

HINDUSTAN BIBLE INSTITUTE & COLLEGE WEBINAR

Is the Roman Empire a friend or a foe in Acts?

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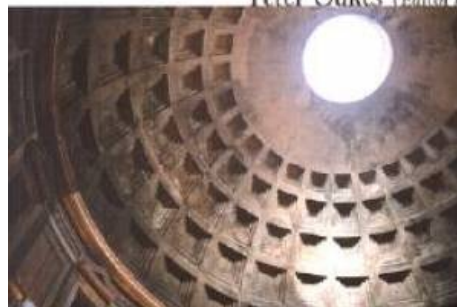
Setting the scene

- ❖ Much recent debate over the Roman empire in the NT, especially in Paul and Luke-Acts
- ❖ Steve Walton, “The State They Were in” (2002)
 - ❖ **online:** <https://stevewalton.info/articles-and-papers/>

ROME

in the BIBLE and the
EARLY CHURCH

Peter Oakes (Editor)



Past scholarship: key views

- ❖ Luke-Acts is an apologia for the church to Rome
- ❖ Luke-Acts is an apologia for Rome to the church
- ❖ Luke-Acts legitimates Christian faith and shows it is compatible with allegiance to Rome
- ❖ Luke-Acts equips believers, by...
 - ❖ sharing Luke's faith in Jesus
 - ❖ providing believers with guidance how to live under Roman rule
 - ❖ giving guidance how to act when on trial
- ❖ Luke is not interested in politics

Proposal in "The State..."

- ❖ Luke **writes purposively** about the Roman Empire, and not only descriptively
- ❖ Luke offers **a variety of perspectives** on Christian relations with the Empire
- ❖ Luke underlines **the supremacy of Jesus** over Caesar
- ❖ Luke offers his readers a strategy of ***critical distance*** from the Empire

Setting the scene

- ❖ In his witness to the truth, Jesus becomes the judge, and both “the Jews” and Pilate are judged by their response to Jesus. Thus the Roman trial becomes the vehicle for the irony that *the accusers are in reality being judged by the apparent accused*. Indeed, one could just as easily entitle the episode “The Trial of Pilate and the Jews before Jesus” as “The Trial of Jesus before Pilate.”

Andrew Lincoln, *Truth on Trial*, 137 (my italics)

The approach of this paper

- ❖ Focus on the Roman trial scenes in Luke-Acts
 - ❖ The trial of Jesus **Luke 23**
 - ❖ Paul before Gallio in Corinth **Acts 18:12-17**
 - ❖ Paul before Felix in Caesarea **Acts 23-24**
 - ❖ Paul before Festus in Caesarea **Acts 25-26**
- ❖ Focus on narrative presentation
 - ❖ A “literary” approach
 - ❖ Considering the historical context

The trial of Jesus

Luke 23

- ❖ Jesus is in control throughout
 - ❖ “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.” 22:42
- ❖ The accusations against Jesus are false 23:2
 - ❖ And they began to accuse him, saying, “We have found this man perverting our nation. He opposes payment of taxes to Caesar and claims to be Messiah, a king.”
- ❖ Jesus is innocent
 - ❖ Pilate vv 4, 14, 22
 - ❖ Herod v 15
 - ❖ The thief v 41
 - ❖ The centurion v 47

Pilate's role

- ❖ “The weak Pilate has let down first himself and Herod, second the Roman administration he represents.”

Helen Bond, *Pontius Pilate in History and Interpretation*, 159

- ❖ **Responsibility for the death of Jesus**

- ❖ “Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed.”

Acts 4:27

Paul before Gallio

Acts 18:12-17

- ❖ The nature of the charge v 12
 - ❖ παρὰ τὸν νόμον “against the law”
 - ❖ ἀναπείθει “he persuades”
- ❖ Gallio’s ruling vv 14-15
 - ❖ v 14b “If there was a felony [ἀδίκημα] or political misdemeanour [ῥαδιούργημα πονηρόν] (but there isn’t), O Jews, I would have begun a hearing [ἀνεσχόμην] to consider the legal basis of your complaint.”
 - ❖ v 15a “If (as seems to be true) it involves points of disagreement about legal immunity, names, and the law that governs you, you shall see to it yourselves.”

Paul before Gallio

Acts 18:12-17

- ❖ Gallio's later actions vv 16-17
 - ❖ ἀπήλασεν “he dismissed” v 16
 - ❖ “nothing of these things (τούτων) was of concern to Gallio” v 17
- ❖ The Lord's promise vv 9-10
 - ❖ “Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and *no one is going to attack and harm you*, because I have many people in this city.”

Paul before Felix

Acts 23–24

- ❖ Claudius Lysias' letter 23:25-30
- ❖ Felix acting properly
 - ❖ establishing jurisdiction 23:34
 - ❖ hearing first-hand from accusers; allowing Paul to defend himself 23:35–24:21
 - ❖ waiting for testimony from Lysias 24:22
 - ❖ relaxing Paul's conditions of confinement 24:23

Paul before Felix

Acts 23–24

- ❖ Felix behaving badly
 - ❖ fearful 24:25
 - ❖ hoping for a bribe 24:26
 - ❖ doing the Jewish leaders a favour (χάριτα) 24:27
- ❖ Felix as a tragic figure

Paul before Festus

Acts 25–26

- ❖ Festus and the Jewish leaders
 - ❖ they seek a favour (χάριν) 25:3
 - ❖ Festus wants to do the Jewish leaders a favour (χάριν) 25:9
- ❖ Paul's appeal to Caesar 25:10-11
 - ❖ ἐπὶ τοῦ βήματος Καίσαρος ἐστῶς εἰμι v 10
“[It is] before the tribunal of Caesar **I am standing**”
 - ❖ οὐδείς με δύναται αὐτοῖς χαρίσασθαι v 11
“No-one is able **to hand me over to them as a favour**”

Paul before Festus

Acts 25–26

- ❖ Festus' self-portrait
 - ❖ his propriety 25:16-20
 - ❖ his defence of Paul 25:23-25
 - ❖ no mention of his real motive 25:9
- ❖ Paul is innocent
 - ❖ Claudius Lysias 23:29
 - ❖ Festus 25:25; 26:31
- ❖ God's perspective 26:22-23
 - ❖ testimony to Jesus vv 22-23a
 - ❖ Jesus giving testimony v 23b

Luke and the Roman Empire

- ❖ Jesus and Paul are innocent
 - ❖ yet they are imprisoned and (Jesus is) killed
 - ❖ political expediency rules the day
- ❖ The focus of Luke's attention
 - ❖ The gospel to “the end of the earth” **Acts 1:8**
- ❖ Romans 13 *and* Revelation 13?

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slides from

Acts and More

<http://stevewalton.info>