

Acts 23 - John Karmelich

1. Two chapters ago, I laid out this big debate question whether Paul was right or wrong about going to Jerusalem. That was Chapter 21. Now were on Chapter 23, and I'm here to tell you, it doesn't matter anymore, sort of. ☺ I'd better explain.
 - a) The debate continues in this chapter, but instead of seeing it from Paul's perspective, we are going to see it from God's perspective. Still confused? Excellent! ☺
 - b) In Chapter 21, Paul has his heart and mind set to go to Jerusalem to preach to the Jews. There were verses indicating this was the right thing to do. There were other verses indicating this was the wrong thing to do. My favorite commentators were pretty much split down the middle on the issue, which made my job more difficult. Therefore, I laid out both arguments.
 - i) The reason the debate is important is that one of the most difficult, daily decisions we wonder about is the question of : "Are we doing, or not doing God's will? That was the great debate question of Chapter 21."
 - a) Half of my sources say Paul was doing God's will, half did not.
 - b) So given this dilemma, how are we suppose to know if *we* are doing God's will?
 - ii) In some ways Chapter 23, gives us that answer.
 - c) Smack dab in the middle of this chapter, the Lord speaks to Paul:
 - i) The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, "Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome." (Acts 23:11 NIV)
 - ii) The whole chapter revolves around this verse.
 - a) Paul's struggles leads up to this verse.
 - b) The actions that happen afterwards are based on this verse.
 - c) I'll get into the "before and after" during the main text.
 - d) What I want you to think about as you read this verse is all of Paul's witnesses to the Jews *from God's perspective*.
 - iii) What this verse tells me is that Jesus is encouraging Paul. Jesus is saying in effect: "Cheer up Paul, don't worry about the fact the Jews didn't believe you. I told you in Chapters 21 and 22 they wouldn't believe you anyway ☺. But you did your job, you testified about me. Now its time for you to testify about me in Rome. I'm not going to tell you the results of how it's going to go in Rome, just that you are going to testify about me in Rome."
 - a) That is the lesson for us right there! We spend so much time focusing on our results that we forget that God's plans are bigger than our plans.
 - b) God calls us to **be** his witness. We don't get a "point" for every person we convert to Christianity. Our success as Christians is not measured by how many people we convert. It is measured by our obedience to do what God has called us to do *no matter what the results appear to be!* God's plans for us, his church, mankind, are too big for us to comprehend.
 - (1) "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. (Isaiah 55:8 NIV)

2. On that note, Chapter 23 is a great one to read in times of disappointments.
- a) Chapter 22 and the beginning of Chapter 23 is Paul witnessing to his fellow Jews and the results were only that these Jews tried to kill them. (And you thought *you* were having a bad day! ☺)
 - b) You have to remember that Paul *hoped and dreamed* that he could convert his fellow Jews. He grew up as a devout and religious Jew. He probably spent most of his trip to Jerusalem rehearsing his speech in his mind and praying for results.
 - i) In Paul's letter to the Romans, you get a sense of how important this was to Paul: "O Israel, my people! O my Jewish brothers! How I long for you to come to Christ. My heart is heavy within me, and I grieve bitterly day and night because of you. Christ knows and the Holy Spirit knows that it is no mere pretense when I say that I would be willing to be forever damned if that would save you. (Romans 9:1-3, The Living Bible)
 - a) Paul *loved* his fellow countryman. He wanted *so bad* to win his fellow Jews to Christ. God allowed Paul to try, even though God warned Paul they would not listen (Acts 22:18).
 - ii) I believe the lesson for us is that God loves us *so much* he often gives us the desires of our heart even though that is not his will for us. The key is that Paul was faithful. During this whole time that the Jews tried to kill him, Paul never denied his faith, he never compromised his beliefs and simply believed what was in his heart was the right thing to do. Whether or not this was God's will is the great debate. The point is Paul never stopped believing in Jesus.
 - a) Remember this question asked of Jesus: Then they asked him, "What must we do to do the works God requires?" Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent." (John 6:28-29 NIV)
 - b) I believe God comforted Paul in the middle of this chapter because Paul never stopped doing the work that God required of him - believing in Jesus. You can argue Paul was right or wrong in going to Jerusalem. You can't argue that Paul stopped doing what Jesus asks *all* of us to do!
 - iii) This leads us back to the topic of us and disappointments. There are things *we* want badly as Christians. It may be a loved one who is not born again. It may be a nation or a group of people going through tremendous suffering. It may be some political or social wrong. *We want* to fix it. *We know* what is right. The problem is wanting *our* will vs. God's will and more importantly God's timing. As Christians, we are called to *pray* for what is right (Biblically!), but we have to remember that God is on the throne, and not us. God does not violate people's free-will, and often God *does* work out the desires of our heart, only by *His* timing, not ours.
 - c) Which leads us back to the question of "God's will and disappointments".
 - i) I believe as long as we are obeying the command that Jesus laid out "to believe in the one he has sent" is the central issue for us. That is why God comforted Paul in his misery, as Paul thought he had failed. That is the message *we* have to remember when we think we have failed. Stop thinking in terms of "earning points for God" and simply focus on "believing in the one he has sent". We must be faithful to what God has called us to do. God stands behind us no matter what!

3. Before I start, there is also another underlying theme that is common throughout the Book of Acts, and that is the subject of "spiritual warfare". The Bible indicates there is a whole world of angels and demons that we cannot see. Remember that Satan's #1 goal is to stop, prevent and slow-down-as-much-as-possible God's redemptive plan. The more people Satan can prevent from becoming Christians the better. The more Satan can make Christians *ineffective witnesses* for the Gospel, the better for his cause.
 - a) Therefore, when we read of violent attacks on the disciples' lives, remember there is a spiritual dark side behind the scenes in control.
 - b) The two great mistakes to make about Satan is 1) he's behind every rock and/or 2) he doesn't exist in the first place.
 - c) The "forces of darkness" exist, and are prevalent everywhere. The greatest weapon we have against these forces is prayer. One of the reasons God *allows* Satan to exist is to entice us to stay close to God, and to call upon him to combat the forces of evil.
 - i) To quote Chuck Missler "if you don't believe Satan is real, try opposing him!"
4. OK, 2.5 pages of introduction means better get started on Chapter 23! To remind you of where we left off, in Chapter 22:
 - a) 1) Paul spoke to a large crowd of Jews in the open court area of the Temple.
 - b) 2) Paul's speech caused a riot.
 - c) 3) The Roman soldiers, who didn't understand Hebrew, arrested Paul, thinking he was the instigator.
 - d) 4) Paul declared his Roman citizenship, which entitled him to a fair trial.
 - e) 5) The Romans *forced* the Jewish leaders (i.e. The Sanhedrin) to meet so they knew what charges could be brought against Paul
 - f) Chapter 23 opens with Paul giving his defense in front of the Sanhedrin.
5. Chapter 23, Verse 1: Paul looked straight at the Sanhedrin and said, "My brothers, I have fulfilled my duty to God in all good conscience to this day." ² At this the high priest Ananias ordered those standing near Paul to strike him on the mouth.
 - a) OK, first question, what did Paul do to warrant a blow in the face?
 - i) It may have been referring to the Sanhedrin as "brothers" claiming equality.
 - ii) It may have been his claim of "fulfilling my duty", thus declaring his innocence before this trial had begun.
 - b) I suspect there is a LOT of anger in the room. I'm sure Paul's reputation preceded him. They knew that Paul was converting a lot of Jews to Christianity. It not only meant a personal demise of their power base, but in their minds, Paul was a heretic damning Jews to hell for his teaching.
 - c) On the previous page I discussed the issue of spiritual warfare. Here was Paul, being used by God to change thousands, and eventually millions of Gentiles and some Jews to born-again Christians. One can imagine the demonic hatred and spiritual attacks being focused on Paul. That hatred has filled this room.
6. Here is Paul's response to being struck in the face: Verse 3: Then Paul said to him, "God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! You sit there to judge me according to the law, yet you yourself violate the law by commanding that I be struck!" ⁴ Those who were standing near Paul said, "You dare to insult God's high priest?" ⁵ Paul replied, "Brothers, I did not realize that he was the high priest; for it is written: `Do not speak evil about the ruler of your people.'"
 - a) Here's the recap: Paul lashed out after being slapped in the face. Paul didn't realize the command to slap him came from the High Priest, who is the leader. Paul apologizes as it is against Jewish law to speak evil of God's appointed leader, no matter what that person is like:
 - i) "Do not blaspheme God or curse the ruler of your people." (Exodus 22:28 NIV)

- ii) Paul sinned, and Paul realized it. Jesus taught the concept of "turn the other cheek". This does *not* mean to sit there and passively accept punishment, but simply to point out how the action was wrong without any insults. Most commentators take the view it was wrong for Paul to "lash out" verbally, but he did realize his mistake and apologized.
- b) It is interesting to read about the historical background of Ananias, the High Priest.
 - i) This was a man *hated* by the Jewish people for being a violent man, a Roman "puppet", taking bribes, confiscating money to be used for other priests and other crimes.
 - ii) The interesting this Paul's curse, in some ways came true. Paul said in Verse 3: "God will strike you, you whitewashed wall". The historian Josephus stated that man was so hated by the Jews, at the end of his life he was hunted and killed by his own people. (Source: Bible Expositor's Encyclopedia)
- c) It is considered a classical debate question as ask: "Why didn't Paul know Ananias was the High Priest?" The most common explanations are:
 - i) The Sanhedrin Court met on less than a day's notice. Maybe Ananias wasn't wearing the High Priest's outfit. Paul has not been in Jerusalem for a long time. Maybe he honestly didn't know who the high priest was. (This is my view.)
 - ii) There are clues in Paul's letters that he had poor eyesight. When Paul was "blinded by the light" in his conversion, there may have been some permanent damage to his eyesight.
 - iii) Paul may have known about Ananias' reputation as an immoral person. His outburst of anger may have reflected that anger or been sarcastic.
- d) The one thing that is impressive about Paul in this whole situation is Paul's willingness to apologize. It was wrong for the high priest to strike him. Paul was probably aware of Ananias' reputation. (I suspect his fellow Christian Jews told and warned Paul about him). Paul focused on *his* error, which was speaking against God's appointed leader, no matter how bad that leader is.
 - i) There is a great lesson for us. Paul apologized for his error, expecting nothing in return. He is letting God deal with the illegality of the other issues.

7. Verse 6: Then Paul, knowing that some of them were Sadducees and the others Pharisees, called out in the Sanhedrin, "My brothers, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee. I stand on trial because of my hope in the resurrection of the dead." ⁷ When he said this, a dispute broke out between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. ⁸ (The Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, and that there are neither angels nor spirits, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all.)
- a) I suspect at this point Paul was getting desperate. He still wanted to convince *somebody* about Jesus. He didn't preach the cross. He didn't testify about Jesus. He thought, in his own mind "Hey I know, I've got a Pharisee-background. Maybe I can appeal to my fellow Pharisee-brethren.
 - i) There is the mistake right there. Paul is trying to win them over by common-background. It would be like trying to convince somebody that Jesus is God because you are both Republicans are both Democrats. God doesn't work that way. The Holy Spirit doesn't convict that way. It may be a good introduction to start a conversation, but a common trait is not going to convince people that Jesus is Messiah. Telling people how Jesus affects your life leads people to Christ. Teaching people about God's word leads people to Jesus. Paul took it too far. He wanted the "divide and conquer" method, which doesn't work.
 - ii) When Paul is on trial in a Roman Court in Acts 24, he admits this outburst was a mistake. In Acts 24, one of the accusations against Paul was for starting a riot.

8. Verse 9: There was a great uproar, and some of the teachers of the law who were Pharisees stood up and argued vigorously. "We find nothing wrong with this man," they said. "What if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?"
- a) Personally, I find a lot of humor in this, only because I know human nature. People can get so headstrong over politics that POLITICS-ITSELF becomes a dividing factor in a group.
 - i) Imagine yelling, "Ladies and Gentlemen, I've been a loyal Republican (or Democrat) all my life, and I'm on trial for being a loyal Republican! So come on, my Republican brothers, won't you support me?! Then half the room yells out "I see no problem with anything this man says!"
 - ii) Sometimes I believe Satan LOVES politics. He loves discussions about governmental politics because it takes our focus off of Jesus. He loves church politics as it divides the body of Christ and gets our mind off of Jesus. Grant it, there is a place for politics. There are some issues in churches where decisions and policy's have to be made, and made in loving manner with respect for other opinions. The problem is when politics becomes idolatry and the minor issues take greater weight than the major doctrines.
 - a) I see that here in this verse where the Pharisee's defend Paul not because they believe in Jesus, but their *love* for the Pharisee's view of Judaism over the Sadducee's view of Judaism. All Paul did was show their love of politics *over* the love of God for the time being. This does nothing to further the cause of the Gospel.
9. Verse 10: The dispute became so violent that the commander was afraid Paul would be torn to pieces by them. He ordered the troops to go down and take him away from them by force and bring him into the barracks.
- a) The Roman commander had to be getting pretty frustrated at this point. All he knew was that Paul was speaking outside the temple, but he didn't know Hebrew. All he knew was that there was a riot and he had to save Paul's life.
 - b) Now the same commander orders the Jewish High Council to meet. The text doesn't say if they spoke in Hebrew or Greek, but I suspect it was Hebrew and again, the Roman commander didn't know what was going on. All he knew was another riot broke out. If it weren't for the fact that Paul was a Roman citizen, Paul probably would have been flogged or killed by now.
 - c) It's time to stop and think about this whole situation from Paul's perspective.
 - i) For months, probably years, he *dreamed* of having a big opportunity to witness to his fellow Jews. I'm sure there are people in the Sanhedrin who Paul has known for years. He knew how they thought. He knew their logic. He considered himself one of them. All they have to do is "see the light". He just wanted to show them, so badly, that they missed their Messiah. It was now so obvious to Paul and is still a blind spot to the Jews of that day as well as today.
 - ii) Imagine Paul's disappointment. His big chance came in the Temple (Chapter 22). The results were no conversions, a big riot, and his life almost ended. He now got "one more chance" in front of the Jewish High Council, only to cause another riot.
 - iii) I suspect Paul was having a pity-party or in fear of his life. I say that because in the next verse Jesus talks to Paul and says "Take courage".
 - iv) The point of all this is God allows us to go through disappointments to teach us the lessons he wants us to learn. God the father told Paul in many ways that the Jews wouldn't believe him. God never violated Paul's "free-will desire" to speak to his fellow Jews.

10. The most important verse of the chapter (pay attention! ☺), Verse 11: The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, "Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome."
- a) Paul sat in the Roman jail until that night. He had time to think about the events of the two previous days. This is when he hit his low.
 - b) Remember this half-a-verse from Hebrews: "because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." (Hebrews 13:5). I'm taking the verse out of context, but the point is the same. During those rough, low moments God is still there. That is something we can be assured of at all times. In my Bible, I like to underline the word "Never" in that verse in Hebrews. The word "never" *means* never and no exceptions!
 - c) Let's look at the second part of this verse: Jesus says "Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome."
 - i) In the great debate of whether Paul was right or wrong to testify about Jesus in Jerusalem does not get answered in this verse. It says "as you have testified about me", so you will do in Rome.
 - a) Jesus is giving Paul his marching orders: You must testify about me in Rome. Jesus does not give any specifics about "how" or "when".
 - b) It is not obvious at first, but Jesus is reassuring Paul that he will not die until he gets to Rome. Paul probably thought it meant that he was going to be set free to go to Rome. The truth is, Paul's trials (literal) *forced* him to go to Rome.
 - (1) When God makes a promise, and doesn't give more details, we have to be careful not to second guess God as to *how* He will act.
 - ii) What does all of this have to do with us? Glad you asked! ☺
 - a) Even if you have never had a direct revelation from God, God makes *all sorts of promises* to us as believers. A wonderful little book to pick up at any Christian bookstore is called "God's Promises", which lists all the promises to believers by topic.
 - (1) God's promises are a great book to study in difficult times. Like Paul, God may not reveal to us *how* he will make those promises come true, but God's Word *is* true and his promises *is* true.
 - (2) The Psalmist said "I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread. (Psalm 37:25 NIV)
 - d) The reason I say this is the key verse in the chapter is that the rest of the chapter, and most of the remainder of Acts, is God fulfilling that promise.
 - i) We are going to read of Paul working his way to Rome, at the paid expense of the Roman government! None of the people who desire to kill Paul, nor calamities we will read about in future chapters will prevent Paul from reaching Rome. The great thing to see about Paul in the rest of Acts is how Paul trusted in God's promise! That is the "mark" of a Christian. We *believe* what God said and act upon it.
11. Verse 12: The next morning the Jews formed a conspiracy and bound themselves with an oath not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul. ¹³ More than forty men were involved in this plot. ¹⁴ They went to the chief priests and elders and said, "We have taken a solemn oath not to eat anything until we have killed Paul. ¹⁵ Now then, you and the Sanhedrin petition the commander to bring him before you on the pretext of wanting more accurate information about his case. We are ready to kill him before he gets here."

- a) Let me paraphrase. The Jews are still angry at Paul, for daring to say that Gentiles can be saved without going through Judaism. They were aware of Paul traveling around the surrounding territories converting Gentiles to Christian and (gasp!) Jews to Christianity! They are thinking "this man must be stopped and stopped now!"
 - i) Imagine having so much hatred and rage you must have to agree to not eat and drink until this man is dead!
 - a) Remember Jesus' words "If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also... They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the One who sent me. (John 15:20b-21, NIV)
 - b) I can't read this passage without thinking about a Christian classic book: "Fox's Book of Martyr's" written in the 16th Century. The book chronicles the testimonies of those who were martyred for their beliefs in Jesus and the Bible. The sad part is that most of those who were burned at the stake was because they went against the teachings of the medieval Catholic Church. You can't read this book without affecting your thinking about Christianity *nor* your gratitude of those who have paved the way for our freedom as Americans to worship Christ.
 - c) I stated in the opening that "spiritual warfare" is a common, underlying theme all through the Book of Acts.
 - i) My view of Satan is that he is only aware of God's redemptive game plan as it is told to man, or as it unfolds in history. Satan does not have the power to read God's mind. If you study the Old Testament, you will notice as God reveals plans of a coming Messiah in a more and more precise manner as time unfolds. Satan focuses his attack more precisely as that information is revealed.
 - a) For example, first there was Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, so Satan's attack was on them. Then came the 12 tribes, so the focus of the attack was on them. (Look at all the Old Testament attempts to wipe out the nation). As God revealed that the Messiah would come through David's seed, Satan's attacks became more and more focused. By the time of the birth of Jesus, Satan tried to kill all the babies in Bethlehem because Satan understands prophecy as well as anyone who studies the Bible.
 - b) OK, John, what' your point? The point is that God revealed to Paul that *he* must be God's witness in Rome. Rome is the capital of the Empire. The last thing Satan wants is Paul preaching to the heads of the empire. Satan must stop this, and thus "coincidentally", a conspiracy was formed by 40 men to kill Paul.
 - (1) To quote Chuck Missler: "Coincidence is not a kosher word!".
 - (2) Paul was making himself *available* to follow God's orders for his life to help grow the number of believers. Spiritual attacks come as we oppose Satan and his forces.
 - (a) Don't panic: "You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. (1st John 4:4 NIV).
12. Back to the conspiracy to kill Paul, Verse 16: But when the son of Paul's sister heard of this plot, he went into the barracks and told Paul.
- a) First thought "Paul's got a sister and a nephew?" Where did THEY come from? There is no mention of Paul's family anywhere else in the Bible.

- i) An interesting, and logical speculation is that Paul's family disowned him when he became a Christian. Remember that when Paul came to Jerusalem in Acts 21, he stayed with disciples. If Paul had a sister in Jerusalem, why didn't he stay with her? Again, the possibility of his family disowning him. But, "blood is thicker than water", and despite their religious differences didn't want to see Paul killed.
 - ii) Paul must have been allowed visitors if his nephew could see him.
- 13. Verse 17: Then Paul called one of the centurions and said, "Take this young man to the commander; he has something to tell him." ¹⁸ So he took him to the commander. The centurion said, "Paul, the prisoner, sent for me and asked me to bring this young man to you because he has something to tell you." ¹⁹ The commander took the young man by the hand, drew him aside and asked, "What is it you want to tell me?"
 - a) The amazing thing is to stand back and see the big picture. There was a conspiracy of 40 Jews to kill Paul. The plan was to call another meeting of the Sanhedrin, and then these guys would ambush Paul. I'm sure the orders among the 40 was to keep their mouths shut. Yet Paul's nephew heard of it. Remember the leaders of the Sanhedrin gave their approval to this action.
 - i) Look how God is working here. The Roman could have said "Get lost kid" or "yeah right, whatever". God was working behind the scenes. God didn't prevent the conspiracy ("free-will"), but God *made a way of escape* for Paul, in the most unlikely of ways.
 - ii) To quote a cute joke from Ray Steadman: "Paul was *relatively* safe!" ☺
- 14. Verse 20, Paul's nephew continues: He said: "The Jews have agreed to ask you to bring Paul before the Sanhedrin tomorrow on the pretext of wanting more accurate information about him. ²¹ Don't give in to them, because more than forty of them are waiting in ambush for him. They have taken an oath not to eat or drink until they have killed him. They are ready now, waiting for your consent to their request." ²² The commander dismissed the young man and cautioned him, "Don't tell anyone that you have reported this to me."
 - a) Most of this paragraph is repetitive of what was already told. I suspect Luke included it due to the amazement of it all. Paul's life was being saved by a young man (or older child) who overheard the conspiracy. God's plan for Paul to go to Rome will occur because 1) his nephew overheard the plans and is risking his own life to save Paul's and 2) The Roman Centurion believed the nephew, and will now make every effort to challenge this ambush.
 - i) Luke probably wrote this years after the actual event. During these moments, you are so busy trying to survive and cope you don't see God working in the background. The fact that God is working in the background is *exactly* what Luke wants us to see!
 - a) The thing to learn from all of this is not history lessons on how Paul's life was spared, but the fact that God is always working in ways we can't always see or comprehend. Just when we think we have hit "rock-bottom", God provides a way of escape!
- 15. The head Roman soldier, like a good commander, takes charge, Verse 23: Then he called two of his centurions and ordered them, "Get ready a detachment of two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen to go to Caesarea at nine tonight. ²⁴ Provide mounts for Paul so that he may be taken safely to Governor Felix."

- a) You have to laugh to think about the 40 conspirators at this point. Here were these guys, hanging outside the Roman fortress. They were angry, scared (taking on Roman Soldiers!) probably hungry and thirsty. Their adrenaline was going strong. Yet, here comes Paul out of the fort, with 200 soldiers, 70 horsemen and 200 spear-throwers. "Well, so much for that conspiracy". ☺
 - i) By the way, in Jewish customs, vows can be broken if made in "rash", so these guys probably didn't starve to death.
 - b) Paul is being taken to Governor Felix. This is the guy who replaced Pontius Pilate as head man over the territory. History records him as a ruthless, evil man. He is recorded as being the only slave ever to become a Governor. His rash acts were known to take revenge based on how he was harshly treated as a slave. We'll talk more about Felix next week as Paul addresses him.
16. Verse 25: He (Roman commander) wrote a letter as follows: ²⁶ Claudius Lysias, To His Excellency, Governor Felix: Greetings. ²⁷ This man was seized by the Jews and they were about to kill him, but I came with my troops and rescued him, for I had learned that he is a Roman citizen. ²⁸ I wanted to know why they were accusing him, so I brought him to their Sanhedrin. ²⁹ I found that the accusation had to do with questions about their law, but there was no charge against him that deserved death or imprisonment. ³⁰ When I was informed of a plot to be carried out against the man, I sent him to you at once. I also ordered his accusers to present to you their case against him.
- a) In these verses, Paul is taken prisoner to Felix. In order to explain to Felix why this man was taken prisoner, the Roman commander sent a letter along explaining the situation.
 - b) This is the first time we learn of the Roman commander's name: Claudius Lysias. Some commentators suspect that Luke, in doing his homework, actually got a copy of this letter and included it verbatim.
 - c) You have to remember that a positive quality about the Roman system is its obsession with justice. Because Paul was a citizen, he was entitled to a fair trial, and thus the effort to protect him to have such a trial.
 - d) A lot of commentators point out that the Roman commander "forgot" to mention that he was about to have Paul whipped, which is a violation for a Roman citizen.
 - e) Stepping back and looking at the bigger picture, we see the Roman commander "passing the buck" to use a modern idiom. He didn't know what to do with Paul. All he really knew was that "this was a religious issue, that he could personally care less about, but the guy is a Citizen, so therefore, he passed Paul along to Felix and let *him* deal with Paul. In other words, Lysias "passed the buck" to Felix.
 - i) This is the way a lot of people react to Christianity: the "whatever" attitude. So many people simply want to live out their lives and ignore Jesus. They aren't angry at Jesus, and probably have some respect for Christians. They just passively refuse to worship Jesus, and do their best to get away from Christians like Paul. When confronted with Christianity, they just "pass the buck" on to get out of the situation.
 - ii) The next couple of chapters are all about different people "passing the buck" on Paul. We are going to read of various Roman officials hearing Paul's testimony, not knowing what to do, and pass Paul on to the next level.
 - a) The lesson for us is to watch the tragedy of excuses people give for not believing the Gospel. By watching Paul we also see the persistence of Paul through the most difficult of trials, being obedient to what God has called him to do.

17. Verse 31: So the soldiers, carrying out their orders, took Paul with them during the night and brought him as far as Antipatris.³² The next day they let the cavalry go on with him, while they returned to the barracks.³³ When the cavalry arrived in Caesarea, they delivered the letter to the governor and handed Paul over to him.³⁴ The governor (Felix) read the letter and asked what province he was from. Learning that he was from Cilicia,³⁵ he said, "I will hear your case when your accusers get here." Then he ordered that Paul be kept under guard in Herod's palace.
- a) God told Paul he was going to be his witness in Rome. What God didn't tell Paul was that the Romans would pay all his expenses and do their best to protect him! God also did not reveal that Paul would be in jail for *years* before reaching Rome.
 - b) Paul stayed for a few days at the governor's mansion in Caesarea, which is a beach-town. As opposed to a jail, Paul probably had a nice room in a governor's mansion.
18. I have to admit, these last set of verses don't give you a lot of great insight on a verse-by-verse basis, so I covered them in paragraphs. I believe that was Luke's intent as the writer. The chapter centers around God's command for Paul to be his witness in Rome. I'm sure the author Luke, was as shocked as anybody as to how God carried out that plan, despite threats on Paul's life.
- a) The chapter is a reminder of how God works, which is unexpectedly. Sometimes I think God delights in doing things in ways we would never expect, just so that we could smile and praise God for his work.
19. Let's Pray: Father, we thank you for the lessons you show us about trusting in you. Sometimes, in times of crisis and pain, we forget that you made us a promise that you would never leave us nor forsake us. Although we don't always know *how* you are going to work it out, we walk by faith that your redemptive plan is far greater than anything we can do by our own effort, so in that fact we walk by faith and put our trust in you. For we ask this in Jesus name, Amen.