

Paul's Continued Trials in Caesarea: Felix / Festus / Agrippa II **Acts 24-26**

Acts 24:1-26 – Paul on trial before Antonius Felix (the procurator/governor)

Jewish prosecution (on behalf of the high priest Ananias and other elders) (2b-9): Paul is a troublemaker, ringleader of the Nazarene sect, and tried to desecrate the Temple.

These are strong words, but notice the severe lack of evidence

Paul's defense (10-21): I am no troublemaker: I've only been in town for 12 days! I went to the Temple to worship, not to riot; I'm a follower of the Way, but have the same hope as the Jews in the resurrection of the dead; I brought gifts/offerings for the Jews (1 Cor. 16:1-4; 2 Cor. 8-9; Rom. 15:25-33) and I was ceremonially pure while doing this – and there was no crowd or tumult organized by me!

Paul challenges the logic of his accusers. Why would someone who has come to bring aid and follows the purification rites be guilty of desecrating the Temple?

Paul readdresses the charges: these men have nothing against me, it's Jews from Asia who started the tumult in Jerusalem, they are the ones who should make accusations; otherwise I'm here for the reason I stated before the Sanhedrin: because of the resurrection of the dead

Felix is not convinced by the charges, but neither does he release Paul (22-26): Felix is described as someone who is familiar with the Way, and delays until Lysias can come to Caesarea – there are no real definitive charges against Paul.

Felix possibly assumes there's more against Paul, but he also doesn't want to face the risk of alienating or angering the Jews by releasing him

Although Felix is knowledgeable about the Way, it doesn't seem he's sympathetic to them, but he's also not openly hostile

Paul remains in custody, but is given liberty and allowed visitors

The Drusilla mentioned here as the wife of Felix was the daughter of Herod Agrippa I (the one who executed James and attempted to kill Peter as well (Acts 12)) and had left her first husband to marry Felix. No doubt she too was a source of information to Felix about Christians.

Luke has a bigger story to tell, but the inclusion of the details that Paul spoke to Felix about “righteousness, self-control, and the coming judgment” and the fact that he was hoping for a bribe from Paul say more than enough about his character.

Paul's “ministry” to Felix and Drusilla is very reminiscent of John the Baptizer's ministry before Herod (Matt. 4:1-12)

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Acts 24:27 – Festus succeeds Felix as procurator of Judea

Luke makes this sound like a normal transition, but we learn from Josephus that Felix was recalled to Rome to explain his savage suppression of a dispute between Jews and Syrians over their respective civil rights in Caesarea and a man named Porcius Festus succeeds him in office

As a footnote, Luke adds that this whole imprisonment in Caesarea under Felix's authority has lasted for TWO YEARS!

Though there are disagreements in the dating, the transition from Felix to Festus is either the year A.D. 58 or 60

Acts 25:1-5 – Festus goes to Jerusalem and is asked to bring Paul back there

Upon beginning his governorship, Festus goes to Jerusalem to better acquaint himself with matters, including this case about Paul

The bitterness over Paul still has not died down, as the "chief priests and principal men of the Jews" hoped to get Paul back to Jerusalem where they could kill him

Festus is not an unsmart man, and tells them that they must come to him in Caesarea to prosecute their case

Acts 25:6-12 – Paul's trial before Festus and his appeal to Caesar

Once again the Jews state their case, this time Luke doesn't even give them a voice, but simply says that they could not prove any of their charges against Paul

Paul's defense is succinct: I haven't done anything wrong against the Law of the Jews, the Temple nor against Caesar

Festus, wanting to appease the Jews, offers Paul a chance for his case to be tried in Jerusalem, but Paul staunchly resists that, appealing not just to Festus' own authority, but ultimately to Caesar's himself

Paul's appeal to Caesar effectively ends the Jewish case against him and Festus must now pass Paul off to Rome

Acts 25:13-22 – King Agrippa (II) and Bernice arrive in Caesarea and Festus informs him about Paul

Although Paul's case has effectively been moved along to Caesar (Nero) (25:21), Festus uses Paul as another attempt to make good relations with the Jews, specifically Agrippa II

Bernice was rumored to be Agrippa II's lover, but was also his sister, both being children of Agrippa I

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Agrippa II is the last ruler of the Jews. He was 17 when his father died and considered too young to rule Judea, so the Romans gave power to the procurator. Agrippa II was given an insignificant area to rule and ruled up until the time of the Jewish Revolt in A.D. 66. At that time, he chose to fight alongside the Romans against the Jews

Agrippa's curiosity over the case of Paul is similar to the curiosity of Agrippa's great-uncle Antipas of Jesus (Luke 23:7ff.)

Again Festus makes it clear that in his judgment there are no real substantive charges against Paul that rise above theological disputes among the Jews (25:18-19). Festus can't understand the hostility the Jews have against Paul nor Paul's beliefs in the face of Jewish opposition.

Although it hasn't been a central part of the trial scenes, Festus reveals that Jesus' own resurrection is part of the debate between Paul and the Jews. In other words, the debate is not merely about the resurrection of the dead itself as a doctrine, but on whether Jesus Himself has risen from the dead

Acts 25:23-27 – Festus presents Paul before Agrippa to determine what charges should be given against him

Festus' summary of the case so far should raise a lot of flags. He states that it has already been decided that he would send him to Caesar because Paul had appealed to him, but Festus feels unreasonable sending Paul with no charges against him.

The problem is not that there have been no charges against Paul, we've already seen there are. The real problem is that none of those charges have stuck. There has been no real evidence produced that would show that Paul is guilty of a real crime (i.e. more than simply a theological disagreement). If this is all true, then there is no reason to send Paul to Caesar. There is no case against him and Paul should be released. However, Festus refuses to allow this as an option. Why?

Acts 26:1-23 – Paul's defense before Agrippa

Ok, Paul. Get ready. Anything and everything you say will be used against you as evidence that prove whatever charge these people can produce to convict you!

“Especially because you are familiar...” – Herod the Great (great-grandfather) tried to kill baby Jesus, Herod Antipas (great-uncle) beheaded John the Baptizer and had a part in Jesus' trial, Agrippa I (father) killed James and tried to kill Peter

Paul describes his life first as a strict Pharisee (4-8), then a zealous persecutor of Christians (9-12), and finally as an apostle commissioned by Jesus (13-23)

The goal for Paul is to express how his present faith and life truly is continuous with Judaism. The hopes that all Jews have now find their answer in Jesus.

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Here Paul is quite specific that while he is on trial because of the resurrection, it is very specifically because of his belief that God raised Jesus from the dead (26:6-8) and this itself for Paul is the proof and support of the greater proclamation that Jesus is the Messiah (see Acts 2:22-36)

Not to be lost is Paul's use of the word "hope" as well (23:6; 24:15; 26:6f.; 28:20): hope here is not mere wishful thinking but the belief that God has fulfilled His Old Testament promises

It was because Paul denied the possibility of Jesus' resurrection that he persecuted Christians. But his encounter with the risen Jesus made it no longer possible for him to hold that belief.

"It is hard for you to kick against the goads" (26:14) – a phrase used in other classical Greek literature for useless opposition to divine will/power

What Paul stresses most here is not his conversion, but rather his commission that he receives from Jesus (just as prophets of old were sent to speak for God, so now Paul has been sent to do the same)

Paul in no way backs down from the very thing that has constantly caused the most friction and passion from the Jews (20-21): Gentiles should repent and turn to God (i.e. the exact same message given to Jews, but with no pre-conditions or extra requirements)

Acts 26:24-32 – Festus and Agrippa's reactions to Paul's defense

Festus is completely perplexed by Paul's testimony, but Paul then turns to Agrippa and attempts to evangelize him! Paul's prayer is that Agrippa would one day be like him (except for the chains part)!

Agrippa's response to Paul is calculated: obviously he cannot agree with Paul that prophets point to Jesus, otherwise why wouldn't he believe, but he also can't deny his belief in the prophets among other Jews

Paul is more concerned about the Gospel (and sharing that with others, here Agrippa) than he is about his own life!

Both Festus and Agrippa agree on one thing: Paul is no criminal (26:31) and should have been set free, but because of his appeal, he must go to Caesar