

“On Trial for Hope”

A Study of Acts 24–25 — Paul Before Felix and Festus

Emmanuel "Baust" UCC • September 2026

“Having a hope in God, which these men themselves accept, that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust.”

— Acts 24:15 (ESV)

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Acts 24 — Paul Before Felix

Paul is transferred to Caesarea and brought before **Governor Felix**. The high priest Ananias sends a hired orator named **Tertullus** to present the Sanhedrin’s case.

Tertullus levels three charges against Paul:

1. He is a troublemaker who stirs up riots among Jews throughout the entire world.
2. He is a ringleader of the *Nazarene sect*.
3. He attempted to desecrate the temple.

Paul responds with a calm, point-by-point defense: he denies all charges, affirms his faithful belief in the Law and the Prophets, and declares his hope in the resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked. Felix — who is already familiar with “the Way” —

adjourns the proceedings and keeps Paul in custody, but allows him relative freedom.

Later, Felix privately summons Paul and hears him speak about **faith in Christ Jesus, righteousness, self-control, and the coming judgment**. Felix is frightened and dismisses Paul, sending for him repeatedly but never acting. Felix ultimately keeps Paul imprisoned for **two years**, hoping for a bribe, and leaves him in custody as a political favor to the Jewish leaders when **Porcius Festus** succeeds him as governor.

Acts 25 — Paul Before Festus and Appeal to Caesar

The new governor, **Porcius Festus**, takes office and immediately faces pressure from the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem, who urge him to have Paul brought there for trial — intending to ambush and kill him on the road. Festus declines and returns to Caesarea, where Paul is brought before him.

When Festus asks whether Paul is willing to go to Jerusalem to be tried, Paul refuses and makes a bold legal move: as a **Roman citizen**, he formally *appeals to Caesar*. The case is effectively taken out of Festus’s hands.

Shortly after, **King Agrippa II** and his sister **Bernice** arrive to pay their respects to Festus. Festus describes Paul’s case to Agrippa, noting the unusual nature of the dispute — centered not on crimes but on “a certain Jesus, who was dead, but whom Paul asserted to be alive.” Festus admits he has no clear formal charge to send to Caesar, and so he asks Agrippa to hear Paul so he can draft a proper indictment before sending him to Rome.

KEY CHARACTERS

Name	Role	Key Detail
Paul	Prisoner /	Exercises his rights as a Roman citizen while boldly and

	Apostle	faithfully witnessing to governors and kings alike.
Felix	Roman Governor of Judea	Already familiar with “the Way”; kept Paul imprisoned for two full years hoping for a bribe before leaving him in chains as a political favor.
Tertullus	Hired orator / lawyer	Retained by the Sanhedrin to present the formal charges against Paul before Felix; opened with flattery toward the governor.
Festus	New Roman Governor	Replaced Felix; immediately faced pressure from the Jewish leaders and sought to placate them by suggesting Paul stand trial in Jerusalem.
King Agrippa II	Jewish client-king	Invited by Festus to hear Paul so that Festus could formulate a proper written charge before sending Paul to Caesar.
Bernice	Agrippa’s sister	Present alongside Agrippa at the hearing; part of the royal entourage that assembled to hear Paul’s case.

KEY THEMES TO EXPLORE

The Sovereignty of God in Unjust Circumstances. Paul endured two years of unjust imprisonment at the hands of a corrupt, bribe-seeking governor. Yet this was no accident. In Acts 23:11, the Lord had already told Paul: “As you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem, so you must testify also in Rome.” Every delay, every injustice, every political maneuver was being woven into the fabric of God’s larger plan to bring Paul — and the gospel — to the heart of the empire.

Courage in the Face of Power. Paul did not soften his message when speaking before powerful men. Before Felix — a man with the authority to release or imprison him — Paul spoke openly about righteousness, self-control, and the coming judgment. True courage is not the absence of risk; it is faithfulness in the presence of it.

The Hope of the Resurrection. The resurrection stands at the very center of Paul’s defense in Acts 24:15. This was not merely a theological hobby-horse; it was the cornerstone of everything he proclaimed. The resurrection of Jesus guaranteed the resurrection of all people — and therefore gave ultimate meaning to righteousness, accountability, and hope.

The Gospel Breaking Through. Even a corrupt, fearful Felix heard the gospel of Jesus Christ. The chains on Paul's wrists could not chain the Word of God. As Paul himself would later write from prison: "The word of God is not bound!" (2 Tim. 2:9). The gospel is not dependent on favorable circumstances to advance.

Using Legitimate Means. When faced with the injustice of being sent to Jerusalem for a rigged trial, Paul did not resign himself passively to injustice — nor did he act unlawfully. He invoked his right as a Roman citizen and appealed to Caesar. Faithfulness to God does not mean the abandonment of wisdom, discernment, or the lawful tools available to us.

DIGGING DEEPER — KEY VERSES

All verses from the English Standard Version (ESV).

Acts 24:14

"But this I confess to you, that according to the Way, which they call a sect, I worship the God of our fathers, believing everything laid down by the Law and written in the Prophets."

Observation: Paul reframes the accusation of sectarianism — he is not departing from Israel's heritage but fulfilling it, standing firmly within the stream of Scripture.

Acts 24:15

"...having a hope in God, which these men themselves accept, that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust."

Observation: The resurrection is Paul's anchor and argument — a hope shared even by his accusers, making his position squarely orthodox rather than heretical.

Acts 24:16

"So I always take pains to have a clear conscience toward both God and man."

Observation: A clear conscience is not passive; Paul says he “takes pains” — it is the active, daily discipline of aligning life with conviction.

Acts 24:25

“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.’”

Observation: The gospel penetrated Felix’s composure, but conviction without response became a tragic postponement rather than repentance.

Acts 25:11

“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.”

Observation: Paul’s appeal is simultaneously an act of bold legal wisdom and an expression of God’s providential hand — steering Paul toward Rome exactly as Acts 23:11 had promised.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Use the lines below each question for personal notes.

1. **1.**What were the three charges Tertullus brought against Paul? How did Paul address each one in his defense?
2. **2.**What does Paul mean when he says he has “a hope in God” (Acts 24:15)? Why is the resurrection so central — not just to his defense, but to his entire life and mission?
3. **3.**How does Paul describe his own conscience in Acts 24:16? What does it look like, practically, to “take pains” to maintain a blameless conscience before God and others?

4. **4.**Felix is described as “alarmed” (or “frightened”) when Paul spoke about righteousness, self-control, and judgment. What does this reaction reveal about the power of the gospel when faithfully proclaimed?
5. **5.**Why do you think Felix kept Paul in custody for two years rather than releasing him? What does his repeated but uncommitted listening tell us about the danger of moral compromise?
6. **6.**How did Festus’s desire to please the Jewish leaders put Paul’s life in danger? Where do we see people-pleasing compromise justice today — in culture, politics, or even the church?
7. **7.**What was the significance of Paul appealing to Caesar? How does this appeal connect to the Lord’s promise in Acts 23:11 that Paul would testify in Rome?
8. **8.**Paul used his Roman citizenship — a lawful, legitimate right — as a tool to advance his mission rather than simply endure injustice. What “legitimate means” do we have available to us today when we face difficult or unjust situations?
9. **9.**In what specific ways do you see God’s sovereignty at work in this passage, even through unjust delays, corrupt officials, and political maneuvering?
10. **10.**If you were facing unjust accusations or a prolonged season of unfair circumstances, what would you take from Paul’s example to encourage and steady you?

PERSONAL APPLICATION

Take a moment to reflect honestly. Check the area(s) that speak to you most this week.

- ☐ **Courage to Speak Truth.** Is there an area of my life where I need Paul’s courage — to speak truth even when it makes people uncomfortable, or when there is something at stake for me personally?
- ☐ **Trusting God’s Plan in Hard Seasons.** Am I allowing difficult or prolonged circumstances — delays, injustice, or uncertainty — to shake my trust in God’s sovereign plan for my life? What would it look like to rest in His promise instead?

- ☐ **Using What I Have for the Gospel.** How can I wisely and intentionally use the resources, relationships, rights, and opportunities available to me to advance the gospel of Christ this week?
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PRAYER FOCUS

As you close your time today, bring these things before the Lord in prayer. Ask God for the boldness of Paul — to speak truth about righteousness, self-control, and the coming resurrection with gentleness and courage. Surrender any area where prolonged difficulty or injustice has begun to erode your trust in His perfect, sovereign plan. Pray for open doors to share the living hope of the resurrection with someone in your life this week, and for the wisdom to walk through them.

NEXT WEEK PREVIEW

Coming Up Next

Acts 26 — Paul Before King Agrippa

Paul delivers one of the most compelling and personally passionate testimonies in the entire New Testament — a moment where his story, the story of Israel, and the story of the risen Jesus converge before a king.

“Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead... the word of God is not bound!” — 2

Timothy 2:8–9 (ESV)