

The Acts of the Holy Spirit

Gloria Dei Lutheran Church

Keith Chuvala, Keith@BackToTheBibleCatechism.com

Paul on Trial Before Felix

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The Jews Make Their Case Against Paul ([24:1-9](#))

Being identified as an “orator” means that Tertullus was a renowned lawyer, selected by the Ananias the high priest and the elders of the Sanhedrin to present their case. The fact that Ananias, the elders, and this Tertullus were all present for this trial in Felix's court tells us of how serious the Jewish leadership was about finally securing a criminal conviction of Paul.

Most excellent Felix: Thus beginneth the flattery. Josephus and Tacitus offer some interesting background on Felix. He began life as a slave, but rose in status as a free man to become the first former slave in history to become a governor of a Roman province. How? Family connections. His brother Pallas was a friend of the emperor Claudius. But the slave mentality stayed with him. Tacitus describes Felix as "a master of cruelty and lust who exercised the powers of a king with the spirit of a slave". Tacitus writes of both Felix's public and private lives, and neither were pretty. Trading on the influence of his brother, he indulged himself in many distasteful ways, and thought himself able to “...do any evil act with impunity”. He also had dealt with several insurrections with violent brutality. The fact is, nobody outside of his inner circle thought well of Felix.

So when Tertullus tells him, “...through you we enjoy great peace... and prosperity...”, the lawyer has gone beyond spin to just flat lying, in order to get Felix on his side from the start.

The charges against Paul would likely resonate with Felix, because they portrayed Paul as *politically* dangerous (“a plague ... a creator of dissention... a ringleader of

the sect of the Nazarenes”), and oh yeah, by the way, that he had profaned the temple.

Judea in this time was rife with would-be “deliverers” and zealots seeking to foment revolution against Rome. To our modern ears, Tertullus here is effectively branding Paul as a terrorist.

Among all Jews throughout the world: This is another example of an unintentional compliment to the reach of Paul's ministry.

The only really specific charge against Paul is that he tried to profane the temple; but no evidence is given of the charge because none existed. This was a fabricated charge, based on rumor only (similar to 21:26-29).

Claudius Lysias, the Roman commander we heard from by letter in chapter 23, and who effectively rescued Paul, is put into a bad light here by Tertullus. The Jews almost certainly would have preferred to settle Paul's intrusion into their world with mob justice. But Lysias did the right thing.

By examining him yourself you may ascertain all these things of which we accuse him: Tertullus doesn't even pretend to offer corroborating evidence of the charges. The truth is, his only hope is that Paul will incriminate himself under Felix's direct examination. And he no doubt knew that Paul had no trouble speaking up for himself!

The Jews also assented...: Ananias and the other accusers agree with the charges, but they offer no supporting evidence, either.

Paul Discredits the Case Against Him (24:10-13)

I do the more cheerfully answer for myself: No public defender is provided here, and that suits Paul just fine. He's happy to answer for himself, knowing that the facts of the case are in his favor. Also, it's notable that Paul employs no flattery in his opening statement to Felix.

Nor can they prove the things of which they now accuse me: At this point it has been about twelve days since Paul's arrival in Jerusalem, and false witnesses should have been easy to find (or employ!) But Paul's accusers provide no witnesses to demonstrate that he guilty of the accusation, so Paul calls attention to it.

Paul Offers the Facts (24:14-21)

...So I worship the God of my fathers: Paul starts by making it clear that he has not abandoned the God of the Jews, or the Law and the Prophets; instead he is acting in fulfillment of them both.

...They themselves also accept, that there will be a resurrection of the dead: This is foundational to Paul's belief, and is a doctrine adhered to by a large percentage of devout Jews, namely the resurrection of the dead (specifically, the resurrection of Jesus!)

They ought to have been here before you to object: Paul reminds Felix that there is no eyewitness testimony to offer proof of the charges against him. F. F. Bruce:

"This was a strong point in his defense: the people who had raised the hue and cry in the first instance, claiming to be eyewitnesses of his alleged sacrilege, had not troubled to be present."

Because Paul is in the right, he consistently calls the case back to the evidence, the very thing his accusers lack, and failed to address in Tertullus' opening statement.

Felix Avoids Making Decisions (24:22-25)

When Lysias the commander comes down, I will make a decision...: Felix avoids making a decision under the pretense of needing more evidence from the Roman commander Lysias. But Felix clearly had enough evidence to make a decision -- in Paul's favor ("having more accurate knowledge of the Way")!

Let him have liberty: Knowing Paul's innocence, Felix grants Paul generous liberty even while he is held in custody. Felix tried to walk a middle ground. He knew Paul was innocent, but he did not want to associate himself with Paul's message, or "the Way", for that matter. So he made no decision, and kept Paul in custody.

Felix came with his wife Drusilla... and heard him concerning... Christ: Felix wanted his wife to hear Paul's testimony, either as a curiosity or so that she could advise him. After all, he claimed to have insufficient evidence for a decision. Drusilla was a sister of Herod Agrippa II and Bernice mentioned in Acts 25. Reportedly, Drusilla was beautiful, and Felix seduced her away from her husband, enticing her to become his wife. His 3rd wife, that is! Which might explain why Paul touches on certain topics...

He reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come: It's probably safe to assume that Paul spoke to Felix and Drusilla about the righteousness that is ours in Jesus Christ; about the need for Christian behavior (self-control), and about accountability before God (the judgment to come).

So here Paul speaks right to the issues present in Felix's life. One wonders what conversations he and Drucilla had after this!

Felix was afraid: Wow! Paul's "reasoning" made Felix afraid. Knowing what we do about his life, this reaction to Paul's words is a bit unexpected, but encouraging. I wish Luke had quoted the actual speech here rather than describing its content in broad strokes. We don't know exactly how long Paul spoke here, but it was clearly long enough, detailed enough, and truthful enough, to impact Felix this way.

Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you: Even so, Felix is unwilling to issue his decision against Paul (and Jesus). He rejects Jesus under the pretense of needing to delaying his decision. Might Paul have thought back to this episode when he was inspired to write "...now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (II Corinthians 6:2)?

Felix's Motivation: Greed and Politics ([24:26-27](#))

He also hoped that money would be given him by Paul, that he might release him: Felix met frequently with Paul, but not to conduct any honest inquiry. He wanted to be paid off with a bribe!

After two years: Under Roman law, the type of custody Paul was in could be limited to two years. But Felix had no legal justification for holding Paul that long. Felix showed a blatant disregard for the law by keeping Paul in custody for such a long time.

Felix ... left Paul bound: Felix refused to release Paul, knowing his innocence, for the same reason that Pilate condemned Jesus while knowing His innocence. They both acted out of political expediency (wanting to do the Jews a favor).