

PAUL BEFORE FELIX (Acts 24)

Flanked by seventy horsemen, Paul arrived in Caesarea where he stayed in Governor Felix's official residence. Felix was *bad* in every sense of the word. The secular Roman historian Tacitus described him as "cruel, licentious, and base". He was formerly a slave but was promoted as a favour to a friend by the fourth Roman Emperor Claudius Caesar to the office of governor.

Previously, Paul was the problem for the Roman commander in Jerusalem, Claudius Lysias, but Claudius managed to send him off sixty miles northwest to the governor Felix in Caesarea ... and Felix did not know what to do. As far as Roman law was concerned, Paul had no case to answer, and besides, great care had to be taken since Paul was a fellow-Roman citizen, as well as a Jew! ... None of the Romans knew what to charge Paul with but Felix *had* to hold court and he *had* to invite the Jewish Council from Jerusalem to attend. ... And the Jewish Council considered Paul too much of a threat, especially since he called them hypocrites, and also because he would not stop preaching Jesus Christ to be the Messiah. Therefore, the Sanhedrin could *not* rest on Paul being out of Jerusalem ... they had to stop him, and there was only one way to stop him ... *kill him!* ... But they could not execute him without the permission of the Roman authorities ... and that is why they made the journey to this court convened in Caesarea.

So, five days later the court sat in session. Felix was seated in a prominent elevated position on his governor's throne. In another part at the front of the court was huddled together Ananias the high priest, the elders who were the regularly outspoken leading members of the Sanhedrin, and they were represented by the smooth-tongued obnoxiously arrogant lawyer Tertullus.

As they stood in the courtroom Paul was summoned to answer the charge. Tertullus began with the usual condescending vain and void rhetoric, appealing to Felix's equally obnoxious arrogance (v.2,3). By showering Felix with flattery, Tertullus was so conceited he wanted to spare no time in presenting the case for the prosecution against Paul, ⁴Notwithstanding, that I be not further tedious unto thee, I pray thee that thou wouldest hear us of thy clemency a few words. ... this case ought quickly to be 'done and dusted' ... I don't want to weary you or waste my time and yours on such an 'open and shut case'. ... Meanwhile, Felix was sitting with a smile brimming from ear to ear ... and Paul was standing listening to all this!

Then comes the accusation, ⁵ For we have found this man a pestilent fellow, and a mover of [stirrer upper, ringleader] sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes: ⁶ Who also hath gone about to profane [desecrate] the temple; whom we took, and would have judged according to our law. ⁷ But the chief captain Lysias came upon us, and with great violence took him away out of our hands, ⁸ Commanding his accusers to come unto thee: by examining of whom thyself mayest take knowledge of all these things, whereof we accuse him. ⁹ And the Jews also assented, saying that these things were so. ... The Sanhedrin stood with their heads bobbing in agreement! Such a pathetic scene, as the case for the prosecution was presented.

Felix then nodded - beckoned (v.10) - to Paul to begin. ... Remember how Felix had already read the correspondence from the Roman commander in Jerusalem, Claudius Lysias ... Felix would have been much more inclined to accept the word of a fellow-Roman official over this smug-talking lawyer Tertullus. ... And so, Paul stood on his own before the Roman Governor and his officials, the high priest and the Jewish Council leaders, and this audacious lawyer ... possibly in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And *[his]* speech ... not with enticing words of man's wisdom (I Cor. 2:3,4). Nevertheless, the Lord gave him the words to say. ... Paul was not represented by a smooth-talking verbacious lawyer, but instead he spoke calmly, courteously, and conclusively.

He began by giving Felix his place, ¹⁰ I know that thou hast been of many years a judge *[ruler]* unto this nation – he had been the fourth Roman procurator of the Judea Province, 52-60 AD, and this meeting took place shortly before 60 AD. Paul then systematically answered one-by-one the charges against him, ¹⁰ ... Forasmuch as I know that thou hast been of many years a judge unto this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself: ¹¹ Because that thou mayest understand, that there are yet but twelve days since *I went up to Jerusalem for to worship*. ¹² And they neither found me in the temple disputing with any man, neither raising up the people, neither in the synagogues, nor in the city *[I started no riots]*. ¹³ Neither can they prove the things whereof they now accuse me *[They have no proof for their allegations are totally unfounded ... I hadn't time to start a riot for five of the twelve days they accuse me of rioting, I was in the temple carrying out a vow ... and the other five days, I was being brought to Caesarea!]* ¹⁴ But this I confess unto thee *[... here's my testimony ...]*, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets: ¹⁵ And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust. *[... A lot of this would have been foreign to what Felix believed ... but Paul was telling it as it was ...]* ¹⁶ And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men. ¹⁷ Now after many years I came to bring alms to my nation *[money for the needy]*, and offerings *[... he is a Jew after all]*. ¹⁸ Whereupon certain Jews from Asia found me purified in the

temple, neither with multitude, nor with tumult *L...I was simply worshipping when they set upon me, without cause.* ¹⁹ Who ought to have been here before thee, and object, if they had ought against me. ²⁰ Or else let these same here say *L... say it here and now ... either stand up or shut up ...I*, if they have found any evil doing in me, while I stood before the council, ²¹ Except it be for this one voice, that I cried standing among them, Touching the resurrection of the dead I am called in question by you this day *L... that is the only subject they can accuse me of, if they wish.*

Of course, Paul knew he was appearing before the court on a theological issue, not on a criminal issue, so he was confident he had no case to answer in a Roman court ... and that was what the letter from the Roman commander Claudius Lysias confirmed (23:26-30).

The case for the prosecution (v. 2-8), the case for the defence (v. 10-21) ... the verdict was now in the hands of Felix. He knew what was right for he had studied, - or at least had come into close contact with some of the followers of The Way. He knew what Paul was saying was consistent with the witness of the Christians ... and they were *not* rebels or revolutionaries, rioters or rascals ... but they peacefully presented their Gospel. There was no evidence for the Sanhedrin's allegations. However, Felix had to be careful how he treated the Jewish leaders for fear they accused him to Caesar, in the same way their predecessors had threatened Pilate years earlier (*Jn. 19:12* the Jews cried out, saying, If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend: whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Caesar). So, Felix was in a quandary for he knew what was right to do, - release Paul because he had done nothing wrong, - but he chose the cowardly way for fear of the Sanhedrin and he 'deferred' his decision until the next time Claudius Lysias, the Roman commander in Jerusalem, was to come to Caesarea ... which was probably *never*, for there is no record of it happening!

In the meantime, he ordered the centurion to continue holding Paul in custody, but allowing him to receive any number of guests to visit him (v.23). ...Basically, Paul had free board, comfort, and protection in a Roman Governor's palace for the two years (v.27)! ... And Ananias the high priest, the elders, and the lawyer slinked back to their dens in Jerusalem having completely failed in the case they had foolishly brought against Paul. ... *Rom. 8:31* What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? ³³ Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect?

Not too long afterwards, Felix's Jewish wife Drusilla heard about the commotion with Paul and the court case ... and she wanted to meet Paul and hear for herself what the Gospel was all about. ... Drusilla was the youngest of

three daughters of Herod Agrippa I, who was the grandson of the Herod the Great who was 'king' when Jesus was born, and who executed John the Baptist. Drusilla had been in a loveless marriage with King Azizus of Emeza, from Syria until Felix came to Judah and enticed her away, and they married. So, Paul sat down with Felix and Drusilla and freely shared with them the whole Gospel, - about Jesus, His perfect life, His atoning death, His resurrection, His ascension, he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come (v.25) ... what an opportunity in such a high place of authority! God was working, even in these circumstances. There is no barrier to what He does. And Paul so faithfully explained the Gospel to them, Felix understood even more than he had known previously but he was arriving at the point where the message was coming too close to his heart, and he was trembling with fear. At that point, - confronted by the clarity of the Gospel, - he directed Paul, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee (v. 25).

Felix also had another more personal item on his agenda for ²⁶ He hoped also that money should have been given him of Paul, that he might loose him: wherefore he sent for him the oftener, and communed with him. ... Felix had been a slave, he used to work for nothing. ... Now he was a governor with money and wealth, he considered his elevated status the opportunity to receive more gain. So, during the two years Paul lived in his home, he called the apostle to speak with him on many occasions about Gospel matters, hoping Paul might donate to his funds. Never again though do we read of him trembling with fear concerning the eternal welfare of his soul, **Mk. 8:36** what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?

At the end of the two years there was a riot in Caesarea and Felix dealt with it so severely he turned the Jews in the region against him, and Caesar recalled him to Rome, replacing him with Porcius Festus. However, before Felix left, - to do the Jews a favour, - he left Paul imprisoned in the Governor's palace (v.27). ... Through it all, God kept His servant faithful and continuing in his powerful witness to the Lord Jesus.