

Acts 22

A letter from Claudius Lysias, Roman commander in Jerusalem, to His Excellency, Governor Felix: Greetings.¹

I am reporting to you on what has happened here in Jerusalem in the last few days. To be honest, these terrible Jews almost got out of hand, but I, Claudius Lysias, have handled the situation well.

I have made a Roman citizen prisoner; his name is Paul, he is Jewish, and he studied here in Jerusalem with the famous rabbi Gamaliel, but he was born in the city of Tarsus.² I do not need to remind you that Tarsus is an excellent city with a great reputation. And I must admit that Paul ranks higher in society than I, for he is a citizen by birth, whereas I had to buy my citizenship.³

It is now almost two weeks ago⁴ that this Paul arrived here in Jerusalem. I understand that he has been travelling half the world to tell other Jews about a certain Jesus of Nazareth. The Jewish leaders hate him for this. Paul thinks Jesus is the Son of the God who created heaven and earth,⁵ but the Jewish leaders will have none of it. Jews in other cities like Thessalonica, Corinth and Ephesus have previously tried to get rid of him.⁶

Anyway, when Paul visited the Jewish temple here in Jerusalem, these Jews seized him and tried to kill him. I heard it just in time and I quickly came to his rescue.⁷ He made a narrow escape but I now need to keep him here in the barracks for his own safety.⁸ In this way I am faithful to our principle that no-one gets punished or even executed without a proper trial.⁹ So Paul is my prisoner, safely guarded. He is a remarkable person; he speaks their language, Aramaic, just as well as Greek.¹⁰ I certainly do not get the impression that his religion is harmful to the Roman Empire or indeed to our beloved Emperor.¹¹

I must confess, Your Excellency, that I made one mistake. I wanted to interrogate Paul before I knew him, so I bound him for the flogging. Only then did he tell me that he was a Roman citizen, so I should not have bound him.¹² Yet Paul accepted my apologies for this error and I hope you will do so as well, Your Excellency.

This Paul is so Jewish, I struggle to understand him. Initially he persecuted the followers of Jesus of Nazareth, but then he had a kind of meeting with Jesus himself, and now he is a follower of him.¹³ And he claims that another pious Jew, Ananias in Damascus, told him that Jesus wanted him [Paul] to be his ambassador.¹⁴ He went to Damascus to arrest followers of Jesus – but he came back as a follower himself. I find this a remarkable story, but Paul seems to be honest enough. What else can explain this change in him if it was not a religious

¹ For the letter-form and the name, see Acts 23:25-30

² Acts 21:39; 22:3, 25-27

³ Acts 22:28

⁴ Acts 21:17, 26, 27

⁵ Acts 9:20

⁶ Acts 17:1-9; 18:6-7; 19: 8-9

⁷ Acts 21:27-32

⁸ Acts 21:34-35; 22:23

⁹ Acts 25:16

¹⁰ Acts 21:37-40

¹¹ Acts 18:14-16; 19:35-41

¹² Acts 22:24-29

¹³ Acts 22:3-7

¹⁴ Acts 22:12-15

experience? He tells me about seeing a bright light from heaven, which blinded him.¹⁵ And he claims that later he saw this Jesus of Nazareth again.¹⁶

On the other hand, the Jewish crowd is so noisy and dangerous; they did not even hear Paul out when he addressed them. When he mentioned his vision in the temple, and that God had sent him to the Gentiles, they rudely stopped listening and called for his death.¹⁷

So what shall I do? It's really an internal Jewish issue.¹⁸ It seems to me that this new group is harmless to us. The one difference between the Jews and Paul is this Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified by your predecessor, Pontius Pilate, some 25 years ago. His followers keep claiming that he came back to life and that he is *still* alive. And the truth is that we never found his body.

I need to tell you more about this, because you are a new governor. The Jews then hated Jesus as much as they hate Paul today. They arrested Jesus, but they were of course not allowed to execute him, for only we, Romans, are allowed to carry out capital punishment. So they took Jesus to Pilate, the then governor, and I have to say that Pilate surrendered to them. He had Jesus executed. That was not our best moment. You can see now why I am protecting this Paul, so that we don't make the same mistake again.

Anyway, when Jesus had died, he was buried, and we then put guards at his tomb. But on the third day the guards ran away from their positions and reported to us that Jesus' disciples had come during the night. They, our guards, had been asleep and the disciples had used the opportunity to steal Jesus' body.¹⁹ We never managed to get to the bottom of this, for the body was never found, as I said.

But back to Paul. I don't understand him. He told the Jews that Ananias had said to him: "The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from his mouth. You will be his witness to all people of what you have seen and heard."²⁰ This would give Paul freedom to proclaim Jesus to us Romans. But he keeps focussing on the Jews.

I was even told that a prophet, one Agabus, warned Paul against coming to Jerusalem at all. This Agabus apparently took Paul's belt, tied his own hands and feet with it and said that the Spirit of God had warned him that the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem would bind Paul in this way. And then the people around Paul warned him not to go up to Jerusalem. But apparently Paul answered that he was ready not only to be bound, but also to die here in Jerusalem for the sake of this Lord Jesus.²¹ This Paul is really very determined! I can only admire him.

Now that I think about this, Your Excellency, I am beginning to wonder. You see, the riddle of the disappearance of the body of Jesus of Nazareth was never solved, not even by our Roman secret agents. And Paul keeps saying that Jesus is still alive, and he keeps preaching this to all the world.²² Do you think that it is possible that Jesus is indeed alive? In that case Paul is right. I wonder...

Your Excellency, I will send you a further report soon. For now, I will keep the Roman citizen Paul in my barracks for his own safety. Kind regards.

Claudius Lysias

¹⁵ Acts 22:6, 11

¹⁶ Acts 18:9, 22:17-18

¹⁷ Acts 22:21-22

¹⁸ Acts 18:14-16

¹⁹ Matthew 28:11-15

²⁰ Acts 22:14-15

²¹ Acts 21:10-14

²² Acts 13:30, 34, 37; 17:18

