



1. What was the significance of the conspirators' vow to not eat or drink until they had killed Paul? (12-14, 21) How did this plan work out for them? What does God have to say about making an oath or vow? (See Matthew 5:34-37; 12:36-37; Exodus 20:7).
2. Why do you think the conspirators needed more than 40 men to carry out a plot to kill one man? Why did the conspirators include the leaders of the Sanhedrin in their plan? Why do you think the Jewish spiritual leadership was willing to join the plot?
3. The Bible does not tell us anything about Paul's nephew except what we see in verses 16-22. From these few verses, what can we learn or deduce about this young man – his character, his relationship with Uncle Paul, and his interactions with the commander? How do you suppose he found out about the plot?
4. How did the commander respond to Paul's nephew? (19-22). Why did the commander tell the young man to "Tell no one..." about these things? What does this interaction indicate about the character and intentions of the commander?
5. The commander organized 470 total soldiers to escort Paul to Caesarea (23). Why did he need so many to protect one prisoner? What does this tell us about God's providence (God's protective care through the circumstances of life)? Think back and describe a time when God used the circumstances of your life to accomplish His will for you.
6. What parts of the commander's letter to Felix were true? What part gave a false impression about the commander to Felix? Why do you think the commander wrote the letter like this?
7. Why didn't God use a miracle to protect Paul like He did in Philippi with the earthquake? (See Acts 16:25-30). Why is it important to know that God is at work even when we cannot see or "sense" it?
8. Why might it have mattered to Felix what province Paul was from? How might Felix have acted differently if Paul had said he was from a different region than Cilicia?
9. After his arrest, Paul moved forward with a direct promise from the Lord that he would represent Him in Rome (23:11). What are some promises that we as believers have from God to see us through difficult times? (For examples, see Isaiah 12:2; Psalm 53:6; Hebrews 13:5-6; Romans 8:28; 8:32; 8:37-39).
10. Apply it: Share how one of the example verses in the previous question has helped you in your life.



## The Assassins' Plot Leader Notes for Acts 23:12-35

On the previous day, Paul had attempted to introduce some Jews to Jesus, resulting in a riot and his arrest. While imprisoned, Paul may have been thinking about the three riots and numerous rejections that had brought him to that cell, which could have been very discouraging. But then Paul received a specific promise directly from Jesus Himself, that Paul would represent Him in Rome. This encouragement gave Paul great confidence to face what was about to happen next.

The passage states that over 40 Jews took a vow to kill Paul, possibly a mix of active assassins and other religiously zealous men. Remember, at this point Jerusalem and Israel in general were in a time of social and political upheaval, and there was a deeply-felt resistance towards the Roman occupation. Zealots were preaching revolution and seeking to resist the empire, even by wounding or killing Roman soldiers, leaders or sympathizers. Religious fervor was high. People rallied around their religion and stood against any who would teach anything contrary to what their leadership said. In this environment, there was no scarcity of religious zealots willing to conduct such an operation.

These men hated Paul because he preached that Jesus was the Messiah. Jesus had not met the Jews' expectation of who their Messiah would be – one who would remove the Roman yoke and establish the glory of Israel. Paul also preached the resurrection, and the leading party in the Sanhedrin, the Sadducees, were anti-resurrectionists. Forty men would be hard to arrest, and it would be even harder to pin the blame on someone. Cooperation with the Council would provide a false sense of official sanction.

The plot was formed, and these men vowed not to eat or drink until Paul was dead. They undoubtedly invoked God's name in making this vow, since they believed their purpose was to defend God Himself. This went against God's command to not use His name in vain (Exodus 20:7) and Jesus' teaching to not swear by anything, but to let your "yes be yes," and your "no be no." The vow firmly committed each man to their goal in the eyes of God, according to their understanding.

They then included the chief priests and the elders in the scheme by having them agree to have Paul pulled out from his cell and brought down to the Council meeting area on the pretense that they had more questions to ask. This would bring Paul out of the physical protection of the cell and the guards, so that somewhere along the route, the assassins could attack and kill Paul.

God intervenes in the affairs of man in one of two ways: (1) through miracles, the supernatural – actions that are beyond the understanding of natural or scientific laws; or (2) through providence – the protective care of God using natural events and circumstances to cause His will to be done. In our passage, even though no mention was made of God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, doctrine or miracles, God used Paul's nephew (who apparently was in Jerusalem with his mother, Paul's sister) to affect the course of events. The nephew somehow heard about the plot and had the presence of mind to go to the prison with all its guards to tell Uncle Paul about it. Following Paul's instructions, a centurion then brought the nephew to the chief tribune, Claudius Lysias (26), who gently worked with the lad to get the story of the plot. The nephew was sworn to secrecy and Claudius began planning to thwart the assassins.

God's providence was again seen in the large cohort assembled to bring Paul to Governor Felix down in Caesarea. Claudius also sent along a letter explaining the situation to the governor that made Claudius out as a man of action who saved Paul from a mob trying to kill him over his understanding of some religious beliefs (which was true). But he conveniently left out the part where he nearly beat a Roman citizen. Claudius may have been trying to position himself for a promotion to a governorship, the natural next career move for a man in his position.

Paul was taken 30 miles from Jerusalem to Antipatris in the plains by night. With the immediate threat removed, the company continued the next day for 28 more miles to Caesarea with a reduced escort. Felix read the letter and was interested in the fact that Paul was from the wealthy and influential, but distant, region of Cilicia. Perhaps Felix had friends there that he wanted to influence. Or maybe he hoped to pass Paul off to another governor, if he had been from a nearby region. But Felix agreed to give Paul a hearing.

