

Paul Before Felix the Governor – Acts 23:12 – 24:27

Introduction:

Postponing a decision is actually making a decision. When something is time sensitive, to delay making a decision is choosing to let the event happen. Reading about the death camp of WWII called Auschwitz it became clear that because the world took a “wait and see” stance thousands of men, women and children were slaughtered in that camp. As people denied the camp existed, or insisted on more proof, or simply denied it was as awful as it was being described, nothing was done to stop the murdering of Jews and friends of the Jews. Indecision was actually a decision to do nothing.

In this week’s study we meet Felix, the Roman-appointed governor of Judea. He is tasked with dealing with a political prisoner named Paul. It is clear this prisoner has many enemies, but it is less clear what crime he has committed. As Felix refuses to make a decision in the matter, Paul remains in prison. The indecision of this man keeps an innocent man behind bars.

Putting off making a decision can be costly. This is the theme of this week’s study.

A Plot to Kill Paul – Acts 23:12-22

1. How committed were the opponents of Paul to see him killed (v. 12)? How many were there? (v. 13)
2. In verses 14-15 a plan is outlined to the chief priests and elders on how they could get rid of Paul. Is the plan legal? Is it God honoring? What would you assume the response of the religious leaders would be to such a plan?
3. God is never caught off guard. Who overhears the plan and tells Paul about it? (23:16) Coincidence? (Notice: Paul’s nephew has access to him, even though Paul is a prisoner.)
4. We do not know anything more about Paul’s sister and nephew than that recorded here. They are likely not Christians, or they would not be privy to

insider information like this, but they are good people. How are they fulfilling Exodus 23:2?

5. What does Paul ask one of the centurions to do (23:17)? It is interesting to note the authority Paul takes – likely because of his Roman citizenship – even as a prisoner.
6. In verses 18-22 the young man tells the tribune in private what he overheard. Why does the tribune speak to the lad in private and warn him afterwards not to tell anyone of their conversation?

Paul sent to Felix the Governor – Acts 23:23-35

7. Does the tribune take the lad serious? (23: 23) What does he plan to do with Paul (23:24)? Why Caesarea?
8. Claudius Lysias is the tribune's name, and he writes a letter to be given to Governor Felix explaining why Paul was sent to him. What does Claudius say in verse 27 to put himself in a good light?
9. What did Claudius conclude about Paul's guilt or innocence (23:29)? So why does he send Paul on to Felix (23:30)?
10. Antipatris is a community about sixty kilometers from Jerusalem. This is how far they travelled in the night. The next day the foot soldiers return to Jerusalem leaving Paul with the horsemen. Why did they take a smaller guard for the last thirty kilometers of the journey?
11. Verse 34 makes it sound like Felix was more willing to hear Paul's case because he was from Cilicia. Why might that be?
12. Where is Paul taken to await his trial (23:35)? Quite amazing, isn't it. The prisoner for Christ's sake is given a king's escort to Caesarea and stays in the former palace of Herod the Great!

Paul Before Felix in Caesarea – Acts 24:1-21

a. The charges – Acts 24:1-8

13. Who makes the trip from Jerusalem to Caesarea to present the case against Paul (24:1)? Who was the spokesman for the religious leaders of Jerusalem?

14. In verses 2-3 of chapter 24 Terrullus begins his speech with flattery towards Felix. What does he say to boost the ego of Felix?

(FYI: History shows that Felix was a cruel opportunist, who did not come from nobility but was a freedman given position and power likely because of his brother's close association with Emperors Claudius and Nero. He was always open to a bribe, put down Jewish uprisings by shedding much blood without a second thought, and made many poor decisions as a leader. After just eight years in power the position was taken away from him.)

15. Terrullus uses three loaded words in his charge against Paul: plague, riots, and ringleader (24:5). Why were these such loaded words?

16. What was the worst thing Paul did according to Terrullus (24:6)? How was that supposedly averted?

17. Note that verse 7 is missing from some translations as it was not in the earliest manuscripts. What accusation does Terrullus make against the Roman centurion in this verse?

18. What is Terrullus doing in verse 8 when he says, "By examining him yourself you will find out from him everything of which we accuse him"?

19. We see the Jews agree with the charges. Why might they want to affirm what their spokesman just said? (Deuteronomy 19:15)

The Defense – Acts 24:10-21

20. Paul's opening words of compliments are brief. What does he allude to (24:10)?
21. In verses 12 and 13 Paul refutes the charges against him. What does he say really happened?
22. In verses 14-15 Paul gives a brief outline of what he believes. What three things does Paul say he believed in?
23. Verse 16 is a great motto for life. What was it, and how did Paul live it out?
24. Paul recounts how he was there to present alms and an offering (24:17). What would this show? 24:17 goes on to add two more realities that showed his innocence. What were they?
25. Who does Paul say should be there to bring their charges against him (24:18)? Why?
26. What is Paul's concluding remark about why he was on trial (24:21)? Is this an accurate statement? Explain.

Paul Held Longer – Acts 24:22-27

27. What surprising fact do we learn about Governor Felix in 24:22?
28. How does Felix bring this trial to an abrupt halt (24:22)? (we never hear that he consulted Lysias)
29. What good news does Paul receive according to verse 23? Why would this be beneficial to Paul? Why might Felix allow it?

30. Paul gets a private audience with Felix and his wife, Drusilla (24:24). What is the focus of Paul's talk?

31. What three things does Paul speak of to his audience of two (24:25)?

(Rev. Randal Denny writes in his book, In Jesus' Strong Hands, that Paul gave a powerful three-point sermon:

1. God's Ideal for Man: "Righteousness"
2. God's Requirement for Man: "Self-control"
3. God's Assessment of Man: "Judgement to Come")

32. How did Felix respond to this sermon (24:25)? What was likely happening in Felix? Is it wise to postpone a decision for Christ?

33. What was Felix hoping he would get from Paul (or his friends) (24:26)? Was Felix really interested in the truth or justice?

34. How long is Paul kept in this prison (24:27)? What reason is given for Felix keeping him there so long? Felix is now replaced by Porcius Festus. His chance to hear more from Paul was gone. Had Felix wasted his time?

Conclusion:

In the introduction, we noted that Felix refuses to make a decision about Paul – whether he was innocent or guilty. This indecision resulted in an innocent man, Paul, remaining incarcerated for over two years. What could have been accomplished for God in that time if Paul was set free?

There is a second area of Felix' life where indecision keeps a man imprisoned. Felix is well versed in The Way (24:22) and spends much time conversing with Paul (24:26). Felix is the man in chains, a sinner who is being offered the grace of God but who refuses to decide if he will accept the gift or not. This indecision is in fact a decision to say "No" to God.

How many people want to put off making a decision to follow Jesus, not realizing their indecision is a decision? And if their lives are cut short, they would be lost eternally, simply because they did not make a decision. As believers who love those God brings across our paths, we must find a way to encourage those without Christ to make a decision. They need to know that indecision is a decision to say “No” to God. Pray that people will see that what Paul meant when he said, “I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation.” (2 Corinthians 6:2).