

“FALSELY ACCUSED” (Acts 24:1-27)

Christians should expect to be falsely accused in this world. It is no friend to the people of God. We should not be surprised if we don't get true justice here. But one day God will right every wrong. Satan had tried to destroy the life and ministry of the Apostle Paul on many occasions. This is just the latest attempt.

And after five days Ananias the high priest descended with the elders, and with a certain orator named Tertullus, who informed the governor against Paul. (v1)

Marcus Antonius Felix was the Roman governor of Judea. He was a successor to Pontius Pilate. The Emperor Claudius appointed Felix governor around 52 AD. Felix was a former slave and governed Judea until about 59-60 AD. The trial of Paul would be before Felix. All the religious leaders from Jerusalem made their way to Caesarea to participate in this trial. Ananias was probably still offended against Paul's insult to him from his willingness to make such a journey.



The brought with them a slick talking Latin lawyer called Tertullus, who was a paid advocate of the Jews. He was a man of no integrity who was willing, for a fee, to take up the slanderous accusations against Paul. In reality, he was a “liar for hire.” There are always people like Tertullus in every part of society who can be bought to lie against the godly.

And when he was called forth, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying, Seeing that by thee we enjoy great quietness, and that very worthy deeds are done unto this nation by thy providence, We accept it always, and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness. Notwithstanding, that I be not further tedious unto thee, I pray thee that thou wouldest bear us of thy clemency a few words. (v2-4)

Nearly half of Tertullus' speech consisted of his obvious flattery toward Felix, although he uses generalities as even he could not truthfully think of much good that Felix had achieved. For Felix

was infamous for being unscrupulous, ruthless, greedy and sexually immoral. The Roman historian, Tacitus, said of Felix, “He wielded his kingly authority with the spirit of a slave, in all cruelty and lust.” Josephus states that Jewish affairs greatly deteriorated during his rule in Judea. Crime was rampant in the region. Felix had also assassinated Jonathan, the high priest. The Jews doubtless despised Felix privately, but if they needed to tell a few lies to destroy Paul then the end justified the means for them. Napoleon once wisely warned, “He who knows how to flatter also knows how to slander.”



For we have found this man a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes: Who also hath gone about to profane the temple: whom we took, and would have judged according to our law. But the chief captain Lysias came upon us, and with great violence took him away out of our hands, Commanding his accusers to come unto thee: by examining of whom thyself mayest take knowledge of all these things, whereof we accuse him. (v5-8)

After laying on the sugar-coated flattery, Tertullus' tone sharply changes when he turns to Paul, who he refers to as, “*this man*.” His strategy is a threefold one. Cleverly, he avoids the religious charges until the end because he knew Felix was only interested in seditious offences, which were taken very seriously by the Romans. They framed the first two charges in terms of politics seeking to portray Paul as a political revolutionary:

(1) He first describes Paul as “*pestilent*” meaning one with a plague who has stirred up trouble all over the empire, “*a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world*.” This was a lie. Paul sought to encourage peace between Jews and Gentile and urged his followers to submit to the Roman Authorities over them (cf. Romans 13).

(2) Tertullus then charges Paul with being a leader of a heretical Messianic sect called the Nazarenes that was not recognized as a legitimate religion by the Roman government. The Romans were concerned about these groups who had proved to be insurrectionist before. Felix would be on guard to stamp out any hint of activities that would upset the “*Pax Romana*” (Roman Peace).

(3) He then accuses Paul of desecrating the Jewish temple by taking a Gentile beyond the Court of the Gentiles, contrary to the agreement of the Roman authorities with the Jews.

The Jewish leaders deceitfully try to paint themselves the victim here as being interrupted while they sought to administer justice. They blamed Paul for stirring up the people. It is notable here that no evidence is offered to support these very serious charges by Tertullus. He just throws out the charges and hopes that this is enough. The Jews probably hoped by these vague charges that Felix would act in his usual insensitive manner and have Paul executed without proper investigation. The first two charges were often used by Roman tyrants to get rid of trouble-makers.

And the Jews also assented, saying that these things were so. (v9)

All the Jewish leaders openly assented in these lies. False religious people are often the most unethical of people. Arnold is right to note,

“What does this tell us? Religion does not change a person's heart. These were the most religious men of the first century; they believed the Bible more or less; they outwardly kept the Law; they went through the externals of religion; they wore the right clothes, said the right things and went through the right motions but their hearts were corrupt, and they would bend any religious conviction to gain their own ends. Men do not need religion. They need regeneration. They need to be born again, so they will have the internal power of the Holy Spirit to live a positive Christian life. Religion damns but Christ saves a condemned soul.”

Their murderous intent coupled with their lying tongues only revealed that they were the devil's children, “*Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.*” (John 8:44) The devil is an expert liar. So don't be surprised if his choicest disciples are also.

Then Paul, after that the governor had beckoned unto him to speak, answered, Forasmuch as I know that thou hast been of many years a judge unto this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself: (v10)

Felix allowed Paul to publicly defend himself from these powerful accusations. Paul could have manipulated this situation as he had all the rhetorical skills of Tertullus, but he did not and was just respectful. Rather than lash out, flatter or play the victim, the Apostle logically and carefully told the truth. Paul gives a masterful defence with unanswerable arguments that completely exonerates himself before the governor. Felix knew Jewish customs as previously he had served under the governor of Samaria, for four years.

Because that thou mayest understand, that there are yet but twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem for to worship. 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: Neither can they prove the things whereof they now accuse me. (v11-13)

Paul points out that he had no time to incite a revolutionary riot in twelve days, and neither did he try. In fact, he went up to Jerusalem simply to worship. Ironically, Paul did dispute in every synagogue he went into but this time the Lord had not led him. Probably, this area was being evangelised by others. This fact strengthened Paul's case and was another instance of providence.

A Christian is not a doormat and Paul protested his rights here. He boldly challenges their whole case, as wholly lacking substance by pointing out that these recent events could easily be checked out and substantiated.



But this I confess unto thee, 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: 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. And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void to offence toward God, and toward men. (v14-16)

Paul's line of argument was that he shared the same common faith as the Jews and Christ was the fulfillment of it. Paul was a complete Jew and clearly believed in the plenary inspiration of the Bible as "believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets." He points out that the belief in a physical resurrection of the dead is a fundamental part of the Jewish faith. It is not a heresy.

Now after many years I came to bring alms to my nation, and offerings. Whereupon certain Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with multitude, nor with tumult. Who ought to have been here before thee, and object, if they had ought against me. Or else let these same here say, if they have found any evil doing in me, while I stood before the council, 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. (v17- 21)

Paul then explicitly refutes the charge here that he was defiling the temple, but points out that, to the contrary, he was simply bringing gifts of money and offerings to Israel. He wisely points out that not a single eye witness is present to prove the serious allegations made against him, "Who ought to have been here before thee, and object, if they had ought against me." Paul finishes his defence by re-emphasizing the Christian's continuity with Old Testament Jewish faith and shows that the only thing he is being accused of is to believe in the resurrection.

And when Felix heard these things, having more perfect knowledge of that way, he deferred them, and said, When Lysias the chief captain shall come down, I will know the uttermost of your matter. And he commanded a centurion to keep Paul, and to let him have liberty, and that he should forbid none of his acquaintance to minister or come unto him. (v22-23)

Felix is in a political bind here. It is clear that Paul the Roman citizen is facing unproven allegations but on the other hand Felix doesn't want to quickly dismiss the illustrious Jewish accusers. Bock summarises his tricky situation,

“Felix found himself on the horns of a dilemma. He could not convict Paul, since Lysias the tribune had found no fault in him (23:29), nor had the Sanhedrin (23:9), nor had Tertullus been able to substantiate his charges. On the other hand, Felix was unwilling to release Paul, partly because he hoped for a bribe (26) and partly because he wanted to curry favour with the Jews (27). The only other option was to postpone his verdict on the pretext that he needed the tribune's advice.”

Like many unethical political leaders, he simply postpones the decision. In the providence of God, he is being transferred from Hebrew surroundings to Roman ones under “house-arrest.” Felix here is being used as an instrument to carry out God's purposes concerning Paul.



And after certain days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess, he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ. And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee. 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. (v24-27)

Paul understood that it wasn't his job to convert anyone – it was simply his job to declare faithfully the Gospel. The Apostle knew the power to convert a person was not in him but in the Word. Providence now gives Paul another opportunity to preach the gospel to Felix and others. This time he will preach to Drusilla. According to Roman historians, they were living in adultery. Felix was said to have seduced her from her husband. Paul knew the best time to preach the gospel to a person was now!

Paul always preached for a decision and Felix trembled under this preaching with conviction. It takes a lot for a ruthless man like Felix to tremble before a mere prisoner. The only explanation is the power of the Word of God. In the heart of every man is the consciousness of eternity to come (Eccl. 3:11). Even the most powerful of men are affected by the throbbing conscience warning them of this. We do not read of him trembling again – procrastination has put an innumerable host in hell (2 Cor. 6:2). Conviction is not conversion. It seems Felix calculated the cost of following Christ and concluded the price was too high.

Felix was hoping Paul would give him a bribe (probably thought as ringleader of such a large sect he would be wealthy) but Paul was content that he was in the will of God and was not willing to step outside of providence. We must all learn this truth. The apostle Paul actually lived in Felix's house for two years – what a story of wasted opportunities. Probably only Judas was worse. As Ray Stedman said, “He had one of the most unusual opportunities ever afforded a human being: To spend hours with the Apostle Paul, to hear the clarity of his revelation of the nature of reality, of the way things really are, and to understand the provision God has made to meet it, to understand the truth as it is in Jesus.”

But after two years Porcius Festus came into Felix' room: and Felix, willing to shew the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound. (v27)

This cynical political expediency is not easy to accept unless you have confidence in a Sovereign God. If we view events from a natural perspective, we could grow impatient and frustrated. It would be especially hard for such a formerly active apostle who knew the great work that still needed to be done. We do not read of God speaking to him during this period and it could have been a great trial to him. In one of his prison epistles Paul later wrote, “*Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.*” (Philp. 4:11) Paul learned much in this time of delay. F. B. Meyer comments,

“So often we mistake God, and interpret his delays as denials. What a chapter might be written of God's delays. It is the mystery of the art of educating human spirits to the finest temper of which they are capable. What searchings of heart, what analyzings of motives, what testings of the Word of God, what upliftings of the soul, ‘searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of God signified.’ All these are associated with these weary days of waiting which are, nevertheless, big with spiritual destiny. But such delays are not God's final answer to the soul that trusts him.”

This incident demonstrates that walking with God in a clear conscience doesn't mean that everything will go the way we want. It seems Paul was stuck in Caesarea, unable to minister as a missionary and unable to even get to Rome. But God would use this providential restraint to get Paul safely to Rome.