

Acts 24 - Paul's Defense Before Felix

III. Outreach to the remote parts of the earth (Acts 13:1—28:31)

(5) Paul's journey to Rome (21:17—28:31)

(B) Paul in Caesarea (23:23—26:32)

(b) Paul's defenses (24:1—26:32)

(i) Before Felix (24:1-27)

Acts 24

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1 Now after five days the high priest Ananias came down with some elders and an attorney *named* Tertullus, and they brought charges against Paul to the governor.

1 After five days the high priest Ananias came down with some elders, with an attorney *named* Tertullus, and they brought charges to the governor against Paul.

1 Five days later, the high priest Ananias arrived with certain elders and Tertullus, an attorney, and they summarized their case against Paul before the governor.

1 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.

- The Jews hatred of Paul is shown in their speedy trip to Caesarea, and by the fact that the high priest himself, Ananias, made the trip, along with a prosecuting attorney
— Roman law was as complex as our modern law, and it took an expert to understand it and know how to apply it successfully to his client's case

2 After Paul had been summoned, Tertullus began accusing him, saying *to the governor*, "Since we have attained great peace through you, and since reforms are being carried out for this nation by your foresight,

2 After *Paul* had been summoned, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying *to the governor*, "Since we have through you attained much peace, and since by your providence reforms are being carried out for this nation,

2 When Paul had been summoned, Tertullus opened the prosecution by saying: "Your Excellency Felix, since we are enjoying lasting peace because of you, and since reforms for this nation are being brought about through your foresight,

2 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,

- Felix was a *fierce* ruler, and the “peace” that existed was a result of *terror* rather than tranquillity
— Tertullus praised Felix for being a peacemaker—in preparation for his charge that Paul was a disturber of the peace (v5-6)

3 we acknowledge *this* in every way and everywhere, most excellent Felix, with all thankfulness.

3 we acknowledge *this* in every way and everywhere, most excellent Felix, with all thankfulness.

3 we always and everywhere acknowledge it with profound gratitude.

3 We accept it always, and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness.

4 But, that I may not weary you further, I beg you to grant us a brief hearing, by your kindness.

4 But, that I may not weary you any further, I beg you to grant us, by your kindness, a brief hearing.

4 But so as not to detain you any further, I beg you to hear us briefly with your customary graciousness.

4 Notwithstanding, that I be not further tedious unto thee, I pray thee that thou wouldest hear us of thy clemency a few words.

5 For we have found this man a public menace and one who stirs up dissensions among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes.

5 For we have found this man a real pest and a fellow who stirs up dissension among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes.

5 For we have found this man a perfect pest and an agitator among all Jews throughout the world. He is a ringleader in the sect of the Nazarenes

5 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:

6 And he even tried to desecrate the temple, so indeed we arrested him. [We wanted to judge him according to our own Law.

6 And he even tried to desecrate the temple; and then we arrested him. [We wanted to judge him according to our own Law.

6 and even tried to profane the Temple, but we arrested him.

6 Who also hath gone about to profane the temple: whom we took, and would have judged according to our law.

- Tertullus' accusations against Paul were no more truthful than his flattery. He brought three charges:

(1) A personal charge ("he is a pestilent fellow")

- As for Paul being "a pest," it all depends on one's point of view. The Jews wanted to maintain their ancient traditions and Paul was advocating something new. The Romans were afraid of anything that upset their delicate "peace" in the Empire. This personal charge was based on the Jews' conflicts with Paul in different parts of the Roman world. It was his own countrymen, not the Roman authorities, who caused Paul trouble from city to city.

(2) A political charge (sedition and leading an illegal religion)

- The political charge was much more serious, because no Roman official wanted to be guilty of permitting illegal activities that would upset the "Pax Romana" (Roman Peace). When Tertullus called Paul "an instigator of insurrections among all the Jews throughout the Roman Empire" (Wuest), he immediately got the attention of the governor. Of course, his statement was an exaggeration, but how many court cases have been won by somebody stretching the truth?
- The first two charges gave the impression that Paul was guilty of sedition against Rome. The Jews had similarly charged Jesus with political sedition before Pilate (Cf. Luke 23:2,5).

(3) A doctrinal charge (profaning the temple)

- Tertullus' third accusation had to be handled with care because it implicated a Roman officer who had saved a man's life. For the most part, Roman officials like Felix did not want anything to do with cases involving Jewish Law (John 18:28-31; Acts 16:35-40; 18:12-17). The fewer Jews who ended up in Roman courts, the better it would be for the Empire. Tertullus had to present this third charge in a way that made the Jews look good without making the Romans look too bad, and he did a good job.

Compare

- Luke's account of Paul's arrest (Acts 21:27-40)
- The captain's account (Acts 23:25-30)
- The lawyer's account (Acts 24:6-8)

Tertullus gave the impression that Paul had actually been guilty of profaning the temple, that the Jews had been within their rights in seizing him, and that the captain had stepped out of line by interfering. It was Claudius, not the Jews, who was guilty of treating a Roman citizen with violence! But Felix had the official letter before him and was more likely to believe his captain than a paid Hellenistic Jewish lawyer (this may be why Claudius wasn't present to testify). Tertullus implied that if Claudius had not interfered, the Jews would

have tried Paul themselves, and this would have saved Felix and Rome a great deal of trouble and expense.

7 But Lysias the commander came along, and with much violence took him out of our hands, with much violence

7 But Lysias the commander came along, and with much violence took him out of our hands,

7 But Tribune Lysias came along and took him out of our hands with much force, ordering his accusers to come before you.

7 But the chief captain Lysias came upon us, and with great violence took him away out of our hands,

8 ordering his accusers to come before you.] By interrogating him yourself concerning all these matters, you will be able to ascertain the things of which we are accusing him."

8 ordering his accusers to come before you.] By examining him yourself concerning all these matters you will be able to ascertain the things of which we accuse him."

8 By examining him for yourself, you will be able to find out from him everything of which we accuse him."

8 Commanding his accusers to come unto thee: by examining of whom thyself mayest take knowledge of all these things, whereof we accuse him.

9 The Jews also joined in the attack, asserting that these things were so.

9 The Jews also joined in the attack, asserting that these things were so.

9 The Jewish leaders supported his accusations by asserting that these things were true.

9 And the Jews also assented, saying that these things were so.

- All of Paul's accusers ("the Jews") confirmed the charges

Paul's Defense Before Felix

10 And when the governor had nodded for him to speak, Paul responded: "Knowing that for many years you have been a judge to this nation, I cheerfully make my defense,

10 When the governor had nodded for him to speak, Paul responded: "Knowing that for many years you have been a judge to this nation, I cheerfully make my defense,

10 When the governor motioned for Paul to speak, he replied: "Since I know that you have been a judge over this nation for many years, I am pleased to present my defense.

10 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:

- Felix did not examine Paul, he merely nodded his head as a signal that it was now Paul's turn to speak. Paul then proceeded to answer the charges of:

(1) Tertullus (v10-16)

(2) The Asian Jews (v17-19)

(3) The Jewish council (v20-21)

11 since you can take note of the fact that no more than twelve days ago I went up to Jerusalem to worship.

11 since you can take note of the fact that no more than twelve days ago I went up to Jerusalem to worship.

11 You can verify for yourself that I went up to worship in Jerusalem no more than twelve days ago.

11 Because that thou mayest understand, that there are yet but twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem for to worship.

- In response to Tertullus' first charge (v5), Paul said that since he had only been in Jerusalem for 12 days, implying that he did not have time to be much of a pest

- In response to the third charge, Paul stated that he went to Jerusalem "to worship"

— He was there (in Jerusalem) to bring money to the Jews there, and to present offerings to Yahweh (v17), not to stir up political trouble (Cf. Gal 2:7-9)

12 And neither in the temple did they find me carrying on a discussion with anyone or causing a riot, nor in the synagogues, nor in the city *itself*.

12 Neither in the temple, nor in the synagogues, nor in the city *itself* did they find me carrying on a discussion with anyone or causing a riot.

12 They never found me debating with anyone in the Temple or stirring up a crowd in the synagogues or throughout the city,

12 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:

13 Nor can they prove to you *the things* of which they now accuse me.

13 Nor can they prove to you *the charges* of which they now accuse me.

13 and they cannot prove to you the charges they are now bringing against me.

13 Neither can they prove the things whereof they now accuse me.

- His accusers could not prove that Paul had even carried on a discussion in the temple or in the synagogues, or even in the city, much less fomented a riot

— Therefore, there was no evidence to support these two charges against him

14 But I confess this to you, that in accordance with the Way, which they call a sect, I do serve the God of our fathers, believing everything that is in accordance with the Law and is written in the Prophets;

14 But this I admit to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect I do serve the God of our fathers, believing everything that is in accordance with the Law and that is written in the Prophets;

14 However, I admit to you that in accordance with the Way, which they call a heresy, I worship the God of our ancestors and believe in everything written in the Law and the Prophets.

14 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:

- Paul rebutted the second charge of leading a cult (v5) by explaining that his beliefs harmonized with the teachings of the Hebrew Scriptures

— This would help Felix see that the real conflict between Paul and his accusers was religious, not political, as Tertullus had made it appear

15 having a hope in God, which these men cherish themselves, that there shall certainly be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked.

15 having a hope in God, which these men cherish themselves, that there shall certainly be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked.

15 I have the same hope in God that they themselves cherish—that there is to be a resurrection of the righteous and the wicked.

15 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.

- Ananias was a Sadducee, who didn't believe in the resurrection (23:8)

— Paul made this statement to make it clear to Felix that Paul and Ananias strongly disagreed on this theological point

— First and second resurrection: Cf. Dan 12:2; John 5:28-29; Rev 20:4-6)

16 In view of this I also do my best to maintain a blameless conscience *both* before God and before *other* people, always.

16 In view of this, I also do my best to maintain always a blameless conscience *both* before God and before men.

16 Therefore, I always do my best to have a clear conscience before God and people.

16 And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men.

- Since Paul believed God would resurrect him, he sought to maintain "a conscience void of offence" while he lived

— “Conscience” is the capacity to feel guilt

17 Now after several years I came to bring **charitable gifts** to my nation and to present **offerings**,

17 Now after several years I came to bring alms to my nation and to present offerings;

17 After many years, I have come back to my people to bring gifts for the poor and to offer sacrifices.

17 Now after many years I came to bring alms to my nation, and offerings.

- “...charitable gifts” - refers to the collection for the poor Jewish Christians

- “...offerings” - refers to Paul paying the expenses of the four men who had taken a vow (21:23-26)

- Rather than desecrating the temple (v6), Paul said he returned to Jerusalem to give money (“alms”) to the Jews there, and to “present” worship “offerings” in the temple

18 in which they found me *occupied* in the temple, having been purified, without *any* crowd or uproar. But *there were* some Jews from Asia—

18 in which they found me *occupied* in the temple, having been purified, without *any* crowd or uproar. But *there were* some Jews from Asia—

18 They found me in the Temple doing these things just as I had completed the purification ceremony. No crowd or noisy mob was present.

18 Whereupon certain Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with multitude, nor with tumult.

19 who ought to have been present before you and to have been bringing charges, if they should have anything against me.

19 who ought to have been present before you and to make accusation, if they should have anything against me.

19 But some Jews from Asia were there, and they should be here before you to accuse me if they have anything against me.

19 Who ought to have been here before thee, and object, if they had ought against me.

- Paul pointed out that his original accusers were not present at the hearing, but they should have been

— The Sanhedrin likely ruled out that possibility, in view of the facts, as it would have been clear that there was no basis for their charges

— Roman law imposed heavy penalties on accusers who abandoned their charges

— Their disappearance suggested that they had nothing against him that would stand up in a Roman court of law

20 Or else have these men themselves declare what violation they discovered when I stood before the Council,
20 Or else let these men themselves tell what misdeed they found when I stood before the Council,
20 Otherwise, these men themselves should tell what wrong they found when I stood before the Council—
20 Or else let these same here say, if they have found any evil doing in me, while I stood before the council,

21 other than in regard to this one declaration which I shouted while standing among them, 'For the resurrection of the dead I am on trial before you today!'"

21 other than for this one statement which I shouted out while standing among them, 'For the resurrection of the dead I am on trial before you today.'"

21 unless it is for the one thing I shouted as I stood among them: 'It is for the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you today.'"

21 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.

- There was a bit of holy sarcasm in Paul's closing statement...we might paraphrase it, "If I have done anything evil, it is probably this: I reminded the Jewish council of our great Jewish doctrine of the Resurrection."

— Paul's present accusers could not even testify that the Sanhedrin had found him guilty when he appeared before that body

— Paul concluded he was on trial over the issue of the resurrection

22 But Felix, having quite accurate knowledge about the Way, adjourned them, saying, "When Lysias the commander comes down, I will decide your case."

22 But Felix, having a more exact knowledge about the Way, put them off, saying, "When Lysias the commander comes down, I will decide your case."

22 Felix was rather well informed about the Way, and so he adjourned the trial with the comment, "When Tribune Lysias arrives, I'll decide your case."

22 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.

23 He gave orders to the centurion for Paul to be kept in custody and *yet* have *some* freedom, and not to prevent any of his friends from providing for his needs.

23 Then he gave orders to the centurion for him to be kept in custody and *yet* have *some* freedom, and not to prevent any of his friends from ministering to him.

23 He ordered the centurion to guard Paul but to let him have some freedom and not to keep any of his friends from caring for his needs.

23 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.

- While Paul waited for Lysias to appear in Caesarea, he enjoyed considerable personal freedom, as well as Roman protection from his Jewish enemies

Paul's Ministry to Felix

24 Now some days later Felix arrived with **Drusilla** his wife, who was Jewish, and he sent for Paul and heard him *speak* about faith in Christ Jesus.

24 But some days later Felix arrived with Drusilla, his wife who was a Jewess, and sent for Paul and heard him *speak* about faith in Christ Jesus.

24 Some days later, Felix arrived with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish. He sent for Paul and listened to him talk about faith in Jesus the Messiah.

24 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.

- "...Drusilla" - Drusilla probably wanted to hear Paul, as her family had a sordid history with Christianity

— She was Felix's third wife, whom he married when she was 16 years old; she was now 19 (57 AD)

- Her family had been involved with "the Way" on several occasions:

- Her great-grandfather tried to kill Jesus in Bethlehem (Matt 2)
- Her great-uncle killed John the Baptist and mocked Jesus (Luke 23:6-12)
- Her father (Herod Agrippa I) killed the Apostle James and imprisoned Peter (12:1-11)

Felix's Wives

(1) A princess

(2) The granddaughter of Anthony and Cleopatra

(3) Drusilla (Daughter of Herod Agrippa). She had been the wife of another king (Azizus, king of Emesa, a state within Syria), but Felix broke up that marriage to get her.

25 But as he was discussing **righteousness, self-control**, and the **judgment to come**, Felix **became frightened** and responded, "Go away for now, and when I have an opportunity, I will summon you."

25 But as he was discussing righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix became frightened and said, "Go away for the present, and when I find time I will summon you."

25 As Paul talked about righteousness, self-control, and the coming judgment, Felix became afraid and said, "For the present you may go. When I get a chance, I will send for you again."

25 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.

- "...righteousness" - sins of the past—yesterday's sin

- "...self-control" - sins of the present—today's temptations

- "...judgment to come" - tomorrow's judgment

— These were the same three things that Jesus predicted the Holy Spirit would convict people about—that would bring them to faith

- "...became frightened" - *emphobos*, Felix was apparently willing to discuss theology, but not personal morality and responsibility

Felix's decision to postpone making a decision about his relationship to God is a common one. Often people put off this most important decision until they cannot make it. This is probably why most people who make decisions for Christ do so when they are young. Older people normally become hardened to the gospel. We do not know if Felix ever trusted in Christ; there is no evidence that he did.

26 At the same time he was also hoping that money would be given to him by Paul; therefore he also used to send for him quite often and talk with him.

26 At the same time too, he was hoping that money would be given him by Paul; therefore he also used to send for him quite often and converse with him.

26 At the same time he was hoping to receive a bribe from Paul, and so he would send for him frequently to talk with him.

26 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.

27 But after two years had passed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus; and Felix, wanting to do the Jews a favor, left Paul imprisoned.

27 But after two years had passed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus, and wishing to do the Jews a favor, Felix left Paul imprisoned.

27 After two years had passed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus. Since Felix wanted to do the Jews a favor, he left Paul in prison.

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

- Two years later, Felix's superiors relieved him of his position because he had handled a conflict in Caesarea too harshly, between the Jewish and Gentile residents, which resulted in the suffering and death of innocent people. Too many Jews had died or been mistreated [Josephus, *Antiquities*, 2:14:1].
- The new governor, Porcius Festus, was a better man than his predecessor and apparently took up his duties with the intention of doing what was right
 - However, he soon discovered that Jewish politics were not easy to handle, especially the two-year-old case of the Apostle Paul, a prisoner with no official charges against him
 - Paul was a Jew whose countrymen wanted to kill him, and he was a Roman whose government did not know what to do with him