

# The Context Bible

## Life Group Lesson 41

October 6, 2014 – October 12, 2014

### Acts 21:27-23:35

Have you ever wished the Bible was easier to read through like an ordinary book – cover to cover? Because the Bible is a collection of 66 books, reading it like an ordinary book is quite difficult. Compounding this difficulty is the fact that the later writers of the New Testament were often quoting or referencing passages in the Old Testament. In fact, much of the New Testament makes better sense only if one also considers the Old Testament passages that place the text into its scriptural context.

You are reading a running commentary to The Context Bible. This arrangement of Scripture seeks to overcome some of these difficulties. Using a core reading of John's gospel, the book of Acts, and the Revelation of John, the Context Bible arranges all the rest of Scripture into a contextual framework that supports the core reading. It is broken out into daily readings so that this program allows one to read the entire Bible in a year, but in a contextual format.

Here is the running commentary for week forty-one, along with the readings for week forty-two appended. Join in. It's never too late to read the Bible in context!

#### *Week Forty-One Readings*

<p><b>10/6 Paul Arrested in the Temple</b> Acts 21:27-21:36</p> <p>Ezek 44 (for v. 28) Pslm 65 Pslm 66 Pslm 28 Prov 17:26</p> <p><b>10/7 Paul Speaks to the People</b> Acts 21:37-22:21</p> <p>Pslm 98 Pslm 108 Pslm 120</p>	<p><b>10/8 Paul and Roman Tribune</b> Acts 22:22-22:29</p> <p>Pslm 40 Pslm 54 Pslm 64</p> <p><b>10/9 Paul Before the Council (Cont'd)</b> Acts 22:30-23:11</p> <p>Ex 22:28 Pslm 92 Pslm 17 Pslm 30 Jer 45 Prov 10:6-10:7, 10:9-10:11</p>	<p><b>10/10 The Plot to Kill Paul</b> Acts 23:12-23:22</p> <p>Prov 1 Pslm 142 Pslm 7 Pslm 140 Pslm 1</p> <p><b>10/11 Paul Sent to Felix the Governor</b> Acts 23:23-23:35</p> <p>Heb 13:3 Luk 12:1-12:12 Esther 1-3</p> <p><b>10/12 Off</b></p>
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## BACKGROUND

Each year I seem to be older than the year before. Over the time I have spent on this planet, I have found that often moments are charged with intense feelings and emotional energy. The events and circumstances of life get translated into emotions in my brain. My disposition is such that the reactions are generally positive, but certainly not always! Sometimes I internalize life's experiences with joy, but there are certainly times of sorrow too. Sometimes I react with confidence and satisfaction, but other times it is concern tinged with dread. I know acceptance but also frustration. Sometimes the overarching presence of God is apparent to me, moving me to praise and worship. Other times I seem alone in my circumstances. I search for him, but seem to find only open sky.

This is one reason I love the psalms. I can always find a psalm that comes from a place like mine, whatever mine happens to be at any certain time.

In this week's readings, we have a focus largely upon psalms as expressions of the experiences of Paul in the continued accountings of his journeys in Acts. A goal for the readings is to see how psalms can operate in this way, as well as to find messages for the reader in the psalms.

*Paul Arrested in the Temple (Acts 21:27-21:36; Ezekiel 44 (for v. 28); Psalm 65, 66, 28; Proverb 17:26)*

Before looking at the psalms accompanying this reading, we explore the Acts story that forms the background for the supplemental readings.

Our last narrative had Paul, Luke and others in Caesarea on their way to Jerusalem with the Gentile contributions for the church there. After staying for a week with Philip the evangelist, the team went up to Jerusalem, some 60 miles inland.

The reception in Jerusalem was warm. We do not know the time of arrival, but Paul and his team waited until the next day to meet with James and the elders. Before going further, we should pause and consider the scene for a moment. First, the James that Paul met was the brother of Jesus (Matt 13:55), the author of the Epistle of James and the head of the Jerusalem church (Acts 15:13; Gal 1:9). This is a different James than the apostle James, brother of John and son of Zebedee (Matt 4:21) who was killed by Herod a decade earlier (Acts 12:1-12:2). Contemporaries also called this brother of Jesus with whom Paul met in Acts 21 "James the Just." He was subsequently martyred for his faith.

Along with James were the elders of the Jerusalem church. These elders and James were mentioned earlier in Acts 15 when the church wrote the letter to the Gentile converts about issues of fellowship and purity. The difference between the Acts 15 letter and Paul's visit is slight, but noteworthy. In Acts 15, we read,

The apostles and elders were gathered together (Acts 15:6).

While here in Acts 21 Luke writes,

James, and all the elders were present (Acts 21:18).

Where were the apostles? Are we to believe Paul came in town and the apostles failed to show up for the fellowship and planning session? Of course not! As Bruce notes,

From the absence of all mention of the Twelve, it is safe to infer that none of them was in Jerusalem at this time.<sup>1</sup>

To locate the Twelve, we get help from other writings of church history. About 100-150 A.D., a work called the *Preaching of Peter* was written. While we do not have that work still today, we have a selection of it quoted by Clement of Alexandria<sup>2</sup> where he states:

Peter says that the Lord said to the apostles: “If anyone of Israel, then, wishes to repent, and by name to believe in God, his sins shall be forgiven him. And after twelve years, go forth into the world, that no one may say, ‘We have not heard.’”<sup>3</sup>

Whether this accurately conveys something Jesus told Peter, we do not know. But even if the statement is apocryphal, it is important as an indication that the twelve left Jerusalem to go to the mission field. This is consistent with Jesus’ instructions to

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you (Matt 28:18-28:19).

That the apostles should follow the Lord’s instruction is expected. History notes they did so after a twelve-year time establishing the church in Jerusalem and the surrounding area.

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<sup>1</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles: The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary* (Eerdmans 1951) at 391.

<sup>2</sup> We do not know Clement’s birth. He died around 205 A.D. For more on Clement see the Church History Literacy lesson 15 found at: <http://lessons.biblical-literacy.org/lessons/church-history-literacy/alexandria-and-early-biblical-understanding/>.

<sup>3</sup> Clement, *The Stromata*, Bk 6, Ch 5.

This tradition continued strong in church history as told us by Eusebius (c260 – c340).<sup>4</sup> Eusebius references an earlier Christian writer Apollonius of Ephesus (who wrote between 180 and 210) when writing:

He speaks, moreover, of a tradition that the Savior commanded his apostles not to depart from Jerusalem for twelve years.<sup>5</sup>

Again, this is not a certainty, for it is not told us in scripture. Scripture does tell us that Jesus told his apostles,

Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4-1:5).

The Eusebius statement may be nothing more than an apocryphal explanation behind an event. But the point is that the twelve evidently left Jerusalem after twelve years to evangelize in the world. This timing is consistent with Paul's return here in Acts 21 and the absence of the apostles (We are over twenty years since Jesus' ascension into heaven).

Paul met with the elders and James and gave a full report on all that had happened in the mission field among the Gentiles. We can easily see Luke taking notes as he heard more details about what happened to Paul during those times when Luke was not there. Paul recounted God's hand among the Ephesians, the sons of Sceva trying to cast out demons in the name of Jesus, the stories of Priscilla and Aquila, the efforts of Apollos, the letter exchange with the Corinthians as Paul worked to bring holiness to their congregation, and more.

When James and the elders heard these stories, they glorified God, understanding that his hand was at work among the Gentiles. The focus of the meeting then turned to the thousands of "believing" or "Messianic" Jews in Jerusalem.<sup>6</sup> These Jews were being told that Paul was teaching Jews outside Judea to forsake the Law of Moses, not to circumcise their sons, and not to follow the Jewish customs. Clearly that was not Paul's work out in the mission field. In fact, Paul was perfectly content for Jews who believed in Jesus to continue otherwise as they were, so long as they remembered that Jesus had

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<sup>4</sup> See Church History Literacy lesson 20 at <http://www.biblical-literacy.com/lessons/CHL/Handouts/CHL20-Eusebius.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> Eusebius, History of the Church, Bk 5, Ch 18.

<sup>6</sup> The actual Greek is "myriads," denoting tens of thousands. With the Jewish population between 20,000 and 60,000 in Jerusalem at the time, this reflects the large numbers who had come in for the holidays. Regardless, we are remiss if we fail to note that a huge number of Jews were believers in Jesus.

made the only sin-offering that ultimately redeemed the sin of man, and that salvation was by God's grace through trusting in Jesus, not because of being a Jew or by keeping God's laws well enough personally (Rom 14:5-14:7; Gal 1:6-1:9; 6:14-6:16). So the problem was not what Paul taught, but how to get the word out to the believing Jews in Jerusalem. The elders and James decided that Paul should join forces with four men who had taken a Nazarite vow in a way that showed Paul took his Jewish heritage seriously.

The Nazarite vow was based on the instructions in Numbers 6:2ff. There, God instructed Moses that those who took a Nazarite vow were to abstain from wine, strong drink, or even grape juice, grapes, or raisins. The hair was to remain uncut; and the person with the vow is to avoid contact with any dead person. Jewish tradition imposed these vows for a period of 30 days, unless the person taking the vow specified a different time period.<sup>7</sup> Once the time of the vow was over, the person was to shave his head and purify himself before the Jewish Temple authorities.

Paul was told to join efforts with these men in the rite including paying their expenses associated with it. Paul would thus show the community his own willingness to honor the historic laws of Moses. At this point, Paul (without the Gentile Luke, for the "we" verses have changed to "he" and "they") proceeded as planned. The result, however, was not quite as planned!

Paul may have thought through Psalm 65 as he went. The psalm calls forth praise to "God, in Zion" to whom "shall vows be performed" (Pslm 65:1). It proclaims God as one who "hears prayer" and "atones for our transgressions" (Pslm 65:2-65:3). The psalm delivers "blessings" and "satisfaction" for those who come into the temple courts" (Pslm 65:4). Psalm 66 follows Psalm 65 with more shouts of joy to God, singing glory to his name. This psalm also promises times of worship and sacrifice as fulfillment of vows made to God (Pslm 66:13-66:15). Along with those sacrifices comes a desire to proclaim the marvelous deeds of God (Pslm 66:16-66:20).

Yet if Paul was thinking about those joys as he went in to worship and fulfill his vows, the blessings did not turn out as many would have expected.

While Paul was in the Temple, some Jews from Asia (Ephesus and the surrounding areas) recognized Paul and stirred up the Jews against him. They falsely began telling as many as they could that Paul had gone all over teaching against the Temple and the Law of Moses. They also (falsely) stated that Paul had defiled the Temple by bringing Gentiles into the holy areas where they were not allowed.

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<sup>7</sup> "A Nazarite vow for an unspecified period of time is [to apply] for thirty days." Jacob Neusner, *The Mishnah: a New Translation* (Yale University Press 1988) at 440 (*Nazir* 6:3).

The Temple had an outer court that allowed Gentiles, but Gentiles were not allowed into the inner court. The Old Testament prophet Ezekiel wrote clearly that letting pagan foreigners into the temple courts was a profound sin (Ezek 44:9). The first century Jewish historian Josephus (born 37 A.D., died after 100) recorded that there was a notice at the foot of the stairs into the inner court expressing in Greek that no one but Jews could go further. Josephus further recorded that even Romans could be sentenced to death for violating this law.<sup>8</sup>

We can find a Greek-inscribed warning uncovered by archaeologist C. S. Clermont-Ganneau in the Istanbul Archaeology Museum, a photo of which is below. The Greek reads:

μηθένα ἄλλογενῆ εἰσπορεύεσθαι ἐντὸς τοῦ περὶ τὸ ἱερόν τρυφάκτου  
καὶ περιβόλου ὃς δ' ἄνληφθῆ ἑαυτῷ αἴτιος ἔσται διὰ τὸ ἐξακολουθεῖν  
θάνατον.

K. C. Hanson and Douglas E. Oakman translate the warning as follows:

No outsider shall enter the protective enclosure around the sanctuary. And whoever is caught will only have himself to blame for the ensuing death.<sup>9</sup>



<sup>8</sup> Josephus, *The Jewish War* Bk 6 Ch2:4 quotes the Roman Titus saying, “Have not you, vile wretches that you are, by our permission, put up this partition-wall before your sanctuary? Have not you been allowed...to engrave in Greek...this prohibition, that no foreigner should go beyond that wall?” Josephus continues, “Have we not given you leave to kill such as go beyond it, though he were a Roman?” Trans. William Whitson.

<sup>9</sup> Hanson, K. C., and Douglas E. Oakman. *Palestine in the Time of Jesus: Social Structures and Social Conflicts*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998.

The accusations against Paul quickly burned through the Jews in the city and a mob scene ensued. Paul was grabbed and pulled from the Temple. The Temple gates were shut and the people prepared to kill Paul.

This would have been a good time for Paul to move from Psalm 65 and 66 to Psalm 28! That psalm is a cry out to God for help by one who is in the temple (Pslm 28:1-28:2). It is a confident cry that God would hear the voice of the one in need, coming to save and rescue (Pslm 28:6-28:9). That is the turn in Paul's day, reminding many of us of such sudden turns we often experience. A moment can shift our need from one of praising God in his service, to one of desperate need of his help!

Word of the riot reached the Roman tribune and he grabbed several hundred soldiers with their centurion leaders and intervened. The tribune had Paul seized and chained. The tribune tried to find out what Paul had done, but the crowd's roaring was such that he could never understand a clear answer. The tribune was sending Paul to the barracks and away from the crowd for further questioning.

*Paul Speaks to the People (Acts 21:37-22:21; Psalm 98, 108, 120)*

Once away from the crowd, Paul was able to speak to the tribune, doing so in Greek.

The tribune was shocked to hear Paul speak in Greek. He thought Paul was Egyptian. The tribune asked Paul,

Do you know Greek? Are you not the Egyptian, then, who recently stirred up a revolt and led the four thousand men of the Assassins out into the wilderness (Acts 21:37-21:38)?

Josephus wrote of this Egyptian as a man who came to Jerusalem claiming to be a prophet who led thousands to the Mount of Olives as part of a plan to capture the city of Jerusalem. While the Roman authorities killed many of the rebels, the Egyptian instigator apparently escaped.<sup>10</sup> Josephus dates this around 54 A.D. which means it was near the time Paul was in Jerusalem.

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<sup>10</sup> Josephus, The Jewish War, Bk 2 Ch 13:5,

But there was an Egyptian false prophet that did the Jews more mischief than the former; for he was a cheat, and pretended to be a prophet also, and got together 30,000 men that were deluded by him; these he led around from the wilderness to the mount which was called the Mount of Olives, and was ready to break into Jerusalem by force from that place...The Egyptian ran away, with a few others, while the greatest part of those that were with him were either destroyed or taken alive." Of interest, the tribune references the story as if the Egyptian led 4,000 men. Josephus has the count at 30,000. Most scholars agree the number must have been 4,000. The error by Josephus makes sense when we realize the Greek for 4,000 (,Δ) is very similar to the Greek for 30,000 (,Λ).

Paul explained that he was not the wanted man. Paul was from Tarsus, the opposite direction of Egypt and was even a citizen of Tarsus. While speaking with the tribune, Paul requested permission to address the still assembled Jewish mob. The tribune consented.

Paul hushed the crowd by extending his hand ready to speak. When Paul spoke, he did so in Aramaic, a local tongue of the Hebrew people.<sup>11</sup> Paul gave the assembled people an account of his life, his conversion, and his ministry since that fateful day. The account is one of three that Luke gives us in Acts. Each of the three is consistent in its history, but we see Paul changing the emphasis in each to fit his audience. For example, here Paul emphasizes not the Greek origins in his life, but the Hebrew aspects. It is as if Paul's life were a two-sided coin. At times, he emphasized the description of the head's side; other times he emphasized the tail's side.

Paul begins his speech with the statement,

Brothers and fathers, hear the defense that I now make before you" (Acts 22:1).

It is no coincidence that Paul began his speech with the exact same address and words that Stephen did in Acts 7:2. Here in Jerusalem, where Stephen had testified to the saving grace of Jesus before Paul and others several decades earlier stands Paul. Now, Paul was no longer a young man holding the coat of the accusers while they stone Stephen. Paul was the accused, holding the same testimony of the martyr Stephen. This must have echoed somewhere in Paul's mind because Paul put into his speech the truth of his persecuting the church to the point of death as well as holding the garments of Stephen's killers.

This was Paul practicing the opportunities urged in Psalm 98. Paul was proclaiming the marvelous things of the Lord. Paul spoke of how the "Lord has made known his salvation," of how "he has revealed his righteousness in the sight of the nations" (Pslm 98:2). Paul knew firsthand that not only had the Lord, "remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness to the house of Israel," but also how "all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God" (Pslm 98:3).

Paul's "defense" is not even fairly called a defense. For Paul's purpose here was not to win his liberty; Paul's purpose was to win people to Christ. Paul might have thought himself the perfect preacher to the Jews. Paul was a Hebrew of Hebrews who had studied under Gamaliel, the most recognized rabbi in Jerusalem. Paul certainly gave it his all as he attempted to proclaim the truth of the gospel.

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<sup>11</sup> Scholars now recognize that many in Jerusalem likely spoke Hebrew as well at this time.



Once Paul mentioned that God had designed to send him to the Gentiles, the mere mention of Gentiles got the Jewish crowd riled up again. They began shouting again emphasizing their point by throwing dust. Paul had no reason to fear, however, for he knew the promises of Psalm 108. Paul's heart could be like that of the psalmist, "steadfast" and "thankful," confident that God was the one God over all peoples and that he would bring "deliverance" and salvation (Psalm 108:5-108:6).

As for the rioting crowd, I can't help but wonder if Paul's mind went to psalms like Psalm 120. Here the psalmist prays,

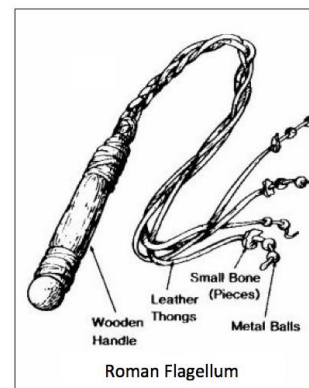
In my distress I called to the LORD, and he answered me. Deliver me, O LORD, from lying lips, from a deceitful tongue.

The psalm laments that while the psalmist is for "peace," not so the others!

I am for peace, but when I speak, they are for war! (Psalm 120:7).

*Paul and Roman Tribune (Acts 22:22-22:29; Psalm 40; 54; 64)*

Returning to the Acts narrative, as the crowd began another riot, the tribune again intervened and ordered Paul flogged to determine what the story was. (No doubt the tribune could not understand Paul's speech that was in Aramaic.) Right before the flogging began, as Paul was stretched out, Paul asked a centurion nearby whether they could flog a Roman citizen. The centurion stopped the proceeding immediately and went straight to the tribune. When the tribune was told Paul was a Roman citizen, the tribune came to Paul and questioned him on the issue.



We should note here, that this flogging was different than the lashes Paul had received in synagogues earlier. A Roman flogging was a torture technique. It was done with a *flagellum*, a leather whip that had bones and metal built into it. The process killed many and left others maimed.<sup>12</sup>

It was illegal for the tribune to have Paul flogged and so he stopped the torture before it started. The tribune then entered into a discussion with Paul over citizenship. The tribune was also a citizen, and had paid a large sum for that title. A number of scholars believe that the tribune was not merely inviting Paul into some "pass-the-time dialogue" about citizenship, but rather was sarcastically suggesting that times must

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<sup>12</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The New International Commentary of the New Testament: Acts* (Eerdmans 1988) at 420.

have changed if someone like Paul was able to buy citizenship. No doubt Paul looked pathetic, having been manhandled and abused for the last few hours. Paul responded to the tribune that rather than buy his citizenship, Paul was born into it. That was impressive to anyone in the day. The tribune was left in fear over what had already happened to Paul while in custody.

There are a number of psalms that speak of God providing rescue from bad earthly situations and persecution. It doesn't always come immediately, and some ultimately are martyred for their faith. However, when the deliverance does come, however late it may seem, the appropriate response of faith is to see the deliverance from the hand of God.

Psalm 40 is one where the psalmist "waited patiently for the LORD" and ultimately received rescue as the Lord pulled him "from the pit of destruction" (Pslm 40:1). The psalmist was in dire straits, but the Lord raised him and placed a song of praise in his mouth. God blesses those who trust in him, more so than those who give him rote obedience, without real regard to what God has said (Pslm 40:6-40:7). Paul could join the psalmist in faith that even though deliverance was not foreseeable, it was in God's hands.

I am poor and needy, but the Lord takes thought for me. You are my help and my deliverer; do not delay, O my God! (Pslm 40:17).

*Paul Before the Council (Acts 22:30-23:11; Exodus 22:28; Psalm 92, 17, 30; Jeremiah 45; Proverbs 10:6-10:7, 10:9-10:11)*

In the Acts narrative, Luke resumes accounting the following day, when the tribune took another tack to figuring out Paul and his story. The tribune called a gathering of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council, and took Paul to the assembly. This would allow the judgment of Paul in a way that did not violate Paul's rights as a Roman citizen. Luke painted the picture of Paul before the Sanhedrin, the chief priest, and the council. Paul looked at them intently, and began to explain his position. Again, though, Paul was not trying to establish innocence. Paul was working to proclaim Jesus.

Paul began by setting forth his own clear conscience for the way he had lived. At this, the High Priest Ananias ordered those near Paul to slap him across the face. Such an order, even from the High Priest, violated Jewish law, which prohibited punishment until one was proven guilty. Paul called out the High Priest (not knowing that he was in

fact High Priest) exclaiming, “God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall (Acts 23:3)!”<sup>13</sup>

Paul was reprimanded for speaking ill of the High Priest and he apologized, explaining that he was unaware of who had spoken. (Ex 22:28 forbids speaking ill of a ruler.) Paul then shifted his appeal to the group. Paul realized that both Pharisees and Sadducees made up the Sanhedrin. Paul appealed to his own beliefs as a Pharisee, adding that he was at least a second-generation Pharisee. Paul pointed out that at the crux of his faith was the resurrection of the dead (Jesus being the first of many). The issue of resurrection was a core difference between Sadducees and Pharisees and it was as if Paul lit a tinderbox.

The Pharisees came to Paul’s defense believing the Sadducees had no right to assume it impossible that a spirit or angel might speak to Paul. The ensuing ruckus frustrated any hope the tribune had of getting resolution. So he pulled Paul away again by force, and put Paul into the Roman barracks.

That night, as Paul was in Roman custody, one wonders what Paul’s prayers would have sounded like. I believe they would have been in accordance with Psalm 17. In this psalm, the writer calls on God to “Hear a just cause” and “attend to my cry” (Pslm 17:1). Paul could have related to the psalmist’s affirmation,

My steps have held fast to your paths; my feet have not slipped (Pslm 17:5).

This would have left Paul seeking a manifestation of God’s love and protection.

Wondrously show your steadfast love, O Savior of those who seek refuge from their adversaries at your right hand (Pslm 17:7).

As Paul was ready to give way to sleep, the last words of the psalm would have been particularly comforting,

As for me, I shall behold your face in righteousness; when I awake, I shall be satisfied with your likeness (Pslm 17:15).

The psalms are replete with promises like, “weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning” (Pslm 30:5). It is the assurance of God’s people that the story will never end with evil on top. God will reign eternally with those in Christ.

Luke tells us that God came to Paul in a special way that night. Luke recorded,

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<sup>13</sup> Paul was prophetic in this. Jews assassinated Ananias in the revolt of 66 because of pro-Roman policies. He was caught hiding under an aqueduct! (See Josephus, *The Jewish War*, Bk 2, Ch 18:9).

The Lord stood by him and said, ‘Take courage, for as you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem, so you must testify also in Rome.’ (Acts 23:11).

The Lord ministered to Paul saying, “Take courage.” This was not a moment unique to Paul. We read of others who have had the reassurance of God in the midst of distress. God gave the comfort to Baruch in Jeremiah 45. He gives it over and over in the psalms. As God told Paul that night there was work to do! Paul was to get ready to go to Rome to testify of the gospel. That didn’t happen for over a year, but with the presence of God, Paul was ready for the next day!

This was a drink of cool water to a parched man on a hot day. It was news that must have brought Paul not only reassurance, but also great joy. Paul could have sung psalm 92, on a day when Paul got to declare God’s great works by day, and then hear and experience God’s faithfulness by night.

It is good to give thanks to the LORD, to sing praises to your name, O Most High; to declare your steadfast love in the morning, and your faithfulness by night (Pslm 92:1-92:2).

This is a psalm of affirmation and faith in God’s goodness and his ultimate triumph over evil and wickedness. Paul knew the enemies of God might succeed for a time, but not in the end. Ultimately, righteousness will flourish (Pslm 92:7-92:8, 92:12-92:13).

*The Plot to Kill Paul (Acts 23:12-23:22; Proverbs 1; Psalm 142, 7, 140, 1)*

While Paul was sleeping in the Roman barracks, his Jewish enemies were not standing still. A group of at least 40 took a mutual oath to avoid all food and drink until they had succeeded in killing Paul.<sup>14</sup> These men had a plan. They went to the Chief Priests and elders and informed them of the vow, urging the rulers to alert the tribune to bring Paul back for another conference. The plan was to ambush Paul on the way.

We should interrupt the narrative here to point out the contrast between someone who commits horrible evil in the guise of piety or holiness and someone who seeks true holiness. We live in a day where regular media reports detail some atrocity of violence

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<sup>14</sup> The oath was not quite as severe as it might sound. The rules at the time (recorded later in the Mishnah) stated that, “Four [types of] vows did sages declare not binding: (1) vows of incitement, (2) vows of exaggeration, (3) vows made in error, and (4) vows [broken] under constraint.” J. Neusner, *The Mishnah, A New Translation* (Yale University Press 1988) *Nedarim* 3:1. Under the fourth category, if someone took a vow but circumstances precluded him from fulfilling the vow, then he would be released from the terms. In other words, if these guys, through no fault of their own, were unable to see Paul dead, then they could resume eating and drinking.

that is perpetrated in the name of devotion or religion. Preaching on this passage John Chrysostom<sup>15</sup> (c. 347-407) added, “For such are the devil’s (ways): under the pretext of piety he sets his traps.”<sup>16</sup>

While Luke does not give details, Paul’s nephew somehow finds out about the plot. The nephew goes to the barracks where Paul is being held and tells Paul about it. Paul calls over one of the centurions, and without divulging details, tells the centurion to take his nephew to visit with the tribune. The tribune took the nephew aside and privately found out what he had to say. Paul’s nephew repeated the story and the tribune told him to leave and speak of it no more to anyone.

This story sets up the supplemental readings, beginning with Proverbs chapter 1. The proverbs often compare the lifestyle and choices of the wise versus the foolish people, and that begins in Proverbs 1. Wisdom begins with fearing God, not man. It is something that fools never get (Prov 1:7). Those planning to ambush Paul would have done well to read Proverbs 1 and realize that the way of fools leads to no good end as they did the very things planned against Paul that night.

My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent. If they say, “Come with us, let us lie in wait for blood; let us ambush the innocent without reason” (Prov 1:10-1:11).

Paul, on the other hand, could draw his assurance from the end of the chapter where we read,

Whoever listens to me will dwell secure and will be at ease, without dread of disaster (Prov 1:33).

That is not to say that Paul was on top of the world after this. Paul had a very tough road in front of him, but it was a road secured by the omnipotent hand of Almighty God. Paul was on mission, and nothing would stop God’s work in and through him until that work was done.

I have no doubt Paul and other believers bathed the journey in prayer. As Paul was sent away, he could have been reciting in his mind the words of Psalm 142:3, “In the path where I walk they have hidden a trap for me” with the assurance of Psalm 142:7, “Bring me out of prison, that I may give thanks to your name! The righteous will surround me, for you will deal bountifully with me.”

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<sup>15</sup> See Church History Literacy lesson 30, at [http://www.biblical-literacy.com/lessons/CHL/Handouts/CHL30-St\\_John\\_Chrysostom.pdf](http://www.biblical-literacy.com/lessons/CHL/Handouts/CHL30-St_John_Chrysostom.pdf).

<sup>16</sup> *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* (Eerdmans 1989 printing) Vol. 11 at 293. John Chrysostom Sermon 49 on Acts.

God is not without real power in the grand scheme of the world as well as the individual powers of man. In the words of Psalm 7, God is not only a refuge for his people, but he is an answer for their enemies. God has appointed a judgment, and it can be in this world *and* the world to come (Pslm 7:6-7:9). What all people need to do is repent, and seek to be right before God! (Pslm 7:12-7:17).

This leaves the challenged believer with many psalms to pray in times like these. Paul had psalms of deliverance (Pslm 140), and psalms of assurance (Pslm 1). The key for Paul, as it is for us today, was to walk faithfully before God, seeking God's will and deliverance, and trusting in God each step. Then whatever may come, Paul could handle it by God's grace, knowing Paul was being used by God for the greatest purpose of all – God's kingdom and the eternal salvation of people.

*Paul Sent to Felix the Governor (Acts 23:23-23:35; Heb 13:3; Luke 12:1-12:12; Esther 1-3)*

In the Acts narrative, the tribune called in two centurions and told them to gather a force of nearly 500 men and leave by 9 or so that night. They were to take Paul to Caesarea, although the full force was needed only to secure Paul away from ambush range. Paul was to be given a mount to ride so they could move quickly.

The tribune also sent a letter to the governor in Caesarea explaining things. In this letter, we learn the name of the tribune, Lysias. The letter describes Lysias's version of events he wished to convey about Paul. The letter is interesting because it clearly alters the details of what happened in ways that make Lysias look ultra-competent before his superior. For example, the implication is that Paul was moments from death when Lysias rescued him from the Jews. Lysias also wrongly states that the reason he saved Paul was that Paul was a Roman citizen. Additionally, Lysias fails to mention that he had bound Paul (illegally) and almost had him tortured (also illegal).

The soldiers gathered and took Paul on the march that night making it to a military outpost called Antipatris. This post was a little over half way from Jerusalem to Caesarea.<sup>17</sup> Part of the troops returned to Jerusalem because the danger of an ambush was minimal at that point. The terrain no longer lent itself to an ambush, and Gentiles inhabited the region more so than Jews.

Once Paul made it to Caesarea, the soldiers delivered the letter to the governor, Felix. Felix questioned Paul very little; basically he wanted to verify jurisdiction and asked Paul where he was from. Paul told him "Cilicia" and Governor Felix agreed to give

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<sup>17</sup> Caesarea was about 60 miles from Jerusalem. Antipatris was slightly over 35 miles from Jerusalem. The group still had 25 miles to cover the next day.

Paul a hearing, but the hearing would not take place until Paul’s accusers had a chance to come to court. Until then, Paul would just have to wait in custody.

The contextual readings for this lesson begin the Old Testament book of Esther. Those flow more naturally with the remainder of that book in next week’s lesson, and will be included there.

### QUESTIONS

1. Have you found the psalms to minister in your life? Can you relate specific times to specific psalms?
2. Have you ever decided to make the psalms a daily part of your life? A really good reading plan is based on dividing the 150 psalms into 30 days, reading 5 psalms per day. The psalms actually read more coherently, and it is easier to follow the reading plan if you read the psalm for the particular day, and then add 30 for the second psalm, 30 for the third, 30 for the fourth and 30 for the fifth. So, for example, on the first day of the month, you would read Psalms 1, 31, 61, 91, and 121. On the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the month, you would read Psalms 15, 45, 75, 105, 135, etc.
3. Which psalms in the lesson speak to you in your life right now? How?

### *Week Forty-Two Readings*

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>10/13 Paul Sent to Felix the Governor</b> Acts 23:23-23:35</p> <p>Esther 4-7</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>10/14 Paul Sent to Felix the Governor</b> Acts 23:23-23:35</p> <p>Esther 8-10 Luk 21:5-21:24, 21:29-21:38</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>10/15 Paul Before Felix</b> Acts 24:1-24:21</p> <p>Eccles 8:6-8:13 Pslm 24 Pslm 35 Prov 24:17-24:18 Prov 18:17</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>10/16 Paul Kept in Custody</b> Acts 24:22-25:12</p> <p>Pslm 9 Prov 20:5 Prov 17:24</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Before Agrippa and Bernice</b> Acts 25:13-25:27</p> <p>Titus 3 Eccles 8:1-8:5</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>10/17 Paul’s Defense Before Agrippa</b> Acts 26:1-26:11</p> <p>Isa 61:5-61:11 Luk 4:26 1 Kgs 17:8-17:24 Luk 4:27 2Kgs 5</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Paul Tells of Conversion</b> Acts 26:12-26:32</p> <p>Pslm 32</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>10/18 Paul Sails for Rome</b> Acts 27</p> <p>1 Pet 1:3-1:7 Isa 48:1-48:11 Prov 15:29-15:32</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>10/19 Off</b></p>
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