

## ACTS 24

Our hero, Paul, is in Caesarea awaiting trial. Felix keeps him in Herod's Praetorium, presumably still in chains and under guard.

Paul must wait 5 days until his accusers come down from Jerusalem.

(Acts 24:1) Now after five days Ananias the high priest came down with the elders and a certain orator *named* Tertullus. These gave evidence to the governor against Paul. (Acts 2) And when he was called upon, Tertullus began his accusation, saying: "Seeing that through you we enjoy great peace, and prosperity is being brought to this nation by your foresight, (3) we accept *it* always and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness. (4) Nevertheless, not to be tedious to you any further, I beg you to hear, by your courtesy, a few words from us. (5) For we have found this man a plague, a creator of dissension among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. (6) He even tried to profane the temple, and we seized him, and wanted to judge him according to our law. (7) But the commander Lysias came by and with great violence took *him* out of our hands, (8) commanding his accusers to come to you. By examining him yourself you may ascertain all these things of which we accuse him."

This sweet-talking shyster lawyer tried to worm his way into the heart and mind of Felix. Pretty much everything he said was a lie or a great stretch of the imagination.

As we learned last week, Felix wasn't a gifted leader at all and was forced to deal with many situations where evil marauders plundered the countryside and indiscriminately killed people in the city. These things would not have occurred under a more responsive leader who meted out consistent harsh punishment on those who disturbed the general peace and broke the law.

Plus, the accusations against Paul were also without merit. He certainly wasn't a plague, a ringleader, a blasphemer nor did he profane the Temple. Yes, they seized him but Tertullus conveniently left out the fact that they nearly beat Paul to death before any trial was considered! I can hear him say, "Oh No, O great Felix, it was your commander to tore Paul from us by great violence!!"

(Acts 24:9) And the Jews also assented, maintaining that these things were so.

The Jews replied "Yup, that's just the way it happened!"; "Yup, that's our story and we're stickin' to it"

(Acts 24:10) Then Paul, after the governor had nodded to him to speak, answered: "Inasmuch as I know that you have been for many years a judge of this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself,

Paul, instead of false flattery, simply states that he is aware that Felix has been a rightful judge of this nation...I think the implication being, a rightful person to judge me, a Roman leader and citizen!

(Acts 24:11) because you may ascertain that it is no more than twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem to worship.

Paul was in Jerusalem about 12 days...but, of the 12 days, he was a prisoner for about 9 days! The point: how could one man do so much in just three days! That's not enough time to stir up the people by seditious talk meant to start a rebellion of any kind!

And, he plainly states that he came up to Jerusalem to worship!

(Acts 24:12) And they neither found me in the temple disputing with anyone nor inciting the crowd, either in the synagogues or in the city.

Paul simply states that when they seized him, he wasn't arguing or inciting the crowds!

(Acts 24:13) Nor can they prove the things of which they now accuse me.

And, Governor Felix, they have no way to prove any of the false things of which they accuse me.

(Acts 24:14) But this I confess to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect, so I worship the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets. (15) I have hope in God, which they themselves also accept, that there will be a resurrection of *the* dead, both of *the* just and *the* unjust. (16) This *being* so, I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men.

Paul professes God and the truthfulness of the Scriptures. He confesses his hope in the resurrection which is accepted even by these men; and he testifies, as he did before these very men, that his conscience is clear before God and men!

### Paul continues his defense:

(Acts 24:17) "Now after many years I came to bring alms and offerings to my nation, (Acts 24:18) in the midst of which some Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with a mob nor with tumult. (Acts 24:19) They ought to have been here before you to object if they had anything against me. (Acts 24:20) Or else let those who are *here* themselves say if they found any wrongdoing in me **while I stood before the council**, (Acts 24:21) unless *it is* for this one statement which I cried out, standing among them, 'Concerning the resurrection of the dead I am being judged by you this day.' "

Paul relates the rest of the story: after he came to give an offering "to my nation", he purified Himself as per the Law before entering the Temple; he wasn't in the midst of a mob; those who accused him (they were from Asia), aren't even here to be witnesses against him! And even those who are here today from the council cannot accuse him of anything other than, possibly, talking about the resurrection of the dead (with the implication that Jesus Himself rose from the dead!).

Notice that Paul does the Joe Friday thing of "**Just the Facts, Ma'am**". It was irrelevant to his trial about why he was in the Temple, especially since he was before a gentile. The details of his personal testimony was, for now, irrelevant and he knew from experience that it would have caused an uproar amongst the religious Jews.

(Acts 24:22) But when Felix heard these things, having more accurate knowledge of *the* Way, he adjourned the proceedings and said, "When Lysias the commander comes down, I will make a decision on your case."

Once again, a verse causes heartburn in bible commentators, scholars and teachers.

There are at least 2 other similar translations:

1. He deferred them, and said, after I have been more accurately informed concerning this way, when Lysias has come down, I will hear the cause.” (Barnes)
  - a. Some believe that Felix needed more education on “The Way” and that he would receive it from Lysias or others; Hmmmm...from a Roman Commander?
2. Felix, having heard these things, put them off to another time, saying, When I shall have acquired a more accurate knowledge of this sect, and when the tribune Lysias shall have come from Jerusalem, I will judge of your business. (Clark commenting on other translations)
  - a. Clark states that Felix previously sent for Paul concerning the faith of Christ so that he would be better able to judge the current situation. The problem is, there’s no mention of such a visit and while Lysias wrote a letter, there’s no mention of him ever coming down to Caesarea.

So is there a solution? Yes. Let’s not translate the verse in any way other than how it is translated in nearly all our current bibles. The issue is “having more accurate knowledge of the Way”. How could a Roman governor be better informed than those standing in front of him? Since to some that seems far-fetched, they would rather change the translation of the text than to think of simpler explanations.

Does the verse mean that **because of the testimonies** of both parties, Felix could claim he now had a more accurate picture of the Way? No.

First, even Paul’s accusers only knew what they wanted to know about Christianity – very little; they knew rumors, they knew lies, they believed that Jesus was just another false Messiah who was crucified on a Roman cross for being a common criminal.

Second, as I said earlier, Paul didn’t testify about the Way.

So, how possibly could Felix make such a claim?

Felix lived in Caesarea and was Governor for at least 6 years. It is quite reasonable that he knew because:

1. Of the conversion of the Roman Centurion Cornelius (see Acts 10). It was in his home that a small church began with his household and friends.
2. Philip the Evangelist lived there
3. Felix’s wife was a Jewess (v 24).

Therefore, it’s not unreasonable for him to be very familiar with the doctrines of the Gospel and I also suspect, given the radical changes made in the believers in Christ, he knew also of their faithful lives in Messiah.

But regardless of the controversy of this statement, I would rather focus on the main point of Felix’s putting off making a decision in this case. It shows him to be a double-minded man who vacillates between options set before him! History records him as still possessing a “slave’s

mentality” because that’s how he was raised.

So, he had the 2 parties “best” defenses. It was obvious that Paul was innocent of the charges. He didn’t have to wait for Lysias, another gentile Roman who already wrote a letter in which he stated, “I found out that he was accused concerning questions of their law, but had nothing charged against him deserving of death or chains.” (Acts 23:29)

Well, there are 2 possible reasons that he did procrastinate on this manner:

1. While Felix probably understood that Paul was innocent, he wanted to please the Jewish leadership because he knew that they could (and in this case would) cause him trouble with higher ups (King Agrippa and possibly Caesar).
2. Wait until verse 26

(Acts 24:23) So he commanded the centurion to keep Paul and to let *him* have liberty, and told him not to forbid any of his friends to provide for or visit him.

This appears to be a ‘house arrest’, that is, Paul is not chained to his guards. It also included the support and provisions from visiting friends.

From all the timelines I studied, it doesn’t not appear that Paul wrote any letters to the church. We must be certain that he did, in fact, have visitors. Many commentators believe that Luke must have been a frequent visitor because they believe he may have compiled or written much of his Gospel. Being with Paul and close to Jerusalem gave him plenty of information.

But Paul did have a chance to proclaim the Gospel in more detail to the one who claimed to understand Christianity more accurately...

(Acts 24:24) And after some days, when Felix **came** with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, he **sent** for Paul and heard him concerning the faith in Christ. (25) Now as he reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, **Felix was afraid** and answered, "Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you."

“Felix was afraid” => Felix trembled!

**A little background:** Drusilla was his second wife. His first wife was also named Drusilla, and she was the granddaughter of Antony and Cleopatra. Apparently, he married, later, a third wife whose name is unknown.

Felix, when he met Drusilla (who was known for her beauty), fell desperately in love with her, and by means of a questionable Jewish magician, persuaded her to leave her husband and become his wife (without a proper divorce).

Whether Felix was truly curious about “The Way” or perhaps his wife, being Jewish was as well, we can only guess.

Paul took advantage of the opportunity and undoubtedly showed that the Christ **had** come, and that Jesus of Nazareth was He; Paul certainly would not have neglected the fact that Jesus was the Son of God, that he died, and rose again on the third day, and that he offers salvation and the forgiveness for every sinner, such that whomever believes in him shall be saved; And knowing of Felix’s and Drusilla’s adulterous affair, this also included discussions on righteousness, self-control and judgment.

The message was so powerful that Felix trembled! But the governor seemed once again unable to decide for himself the veracity of the message.

(Acts 24:26) Meanwhile, he also hoped that money would be given him by Paul, that he might release him. Therefore, he sent for him more often and conversed with him.

Ahhh...the heart of Felix is finally revealed...he wanted a bribe from Paul to release him. A bribe that never came! But whether he or Drusilla received the truth that they heard is doubtful. No mention is made here or later in the history books of their conversion.

The fact of Felix's trembling shows the affect of the Holy Spirit upon him. But Felix's procrastination prevailed. He obviously knew of his guilt before God. He could have taken what was offered to him and become a great leader – under the direction of the Holy Spirit. But he, like those in the church of Laodicea, was neither hot nor cold. He wouldn't say YES to God and wouldn't even say NO. Didn't he realize that no answer to God is really a NO?

(Acts 24:27) But after two years Porcius Festus succeeded Felix; and Felix, wanting to do the Jews a favor, left Paul bound.

Not bound in chains but detained in custody.

Two years later, by most records it's now 60AD (+-), Paul is still under house arrest in Caesarea and not any closer to Rome...he's still waiting for the second hearing under Felix which never came. And now there's a change in the governorship and that means more waiting. Felix was recalled to Rome to answer to Nero about his conduct as governor.

The record is clearly silent on these 2 years! But the phrase "after 2 years" implies that it was only after the filling up or the fulfillment of these 2 years, that perhaps a resolution was near because the things that the LORD wanted to accomplish were nearly complete.

But all Scripture has something to teach us!

We have learned some lessons:

1. Don't be like Tertullus, a flatterer who wasn't interested in the truth and presented half-truths and down-right lies. But rather, be like Paul who calmly and rationally presented the facts – trusting that the LORD would deal with this situation.
2. Don't be like Felix who was an accomplished procrastinator! So much so that (from all accounts), having heard the truth, could not decide for it and be saved! Be like Paul who when confronted by Jesus asked, "What shall I do, Lord?". And then, go and do it!
3. Don't be like Drusilla a Jewess who evidently could not (perhaps because of Felix), or would not, make a personal decision for Christ. Perhaps Paul told her of Isaiah 49:8 which he quoted in 2 Corinthians 6:2 saying
  - a. "IN AN ACCEPTABLE TIME I HAVE HEARD YOU, AND IN THE DAY OF SALVATION I HAVE HELPED YOU." Behold, now *is* the accepted time; behold, now *is* the day of salvation.

Sadly, in 79AD, she and her son were killed by the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius!

And, a perhaps a larger lesson for Paul. This is a man of action, a man who travelled

extensively, a man who planted, taught and preached, a man who shepherded the churches either through letters or personal visits. And he often worked to support himself! He packed a lot of ministry into his life. He was about 54 years old at this time.

The lessons for Paul?

1. Sometimes we must wait silently for the LORD. If the Holy Spirit wanted him to continue his ministry in some manner, he would have been obedient. [we cannot conclude by the lack of tangible evidence that he did not write to the churches or his friends in Asia, but given his other letters, it seems reasonable to believe that nothing of any significance was written].
2. Was this a time of learning humility? Two Years without Paul in the world? “O, What would they all do without me?” This is just conjecture.
3. We know that God is in control when things happen...but isn't he still in control when things don't happen? Because, quite frankly, the world just doesn't revolve around us...
4. Jesus told Paul that he would go to Rome. He was told that he would witness to Jews, Gentiles, Leaders and Kings. And, except for a King and a Caesar, he has.

But what about us? Have you been waiting on the LORD for something, some event, some provision, some answer to prayer? Has it been frustrating? It was for me when I was waiting on Trip and the board to decide...

While we wait, we live! Sure, we can retire from a job, but we shouldn't ever retire from life! Seek the LORD and His Face and He will tell you what he wants of You. Is it to evangelize? Is it to teach? Is it to minister? Is it to lead? Is it to disciple? So, isn't the waiting really a time of preparation? Prepare and when He tells you to go, go!