

GOD'S SOVEREIGN HAND IN ALL EXPERIENCES!
ACTS CH23:23-35



John Stott says “So far Luke has portrayed his hero on the offensive, taking bold initiatives under the leading of the Holy Spirit to evangelize most of Asia and Greece. But when Paul arrived in Jerusalem, his whole career abruptly changed. He was assaulted, arrested, bound and brought to trial. He found himself on the defensive. Following his three epic missionary journeys Luke describes the five trials he had to endure. The first was before a Jewish crowd at the Northwest corner of the Temple area (**22:1**), the second before the Supreme Jewish Council in Jerusalem (**23:1**), the third and fourth in Caesarea before Felix and Festus, who succeeded one another as the procurator of Judea (**24:1; 25:1**), and the fifth, also in Caesarea, before King Herod Agrippa 11 (**26:1**).

These five trials, including in each case Paul's defence speech, together with the circumstances of his arrest (21:18), take up six chapters in our Bibles and nearly 200 verses.” (Cited in John Stott's Commentary on Acts pg 335)

PROTECTION FOR PAUL! V23-25

The Garrison in Jerusalem was a cohort, normally consisting of 760 infantry and 240 cavalry commanded by a “**tribunus militum**” an officer similar to a rank of a Major or Colonel, Claudius Lysias. In these verses the Tribune takes the “threat to kill Paul” so seriously, that he orders two centurions, to arrange for nearly half of his 1000 military force, 470 men to be exact, to take Paul at night to the praetorium at Caesarea, where Governor Felix is the procurator!

Luke wants Theo, and other readers to see how serious the situation for Paul is, through the response of the Tribune. He summons two Centurions, to organise and lead a very large military force, out numbering the serious “threat to kill Paul” by almost 12-1 in favour of the Romans! Only a very large military force, travelling under the protection of darkness, can successfully deliver Paul safely to Caesarea, and in doing so, a step closer to reaching Rome, as God had promised (Acts Ch23:11).

This response reveals not only how serious the Tribune takes the threat, but in responding how he does, he also reveals how important and significant Paul is as a Roman citizen! This is now the 6th time where Luke records for us the actions of **Jewish injustice and the actions of Roman justice, ultimately, so that the Gospel is protected** (Ch13:4-12; Ch18:12-17; Ch21:27-36; Ch27:37-Ch22:24; Ch23:1-11 and here)!

PROVISION FOR PAUL! V26-30

A letter, another tool of provision and protection, is written by Claudius Lysias to Felix who is the Governor at Caesarea. Look at how he addresses the Governor, with the phrase “his excellency” used here in v26. It is also used by Luke in his Gospel – Luke Ch1:3 as he addresses Theophilus, and again in both Acts Ch24:3 “most excellent Felix and in Ch26:25 “most excellent Festus”. This suggests that the title is used when addressing persons who occupied a high position within the Roman Government! We can then, reasonably, attach this understanding to Theophilus, it is highly probable at the time of writing the Gospel of Luke, Theophilus is not yet saved, however, in addressing him in Acts, its just “Theophilus”.suggesting that he is now born again!

What does the Tribune report?

1. V27 - I rescued him
2. V28 - I brought him to the Council
3. V29 - I found that he was being accused
4. V30 - I sent him safely to you

But what did he leave out:

1. Ch21:33 – he had him bound in chains!
2. Ch21:38 – He mistakenly thought Paul was the Egyptian terrorist!
3. Ch22:24 – He ordered that Paul be flogged!

The Tribune has purposely presented himself as having an “unblemished and perfect record” in dealing with a very complicated situation. Is that true? No!!! Why do humans do that? Why do we often leave out info that could reveal our flaws? Why can't we put all the details in when providing detailed reports?

PRELIMINARY HEARING FOR PAUL! V31-35

You may remember that on Day 3 of Paul being in Jerusalem, he had been so badly beaten by the mob, that he had to be carried down the steps of the Temple (Acts Ch21:35) by the Roman soldiers. We are now on Day 6 (Acts Ch23:12), its only 3 days later and Paul is expected, in his current physical condition, to travel by horse, at night time, a distance of over 60 miles (Jerusalem – Caesarea – 62 miles)!

Probably from midnight the two centurions along with the 200 soldiers, the 70 horsemen and the 200 spearmen, all there to protect Paul, head off towards Caesarea. They make good progress and arrive at Antipatris, still under the cover of darkness some 35 miles away from Jerusalem, but still 27 miles from Caesarea. At this point, they decide, the two Centurions that is, to release the soldiers, all 200 of them, along with the 200 spearmen and allow them to return to Jerusalem, leaving Paul with the 70 horsemen who will take him all the way to Caesarea.

When Paul is presented to Governor Felix, the first point of clarity that he wants to establish, is where is Paul from, to decide whether it should be he who takes responsibility for his case. When Paul makes it clear that he is from the province of Cilicia, Felix, has to take his case! ***This is similar to Jesus before Pilate in Luke Ch23:6-7, where Pilate learns that Jesus is from Galilee and is therefore under the jurisdiction of Herod!***

“According to Roman Historian Tacitus (Hist. 5.9), the full name of the governor was Antonius Felix, though Josephus (Ant.20.137) calls him Claudius Felix. His appointment as Governor was unusual since he was a former slave, and not part of the Roman Aristocracy. His promotion appears to have been due to the influence of his brother Pallas in the Imperial Court, though Josephus (Ant. 20.162) records that Jonathan the High Priest actually suggested his appointment to Emperor Claudius. According to Josephus (War 2.247; Ant 20.137-38), Felix succeed Ventidius Cumanus as procurator of Judea in A.D. 52. Tacitus (An. 12.54) famously described him as having “practised every kind of cruelty and lust, wielding the power of a king with all the instincts of a slave”. His term of office was marked by increasing insurgency throughout the province. He put down these uprisings ruthlessly, in a way that alienated more moderate Jews and led to further rebellion” (Cited in David G. Peterson, Acts of the Apostles – pg 626).

APPLICATION

Re-read the letter from Claudius Lysias, is he being completely truthful? Yes/No and why do you think so.

Was Lysias evading his responsibility by sending Paul to Governor Felix? Is this “passing the buck”?

Why do you think Lysias left out his errors concerning all of his involvement with Paul?