

THE BOOK OF ACTS | GOD'S REVELATION OF TRANSITION

SESSION 72 ACTS 23:23-24:15

ACTS 23:23-35 | PAUL'S JOURNEY TO CAESAREA

- Verses 23-24 –
 - Clearly Paul was no ordinary soldier. With 200 soldiers and 70 horsemen, along with 200 **spearmen**, Paul's escort was huge.
 - **Felix the governor** was made **governor** (procurator of Judea) in 52AD. Josephus speaks at length of Felix, speaking of him as a cruel tyrant. See *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 20, chapters 7 and 8.
- Verses 25-26 –
 - Claudius Lysias was directly responsible to Felix and was the chief law-enforcement officer for Jerusalem. His letter puts a very positive spin on the entire situation.
 - However, outside of the near beating, this Roman officer had treated Paul favorably.
- Verse 27 –
 - This account is, of course, the most favorable light in which the report could have been given.
- Verses 28-29 –
 - The Roman government, for the most part, allowed the Jews a degree of self-governance, especially as it related to their religion. However, matters of capital and civil punishment were solely in the hands of the Romans.
- Verse 30 –
 - This conclusion to the “short and sweet” letter is wholly accurate, although we are still left with the impression that the semi-public death plot was never prosecuted.
- Verse 31 –
 - This verse picks up, chronologically, with the departure from Jerusalem in verse 24.
 - **Antipatris** is a small town on the coastal plain, west of Jerusalem, built by Herod the Great and named after his father, Antipater the Idumean.
- Verses 32-35 –
 - Because Paul, the Roman citizen, was from Tarsus, in the province of **Cilicia**, Governor Felix had jurisdiction and agreed to hear the case, but not before **thine accusers are also come**.
 - Herod the Great had built a palace in Caesarea (the remains of which are seen today). This palace included a **judgment hall**. The Greek is *πραίτωριον* [praitorion], sometimes transliterated in the account of Jesus' trial (Mark 15:16).

ACTS 24:1-27 | PAUL BEFORE FELIX

- Verse 1 –
 - The leaders of the Jews bring **Tertullus**, who is otherwise unknown other than that he is an **orator**, to inform **the governor against Paul**. The word **orator** is *ῥήτωρ* [rhetor], from which we get *rhetoric*. In some sense, Tertullus was the prosecuting attorney.
 - It is worthy of note that in all segments of history that *rhetoric* is a valuable skill, and one that should be taught to our children. The three basics of classical education are grammar, logic, and rhetoric.
- Verses 2-4 –
 - The job of Tertullus was to **accuse** Paul.
 - The word **accuse** is *κατηγορέω* [katagoreō], from which we get *category*. Basically, Tertullus needs to “throw the whole book” at Paul, hoping something sticks.
 - Incidentally, this is the word that is used in some rabbinical literature as a name for the devil.
 - Tertullus begins with political puffery toward Felix, bloviating about how wonderful he has been for the nation, and how the nation is most grateful for his benevolence.
 - Tertullus begs for a gracious hearing, promising to make his case short.

- Verse 5 –
 - The charges brought against Paul were as follows:
 - He was a **pestilent fellow**. The word λοιμός [loimos]. Jesus used the word in Matthew 24:7 to refer to the calamity of the end times.
 - He was a **mover of sedition...throughout the world**. A sedition is a riot or insurrection.
 - He was a **ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes**. In Antioch they had been called Christians (Acts 11:26). Here they were *followers of the man from Nazareth*. It is notable that they were considered a **sect**. The Jewish leaders clearly understood Paul to be “in the family” and thus worthy of an in-house trial (note concluding words of verse 6).
 - He had tried to **profane the temple**. This was the original charge of Acts 21:28.
 - In the verses to follow, Paul will defend himself against the accusations.
- Verses 7-8 –
 - Lysias had a thankless job, which he carried out decently well, under the circumstances. However, he is accused of police brutality when Tertullus says that **with great violence** Paul was taken **out of our hands**.
- Verse 9 –
 - Groupthink is a powerful (and dangerous) thing, regardless of its source.
- Verse 10 –
 - Paul seemed to take some comfort in the rule of law that he expected of Felix, who was **of many years a judge**. Felix had held his position 7-8 years at the time of Paul’s defense.
- Verses 11-13 –
 - Concerning the charge that he was a **pestilent fellow** (v. 5), Paul doesn’t even speak.
 - Concerning the charge that he was a **mover of sedition** and that he tried to **profane the temple** (v. 5), he does speak. His defense: *they have no evidence, and all the witnesses that could be called forth would testify that I haven’t done that which they accuse me of.*
- Verses 14-15 –
 - Paul claims innocence of three charges, but here declares his guilt of being a **ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes** (v. 5).
 - Earlier it was referred to as a **sect**, using the word αἵρεσις [haireisis]. Now it is called a **heresy** (in English), using the exact same word, which is the source of our English word *heresy*.
 - Paul describes his faith, which is of great importance to our theological understanding of doctrine in Paul’s later days.
 - Paul says that he not only worships **the God of my fathers** but also believes **all things which are written in the law and in the prophets**. The word **believing** (v. 14) is πιστεύω [pisteō], the exact same form of the word used in John 3:16 (where it is translated **believeth**).
 - It would be *impossible* to claim that Paul himself did not obey the demands of the law at the time he spoke these words (without, of course, simply calling him a liar and holding him in contempt of court).
 - There are really only two ways to align Paul’s obedience to the law with the age of grace:
 - Assume the age of grace *has not actually begun*, but is still hidden in God (this is the Bullinger/Acts 28 model).
 - Assume that the age of grace must have begun (for there is too much evidence to deny it), and that Paul’s obedience to the Kingdom Gospel reveals an overlap of the two periods (this is my consistent position).
 - Paul goes further to say that this **heresy** was not only thoroughly faithful to Judaism but that it was ultimately a salvation that rested in **a resurrection of the dead**. Because he uses the plural for **dead**, he cannot be referring to the resurrection of Jesus. Clearly, *Paul is claiming to hold to the Kingdom Gospel*.
- ...to be continued