

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

### Setting the scene

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- recent debate over the Roman Empire's portrayal in the NT
- suggestion that trial of Jesus in John turns the tables on Pilate and Herod
- purpose of this paper
  - look at Roman trials of Paul in Acts from this angle
  - focusing on specifically Roman trials
- approach of this paper
  - trial of Jesus in Luke
  - Roman trials of Paul (Corinth before Gallio, Caesarea before Festus and Felix)
  - methodologically, "literary" and historical approach

### The trial of Jesus in Luke *Luke 23*

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- Jesus is in control throughout 22:42, 50-51; 23:33, 9, 28-31, 43; cf. 13:33-35; 18:31-33; 24:27, 44
- the accusations against Jesus are false v 2; cf. 20:25; 9:20-21; 22:67-69; 2:11; Acts 2:36
- Jesus is declared innocent at least six times
  - Pilate vv 4, 14, 22
  - Herod v 15
  - the thief v 41
  - the centurion v 47
  - perhaps the women v 27 and the crowds v 48
- Pilate's role 23:6-7, 13-18, 16, 22
  - pressure from others 23:1-2, 5, 10, 18, 21, 23
  - Barabbas 23:18, 25
- who is responsible for the death of Jesus? Acts 4:27; cf. 13:28, 30; 4:28

### Paul before Gallio in Corinth *Acts 18:12-17*

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- the nature of the charge v 12—which law?
- the meaning and tone of Gallio's ruling vv 14-15
  - v 14b "contrary to fact" conditional
  - v 15a protasis assumed true
- Gallio's actions subsequent to the ruling vv 16-17
  - ἀπήλασεν, "he dismissed" v 16
  - Sosthenes' beating v 17
- a wider context: the Lord's promise vv 9-10

## Paul before Felix in Caesarea Acts 23–24

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- Claudius Lysias, the tribune
- Felix the governor
- Felix acting properly
  - establishing jurisdiction
  - hearing first-hand from the accusers and the accused
  - deciding to wait for testimony from Lysias
- Felix and Paul
  - fearful of Paul's words 24:25
  - hoping for a bribe 24:26
  - doing the Jewish leaders a favour [χάριτα] 24:27

## Paul before Festus in Caesarea Acts 25–26

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- Festus' tribunal
  - the Jewish leaders seek a favour [χάριν] 25:3
  - “wanting to do the Jews a favour [χάριν]” 25:9
- Paul's appeal to Caesar
  - ἐπὶ τοῦ βήματος Καίσαρος ἐστῶς εἰμι  
“I am standing at Caesar's tribunal” 25:10 [not as NRSV]
  - “no-one is able to hand me over [χαρίσασθαι] to them” 25:11
- Festus' self-portrait
  - his propriety 25:16-20
  - his defence of Paul 25:23-25
  - no mention of his real motive 25:9
  - distortion of Paul's appeal 25:21
- Paul is innocent 26:31; cf. 23:29 [Lysias]; 25:25 [Festus]
  - cf. Pilate's threefold declaration of Jesus' innocence
  - Agrippa as “Jewish adviser”; cf. Herod
- Paul speaks for God 26:22-23

## Conclusion

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- Theophilus, Felix and Festus as κράτιστε “most excellent”

## See further...

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Walton, Steve, “The State They Were In: Luke's View of the Roman Empire” in *Rome in the Bible and the Early Church*. ed. Peter Oakes, Carlisle: Paternoster; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002, 1-41; online: <https://stevewalton.info/articles-and-papers/>