

Valley Bible Church
Sermon Notes for March 17, 2019

The Arrival of Paul in Caesarea
Acts 23:23-35

Acts 23 concludes with a description of the deliverance of Paul from Jerusalem to Caesarea as a result of the Roman commander learning about a plot by the Jews to kill Paul. This begins the final section of Acts that concludes with Paul's arrival in Rome and is sometimes referred to as his "fourth missionary journey."

This detailed account includes the text of the personal letter from the commander to Felix, the governor of Judea, which provides us with some insight into Luke's sources for his inspired text, likely a believer in Jesus with access to it.

1. The decision to send Paul to Felix (23:23-24)

The total of 470 troops sent with Paul would be about half of the roughly 1,000 soldiers stationed at the fortress in Jerusalem. Clearly, there was a great concern over the disturbance involving Paul and the plot against him required a large force. Embarking on this difficult sixty-two mile journey to Caesarea at night highlighted the urgency of escaping the threat from the Jews.

Felix was a freed slave who rose to become Roman governor of Judea on the basis of his relationships. Ancient historians viewed him as a tyrant.

How ironic that Paul escaped the plot of the Jews to kill him mounted upon a Roman military horse! The 40 men who plotted against Paul (23:12-13) would have considered their vow to be voided due to this deliverance.

This is the final time we see Jerusalem in the book of Acts. Throughout this last visit we see no responsiveness from the Jews to the gospel at all.

2. The document about Paul for Felix (23:25-30)

The phrase "having this form" (23:25) could be understood as a general summary or as a verbatim replica of the letter. Either way, it was likely a Greek translation of what was written in Latin.

The commander took the name “Claudius” in the custom of honoring the Emperor who granted him Roman citizenship (cf. 22:28). The letter is accurate in its representation of the issue, which was strictly regarding Jewish practices which were of no concern to the Romans.

However, the letter was less accurate regarding his own role in the matter. His description to Felix depicts his role as the rescuer of a fellow Roman citizen from a mob concerned about their Jewish Law. In reality, he only learned of Paul’s citizenship when he was about to have him flogged (22:25-29). Exaggerating our importance serves us, not the Lord.

This letter from the Roman Commander to the Roman Governor of Judea is reminiscent of the words of one who held the same position two dozen years earlier, Pontius Pilate, who spoke about Jesus in Luke 23:14-15.

3. The deliverance of Paul to Felix (23:31-35)

After the thirty-seven mile trek to Antipatris, the remaining twenty-five miles to Caesarea was through Gentile territory that was less dangerous and required less protection.

Cilicia was not under Felix’s jurisdiction but Roman law allowed cases to be tried in the local of the offense. Cilicia would be another 500 miles further for the accusers to travel.

Paul’s confinement in Herod’s Praetorium, Felix’s official residence, was the beginning of imprisonment in Gentile lands for the next five years of his life. The Lord’s plans may take us down unexpected paths but His ways are higher than ours. If God is for us, who is against us (Romans 8:31)?