–Save This Page as a PDF–

Paul Escorted to Caesarea
23: 23-35

57 AD

Paul escorted to Caesarea DIG: How does the way the commander provided for Paul contrast with the way Pilate dealt with Jesus? Why do you think this is the case? What has the commander decided to do with the "Paul problem?" How does all this relate to 9:15? How would you feel if you were one of the men in 23:12-13 when you found out the next day that Paul was gone? Why did Governor Felix decide to hear the case involving Paul?

REFLECT: How do Paul's experiences with Roman authority here shed light on his comments in Romans 13:1-7? How does this contrast with Peter's experience with the Jewish authorities in Acts 13:19-20? Sometimes God delivers us *from* peril, and sometimes He delivers us *through* peril. How have you experienced both? What do these two incidents show you about the believer's relationship with civil authority? Where do you need to show your support of government authority? Where should you be challenging it? As Paul awaited trial in Caesarea, how do you think his heart stood? Stressed? No doubt, but he trusted God, because he had received the Lord's words of encouragement and His promise that lonely night in Jerusalem. Have you ever received the Lord's words of encouragement and promise to you? Are they making a difference?

Faced with the difficult and potentially explosive situation, Claudius **Lysias** again proved **himself** to be an able commander. Realizing things were getting out of hand, **he** wisely decided to get **Paul** out of Jerusalem. That would of course, thwart the plot of **the zealots** and keep a prisoner for whom **he** was responsible from being assassinated. **He** solved both of **his** problems by sending **Paul** to **Caesarea** and putting **him** under the protective authority of **Felix**, **the Roman governor.**



Not willing to risk waiting until **the next day**, **Lysias called two of his centurions** and said: **At the third hour of the night (9:00 pm), prepare** 470 **soldiers: two hundred** foot-**soldiers, along with seventy horsemen** from the cohort's cavalry detachment **and two hundred** lightly armed **spearmen, to proceed as far as Caesarea.** The over ten-to-one ratio of **Roman soldiers** to **zealots** would guarantee that **Paul** would reach **Caesarea** safely. In addition, the fact that such a large show of force was necessary was not only to protect a single prisoner, but also to prevent an ambush by **zealots** by night. **Then proceed as far as Caesarea,** which was the official residence of **the Roman governor** in Judea. **The governor** customarily went up to Jerusalem only during the feasts, and since **Felix** was in **his** residence in **Caesarea, Shavu'ot** must have just been celebrated. **Also, provide mounts for Paul to ride (23:23-24).** This probably meant a horse for **Paul** and a pack animal for **his** baggage, or both **mounts** may be simply for **Paul**, the **one** spelling **the other** in a rapid journey. And, in view of **24:23**, that **Paul's traveling companions** were also to be provided for, which would probably include **Luke** in view of the fact that the **we** passages (**to see link click Bx – Paul's Vision of the Man of Macedonia: A closer look at the "us" or "we" passages and sea passages**) that start again in **Caesarea (27:1)**.

So that he might be brought safely to Marcus Antonius **Felix the governor** of Judea who ruled from 52 to 59 AD **(23:24b). He** owned **his** appointment to **his** brother Pallas, who was a favorite at the court, first of the Emperor Claudius, and then of Nero. Both brothers were freed slaves of the imperial family. **Felix** was not only related to Claudius by marriage through the granddaughter of Mark Antony and Cleopatra **(Tac. *Hist.* 5.9.3)**, but was also directly associated with the Herodian royal family through his controversial marriage (shortly before Claudius' death at 54) to Agrippa I's youngest daughter Drusilla when she was only sixteen.[557] **His** administration was marked by the rising tide of **Jewish** nationalism with many insurrections, both political and religious. All were brutally suppressed by **him**. As a

judge **he** was totally arbitrary and lacked any understanding or sympathy for **the Jews**. This only heightened the anti-**Roman** feelings of **the Jews** and accelerated the Rebellion of 66 AD. About **him** the Roman historian Tacitus wrote, “With all cruelty and lust he exercised power of a king with the instincts of a slave” (*Ann.* 12.54; cf. *History* 5.9). **Felix’s** administrative ineptitude was bound to catch up with **him** sooner or later, and **he** was finally removed from office for **his** total mismanagement of the way **he** dealt with the riots between **Jews** and Gentiles of **Caesarea**.[558]

Luke tells us that **the commander** at Fort Antonia **wrote a letter** explaining the charges against **Paul** to be delivered to **Governor Felix**. Such letters were required when transferring a prisoner from one jurisdiction to another. The phrase “that went like this” indicates that this was a verbatim account of **Lysias’** letter. Other similar historical letters from **Roman** officials are recorded in contemporary literature, especially in **Josephus and the books of Maccabees (Josephus Antiquities 14.241ff, 17.134ff; Life of Flavius Josephus 217-218; First Maccabees 11:29ff, 15:1ff, Second Maccabees 9:18ff, 11:16ff; Third Maccabees 3:11ff).**[559]

Claudius Lysias diplomatically addressed **the letter to the Most Excellent Governor Felix: Greetings! Luke** must have had access to the letter itself in order to quote it exactly, which said: **This man was seized by the Judean leaders and was about to be killed by them, when I came on the scene with the soldiers and rescued him, having learned that he is a Roman citizen.** The reader already knows that **Lysias** seized **Paul** in the Temple and put **him** in chains. **Desiring to know the charge of which they were accusing him, I brought him down to their Sanhedrin. I found that he was accused concerning issues of their law, but charged with nothing worthy of death or imprisonment** regarding **Roman** law**.** Which was basically declaring **him** innocent. Then **Lysias** closed by giving **his** reason for burdening **Felix** with the case: **When I was informed that there was a plot against the man, I sent him to you immediately, also ordering his accusers to state before you what they have against him (23:25-30). Lysias** did embellish things to put **himself** in the best possible light; contrary to what **he** wrote, **he** did not discover **Paul’s Roman** citizenship until after **he** rescued **him**. And **he** conveniently failed to mention **his** order to have **Paul** scourged and **his** erroneous assumption that **he** was the famed Egyptian terrorist.[560] **He** knew that these **accusers** have nothing against **Paul** worthy of judgment in a **Roman** court – **he** had already learned that

and said so. But **he** wanted to distance **himself** from a bad situation that **he** had already bungled several times.[561]

After giving the text of the letter, **Luke** describes **Paul's** military transfer. **So the soldiers, in keeping with their orders** left Jerusalem, **took Paul and** traveled 37 miles, **arriving at Antipatris before dawn.** This first leg of the journey was a forced march, but it was mostly downhill. We have clear evidence that **Roman** troops traveled this distance in the same amount of time. It does not pay to underestimate **what Roman** troops were capable of when a crisis situation was involved, especially when the only person not capable of such a strenuous effort due to recent abuse was riding a horse!

Antipatris was built by Herod the Great in honor of his father Antipher. It was located in Samaria, but had a mixed Samaritan and **Jewish** population. In addition to being the approximate mid-way point between Jerusalem and **Caesarea**, it was a **Roman** military station and would have provided a logical resting place for **the** tired **soldiers**. Once **Antipatris** was reached, the two major dangers of the trip – contact with **the plotters** or being ambushed in treacherous terrain – were behind **them**, and thus there was no need for the whole contingent of **soldiers** to go all the way to **Caesarea**. **So, on the next day, the two hundred** foot-**soldiers and the two hundred spearmen returned to headquarters** at Fort Antonia **(23:31-32)**.[562]

When they came to Caesarea and delivered the letter to the governor, they also presented Paul before him. Upon reading the letter out loud, as was the universal practice at that time**, Felix asked Paul what province he was from. When he learned that he was from Cilicia** in Syria**, the governor** said: **I will give you a hearing when your accusers have arrived also. Felix** would not want to send **Paul** to the Syrian **governor**, since the case was too small, and **Paul's accusers** would have to travel too far. Had **he** done so, **he** would likely have only created more troubles for **himself** with both **Roman** and **Jewish** officials with whom **he** was bound to have ongoing dealings. **Then he gave orders for Paul to be guarded in Herod's Praetorium.** This had been the scene (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Ln – The Civil Trial**)**. Paul** was placed in military custody for **his** protection, but not in a prison cell, since not formal charges had been brought against **him (23:33-35)**. The stage was set for the first in **Paul's** series of **Roman** trials.

What we have seen since **Paul's** arrest and protection by the **Roman** legal system

(see **Cp – Paul's Testimony on the Steps of Fort Antonia**), is a diverse response to the gospel. The Sadducees were extremely hostile, while some of the Pharisees were willing to entertain some of the ideas that **Paul** put forth. For the most part, **the Romans** were more interested in just doing their jobs than seriously considering the eternal destiny. Many people just go through the motions in their lives, pursuing their own goals or seeking to survive rather than having a relationship with their **Creator**. Whether this is a result of their own background or is motivated by the self-focus our culture generates, it is a major distraction from the reason we were created by **God**. **The Creator** deserves more than a lip-service in our lives. Hence, as throughout this section of **Acts**, **Paul** is our model to follow. **He** acknowledged **ADONAI** not only by **his** words, but also by the very manner **he** faced adversity. **Paul** used every opportunity to be a living testimony to **his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ**.[563]

God my Lord, the strength of my deliverance, You shield my head in the day of battle (Psalm 140:7) through your intercession and the help of the Ruach of Messiah Yeshua (Philippians 1:19b). *How encouraging to know that my prayers don't just vanish into thin air, but, like* ***the smoke*** *rising from* ***incense,*** *my* ***prayers rise into Your presence (Revelation 8:4).*** *Thank* ***You*** *for hearing me, and acting, as I pray right now.*[564]