

Testifying Before Felix and Drusilla

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The video version is available at: <https://youtu.be/2wGLtzipVKU>

The scripture reading is Acts: 23:23-24:27

After Paul was confronted by disgruntled Jews from Asia in the temple on Shavuot, Paul began giving his testimony before various groups. He would eventually testify before seven different groups culminating with an audience before Emperor Nero. The first group Paul testified before was the gathered mob or crowd that followed him from the temple to the base of the fortress of the Roman guard. This mob, after listening to much of Paul's testimony erupted into violence and calling for his death when Paul stated he was commissioned to bring the gospel message to the Gentiles. After his arrest, Paul testified before the Sanhedrin. When that situation erupted in violence, Paul was put in the Roman prison with the intention of bringing Paul back before the Sanhedrin a couple of days later.

However, Yeshua came to Paul and revealed that the charges leveled against him would not be resolved in the Sanhedrin; they would be taken all the way to Rome.

Acts 23:11 NKJV 11 But the following night the Lord stood by him and said, "Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome."

At this point, Paul was still in Jerusalem. In the days ahead, he would have opportunity to testify in Caesarea before the Roman procurator and his Jewish wife.

Before Paul could be taken back before the Sanhedrin, Paul's nephew warned him and the Roman guard about a plot to ambush him on the way to the meeting with the Sanhedrin.

Acts 23:20-21 NKJV 20 And he said, "The Jews have agreed to ask that you bring Paul down to the council tomorrow, as though they were going to inquire more fully about him. 21 "But do not yield to them, for more than forty of them lie in wait for him, men who have bound themselves by an oath that they will neither eat nor drink till they have killed him; and now they are ready, waiting for the promise from you."

How would Lysias, the Roman Commander who had arrested Paul, handle this situation? Paul was a Roman citizen, and as such, had more rights than the typical inhabitant of the Roman Empire. Lysias ultimately decided to bump the whole situation up to Felix, the Roman Procurator of Judea whose seat of authority was in Caesarea.

Acts 23:23-24 NKJV 23 And he called for two centurions, saying, "Prepare two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen, and two hundred spearmen to go to Caesarea at the third hour of the night; 24 "and provide mounts to set Paul on, and bring him safely to Felix the governor."

Lysias took the threat against Paul very seriously providing him with an escort of four hundred seventy men. Further, they left in the night before word of their departure could reach the would-be assassins. These Jewish agitators, probably from the sect of the Sicarii zealots, had taken a vow not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul. They put themselves in an impossible situation! There was no way they could now fulfill their vow! First Fruits of Zion in [Chronicles of the Apostles](#) comments on this.

“The forty Zealots failed, but they were doomed to die of starvation and dehydration unless they could find a cooperative rabbinical court with the authority to find some bases for annulling their vows. They probably did.”ⁱ

After a two day journey, Paul safely arrived in Caesarea accompanied by a letter from Lysias stating the volatile situation surrounding Paul. Lysias, of course, restated the situation in terms most favorable to him!

Acts 23:27-30 NKJV 27 This man was seized by the Jews and was about to be killed by them. Coming with the troops I rescued him, having learned that he was a Roman. 28 And when I wanted to know the reason they accused him, I brought him before their council. 29 I found out that he was accused concerning questions of their law, but had nothing charged against him deserving of death or chains. 30 And when it was told me that the Jews lay in wait for the man, I sent him immediately to you, and also commanded his accusers to state before you the charges against him. Farewell.

Lysias had emphasized that he had saved the life of Paul who was a Roman citizen. This would gain favor from Felix for both Lysias and Paul. Felix was appointed by Emperor Claudius as procurator over Judea five years earlier in 52 CE. As a former slave, Felix reveled in his freedom and newfound authority over Judea. When King Agrippa the first's daughter Drucilla came to Jerusalem with her husband to celebrate a feast in Jerusalem, Felix saw her and determined to claim her as his wife. Josephus describes the situation in his work Antiquities of the Jews.

“But for the marriage of Drusilla with Azizus, it was in no long time afterward dissolved upon the following occasion: - While Felix was procurator of Judea, he saw this Drusilla, and fell in love with her; for she did indeed exceed all other women in beauty, and he sent to her a person whose name was Simon, one of his friends; a Jew he was, and by birth a Cypriot, and one who pretended to be a magician; and endeavored to persuade her to forsake her present husband, and marry him; and promised, that if she would not refuse him, he would make her a happy woman.”ⁱⁱ

Drusilla was persuaded and left her husband who had converted to Judaism in order to marry her. Drusilla married Felix, a Roman former slave who did not convert to Judaism. This divorce and remarriage of their “princess” to a non-Jew angered the Jews. Adding in the constant criticism and unwanted advice from the high priest Jonathan, Felix was not favorably disposed to the Jews. In an earlier teaching, we related the role that Felix played in the assassination of Jonathan just months before these events concerning Paul at Shavuot.

When Paul was delivered to Caesarea, Felix read the letter and met with Paul.

Acts 23:33-35 NKJV 33 When they came to Caesarea and had delivered the letter to the governor, they also presented Paul to him. 34 And when the governor had read it, he asked what province he was from. And when he understood that he was from Cilicia, 35 he said, "I will hear you when your accusers also have come." And he commanded him to be kept in Herod's Praetorium.

With the situation as laid out in the letter from Lysias, Felix was disposed to ruling in Paul's favor. However, he was a shrewd and ruthless man who would use any situation to his own advantage.

The high priest Ananias prepared his arguments and, along with others of the council and a Roman lawyer, went to Felix in Caesarea to present his case against Paul. The Roman lawyer, Tertullus, framed the case as one of civil and political crimes against Rome with a secondary charge of defiling the temple.

Acts 24:5-6 NKJV 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.

The implication made is that if the Jewish authorities had been allowed to judge Paul for profaning the temple, then Felix wouldn't have to deal with him for creating dissension and riots. They tried to paint Paul as a zealot by labeling him as a ringleader. It seems that they were hoping that Felix didn't recognize who the followers of the Way were and that they were a peaceful group who did not advocate revolt against Rome.

Acts 24:7-9 NKJV 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." 9 And the Jews also assented, maintaining that these things were so.

The governor didn't respond to the accusations brought against Paul; he merely nodded at Paul to respond to the charges.

Acts 24:10 NKJV 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,

Like Tertullian, Paul opened with some well thought out flattery. Paul commented favorably on Felix's background in ruling Judea and his confidence that Felix would fairly judge his case.

Paul explained that he was engaging in typical Jewish behavior as he brought his offering in the temple. He was not engaged in any civil or political crimes.

Acts 24:11-13 NKJV 11 "because you may ascertain that it is no more than twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem to worship. 12 "And they neither found me in the temple disputing with anyone nor inciting the crowd, either in the synagogues or in the city. 13 "Nor can they prove the things of which they now accuse me.

Felix was very familiar with the Jewish pilgrimage feasts after governing in Caesarea for five years. Paul referred to his open arrival in Jerusalem less than two weeks earlier along with his purpose to worship at the temple, thus, refuting the claim that he engaged in inciting riots or profaning the temple. However, one point that Paul didn't back down from was his role as a leader of the followers of the Way.

Acts 24:14-16 NKJV 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.

The word "sect" is the Greek word "hah-ee-res-is," number 139 in Strong's Greek Concordance meaning a choice or party. It is the origin of our English word "heresy" meaning a belief contrary to accepted doctrine. However, at this time, the word simply means a different choice. Josephus uses this word to describe the various types of Judaism including the Pharisees, Sadducees and Essenes. Paul is saying that his accusers are calling the followers of the Way simply another choice in Judaism; one of which they don't agree with. However, Paul regards the followers of the Way as much more than one of many ways to practice Judaism. They call it a sect, but Paul calls it worshipping God according to all the things written in the Torah and the

prophets! Paul asserts that a central part of his doctrine is the belief in the resurrection of the dead and judgment after death for everyone!

As Paul's Jewish antagonists are accusing him of violating the Torah, Paul is confronting them with their own hypocrisy. He knows that his actions will be judged before the Judge of all creation; do they know and realize that their actions will be judged?

Paul, then, describes his purpose in coming to Jerusalem as that of bringing alms for the poor and offerings to God. While calmly bringing offerings, it was the Jews from Asia, who by the way weren't even present to bring charges, who disrupted his own worship!

Acts 24:17-21 NKJV 17 "Now after many years I came to bring alms and offerings to my nation, 18 "in the midst of which some Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with a mob nor with tumult. 19 "They ought to have been here before you to object if they had anything against me. 20 "Or else let those who are here themselves say if they found any wrongdoing in me while I stood before the council, 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.'"

Since Paul's accusers who started the riot weren't there to present their charges, according to the Torah, no charges could be laid against him. Since the council did not observe him in the temple, Paul concludes that the only thing the council could possibly bring against him was causing an uproar in the council by his statement that he was being judged for believing in the resurrection of the dead.

Felix, who Luke tells us already had knowledge of the followers of the Way, adjourns without making a ruling.

Acts 24:22-23 NKJV 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." 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.

Paul remained in custody but his friends and family could openly visit him and take care of his needs. It was a type of open arrest. He could not leave confinement but he was locked not in or chained. We don't know if Lysias ever came to Caesarea to clarify the charges against Paul.

After several days, Felix's wife Drusilla, the daughter of King Agrippa the first, expresses a desire to hear Paul. Paul had stated his testimony before Felix; now he does the same before Drusilla.

Acts 24:24 NKJV 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.

Paul had the opportunity to share his testimony away from the courtroom with Felix and Drusilla. Felix's heart was touched and his conscience pricked at him.

Acts 24:25 NKJV 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 put off making a decision about salvation, but he continued to send for Paul - partly hoping to convince Paul to bribe him to rule in his favor and secure his release, and partly to hear more about the gospel.

Acts 24:26 NKJV 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.

Things continue in this way for the next two years until Felix is replaced in 60 CE by Porcius Festus.

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

After being replaced, Josephus tells us that Felix along with his wife Drusilla and son Agrippa travel and settle in the Roman city of Pompeii which will be destroyed by the volcanic eruption of Vesuvius twenty years later. Did Felix or Drusilla ever accept the salvation offered to them as presented over the two years by Paul? Although his heart and conscience were touched, it seems that Felix refused to repent and receive salvation. Drusilla, raised as a Jew, would have known more about what Paul was explaining, but we have no evidence that she, also, turned her heart toward God and accepted salvation.

Paul has now testified before three different groups defending his faith and the call to go to the Gentiles. He testified before the crowd at the temple who had come to worship and celebrate the Feast of Shavuot. He testified before the Sanhedrin about Yeshua and the gospel message. Both the crowd and the Sanhedrin rejected Paul's gospel. This third time that Paul was called on to defend his gospel was before the Gentile Felix and the Jew Drusilla. Once more, the message was rejected.

The writer of the book of Hebrews tells us not to be stubborn like those in the wilderness who did not have faith to receive the promises God has for us calling these promises God's rest.

Hebrews 4:1-2 NKJV 1 Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it. 2 For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it.

The writer reminds us that the day to receive God's rest – God's salvation is today.

Hebrews 4:7 NKJV 7 again He designates a certain day, saying in David, "Today," after such a long time, as it has been said: "Today, if you will hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts."

Felix put off a decision day after day. He heard the message Paul spoke and was drawn to it. He brought Paul before him time after time over a two year period, yet he didn't hear Paul's words with faith. He hardened his heart against his own conscience. If you have not yet received salvation and eternal life offered to us through the promise of God's son, today is the day of salvation. Don't turn away.

Study Questions:

1. What does the rash vow of the zealots in Acts 23:20-21 reveal about the zealots as a whole? How did Yeshua address the issue of rash vow?
2. How does understanding Paul's standing as a Roman citizen help us understand his unique position among the Jewish people? How did it help advance or hinder the spread of the gospel?
3. Compare the charges brought against Paul by the Sanhedrin with the charges they brought against Yeshua?
4. Paul and Yeshua were both brought before Roman procurators. Compare the responses of these Romans to testimonies of Paul and Yeshua.

5. What does the writer of Hebrews mean when he states that the Children of Israel in the wilderness did not hear the gospel with faith? (Hebrews 4:1-2). How does that apply to Felix and Drusilla? How does that apply today?
6. What new insight did you gain from this teaching? How do you respond to this new insight? How will you realign your life based on this new understanding?

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ⁱ Chronicles of the Apostles. D.T. Lancaster. First Fruits of Zion. ©2011, 2016. Book 3, Page 779.

ⁱⁱ The Work of Josephus. *Antiquities of the Jews*. Translated by William Whiston, A.M. Hendrickson Publishers. ©1987. Book 20, Chapter 7, line 141-142. Page 608.