



Paul Appears Before Felix and Festus Acts 24:1 - 25:12

Introduction

Paul now found himself a prisoner in Herod's Praetorium in Caesarea. It had been only a short time earlier, on his journey to Jerusalem, that the prophet, Agabus, had warned him that the Jews would arrest him and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles (Acts 21:11). That warning had been fulfilled when Roman soldiers had rescued him from an attempt by the Jews to kill him. Because of a second threat on his life, the soldiers had whisked Paul away to Caesarea. Now he waited for his case to be heard before Felix, the governor.

History records little good about Felix. He had been born a slave but was given his freedom by the Roman emperor Claudius in return for a service he had rendered. In A.D. 53, Claudius appointed him governor of Judea. Felix was a ruthless ruler who indulged in cruelty and lust to secure his political position. He had influence at the royal court in Rome which made him feel free to ignore the law and act any way he pleased. For this reason the Jews had little respect for him.

It is difficult to know what Paul's thoughts were while he waited for his accusers to arrive in Caesarea to present their case against him. The Lord had promised Paul that he would testify for Him in Rome (Acts 23:11), so surely Paul considered his trial before the Roman governor a stepping stone in the fulfillment of that promise. Paul trusted in the Lord and was able to endure delay and suffering, knowing that God's victorious will would prevail in His own perfect time. Paul is a great example for Christians today when it comes to patient and cheerful endurance. Because of his attitude, God used Paul in significant ways to witness before governors and kings. In what situation do you need to follow Paul's example today so you can be useful to God?

Outline of Acts 24:1 - 25:12

- I. Paul's Accusers Appear Before Felix - 24:1-9
- II. Paul Delivers His Defense Before Felix - 24:10-21
- III. Paul Is Kept in Custody - 24:22-27
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I. Paul's Accusers Appear Before Felix - 24:1-9

Paul waited in prison five days before the Jews from Jerusalem arrived in Caesarea to make their charges against him. Ananias and the elders had hired a

professional advocate to present their case. Tertullus was an attorney and orator. He knew the Roman law and court procedures and was skilled in presenting legal testimony. Although Tertullus is a Roman name, he may have been a Jew since he refers to Jewish law as *our law* in verse 6. However, this may have been merely a method of associating himself with his clients.

A. Tertullus flatters Felix - Acts 24:1-4

As was customary, Tertullus began his speech with flattery, hoping to make a favorable impression on the governor but he went to extremes. Tertullus praised Felix for the peace and prosperity he had brought to the Jewish people and thanked him profusely. In truth, Felix's administration had been one of turmoil and deteriorating relations between the Jews and Rome. Although obviously false, the flattery surely appealed to Felix's pride.

Tertullus promised to keep his speech short, *a few words*. This was also customary in the Roman courts.

B. Tertullus presents false accusations - 24:5-9

Tertullus made three charges against Paul. Two were general charges and one was specific. All were false.

1. Paul is a *plague* - 24:5

Tertullus presented Paul as a chronic troublemaker, claiming that he stirred up dissension among all the Jews everywhere. In a sense this was true. Almost everywhere Paul preached the gospel, there were Jews who hated him and wanted to be rid of him (Acts 13:45,50; 14:2-5; 17:5-9; 18:6; 19:9). However, the disturbances were rooted in Jewish religion and were of no interest to the Roman courts. In Corinth, the Roman proconsul, Gallio, had dismissed the Jews' case against Paul because it dealt with *words and names and your own law* (Acts 18:15). Paul had not broken the Roman Law.

Tertullus tried to make his charge sound political, knowing that Rome was intent upon keeping order throughout the empire, but in reality it was an empty charge as far as the Roman courts were concerned.

2. Paul is a *ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes* - 24:5

This is the only place in Scripture where Christians are

referred to as *Nazarenes*. The term was first applied to Jesus because his hometown was Nazareth. Later it was applied to his followers as well. *To this day Christians in general are known in Hebrew and Arabic as Nazarenes (The Book of the Acts, F.F. Bruce).*

Tertullus may have used the term *sect of the Nazarenes* in an attempt to separate Christianity from Judaism. Judaism was recognized as a legal religion in the Roman Empire and an offshoot of Judaism would also be accepted as legal. However, a distinctly new sect would not be tolerated.

3. Paul tried to profane the temple - 24:6

This was Tertullus' one specific accusation and it relates to the incident recorded in Acts 21:27-36. The Jews had falsely charged Paul with taking Gentiles into the temple. This was a very serious charge because the Romans had given the Jews permission to execute any Gentile who went inside their temple. If Paul was convicted of profaning the temple, there would be sufficient legal ground for executing him. However, being of a religious nature, this was more likely a case for the Jewish Sanhedrin rather than a Roman court.

C. Tertullus distorts the facts - Acts 24:7-8

Compare this passage to Acts 21:31-34 to see the distortion in Tertullus' testimony. The Jews had not wanted to *judge* Paul according to their law; they had wanted to *kill him*. Lysias had not used violence; it was the Jews who had used violence. Also, Lysias did not decide to take Paul to Felix until the Jews had threatened his life a second time (Acts 21:21-24).

D. False witnesses concur with Tertullus - Acts 24:9

The high priest and the elders stated their agreement with all the charges.

II. Paul Delivers His Defense Before Felix - Acts 24:10-21

Paul was given permission to speak for himself.

A. Paul compliments Felix - Acts 24:10

In contrast to Tertullus' fawning flattery, Paul modestly complimented Felix, expressing his confidence that Felix's experience as a ruler of the Jews would insure him a fair trial.

B. Paul refutes the charges - Acts 24:11-13

1. Twelve days - 24:11

It had been no more than twelve days since Paul had

arrived in Jerusalem, hardly enough time to instigate a riot. Furthermore, any claims against him would be recent enough to have fresh evidence and readily available witnesses. The Jews had neither.

2. Paul had gone to Jerusalem to worship - 24:11-12

Paul's purpose in going to Jerusalem was not to stir up trouble but to worship in the temple. (During the days of the early church, Jewish Christians continued to go to the temple to pray and worship God.) His accusers could not cite any instance of his inciting the crowd, either in the temple, the synagogues, or the city.

3. Accusations against him could not be proven - 24:13

Because Paul was innocent of all the charges, Tertullus, Ananias, and elders could not prove the charges they had made.

C. Paul confesses that he is a Christian - Acts 24:14-16

Paul was not a member of a seditious sect. He worshiped God according to *the Way*, referring to Christianity. Paul showed that followers of *the Way* were part of a legitimate religion which was recognized and protected by Rome. They believed in the *Law* and in the *Prophets* and they had the same *hope..... in the resurrection of the dead* as Paul's Jewish accusers. This proved that Christianity was founded on the Old Testament and Judaism. (Furthermore, since Christ had been resurrected from the dead, Christianity fulfilled the Jewish hope of the resurrection!)

Because of his belief in the resurrection of both the just and the unjust (with the implication of a future judgment), Paul worked at keeping his conscience clear towards both God and men.

D. Paul's true accusers are not present - Acts 24:17-20

Paul had gone to Jerusalem to *bring alms and offerings*. This most likely refers to the offering (mentioned in Lesson 17 in comments on Acts 20:4) the Gentile churches had collected for the Jerusalem church. This is the only time the it is mentioned in Acts, but it is often referred to in Paul's letters (Romans 15:25-28; 1 Corinthians 16:1-4; 2 Corinthians 8:13-14; 9:12-13; Galatians 2:10). It was both alms, *a contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem* (Romans 15:26) and an offering or *gift, which is administered by us to the glory of the Lord Himself* (2 Corinthians 8:19).

While he was in the temple in Jerusalem, some Jews

from Asia saw him. Paul was not with a crowd of people, nor was he causing a disturbance. His implication was that the Asian Jews had caused the trouble; and that truly was the case (Acts 21:27).

The high priest and elders had not witnessed what had happened in the temple. As members of the Sanhedrin, they had examined Paul (Acts 22:30) but had found no evidence of guilt. Therefore, they had no legitimate charges. If the Asian Jews had accusations to make, they should have been there to speak for themselves.

E. Only one legitimate charge - Acts 24:21

The only true charge which might have been brought against Paul was concerning his belief in the resurrection of the dead. This concerned the doctrinal dispute between the Sadducees and the Pharisees (Acts 23:6-9) and was purely a religious matter. The Roman courts had neither jurisdiction nor interest in such matters. Paul made it clear that there was no reason for him to be on trial in a Roman court. He was innocent and should be released.

III. Paul Is Kept in Custody - Acts 24:22-27

In spite of his knowledge of *the Way* and the indication that Paul was innocent, Felix chose to keep Paul a prisoner.

A. Felix delays his decision - Acts 24:22-23

Felix probably knew enough about Christianity, to discern the truth from Tertullus' and Paul's conflicting testimony, but he decided to reserve judgment until Lysias came to Caesarea. Luke doesn't record whether or not Lysias ever arrived to tell his side of the story.

Paul was remanded to the custody of the centurion, but because he was a Roman citizen, he was given freedom to see his friends and receive food and other necessities from them.

B. Felix and Drusilla hear Paul speak about faith in Christ - Acts 24:24-25

Several days later Felix and his wife, Drusilla, sent for Paul. Drusilla was Jewish, the youngest daughter of Herod Agrippa I (Acts 12:1) and the sister of Herod Agrippa II and Bernice. She had been married to the king of a small state in Syria, but when Felix met her he was overcome by her beauty and persuaded her to leave her husband and become his third wife. Paul spoke to Felix and Drusilla about *faith in Christ*. He delivered a very practical sermon to the adulterous couple, speaking of *righteousness, self control, and the judgment to come*, most likely calling them to repentance. (Repentance was Paul's constant subject. See Acts 26: 18 and 20).

Understandably, Felix's response was fear. He undoubtedly recognized the application of Paul's sermon to himself. Both his marriage and his governorship were immoral and unjust. Felix sent Paul away, promising to call for him at a more *convenient* time.

C. Felix's ulterior motive - 24:26

In addition to all his other negative attributes, Felix was duplicitous and greedy. He found many *convenient* times to call for Paul, hoping that Paul would offer him a bribe for his release. Accepting a bribe for release of a prisoner was against Roman law. However, it was difficult to enforce and therefore quite common. It was certainly consistent with Felix's character.

D. Felix is succeeded by Festus - 24:27

Paul remained in custody for two years. Felix surely knew that Paul was not guilty, but he held him in order to gain the favor of the Jews. The irony is that after two years Felix lost his governorship because of the Jews. He intervened with troops in a Jewish - Gentile conflict in Caesarea and much bloodshed resulted. The Jews complained to the emperor, Nero, who recalled him to Rome and sent Porcius Festus as his replacement.

IV. Paul Appeals to Caesar - Acts 25:1-12

When the new and inexperienced governor arrived, Paul's case was reopened. This time the circumstances were less auspicious and Paul was moved to use his status as a Roman citizen to appeal to Caesar. This section of Acts sets the direction for the remainder of the book and introduces us to the manner in which Paul reached Rome.

A. Festus makes a trip to Jerusalem - Acts 25:1-5

Porcius Festus was the Roman governor of Judea during the years A.D. 58-62. He was from a noble family in Rome and although his term of office was cut short by his death, his administration was far more prudent and fair than that of Felix.

One of the first things Festus did as governor was visit Jerusalem. Caesarea was the capital of the province of Judea, but Jerusalem was the religious center and Festus knew the importance of paying a courtesy visit to the chief priests and leaders of the Sanhedrin in order to establish good relations with the Jews.

1. Jews' petition and plot - 25:1-3

Two years had gone by, but the Jewish leaders had not forgotten Paul. They told Festus about their case against Paul and requested that he be summoned to Jerusalem. However, their real plan was to get rid of Paul. They

knew they had no legal case and the only way to get rid of Paul was to ambush and kill him. *They desired from the judge partiality, not justice* (The One Volume Bible Commentary, J. R. Dummelow, ed.).

2. Festus' decision - 25:4-5

Festus' answer was that he did not plan to stay long in Jerusalem. He planned to return to Caesarea shortly and invited the Jewish leaders to accompany him and present their accusations against Paul there.

B. Festus hears complaints against Paul - Acts 25:6-7

Upon returning to Caesarea, Festus formally took his seat as judge and called for Paul to be brought in. The Jews made *many serious complaints* but offered no proof for any of them.

C. Festus honors Paul's request - Acts 25:8-12

Although Festus desired to curry the favor of the Jews just as Felix had done (24:27), he could not deny Paul's appeal to Caesar.

1. Paul's defense - 25:8

Paul defended himself by denying the charges against him. He had not acted against the Jewish law, the Jewish temple, or the Roman Caesar.

2. Festus' proposal - 25:9

The conflicting testimony left the new governor perplexed. Roman justice must be done, but why not reopen the case in Jerusalem in order to establish a good relationship with the Jewish religious leaders. Festus asked Paul if he would be willing to stand trial in Jerusalem with himself as judge in order to insure fairness.

3. Paul's request - 25:10-11

Paul knew that the Jews would never allow him to make it to Jerusalem alive. Their plot had been foiled once, and they would not let it happen again. Paul's recourse for avoiding the danger of returning to Jerusalem was to use his Roman citizenship and appeal to Caesar. In Rome he would receive a fair trial, free from the influence of the Jews. Nero was the Roman emperor at the time, but he had not yet shown hostility to Christianity.

Paul made it clear that there was no reason to continue the trial in Jerusalem. He had done no wrong to the Jews. He was not trying to evade justice. If he had done anything worthy of death, he was willing to die, but the

Jews' charges were false and empty. Paul appealed to Caesar.

NOTE: The right of appeal by a Roman citizen dated back to 509 B.C. and the foundation of the Roman republic.

4. Final decision - 25:12

Festus conferred with his council of legal advisors and they supported sending Paul to Rome. He told Paul, *You have appealed to Caesar? To Caesar you shall go!* God's promise that he would go to Rome was confirmed for Paul.

Applications

1. Tertullus used excessive flattery to win Felix to the Jews' side. Do you ever flatter people to get your own way? Are you ever swayed by the flattery of others? Someone has said that only a person who flatters himself (or herself) can be influenced by the flattery of others. How can you be more truthful with others and more humble in your own heart?

2. The Jews, their spokesman, and their leaders all presented false evidence against Paul and the lies seemed to be prevailing. Have people ever lied about you in order to hurt you? If so, you are in good company with the apostle Paul. Christ also suffered the same injustice. Sometimes it is difficult to understand why God allows lies to win out for a time, but you can take comfort in knowing that the Lord understands and will uphold you and give you victory. Will you claim that victory now?

3. Paul waited two years in prison before he began to see the fulfillment of God's promise that he would go to Rome. Are you waiting for God to move you out of a situation which is a prison to you? Will you follow Paul's example of cheerful endurance and look to God to move you on in His perfect timing?

4. In Acts 24:16, Paul said, *I always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and man.* The Greek word translated *strive* means literally to *exercise oneself*. As a Christian, how do you exercise yourself to live without offense toward both God and other people?