 22:24-27. What really happened and why would they seek to cover this up?

- b. According to verse 23 under what favorable conditions would Paul be held in Caesarea? Recall other believers Paul knew who lived in Caesarea.

Presumably Lysias does come at some point and the trial is resumed, although Luke says nothing about this (Acts 24:22.) If Lysias did come, Felix did not find enough information to release Paul or proceed with a conviction.

Reread Acts 24:22-27.

An interesting dialogue developed between Paul, Felix and his wife Drusilla. For two years Paul served as Felix's personal spiritual conversationalist and Felix was regularly exposed to the truth.

15. What motivation fed Felix's desire to meet with Paul frequently (verse 26)?
16. What subjects became too personal for Felix (verses 24-25)? Explain the reason for his reaction (verse 25).
17. How does Felix present a picture of our own human nature?

Personal Reflection and Application

18. a. Are there subjects in your life that you avoid talking to God about? If so, ask God to bring every hidden thing in your life to "light"—remembering this is what the Gospel is all about—God's power to change lives! *Note any areas below that God is speaking to you about.*
- b. In what ways do you need to grow in humbly accepting God's hand in your life—even if it involves being falsely accused, as Paul was?
- c. In this passage it has been our privilege to observe God's protection of Paul in direct, personal and supernatural ways! How have these vivid glimpses of "God at work" drawn you into the intimate inner fellowship of the life of God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit? Be specific.

Map 7

