

# Acts 24:24-25:12: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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Preacher: Alastair Roberts

[ 0 : 0 0 ] Acts chapter 24 verse 24 to chapter 25 verse 12. After some days Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, and he sent for Paul and heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus.

And as he reasoned about righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment, Felix was alarmed and said, Go away for the present. When I get an opportunity, I will summon you.

At the same time he hoped that money would be given him by Paul, so he sent for him often and conversed with him. When two years had elapsed, Felix was succeeded by Portius Festus, and desiring to do the Jews a favour, Felix left Paul in prison.

Now three days after Festus had arrived in the province, he went up to Jerusalem from Caesarea, and the chief priests and the principal men of the Jews laid out their case against Paul, and they urged him, asking as a favour against Paul that he summon him to Jerusalem, because they were planning an ambush to kill him on the way.

Festus replied that Paul was being kept at Caesarea, and that he himself intended to go there shortly. So, said he, let the men of authority among you go down with me, and if there is anything wrong about the man, let them bring charges against him.

[ 1 : 1 5 ] After he stayed among them not more than eight or ten days, he went down to Caesarea. And the next day he took his seat on the tribunal, and ordered Paul to be brought. When he had arrived, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around him, bringing many and serious charges against him that they could not prove.

Paul argued in his defence, Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I committed any offence. But Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favour, said to Paul, Do you wish to go up to Jerusalem, and there be tried on these charges before me?

But Paul said, I am standing before Caesar's tribunal, where I ought to be tried. To the Jews I have done no wrong, as you yourself know very well. If then I am a wrongdoer, and have committed anything for which I deserve to die, I do not seek to escape death.

But if there is nothing to their charges against me, No one can give me up to them. I appeal to Caesar. Then Festus, when he had conferred with his council, answered, To Caesar you have appealed.

To Caesar you shall go. After the high priest Ananias, the elders and Tertullus had come before Felix, and Paul had given his defence, Felix adjourned the trial until Lysias the tribune would arrive.

[ 2 : 3 3 ] Now, at the end of chapter 24, we discover that he summoned Paul before him again, this time with his Jewish wife Drusilla present. As Craig Keener notes, Drusilla might have appreciated having someone like Paul, who was familiar with Greco-Roman thought, and was able to express traditional Jewish convictions within that sort of idiom, having a potential influence upon her husband.

Paul's speaking before Felix and Drusilla here is also part of the way in which he fulfills what Christ foretold in Luke chapter 21 in the Olivet Discourse, in verses 12 to 13.

But before all this, they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake. This will be your opportunity to bear witness. And Paul takes his opportunity to bear witness here. He speaks boldly about faith in Christ Jesus, shorthand for the gospel message.

More specifically, he speaks about righteousness, self-control, and the coming judgment. These are core implications of the Christian message for someone in the office of civil authority.

[ 3 : 4 0 ] Felix is such a ruler, and he must submit to the authority of Christ as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Civil authority comes under the rule of Christ. A governor like Felix bears the sword, but he is responsible to Christ for the way that he does so.

He must learn about righteousness. He must learn about self-control, a classic virtue for rulers in Greco-Roman thought, but here framed in terms of Christian teaching. The ruler without self-control is apt to be tyrannical.

The leader, however, who has controlled himself will be much less likely to use his power to prey upon others or to fulfil his lusts. As we learn more about Felix as a character, we will see that he has failed in this regard and is a corrupt ruler in many respects.

A message of judgment to come was also very prominent within the teaching of Paul and the other apostles. There was a higher throne to which this world's authorities must answer, and the fact that such judgment will come, and the one by whom it will be rendered, was announced by the raising of Christ from the dead.

Paul makes the same point in his Areopagus speech in Athens, in Acts chapter 17. Here we might get some indication of the fact that Paul has a particular form of his message that is especially targeted at those who exercise civil or political authority.

[ 4 : 57 ] Felix seems to be rattled, and he sends Paul away, saying that he will call him again when he has the opportunity. He continues to talk to him on regular occasions, but he does not free him. This is not the brief postponement of Paul's trial that we might have anticipated.

We begin to realise that Felix is a corrupt ruler. He's hoping to be given a bribe. The longer he delays, the greater the pressure would be for Paul or his friends to give one. He also wants to appease the Jews by keeping Paul imprisoned, and yet he knows that Paul is innocent, so he does not want to condemn him.

Two full years elapsed before Portius Festus replaces Felix as the governor of the province. Three days after Festus arrives, he goes up to Jerusalem, and at the very start of his tenure as governor, the chief priests and the principal men of the Jews present him with Paul's case.

They want him as a favour to them to bring Paul back to Jerusalem. They're hoping to ambush and kill him on the way. This is the second time that they had played the part of brigands in trying to take Paul's life through an ambush.

Festus' rejection of the petition of the chief priests and the leading men of the Jews highlights divine protection of Paul. Festus was a very new ruler, and they are requesting a favour at this point, which would have put them in his debt and created goodwill at the outset of his governorship.

[ 6 : 14 ] The petition seems to have been made with some insistence too. Festus, however, seems to be wary. He invites the leading men of the Jews to join him in going down to Caesarea, where they can bring their charges against Paul if there is anything wrong about him.

Unbeknownst to Festus, he is protecting Paul in this way. The providential protection of God should clearly be seen to lie behind all of this. God has a purpose for Paul, and Paul will come to no harm before that purpose has been fulfilled.

Festus only stays in Jerusalem for a few days, eight to ten days, and then he goes down to Caesarea, and immediately, on the very next day, he takes up his seat in the tribunal to judge and orders Paul to be brought.

As Cina observes, there is likely a great irony here. There was quite likely a backlog of cases after Felix's tenure as governor. As we have seen, he used his power to imprison people as a means of extracting bribes.

However, the Jewish authorities concerned to get rid of Paul actually leads Festus to expedite his case and to deal with him immediately. The Lord actually uses the enemies of Paul to move his case up the queue.

[ 7 : 20 ] What's more, seemingly as a result of this expediting of his case, he gets to speak to Agrippa and Bernice shortly afterwards. It is possible that Luke had access to Roman archives.

There were carefully kept records, and speeches would be of similar length to those that we see in this chapter. Festus is accompanied by a number of Jews from Jerusalem who come to present the case against Paul.

They take a very confrontational tone, but they cannot prove their charges. Paul's response gives some indication that both Jewish and Roman legal concerns are at play. Is Paul a rabble-rouser among his own people, opposing the law, the people, and the temple, as he was accused of a few chapters ago?

Is he seditious against Caesar? He insists that both are not the case. He's a good Jew, and he's a good citizen. The Jews had earlier asked of Festus that Paul be brought to Jerusalem to be tried there.

Although Festus was wary, he still wishes to do the Jews a favour in offering him a trial in Jerusalem. He might be suggesting a Jewish proceeding over which he presides. But Paul recognises that the Jews are not to be trusted.

[ 8 : 24 ] He had been involved in their murderous plans against Christians before, so he has seen things from the inside. He knows better than to trust them. He wishes for justice to be done.

He isn't seeking to avoid death. And there is an implicit criticism of Festus here. He knows that Festus is too much swayed by political concerns, and that he might not get justice from him. He makes clear that he knows that Festus is aware that there is no substance that the allegations made against him, and that if Festus were to do this favour for the Jews, he would effectively be handing Paul over to them.

At this point then, he makes the key move of appealing to Caesar. He gives himself over to the protection of the state. He rejects Jewish oversight of the Christian church in the process too. This turning away from the court of the Sanhedrin and turning towards the emperor for justice is one more sign, one more step, on the parting of the ways of the early Christian movement and the Jewish authorities.

[ 9 : 20 ] Daryl Bach notes that what became an appeal for Caesar's judgment was originally the right to have the people, rather than an official, render judgment. By the time of the first century, this had become a matter of the highest official casting judgment in the case.

This request was outside of the official code of law, so Festus would have enjoyed some latitude in how he handled the appeal. This also gives Festus an out, a way of escape.

Paul knows that Festus is entangled in Jerusalem politics and its machinations, and that it would make a righteous judgment very unlikely. Festus, in some ways, has his hands politically tied. The exact character of an appeal to Caesar is not entirely clear. What cases was it permitted, for instance? Just in capital cases? Just in cases with the Roman citizens? The Caesar in question would have been Nero.

Paul isn't necessarily expecting to find justice, but he knows that his chances would likely be greater. Throughout the book of Acts, Paul shows great shrewdness in the way that he approaches Jewish authorities and Roman authorities, the way that he will take advantage of certain laws, the way that he will use certain situations to his advantage.

[ 10 : 27 ] He is adaptable and resourceful, always alert to clever ways in which he could turn things to his favour. In Paul's appeal to Caesar, he is doubtless thinking about something else, though. In Acts chapter 23, verse 11, A question to consider.

Considering Paul's teaching in his epistles, what do you imagine that his message to Felix concerning righteousness, self-control, and the coming judgment might have contained?