

Study 36: Acts 24

Introduction

Paul had been taken under guard to Caesarea, and he appeared before Felix the Governor. The Jews from Jerusalem came down and brought with them “an orator” – or a lawyer to present their case against Paul to Felix.

Timing: *When did these events occur?*

Content: *What are the major events?*

Cast: *Who are the major players?*

Body of the Study

Who came to make accusations against Paul?

What were the accusations?

What was Paul’s response?

What was Felix’s reaction?

What did Paul preach to Felix?

What happened to Paul?

Homework:

Read the notes as a review of the study.

- *How does Paul respond to the false accusations? What is the essence of his defence?*
- *How must Paul be feeling at this time – after repeated calls from Felix for 2 years, and Jesus’ assurance that he would get to visit Rome, and the repeated attacks on him?*

Read chapter 25 in preparation for next week

Notes for study 36: Acts chapter 24

Introduction

Paul had been taken under guard to Caesarea, and he appeared before Felix the Governor. The Jews from Jerusalem came down and brought with them “an orator” – or a lawyer to present their case against Paul to Felix.

It was less than two weeks after Paul left Caesarea, so things happened very quickly. Although Jesus had appeared to Paul and assured him that he would go to Rome, it would be sometime before he makes the journey.

Timing: *When did these events occur?*

The period of the chapter begins only a few days after Paul arrived in Caesarea in AD 58, but Paul spent a period of 2 years in prison, which places the time of the conclusion of the chapter at AD 60.

Content: *What are the major events?*

The High Priest and the Jews came down and made accusations against Paul; Paul’s defence before Felix; Paul preached to Felix & Drusilla; Paul imprisoned for two years.

Cast: *Who are the major players?*

Paul, Ananias, Tertullus, Felix, Drusilla.

Body of the Study

Who came to make accusations against Paul?

Paul had been in Caesarea for five days before his accusers arrived. During his trial before Felix (presumably the same day) he said that it was 12 days since he had left Caesarea (24:11). Allowing for a 2 day walk from Caesarea to get to Jerusalem, and a one day journey back again, then Paul must have only been in Jerusalem for 4 days. The first of these days was taken up by visiting with James. We can see how quickly the events unfolded.

Not only did the Jewish leaders come down to accuse Paul, but Ananias the High Priest himself came, and brought an orator named Tertullus with him. They must have recognised that they were in some serious difficulty – having been summonsed to appear in court before the governor. Tertullus would have been an expert in the Roman law, and would be akin to a Barrister who would appear before the Judge representing either side of a case – depending upon who was paying him. (He was not there to argue right from wrong *per se*, but merely to present the strongest legal case for those he was representing).

The accusations were made formally to Felix, and Tertullus began by “endearing himself” to him through his introduction. “...*Seeing that through you we enjoy great peace, and prosperity is being brought to this nation by your foresight, we accept it always and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness...*” (24:2-3 NKJV). The great peace and prosperity was generally attributed to the providence of Caesar – and is inscribed upon coins from the time – but Tertullus extended this to the governor. The kindness of Felix that Tertullus speaks of is a fabrication of his own flattery, for Felix was well known for his cruelty and severity, allowing himself to indulge in every form of license and excess. Tertullus then spoke as though he had to restrain himself for giving further accolades to Felix! “...*Nevertheless, not to be tedious to you any further, I beg you to hear, by your courtesy, a few words from us...*” (24:4 NKJV).

The governor, Antonius Felix, was born a slave and freed by Antonia, the mother of the emperor Claudius. He was a brother of Pallas, who was also a freedman of Antonia and became a good friend of the young prince Claudius. Through the influence of Pallas, Felix was appointed in A.D. 48 to a subordinate government post in Samaria. In 52 Claudius appointed him governor of Judea. History tells us that he was a master of cruelty and lust. During his governorship, insurrections and anarchy increased throughout Palestine. Try as he would to put down the uprisings and regain control, his brutal methods only alienated the Jewish population more and led to further disturbances. Despite his low birth, Felix had a succession of three wives--the third being Drusilla, the youngest daughter of Agrippa I, who had been unhappy as the wife of Azizus, king of Emesa; Felix desired her because of her beauty and persuaded her to leave Azizus for him. The relationship between these two seems to have been based upon greed, lust, and expectations of grandeur. (NIVBC)

What were the accusations?

Tertullus gave an outline of the case against Paul – essentially making the accusations against him. Because Paul was being judged by the Roman governor under Roman law, Tertullus probably wanted the case to sound like sedition against Rome.

During his reign over Judea, Felix had repeatedly crucified the leaders of various uprisings and had killed many of their followers for disturbing the Pax Romana. Tertullus's endeavor, as supported by the high priest and the Jewish elders with him, was to put Paul on the same level as these brigands, with the hope that in his insensitivity to the issues, Felix would act in his usual manner simply on the basis of their testimony. (NIVBC)

The accusations were:

- We have found this man a plague (true)
- A creator of dissension (sort of true)
- Amongst all of the Jews throughout the world (sort of true – although Paul hadn't been absolutely everywhere)
- A ringleader (partly true – as an Apostle he was authoritative, but not the only one)
- Of the sect of the Nazarenes (sort of true – from their perspective – they regarded christianity as just another new Jewish sect)
- He even tried to profane the Temple (not true – although the Jews thought that he had)
- We seized him (true)
- Wanted to judge him according to our law (true)
- But Lysias came and took him from our hands with great violence (not true – the violence was coming from the Jews, and Lysias exercised forcefulness to remove Paul from it – which could be read as violence towards the Jews)
- Commanding his accusers to come to you (true)
- By examining him yourself you can ascertain all of these things (true)

The accusations against Paul were partly correct, but were designed to present Paul in a bad light. A fair inquiry into the matter would soon reveal that the case was trumped up.

In essence, there were three charges against Paul:

- He has caused dissension amongst the Jews everywhere,
- As a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes, he is trying to start a new religion – which is against the Roman law,
- He tried to desecrate the Temple.

What was Paul's response?

Paul brought a defence to the accusations “...after the governor had nodded to him to speak...” (24:10 NKJV). He began by also acknowledging Felix, and the fact that he had been a judge of the nation. However Paul was nowhere near as strong in his accolades as Tertullus “...I know that for a number of years you have been a judge over this nation; so I gladly make my defense...” (24:10 NIV).

Paul needed to make a defence of the charges against him – without previous notification – and the consequences of these charges would be his life, if they were properly sustained. He did not have the luxury of calling witnesses, but relied on the self-evident truthfulness of the things he had to say. We should not forget that he also had the assurance of Jesus' promises that "...*the Holy Spirit will provide the words of wisdom which cannot be spoken against...*" (Lk 21:15); and "...*for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome...*" (23:11 NKJV).

Paul's argument was:

- You can confirm for yourself that it is only 12 days since I went to Jerusalem to worship,
- No-one found me disputing in the Temple whilst I was there,
- Nor was I stirring up the crowd – either in the city or in the synagogues,
- They cannot prove the things that I am accused of,
- But I admit that I do worship the God of our fathers – even after the way that they have described as a sect,
- I believe everything that the Law and the Prophets have said,
- I have hope in God, just as the Jews also do,
- I am convinced that there will be a resurrection from the dead of the righteous and the unjust,
- Therefore I have always tried to live before God in good conscience,
- After many years absence I have returned to Jerusalem,
- I came with the purpose of bringing charitable relief to the Jewish nation,
- In the middle of this, some Jews from Asia saw me in the Temple, having been purified,
- I was not involved in any crowd or any uproar.
- The Jews from Asia should have come, if they have anything to say against me,
- Even the very accusers who have come here can say whether or not the Sanhedrin actually found anything of fault against me when I stood before them (which of course they didn't),
- The only possible thing they could disagree over is the resurrection from the dead (and then, half the Sanhedrin believe in it and the other half don't!!!)

The essence of Paul's defence is that the charges could not possibly be correct. How could Paul have stirred up such problems in Jerusalem in such a short time? He did not come there to bring trouble to the Jews, he came bringing gifts!

He was accused of being the ringleader of the Nazarenes, but how could that be the case when he had been out of Jerusalem for many years?

What was Felix's reaction?

Felix was married to Drusilla, who was a Jewess. Although he was not a Jew, he certainly had a good understanding of the Jewish issues. His knowledge about christianity was also better than his accusers had given him credit for. Felix had lived in Judea and Samaria for 10 years, and during this time the church would have become quite influential. It is also possible that Philip the evangelist had made contact with Felix.

Felix was cruel and tyrannical. He had the High Priest Jonathon murdered by a group of Jewish thugs.¹ He married Drusilla after seducing her from her lawful husband, and kept Paul in Jail hoping to be bribed for his release. Felix was sent back to Rome and tried before Nero for his cruelty around AD 60, and would have been punished if his brother Pallas – a great man in the court of Claudius – had not intervened on his behalf.² Drusilla was the daughter of Herod Agrippa 1st (who was eaten of worms after killing James – Acts 12:1, 23). Her father died when she was 6 years old, and sibling rivalry between her and her sister was one of the factors that caused her to leave her husband and marry Felix – in order to have a higher social status than her sister.

¹ Josephus, Antiq 20:8:5

² Reese, p. xvii

His reaction was to defer the case, under the pretence of gaining further information from Lysias. “...*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”...*” (24:22 NKJV). This may have been a valid thing to do, as the two sides of the argument had been presented, and the testimony of Lysias as an independent party had great credence. But the fact that Paul was left in prison for 2 years, and that Felix called for him several times looking for a bribe confirms his ulterior motives.

Felix did however, show great sympathy to Paul, “...*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...*” (24:23 NKJV).

What did Paul preach to Felix?

During the time that Paul was held in Caesarea, Felix inquired of Paul about christianity. He certainly would have known about the rise of the new religion, and he had the opportunity to get some first hand insight. “...*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...*” (24:24 NKJV).

Paul could have spoken to Felix about many things. His knowledge of Greek culture; his travels through many parts of the Roman world; his education under Gamaliel, the great scholar of the Jewish religion. But Paul used the opportunity presented to him and spoke about three things:

- Righteousness
- Self – control
- Judgement to come

Paul might have presented a “soft sermon” designed to appeal to Felix in the hope of being released, but instead it was as strong as any of his other sermons.

Righteousness implies firstly the righteousness of God, and also that of man being made right (justified) by God through the saving power of Jesus Christ, and our faith in Him. The consequence of *being made right* is that we continue in the faith and do not go back to a life of sin. This must have hit a raw nerve to Felix with his reputation for cruelty, and his stealing of Drusilla for his wife.

Self Control would have really hit the nerve of Felix, who allowed his cruel desires and his decadent ways to be gratified at every occasion. By this time, Felix was no doubt feeling scornful towards Paul, and would likely have dismissed him – however Paul has more to say.

Judgement to come takes the discussion away from just the personal traits. There is a life beyond this world, and the things that we do here and now have consequences in that life to come. “...*we must all stand before the judgement seat of Christ, and give account of the things we have done whether they are good or bad...*” (2 Cor 5:10). This would have really put Felix into the position of having to face the consequences and the reality of his actions and lifestyle.

“...*Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way...*” (24:25 KJV) This really hit a raw nerve when Felix understood the implications. He sent Paul away *seeking a more convenient time*. Unfortunately for Felix, he never did find that more convenient time. He never did become a christian, and when he stands before God on the day of judgement he will not be able to say that he did not have the opportunity, or that he did not know about his condition. He knew what he had to do to submit to God and be covered by the blood of Jesus, but his calling for Paul to come again often only caused his heart to be hardened, and rather than submitting to God he found christianity just of academic interest.

What happened to Paul?

Felix “...*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...*” (24:26 NKJV). Felix was not interested in truth and justice. He wanted a bribe to release Paul, and kept coming to him in the hope

that he might get one. When there was no bribe he kept him for 2 years. There is no doubt that he found Paul to have some endearing qualities, and enjoyed the learning experience of the discussions, but it was to no effect, and Felix had no desire to want to be right with God, or put right the wrongs that he had done in his life.

It is most likely that Luke had a close association with Paul at this time, and collected much of his material for the book of Acts from Paul during this period. It would also have given Luke strong connections with Philip as a source of much information.

Some writers place Paul's "Prison Epistles" from this period of imprisonment. However, this imprisonment in Caesarea is very soon after he had left Ephesus, and the things that Paul wrote in the Ephesian letter doesn't fit with preparation for the impending apostasy (it's too soon after Paul's warning to the elders 20:29-31) – it fits much better with his later imprisonment in Rome.

It is likely that Felix might have left Paul in prison *ad infinitum* and the reason that he continued to hold him was that it pleased the Jews. Felix was called back to Rome, "...after two years Porcius Festus succeeded Felix..." (24:27 NKJV). Festus became governor about AD 60. He made a strong attempt to right many of the wrongs of Felix, but he died in office after only about 2 years.

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