

## Wednesday Evening Bible Study

January 24, 2024

Series - The Life and Writings of the Apostle Paul

*Paul's Appearance Before Felix*

Text – Acts 23:33 – 35; Acts 24

### Introduction



In the last study, we saw from chapter 23 that Paul was rescued from a plot to execute him in Jerusalem and was brought under the guard of four hundred and seventy soldiers, first to Antipatras, and then to Cesaerea

The last point from last week's lesson: **Paul Arrives in Caesarea and Is Enquired of By Governor Felix (vs. 33 – 35)**

### According to J. B. Polhill:

Claudius Felix, procurator of Judea from a.d. 52–59, plays a major role in the following chapter of Acts. Knowledge of his background and of general conditions during his administration throws significant light on the Acts narrative. Felix owed his high position to his brother Pallas, who had considerable influence in the court of the emperor Claudius. Both brothers were freedmen of the imperial family. The high procuratorial office granted Felix was something almost unheard of for a former slave and was doubtless secured through his brother's influence in the imperial court. That it was considered with disdain in some Roman circles is reflected in Tacitus's judgment that Felix "wielded royal power with the instincts of a slave" (*History* 5.9). The reference to "royal power" could be related to either his administration or to his family life. His administration was marked by the rising tide of Jewish nationalism with many insurrections, both political and religious. All were brutally suppressed by the procurator. He tended to be arbitrary in his dispensation of justice and totally lacking in understanding of or sympathy for the Jews. This only heightened the anti-Roman feelings of the Jews and proliferated the freedom movements. Felix's ambitious and pretentious nature was nowhere demonstrated more clearly than in

his marriages. He had three wives. All were princesses. The first was the granddaughter of Antony and Cleopatra. The third was Drusilla, the daughter of Agrippa I (see 24:24). Felix's administrative ineptitude was bound to catch up with him sooner or later, and he was finally removed from office for his total mismanagement of a dispute between the Jews and Gentiles of Caesarea (see 24:27).<sup>1</sup>

Felix was not only the son-in-law of Herod I, but he was also the brother-in-law of Herod II (or King Agrippa) who we will meet in the chapter 25.

*"Who, when they came to Caesarea, and delivered the epistle to the governor, presented Paul also before him." (Acts 23:33)*

*"And when the governor had read the letter, he asked of what province he was. And when he understood that he was of Cilicia;" (Acts 23:34)*

Felix' asked Paul what province he was from to determine if he had jurisdiction over the trial. Since both Cilicia and Judaea were both part of legate, or province of Syria, it was within his jurisdiction. According to Roman Law, either the citizenship of the offender or the location of the offence determined jurisdiction. In this case, Felix presided over both places.

*"I will hear thee, said he, when thine accusers are also come. And he commanded him to be kept in Herod's judgment hall." (Acts 23:35)*

Paul was to be detained here in Herod's Judgment Hall, which was formerly a palace, until Felix assembled all of Paul's accusers. In Acts 24:1 everyone has arrived:

*"And after five days Ananias the high priest descended with the elders, and with a certain orator named Tertullus, who informed the governor against Paul." (Acts 24:1)*

#### **I. A Professional Is Included to Argue Against Paul (vs. 2 – 9)**

The orator is a professional speaker. He would choose his words very carefully to paint a picture that would place the Jews in a most favorable light. Notice how he butters up Felix, saying all kinds of nice things about him, which weren't true. Felix was not a friend to the Jews at all, but the religious leaders needed him now to take care of their enemy – Paul.

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<sup>1</sup> Polhill, J. B. (1995). *Acts* (Vol. 26, p. 476). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

*"A lying tongue hateth those that are afflicted by it; and a flattering mouth worketh ruin."*  
(Proverbs 26:28)

Notice the word "clemency" in v. 4 – meaning fairness, or gentleness. Felix had a reputation for being anything but fair or gentle.

Warren Wiersbe states: "the prosecutor's accusations against Paul were no more truthful than his flattery. He brought three charges: a personal charge ("he is a pestilent fellow"), a political charge (sedition and leading an illegal religion), and a doctrinal charge (profaning the temple)."<sup>2</sup>

Notice in v. 5 – "a pestilent fellow" (meaning diseased), and "a mover of sedition", meaning one who causes insurrection or rebellion. Tertullian had to paint Paul as an enemy of Rome. He also states that Paul was "ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes". This is interesting because the Christians were still considered at this point a branch of Judaism. Judaism was a recognized and authorized religion in the empire. Later, however, when the number of Gentile believers would multiply even more, the Romans would then recognize that Christianity was its own entity, and as such was subject to approval or disapproval by the Roman authority.

In v. 6 he states that Paul had defamed the temple, which was an outright lie. The religious leaders claimed that Paul had brought Trophimus (a Gentile from Ephesus – Acts 21:29) into the temple, which he had not done.

Notice in v. 7, they claim that Claudius Lysius had violently removed Paul from them – as if to say that they were just innocently speaking to Paul, and not trying to do him any harm. (See Acts 21:31 – 32)

## **II. A Plea of Innocence is Entered by Paul (vs. 10 – 21)**

Paul does not flatter Felix. He stated his position on using flattery in his first letter to the Thessalonians:

*"For yourselves, brethren, know our entrance in unto you, that it was not in vain: But even after that we had suffered before, and were shamefully entreated, as ye know, at Philippi, we were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God with much contention. For our exhortation was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile: But as we were*

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<sup>2</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 498). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

*allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts. For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloke of covetousness; God is witness: Nor of men sought we glory, neither of you, nor yet of others, when we might have been burdensome, as the apostles of Christ."*

(1 Thessalonians 2:1-6)

Notice vs. 14 and 15, and v. 21. In these verses Paul explains to Felix the real issue that is upsetting these religious leaders. The actual charges leveled against him are not only false, but they cannot be proven because the men from Asia that started all the trouble were not present to witness against him.

The root problem is that Paul was preaching of a resurrected Saviour who was the exact fulfillment of all that was taught in their Law and Prophets, but they had rejected, and still were living in rejection of the Messiah that had come to deliver them.

### **III. A Postponement is Instructed by Felix (vs. 22 - 23)**

At first glance, we get the idea that Felix was a fair and impartial judge. He listens patiently to both sides of the issue, and now he has decided to adjourn until he can hear from the chief captain, Claudius Lysius. Paul is granted liberty to have visitors while they are waiting. The interesting thing is that the trial is never resumed. There is no record of the chief captain ever coming to Cesaerea to appear before Felix.

### **IV. A Prolonged Period of Incarceration (vs. 24 – 27)**

Here we see that Paul will remain incarcerated in Caesarea for two years. Felix never summons for the chief captain, and the trial is never finished. Felix does call for Paul to come and speak with him and his wife Drusilla regarding the Christian faith; and though, he “trembles” when he heard about the “judgment to come”, he never gets saved. His emotions were stirred, but he refused to surrender his will.

Quoting Wiersbie again:

It must have been the curiosity of his wife, Drusilla, that prompted Felix to give Paul another hearing. She wanted to hear Paul; for, after all, her family had been involved with “the Way” on several occasions. Her great-grandfather tried to kill Jesus in

Bethlehem (Matt. 2); her great-uncle killed John the Baptist and mocked Jesus (Luke 23:6–12); and Acts 12:1–2 tells of her father killing the Apostle James.<sup>3</sup>

Notice the outline of Paul's message in v. 25:

**Righteousness (past)** – what must be done about your sin record. Righteousness can only come through the cleansing blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

**Temperance (present)** – how the sin nature can be conquered through yielding to the indwelling Holy Spirit of God. Of course, this can only come after the question of righteousness has been first dealt with.

**Judgment to Come (future)** – There is coming a day when Felix would have to face God. If he remained an unbeliever, it would be before the Great White Throne Judgment where all his sins would be judged, and then he would be sent to the Lake of Fire.

Jesus Christ is either your Saviour or your judge.

Felix decides to wait for a “convenient season”. He puts off the decision, which is a very dangerous thing to do. The “convenient season for the lost sinner is now.

*"(For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.)" (2 Corinthians 6:2)*

If you are yet in your sins, don't wait for a convenient season to trust Christ – trust Him right now!

Illustration regarding delaying a decision for Christ:

Dr. Clarence Macartney told a story about a meeting in hell. Satan called his four leading demons together and commanded them to think up a new lie that would trap more souls.

“I have it!” one demon said. “I'll go to earth and tell people there is no God.”

“It will never work,” said Satan. “People can look around them and see that there is a God.”

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<sup>3</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 501). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

“I’ll go and tell them there is no heaven!” suggested a second demon, but Satan rejected that idea. “Everybody knows there is life after death and they want to go to heaven.”

“Let’s tell them there is no hell!” said a third demon.

“No, conscience tells them their sins will be judged,” said the devil. “We need a better lie than that.”

Quietly, the fourth demon spoke. “I think I’ve solved your problem,” he said. “I’ll go to earth and tell everybody *there is no hurry*.”

The best time to trust Jesus Christ is—*now*!

And the best time to tell others the Good News of the Gospel is—*now*!<sup>4</sup>

The two things from this passage that reveal Felix’ true character are that:

1. He was willing to do the Jews a pleasure.
2. He was hoping that Paul would bribe him.

Reading between the lines, we could surmise that it is very probable that though Paul was not willing to pay off Felix, the religious leaders were willing; and instead of continuing with a trial that they could not possibly win because of a lack of evidence, they just paid Felix to keep Paul locked away.

The last verse tells us that a new sheriff is in town after two years, and with him the hope that Paul will finally receive the justice that he deserves.

Note – Paul was incarcerated for two years in Cesaerea waiting for his case to be heard. I am sure that while he was there, he was preaching the gospel, and ministering to the saints. However, there is nothing recorded here about any fruit that came from his time in Cesaerea. What could Paul have been doing had he obeyed the Holy Spirit, and not insisted on going to Jerusalem outside of the will of God.

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<sup>4</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 502). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.