

2 Corinthians 11:32

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

In Damascus the governor under Aretas the king kept the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desirous to apprehend me:

Analysis

In Damascus the governor under Aretas the king kept the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desirous to apprehend me. Paul recounts his humiliating Damascus escape (cf. Acts 9:23-25) as the climax of his 'boasting in weakness.' En Damaskō ho ethnarchēs Areta tou basileōs (ἐν Δαμασκῷ ὁ ἔθναρχης Ἀρέτα τοῦ βασιλέως, 'in Damascus the ethnarch under Aretas the king')—historical precision identifying the Nabatean king Aretas IV (9 BC - AD 40).

Ephrourei tēn polin Damaskēnōn (ἐφρούρει τὴν πόλιν Δαμασκηνῶν, 'guarded the city of the Damascenes')—military occupation or control. Piasai me thelōn (πιάσαι με θέλων, 'wishing to seize me')—official manhunt for Paul. The verb ephrourei (ἐφρούρει, 'kept guard') implies systematic surveillance, posting guards at city gates to prevent escape.

Why include this story in a boasting catalog? Because it's the opposite of triumphant apostolic ministry—fleeing for his life, smuggled out like a criminal, undignified escape. Yet it demonstrates God's deliverance through weakness and establishes the pattern of Paul's ministry: not power and victory but vulnerability and God's saving grace. The story also dates Paul's conversion precisely (Aretas IV's reign), grounding his claims in verifiable history.

Historical Context

Aretas IV was king of Nabatea (Petra) from 9 BC to AD 40. How Damascus came under his control is debated—possibly Caligula granted it, or Nabatean ethnarch controlled the Jewish quarter. Acts 9:23-25 says Jews plotted to kill Paul; 2 Corinthians says Aretas's governor sought him. Possibly Jewish leaders enlisted governmental help, or Paul faced dual threats.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. Why would Paul 'boast' of a humiliating escape that makes him look like a fugitive rather than a triumphant apostle?
2. How does the Damascus escape establish the pattern of God working through Paul's weakness that continues throughout his ministry?
3. In what ways does including historically verifiable details (Aretas, Damascus) ground Paul's claims in fact and challenge accusation of fabrication?

Interlinear Text

ἐν	Δαμασκῷ	ό	ἐθνάρχης	Ἀρέτα	τοῦ	βασιλέως
In	Damascus	G3588	the governor	under Aretas	G3588	the king
G1722	G1154		G1481	G702		G935

ἐφρούρει	τὴν	Δαμασκηνῶν	πόλιν	πιάσαι	με	θέλων·
kept	G3588	of the Damascenes	the city	to apprehend	me	desirous
G5432		G1153	G4172	G4084	G3165	G2309