

The Historical Stories of the Acts of the Apostles

Lesson 15 Acts 24:1 – Acts 27:1

It is May of AD 58 and Paul is safe in the care of Felix in Caesarea. Felix will give Paul a hearing as soon as the high priest and council arrive to voice their charges against him. It takes five days for the religious men to arrive, bringing with them a lawyer named Tertullus.

Paul's first trial in Caesarea before Felix Tertullus speaks first

Acts 24:¹And after five days the high priest Ananias came down with some elders, with a certain attorney *named* Tertullus; and they brought charges to the governor against Paul. ²And after *Paul* had been summoned, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying *to the governor*, "Since we have through you attained much peace, and since by your providence reforms are being carried out for this nation, ³we acknowledge *this* in every way and everywhere, most excellent Felix, with all thankfulness. ⁴"But, that I may not weary you any further, I beg you to grant us, by your kindness, a brief hearing. ⁵"For we have found this man a real pest and a fellow who stirs up dissension among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. ⁶"And he even tried to desecrate the temple;¹⁹³ and then we arrested him. [~~And we wanted to judge him according to our own Law.~~ ⁷"But Lysias the commander came along, and with much violence took him out of our hands, ⁸~~ordering his accusers to come before you.~~] And by examining him yourself concerning all these matters, you will be able to ascertain the things of which we accuse him." ⁹And the Jews also joined in the attack, asserting that these things were so.

The representatives of the Sanhedrin accompanying the high priest are probably Sadducees because the Pharisees have finally come to the defense of Paul.¹⁹⁴ They have enlisted the aid of Tertullus, a Roman attorney. Tertullus is necessary because they need their case presented to the governor according to the Roman law, customs and procedures. Most likely, the case is presented in Latin, a language that Paul probably understand and speaks.

At the same time he sends Paul to Caesarea, Claudius Lysias informs the Sanhedrin that they can present their complaint to Felix, the governor in Caesarea.¹⁹⁵ It takes five days for them to arrive and present themselves at a hearing before the governor. From the time Paul arrives in Jerusalem for Pentecost until he stands before Felix is a mere 12 days.

¹⁹³ By bringing Trophimus into the Temple – Paul did not bring him into the temple as accused.

¹⁹⁴ **Acts 23:9** And there arose a great uproar; and some of the scribes of the Pharisaic party stood up and *began* to argue heatedly, saying, "We find nothing wrong with this man; suppose a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?"

¹⁹⁵ **Acts 23:30** "And when I was informed that there would be a plot against the man, I sent him to you at once, also instructing his accusers to bring charges against him before you."

Paul's response

Acts 24:10 And when the governor had nodded for him to speak, Paul responded: "Knowing that for many years you have been a judge to this nation, I cheerfully make my defense, ¹¹since you can take note of the fact that no more than twelve days ago I went up to Jerusalem to worship. ¹²"And neither in the temple, nor in the synagogues, nor in the city *itself* did they find me carrying on a discussion with anyone or causing a riot. ¹³"Nor can they prove to you *the charges* of which they now accuse me. ¹⁴"But this I admit to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect I do serve the God of our fathers, believing everything that is in accordance with the Law, and that is written in the Prophets; ¹⁵having a hope in God, which these men cherish themselves, that there shall certainly be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked. ¹⁶"In view of this, I also do my best to maintain always a blameless conscience *both* before God and before men. ¹⁷"Now after several years I came to bring alms to my nation and to present offerings; ¹⁸in which they found me *occupied* in the temple, having been purified, without *any* crowd or uproar. But *there were* certain Jews from Asia-- ¹⁹who ought to have been present before you, and to make accusation, if they should have anything against me. ²⁰"Or else let these men themselves tell what misdeed they found when I stood before the Council, ²¹other than for this one statement which I shouted out while standing among them, 'For the resurrection of the dead I am on trial before you today.'

Paul has not been in Jerusalem for many years and he finally comes to the city for the festival of Pentecost. At the bidding of the leaders in the church, Paul joins four men in a Jewish vow. It is not Paul's intent to make an offering at the temple for these men and himself, yet he does. At the end of the vow the Jews from Asia recognize him and start a riot. None of the Jews who started the riot in Jerusalem is present in Caesarea to prove the charges against him. The only thing that Paul has said that is offensive to the Sanhedrin is his statement concerning the resurrection of the dead. For all practical purposes, the issue before Felix is a face-off with no easy outcome. Felix makes no decision on the matter and sends Paul into a semi-custody situation.

Felix puts the matter off with custody and freedom

Acts 24:22 But Felix, having a more exact knowledge about the Way, put them off, saying, "When Lysias the commander comes down, I will decide your case." ²³And he gave orders to the centurion for him to be kept in custody and *yet have some* freedom, and not to prevent any of his friends from ministering to him.

Felix ends the hearing by placing Paul in custody with freedom to be with his friends and anyone else who wants to visit him. Felix uses the excuse that he wants to hear from the commander who rescued Paul from the Asian Jews beating him outside the temple. Felix is lying; he already has a letter from Claudius Lysias stating that Paul is innocent. As it turns out, Felix never sends for Claudius to testify.

Felix and Drusilla send for Paul

Acts 24:24 But some days later, Felix arrived with Drusilla, his wife who was a Jewess, and sent for Paul, and heard him *speak* about faith in Christ Jesus. ²⁵And as he was discussing righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix became frightened and said, "Go away for the present, and when I find time, I will summon you."

Drusilla, Felix's wife at this time, is the daughter of Herod Agrippa I. When she meets Felix, she is the wife of the king of Emesa. Her love for Felix blooms and she leaves her husband to be Felix's adulterous companion until she is finally able to marry him.

Felix is enamored of Paul and sends for him from time to time. Paul's presence and conversation always make him uneasy so he sends Paul away. Felix really does not have a reason to hold Paul in custody, but he does so because he wants more from Paul than just talk.

Felix was looking for bribe money from Paul

Acts 24:26 At the same time too, he was hoping that money would be given him by Paul; therefore he also used to send for him quite often and converse with him.

Felix wants Paul to pay him money to let him loose, but Paul does not offer to do so at any of their meetings. Paul knows that he will make it to Rome because he has that promise from the Lord. Felix continues to summon Paul often, giving him many opportunities to offer a bribe, but it does not occur.

Felix is replaced by Festus, the fall of AD 60

Acts 24:27 But after two years had passed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus; and wishing to do the Jews a favor, Felix left Paul imprisoned.

Josephus confirms this transition in *Antiquities*.¹⁹⁶ According to Josephus, at the end of his two year term Felix is replaced by Porcius Festus in AD 60. A few months after his replacement, he is called to Rome where he is accused by the Jews in Caesarea of cruelty in his office. The charges are dropped through the influence of his brother, Pallas, who is very close to Nero. We can assume that Felix leaves Paul in custody hoping to deflect the Jews' unhappiness with him as governor. By now, Paul has been in the custody of the Roman forces for more than two years.

Festus goes to Jerusalem

Acts 25:1 Festus therefore, having arrived in the province, three days later went up to Jerusalem from Caesarea. **2** And the chief priests and the leading men of the Jews brought charges against Paul; and they were urging him, **3** requesting a concession against Paul, that he might have him brought to Jerusalem (~~at the same time, setting an ambush to kill him on the way~~). **4** Festus then answered that Paul was being kept in custody at Caesarea and that he himself was about to leave shortly.

Acts 25:5 "Therefore," he said, "let the influential men among you go there with me, and if there is anything wrong about the man, let them prosecute him." **6** And after he had spent not more than eight or ten days among them, he went down to Caesarea; and on the next day he took his seat on the tribunal and ordered Paul to be brought.

It is the spring of AD 60 and three days after arriving in Caesarea, Festus journeys to Jerusalem making his first visit as governor. His visit is cut short because of the complaints about Paul still being held in Caesarea without being punished. Back in Caesarea, Festus calls for Paul.

¹⁹⁶ Josephus, Ant. xx. 8, 9.)

Paul's second trial in Caesarea before Festus

Acts 25:⁷ And after he had arrived, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around him, bringing many and serious charges against him which they could not prove; ⁸ while Paul said in his own defense, "I have committed no offense either against the Law of the Jews or against the temple or against Caesar." ⁹ But Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favor, answered Paul and said, "Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and stand trial before me on these *charges*?" ¹⁰ But Paul said, "I am standing before Caesar's tribunal, where I ought to be tried. I have done no wrong to *the* Jews, as you also very well know. ¹¹ "If then I am a wrongdoer, and have committed anything worthy of death, I do not refuse to die; but if none of those things is *true* of which these men accuse me, no one can hand me over to them. I appeal to Caesar." ¹² Then when Festus had conferred with his council, he answered, "You have appealed to Caesar, to Caesar you shall go."

Paul is not willing to return to Jerusalem. He has already had a trial in the holy city and is ready to move on to Rome. Paul is standing at the judgment seat with Festus as the head of the tribunal. He is a Roman citizen and he should be judged in the Roman court, not back in the Jewish tribunal. Since Festus can not make a decision, Paul appeals to Caesar; Festus agrees but holds him in prison for many more days. King Agrippa visits the city and Festus presents Paul's case to him. Festus still does not have a good reason to send Paul on to Caesar; therefore he has not done so.

Paul's third trial in Caesarea before King Agrippa Festus' report

Acts 25:¹³ Now when several days had elapsed, King Agrippa and Bernice arrived at Caesarea, and paid their respects to Festus. ¹⁴ And while they were spending many days there, Festus laid Paul's case before the king, saying, "There is a certain man left a prisoner by Felix; ¹⁵ and when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews brought charges against him, asking for a sentence of condemnation upon him. ¹⁶ "And I answered them that it is not the custom of the Romans to hand over any man before the accused meets his accusers face to face, and has an opportunity to make his defense against the charges. ¹⁷ "And so after they had assembled here, I made no delay, but on the next day took my seat on the tribunal, and ordered the man to be brought. ¹⁸ "And when the accusers stood up, they *began* bringing charges against him not of such crimes as I was expecting; ¹⁹ but they *simply* had some points of disagreement with him about their own religion and about a certain dead man, Jesus, whom Paul asserted to be alive. ²⁰ "And being at a loss how to investigate such matters, I asked whether he was willing to go to Jerusalem and there stand trial on these matters. ²¹ "But when Paul appealed to be held in custody for the Emperor's decision, I ordered him to be kept in custody until I send him to Caesar."

Festus explains Paul's circumstances to Herod Agrippa and asks his advice in the matter.

It is AD 60 and Herod Agrippa II, the son of Herod Agrippa I mentioned in Acts 12, is the king.¹⁹⁷ Upon the death of Herod, King of Chalcis, Claudius Caesar gives his throne to

¹⁹⁷ Acts 12:20-23

Agrippa II. He is the king of Chalcis but not the king of Judea; however, Claudius has given Agrippa II authority over the temple and the right to appoint the high priest. He is the last king to serve in Palestine.

Bernice was originally married to Polemon, king of Cilicia. When he lost his authority, she divorced him and married her uncle, Herod, king of Chalcis. Following his death, Bernice began living with Agrippa II, who is her biological brother, in an intimate relationship. Later, she became the mistress of Caesar Titus.

Festus introduces Paul

Acts 25:²²And Agrippa said to Festus, "I also would like to hear the man myself." "Tomorrow," he said, "you shall hear him." ²³And so, on the next day when Agrippa had come together with Bernice, amid great pomp, and had entered the auditorium accompanied by the commanders and the prominent men of the city, at the command of Festus, Paul was brought in. ²⁴And Festus said, "King Agrippa, and all you gentlemen here present with us, you behold this man about whom all the people of the Jews appealed to me, both at Jerusalem and here, loudly declaring that he ought not to live any longer. ²⁵"But I found that he had committed nothing worthy of death; and since he himself appealed to the Emperor, I decided to send him. ²⁶"Yet I have nothing definite about him to write to my lord. Therefore I have brought him before you *all* and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that after the investigation has taken place, I may have something to write. ²⁷"For it seems absurd to me in sending a prisoner, not to indicate also the charges against him."

Clearly, Festus blames Paul's delay in Caesarea on Agrippa II. He is looking for Agrippa to find a reason to send him to Caesar. Felix could have settled the matter and either let Paul go or put him to death. Likewise, Festus could have already handled Paul's case, but he could not find a legal reason to convict Paul. Not wanting to incite the fury of the Jews, Festus, like Felix, does nothing. It is now in the hands of King Agrippa who has Jewish blood in his veins.

Paul's defense in his testimony

Acts 26:¹And Agrippa said to Paul, "You are permitted to speak for yourself." Then Paul stretched out his hand and *proceeded* to make his defense: ²"In regard to all the things of which I am accused by the Jews, I consider myself fortunate, King Agrippa, that I am about to make my defense before you today; ³especially because you are an expert in all customs and questions among *the* Jews; therefore I beg you to listen to me patiently. ⁴"So then, all Jews know my manner of life from my youth up, which from the beginning was spent among my *own* nation and at Jerusalem; ⁵since they have known about me for a long time previously, if they are willing to testify, that I lived *as* a Pharisee according to the strictest sect of our religion. ⁶"And now I am standing trial for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers; ⁷*the* promise to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly serve God night and day. And for this hope, O King, I am being accused by Jews. ⁸"Why is it considered incredible among you *people* if God does raise the dead? ⁹"So then, I thought to myself that I had to do many things hostile to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. ¹⁰"And this is just what I did in Jerusalem; not only did I lock up many of the saints in prisons, having received authority from the chief priests, but also when they were being put to death I cast my vote against them. ¹¹"And as I punished

them often in all the synagogues, I tried to force them to blaspheme; and being furiously enraged at them, I kept pursuing them even to foreign cities. ¹²"While thus engaged as I was journeying to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests, ¹³at midday, O King, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining all around me and those who were journeying with me. ¹⁴"And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew dialect, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.' ¹⁵"And I said, 'Who art Thou, Lord?' And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. ¹⁶'But arise, and stand on your feet; for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you; ¹⁷delivering you from the Jewish people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you, ¹⁸to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, in order that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.' ¹⁹"Consequently, King Agrippa, I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision, ²⁰but kept declaring both to those of Damascus first, and also at Jerusalem and then throughout all the region of Judea, and even to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance. ²¹"For this reason some Jews seized me in the temple and tried to put me to death. ²²"And so, having obtained help from God, I stand to this day testifying both to small and great, stating nothing but what the Prophets and Moses said was going to take place; ²³that the Christ was to suffer, and that by reason of His resurrection from the dead He should be the first to proclaim light both to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles."

Paul's personal testimony grips the heart of the king who knows all the history and can say nothing to dispute Paul in the sight of all the onlookers. As soon as Paul uses the word "Gentiles," Festus interrupts Paul's testimony and Agrippa's train of thought is broken.

Festus interrupts

Acts 26:²⁴And while Paul was saying this in his defense, Festus said in a loud voice, "Paul, you are out of your mind! Your great learning is driving you mad."

Paul's ability to condense the history of the Jews is unmatched and it shows his vast in-depth knowledge. Since no one can argue with his testimony that he has attached to the history, Festus can attack only his sanity. Paul's response is kind and courteous.

Paul's reply

Acts 26:²⁵But Paul said, "I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I utter words of sober truth. ²⁶"For the king knows about these matters, and I speak to him also with confidence, since I am persuaded that none of these things escape his notice; for this has not been done in a corner. ²⁷"King Agrippa, do you believe the Prophets? I know that you do."

King Agrippa, as overseer the temple in Jerusalem, is required to confess a faith in the prophets. Now, Paul has Agrippa cornered. To deny the prophets signifies to all the Jews present that he is not a believer. To say yes to Paul's challenge means that he accepts all that Paul has said. Festus has interrupted Paul at the perfect moment. Paul has just said:

Acts 26:²² "So, having obtained help from God, I stand to this day testifying both to small and great, stating nothing but what the Prophets and Moses said was going to take place; ²³ that the Christ was to suffer, *and* that by reason of *His* resurrection from the dead He would be the first to proclaim light both to the *Jewish* people and to the Gentiles."

He has proclaimed the prophecies concerning the Messiah from Moses and the Prophets and he has linked the Messiah to Jesus who is risen from the grave. What can Agrippa say? He will have to couch his answer in language that will not offend either side.

Agrippa is almost persuaded

Acts 26:²⁸ And Agrippa *replied* to Paul, "In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian." ²⁹ And Paul *said*, "I would to God, that whether in a short or long time, not only you, but also all who hear me this day, might become such as I am, except for these chains."

Students of the Bible who study this passage today often read the wrong intent into Agrippa's words. Agrippa is not "almost" a Christian as some adhere. Agrippa is appealing to both sides with his answer. If Agrippa gives Paul more time, he might convince him to believe, but Agrippa is not going to give Paul more time, so he will not believe. For the other side, Agrippa uses the word "Christian." Today the word is used by believers as a badge of pride, the name of their faith, but in AD 60, it is still a name used to put the believers in their place and show that the name caller is not a believer.

The authorities decided to send Paul to Caesar –the fall of AD 60

Acts 26:³⁰ And the king arose and the governor and Bernice, and those who were sitting with them, ³¹ and when they had drawn aside, they *began* talking to one another, saying, "This man is not doing anything worthy of death or imprisonment." ³² And Agrippa said to Festus, "This man might have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar." **Acts 27:**¹ And when it was decided that we should sail for Italy, they proceeded to deliver Paul and some other prisoners to a centurion of the Augustan cohort named Julius.

Agrippa has heard enough from Paul and is ready to move him on to Caesar. Without stating a reason, the three assign him to a soldier named Julius who is to escort Paul and other prisoners to Rome.

At the time of Paul's assignment to Julius, the Augustan cohort is a legion of soldiers assigned to the service of Caesar to deliver messages from the throne to various places in the empire and also to deliver prisoners back to Rome in accordance with his decree. For the most part, all Roman offenders worthy of the death penalty are immediately sent to Rome in the care of the Augustan cohort to participate in the games at the coliseum. Although Julius is the only one mentioned by name, other members of the cohort are with him.

The journey to Rome takes longer than imagined. By the time they make their first stop and change ships, the fast is already over.¹⁹⁸ It is Luke's way of saying the Day of

¹⁹⁸ Acts 27:9

Atonement has passed. In AD 60, the Day of Atonement occurs on October 6. Sailing the seas of the northeast Mediterranean from October through January is always treacherous and so it is with Paul, even though he has the Lord's promise that he will witness in Rome.