

Trial Replay. . . before a Roman Governor

V 1 Now after five days Ananias the high priest came down with the elders and a certain orator named Tertullus. These gave evidence to the governor against Paul.

“After five days.” A short time for the Jews to prepare a case, hire an attorney (*“orator”*), and make the trip to Caesarea. They may have been worried that Felix would dismiss the case if they waited too long, or perhaps they were hoping to catch Felix off guard before he could form any definite opinions about it. *“Tertullus.”* Possibly a Roman, more likely a Hellenistic (Greek) Jew.

V 2-4 And when he was called upon, Tertullus began his accusation, saying: “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.

“Nevertheless, not to be tedious to you any further, I beg you to hear, by your courtesy, a few words from us.

Tertullus introduces the case against Paul with much flattery of governor Felix. *“Most noble Felix.”* Roman governor of Judea, 52-59 A.D. Felix was a former slave whose brother won the favor of the emperor Claudius and secured for him the governorship of Judea. He was not a remarkable ruler and achieved little during his time in office, except that he vanquished the Egyptian rebel whom Lysias referred to in Acts 21:38. Felix’s tough rule angered the Jews, and the emperor Nero ousted him from the governorship *“two years after”* Paul’s hearing (verse 27).

“Through you we enjoy great peace.” This flattery was likely meant to prepare Felix to react strongly to the main charge that Tertullus was about to bring against Paul, that he was a *“creator of dissension”* (“mover of sedition” in KJV).

How different was the Sanhedrin’s approach in these new circumstances: when in their own territory and in the presence of a minor Roman official (Lysias), they showed no respect for the proceedings and thought nothing of striking Paul and creating a big commotion. What a

different face they put on here, now that they were standing before the Roman governor in the Roman city of Caesarea.

V 5-9 “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.

“He even tried to profane the temple, and we seized him, and wanted to judge him according to our law.

“But the commander Lysias came by and with great violence took him out of our hands,

“commanding his accusers to come to you. By examining him yourself you may ascertain all these things of which we accuse him.”

And the Jews also assented, maintaining that these things were so.

“We have found this man a plague (“pestilent fellow” in KJV).”
Tertullus goes on to list the accusations that the Jewish council was making against Paul.

Firstly, *“a creator of dissension... throughout the world... a ringleader.”* The Romans did not tolerate those who incited rebellion, and in a Roman court this would have been the most serious charge. These carefully chosen words were meant to throw Paul’s deeds into as bad a light as possible. Tertullus made sure to avoid mentioning any specific incidents of sedition for fear that the case would get shifted to some other governor elsewhere in the Empire. The Jews wanted Paul to be tried by a judge, Felix, over whom they could apply some leverage; as Judeans, they could complain to Rome against Felix, but not against governors in other districts.

Secondly, *“a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes.”* This contemptuous reference to Christianity made it sound as if Paul was the leader of some kind of subversive organization that might pose a danger to Rome. It made Paul’s activities sound much worse than a mere charge of heresy against the Jewish religion, a charge which would not mean anything in a Roman court.

“Profane the temple.” This third accusation of blasphemy against God was only circumstantial evidence, but designed again to throw a bad light on Paul’s activities.

“We seized him, and wanted to judge him according to our law.” This was just more whitewash: it ignored the crowd’s savage beating of Paul and falsely claimed that they were merely trying to arrest him. According to their version, ***“Lysias... with great violence took him out of our hands.”***

With Lysias absent from the proceedings, Tertullus hoped to put the Jews in a good light by shifting the blame for the violence on Lysias the chief captain. (This implied accusation against Lysias may not have gone down too well with the governor, especially if Lysias was known to be a trustworthy soldier; but at this point the Jews couldn’t contain their bitterness over Lysias’ suppression of them in Jerusalem.)

The truth was that the Jewish mob had turned insanely violent, and Lysias had to, of course, use violence to put a stop to their rioting and to rescue Paul. The Jewish leaders were trying to make it sound as if the matter should have been left in their hands, and no doubt they were hoping that’s what might yet happen.

“The Jews also assented, maintaining that these things were so.” It might have seemed impressive that all these rulers of the Jews were giving their assent to Tertullus’ version of the Jerusalem incident. Paul’s enemies, without the slightest twinge of conscience, were ready to stoop to any level of falsehood and subversion to achieve their aims.

V 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,

“Many years a judge of this nation.” More than most foreign rulers, Felix had some acquaintance with Jewish laws, customs, and beliefs. (He was married to a Jewess.)

“I do the more cheerfully answer for myself.” Paul did not need an orator like Tertullus to speak for him; it was a sign of his trust in Felix that he was experienced and discerning enough not to be swayed by falsehood and flattery. By noting Felix’s ***“many years”*** as a judge, Paul was showing due honor and respect while at the same time encouraging him to be fair and come to a just verdict.

V 11-13 “because you may ascertain that it is no more than twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem to worship.

“And they neither found me in the temple disputing with anyone nor inciting the crowd, either in the synagogues or in the city.

“Nor can they prove the things of which they now accuse me.

“Twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem.” Five of those days had just been spent in Caesarea waiting for his accusers to arrive (in verse 1). Most of the other seven days before that were engaged in the purification rites. Paul’s point was that, even if he wanted to, he did not have the time to organize or incite a revolt.

V 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.

“Believing all things... written in the law and in the prophets.” Unlike the Sadducees, who only accepted the Torah, and the Pharisees, who would not believe the promises about their Messiah as fulfilled in Jesus, Paul accepted the entire Old Testament as the Word of God.

V 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.

“Hope in God.” A great hope of the Jewish people was the “*resurrection of the dead*”. (Job 19:25-27, Daniel 12:2) Except for the Sadducees, the Jews understood that God was not a distant Being but had a great concern for mankind, both in this life and the next. They understood that every man would have to account for his deeds. The “*just*” whose good deeds had benefited mankind will be recognized and richly rewarded. The “*unjust*” who thought they had gotten away with their evil deeds will be found out and receive whatever retribution is coming to them.

V 16-17 “This being so, I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men.

“Now after many years I came to bring alms and offerings to my nation,

“Conscience without offence toward God and men.” In the previous

trial, when Paul said something similar - *“I have lived in all good conscience before God”* - he got slapped across the mouth. But now circumstances had changed, and the high priest had to restrain himself.

“I came to bring alms and offerings to my nation.” Far from seeking to stir up strife, Paul had actually gone on a humanitarian mission to Jerusalem. Paul focuses attention on the good things he was doing rather than overdo it with trying to prove his innocence. Along that line, Paul only said, *“Neither can they prove the things whereof they now accuse me”* (verse 13).

V 18-21 *“in the midst of which some Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with a mob nor with tumult.*

“They ought to have been here before you to object if they had anything against me.

“Or else let those who are here themselves say if they found any wrongdoing in me while I stood before the council,

“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.’”

“Neither with a mob nor with tumult.” For the Roman governor, it was the disturbing-the-peace issues that really mattered. Paul had not done any rabble-rousing among the crowds at Jerusalem. Only during the hearing before the small group of the Sanhedrin was there an incident that remotely resembled anything like that when Paul *“cried out in the concil... ‘concerning the resurrection of the dead I am being judged!’”* (23:6) Proclaiming the resurrection from the dead before the skeptical Sadducees may have upset them, but it was no crime, neither in Jewish nor in Roman law.

Other than the above incident, none of those who examined Paul a few days earlier had *“found any wrongdoing”* in Paul’s words or activities. They had no concrete accusations; it was nothing more than vaporous hype and spin cooked up by the orator Tertullus.

V 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.”*

“Having more accurate knowledge of the Way.” Felix knew more about Jewish beliefs, probably because of his Jewish wife Drusilla. It is possible he may have gathered by now that the Christians, some of whom were his own soldiers, were no threat to society. (Cornelius, for example, was a converted Roman soldier.)

“Adjourned the proceedings.” There was every reason to do this, for the Jews from Asia, who had first accused Paul (21:27-28), had failed to show up for the trial; furthermore, the Jewish leaders could not prove Paul to be guilty of any crime. So Felix adjourned the proceedings on the pretext of needing more information from Lysias the chief captain.

By not making a snap judgment and deciding to wait until he could hear Lysias’ version of events, this guaranteed an unfavorable outcome for the Jews. Lysias had already said in his report everything that needed to be said, and there is no record that he was ever actually summoned. His further input, had he come, certainly would have set the record straight about how violent the Jewish crowd was. It would have exposed Tertullus’ version of events as slanted and false.

In the final outcome the only verdict left for Felix, according to Roman law, was not guilty. This, of course, would infuriate the Jews and bring on more trouble. As governor, Felix may have felt his main responsibility was to maintain order. From his viewpoint the best decision was no decision.

V 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.**

“Have liberty... not to forbid any of his friends to provide for or visit him.” This was certainly a mild form of incarceration.

V 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.**

“Drusilla, who was Jewish.” Youngest daughter of Herod Agrippa I who had executed James (12:1). She was Felix’s third wife, and not more than 20 years old at this time. Felix, entranced by her beauty, had lured her away from her former husband.

“Felix... heard him concerning the faith in Christ.” To his credit Felix was intrigued by Paul and open to learning more from him.



V 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 was afraid.” Hearing about ***“righteousness, self-control (temperance), and the judgment to come”*** shook Felix to the core, and he dismissed Paul, escaping for the time being the conviction he was feeling.

V 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.

“Money would be given him by Paul.” Likely, this was some form of

bribery which, although illegal under Roman law, was commonplace.

“Therefore he sent for him more often and conversed with him.” Having to interact with a bribe-seeking high official must have been a dreary exercise for Paul, and this went on for two years. Whether Felix continued to engage Paul in any more serious discussions on spiritual matters, we don’t know. Why no money was procured for Paul’s release is also not known: perhaps for moral reasons; perhaps Paul did not want to deplete the resources of the Jerusalem church; or there may have been some other reason.

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

“Porcius Festus succeeded Felix.” Because of Felix’s brutal suppression of a riot in Caesarea, the Jews complained to Rome, and Nero had him recalled and replaced by Festus. Unlike Felix, Porcius Festus was a member of the Roman nobility. He ruled only for two years before he died but was considered a better ruler than Felix. To prevent any more trouble coming his way from the Jews, Felix tried to *“do the Jews a favor”* and *“left Paul bound”*.

[\(Continue to ACTS, chapter 25\)](#)