

Fact Sheet for “The Strength of Our Discipleship” Acts 23:12-24

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All of us have been called to be disciples of Christ (Matthew 28:18-20). Today we be considering the strength, the firmness, the maturity of our own discipleship.

Paul had just split the Sanhedrin. The tribune was at a loss as to what now to do. Then God spoke to Paul (Acts 23:11).

ESV 12 ¶ When it was day, the Jews made a plot and bound themselves by an oath neither to eat nor drink till they had killed Paul.

The word translated “oath” comes from the word “curse” (*ἀνάθεμα* a-na'-the-ma), which is found in several well-known passages (Rom. 9:3; 1 Cor. 12:3; Gal 1:8) and is even in a passage about Peter (Mark 14:1).

13 There were more than forty who made this conspiracy. 14 They went to the chief priests and elders and said, "We have strictly bound ourselves by an oath to taste no food till we have killed Paul.

God had just told Paul that he would go to Rome. It would seem that these 40+ men had either brought God's curse on themselves or were going to die of thirst (or starve) to death! But there was an out in rabbinical thought. The Mishnah states, “Four kinds of vows the Sages have declared not to be binding: vows of incitement, vows of exaggeration, vows made in error, and vows [that cannot be fulfilled by reason] of constraint.”¹ These exclusions allowed for almost any contingency.

15 Now therefore you, along with the council, give notice to the tribune to bring him down to you, as though you were going to determine his case more exactly. And we are ready to kill him before he comes near."

Council = Sanhedrin (*συνέδριον* Sun-e'-dri-on)

This was a lie by omission, something in keeping with the character of the high priest, Ananias, who commanded that Paul be struck on the mouth (see Acts 23:2). The complicity of the Sanhedrin in this plot shows *both* their lack of a legitimate case against Paul *and* their base characters. Position had become more important to these men than God, but as always God was the One in control. God would now use a young boy to foil the great Sanhedrin! *Never overlook the fact that God can use children in working out His will.*

16 ¶ Now the son of Paul's sister heard of their ambush, so he went and entered the barracks and told Paul.

As a Roman citizen under protective custody, Paul could receive visitors who could bring him food and other amenities.

17 Paul called one of the centurions and said, "Take this young man to the tribune, for he has something to tell him."

Verses 18-22 are set off by Luke's favorite connecting phrase “so,” “then” (μέν οὖν) both at its beginning and at its end.

Luke's source of this information may have been from the nephew himself.

¹ Mishnah, Nedarim 3:1-3.

¹⁸ **So** he took him and brought him to the tribune and said, "Paul the prisoner called me and asked me to bring this young man to you, as he has something to say to you." ¹⁹ The tribune took him by the hand, and going aside asked him privately, "What is it that you have to tell me?" ²⁰ And he said, "The Jews have agreed to ask you to bring Paul down to the council tomorrow, as though they were going to inquire somewhat more closely about him. ²¹ But do not be persuaded by them, for more than forty of their men are lying in ambush for him, who have bound themselves by an oath neither to eat nor drink till they have killed him. And now they are ready, waiting for your consent." ²² **So** the tribune dismissed the young man, charging him, "Tell no one that you have informed me of these things."

"The seriousness with which the commander took the warning about the plot shows that he knew Ananias was the kind of man to fall in with it and realized that Jewish feeling against Paul was strong enough to nurture such a plot."²

²³ ¶ **Then he called two of the centurions and said, "Get ready two hundred soldiers, with seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen to go as far as Caesarea at the third hour of the night. ²⁴ Also provide mounts for Paul to ride and bring him safely to Felix the governor."**

Jerusalem was the seat of the Jewish government, but Caesarea was the Roman headquarters for the area. There Paul would be guarded in Herod's Praetorium (Acts 23:35). There were 470 soldiers plus the centurions! The third hour of the night was 9P.M. God sometimes works in amazing and amusing ways.

This account reminds me so strongly of a book in the OT... Esther. That book, which never mentions God, shows so clearly God's direction of human events. This account from Paul's life does exactly the same.

Why is this passage important to your daily life? Here's why. For all of us life throws curves... financially, medically, relationally. What we desire... what we set goals to achieve... what we pray for... often does not come about. Unless you know beyond any shadow of doubt that God is working all things for good... that He is in control... that He is always there for you... then you will doubt God... you will doubt the Bible... you will doubt the gospel... you will doubt your salvation... and you will get depressed... or angry... or disillusioned. Your discipleship will be weak (compare James 1:5-6).

Think about Paul's thoughts in these events. You can see his absolute trust in God through each circumstance.

What do you want your discipleship to look like? How strong do you want it to be? Even Peter who had walked with Jesus for a couple of years denied Christ with a curse on himself when Jesus was standing trial. Jesus later would ask him three times, "Do you love me?" Peter would again fear those who wanted the Gentiles to take on Jewish Law. The point is that becoming a mature disciple is a process. You will always be tested.

This passage, along with a multitude of others, shows that God is in absolute control of human events. Trust Him implicitly whenever life throws you a curve. When your mettle is tested how do you want to be found?

² The Expositor's Bible Commentary, vol. 9, p. 534.