

## EXPOSITION OF ACTS

### Message #51

Acts 24:1-27

Now we may remember that Jesus Christ spent the night with Paul and told him he had been a great witness and that he was going to Rome to be his witness there. We need to keep this in mind because what happens to Paul in the process of getting him to Rome is bizarre.

Last time, Paul was taken to Caesarea and Felix decided he would give Paul a hearing when his accusers arrived. Until then he was kept in Herod's Praetorium. Now Herod's palace had been built by Herod and it became the residence of the legal and financial rulers of the Roman Empire. Apparently Paul was confined to some apartment within this palace.

### **GOD'S SOVEREIGN PLAN TO GET PAUL TO ROME INCLUDED FALSE ALLEGATIONS THAT BROUGHT HIM TO COURT AND KEPT HIM IN JAIL FOR TWO YEARS.**

There are five main parts to this intriguing story:

#### **PART #1** – The High Priest comes to Caesarea to bring false charges against Paul. **24:1**

Five days after the conspiracy was formed and Paul had been smuggled out of Jerusalem and taken to Caesarea, his accusers showed up. Naturally, there was the high priest Ananias and he brought with him an attorney named Tertullus and some other elders who were Jewish representatives of the Sanhedrin. They went to Felix and filed charges against Paul. Actually what they did was went and filed their formal complaint, which is the beginning of any judicial action.

Now keep in mind that the high priest is supposedly the most religious man on the face of the earth. What we find this upstanding religious leader trying to do is making up lies to kill Paul, who is preaching grace. **Proud and arrogant religious people love themselves and their works and their legalism and they hate grace.** Do not miss this point. Just because one is very religious and in ministry and high up in ministry does not mean he is right with God. He may be a very wicked, evil, diabolical person.

According to **verse 2**, Paul was summoned, which means he was notified of this hearing against him and he went to it.

This passage breaks down quite nicely into three main parts:

#### **PART #2** – Tertullus makes his false allegation presentation for the prosecution. **24:2-9**

The name Tertullus is Latin, which means he was probably a Roman attorney representing the Jews. Tertullus was a typical attorney. By virtue of the fact that he was chosen by the High Priest, he must have been a top attorney of his time. He was very skilled and competent as a lawyer and as a speaker. He is a corrupt prosecutor.

He begins in **verses 2-4** with opening remarks that are designed to win over the jury, who in this case is Felix. He engages in what Dr. S. Lewis Johnson said is “nauseating flattery.” Dr. Chuck Swindoll said this flattery consists of a bunch of lies (*Acts*, Vol. 2, p. 85).

He starts off by saying that through Felix’ leadership the Jews had lived in peace because he had made such wonderful reforms (**v. 2**) and that all Jews everywhere honored the “most excellent” Felix (**v. 3**) and they did not want to weary him, but just needed a brief moment of his time to tell him about Paul.

Now I want to take a moment to give a brief description of Felix. There are four major sources of historical data about him: 1) The Bible; 2) Seutonius; 3) Tacitus; 4) Josephus; and when you study all four sources, you conclude that this attorney isn’t dealing with reality in his flowery speech.

Felix was born a slave. Tacitus says he was given freedom by the mother of Claudius and Josephus says he was given freedom by Claudius himself. More than likely, Claudius’ mother convinced Claudius to grant him freedom. He rose high in Roman politics and was the governor of Judea from A.D. 52-59. He was a corrupt and immoral politician. In fact, Tacitus says he was known for stamping out Jewish uprisings in a brutal and ruthless way. In fact, Felix was the one who caused the assassination of Jonathan the high priest.

So here is this attorney standing before him telling him that Jews everywhere honor him as the “most excellent” Felix, which is an outright lie. Dr. Johnson is right; this is “nauseating flattery” of a weasel prosecuting attorney.

The charges he will bring against Paul are **first, personal**—he is a pest; **second, political**—he is causing an uprising; **third, religious**—he is the leader of some new religious sect and then **fourth, sacrilegious**—he profanes the temple. **There are five false accusations and two true accusations:**

**(False Accusation #1) - Paul is a pest. 24:5a**

The word “pest” refers to the kind of pest that causes pestilence (Smith, pp. 271-272). It is a term used for things that cause a plague. The implication by using this word is that we need to stamp him out, because that is what you do with pests.

**(False Accusation #2) - Paul is a man who stirs up dissension with all Jews in the world. 24:5b**

The word “dissension” (στᾶσις) is one that means they are accusing Paul of being an insurrectionist, a revolutionary who is seditious (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 415). He is implying that Paul is trying to get Jews all over the world to turn against Rome.

**(False Accusation #3)** - Paul is the ringleader of a sect or cult of Nazarenes . **24:5c**

Now this is serious because Rome did not look favorably upon sects. So not only is Paul accused of causing problems all over the world, but he leads a sect, which makes him dangerous to the Roman Empire. Now the term “Nazarene” was a term used specifically for Jesus Christ (2:22; 3:6; 4:10; 6:14; 22:8; 26:9).

We get a good glimpse as to how the Jews viewed someone from Nazareth right here. The Jews did not think anything good could come from Nazareth, because it was not a pure Jewish city and the Jews despised and hated any who came from there. The charge is he is leading the Nazareth cult.

**(False Accusation #4)** - Paul tried to desecrate the Temple . **24:6a**

They accuse Paul of trying to “desecrate” sanctified ground like the Temple. The word “desecrate” means they accuse Paul of profaning or unhallowing or trodding down the sacred Temple.

**(True Accusation #1)** - Religious Jews arrested Paul and wanted to judge Paul by their law .  
**24:6b**

The attorney says, “We nabbed Paul” and took him into custody and we were going to judge him by our law.

**(True Accusation #2)** - Lysias took him and ordered that he appear before you. **24:7-8a**

This is a slight slam against Lysias, the commander, and it is a tactful way of saying that we wouldn’t even be here before you if it weren’t for Lysias. Notice in **verse 7** he says he took him out of our hands “with much violence.” He doesn’t bother to tell him that they were going to kill Paul without a hearing or trial.

**(False Accusation #5)** - If you examine Paul you will see he is guilty . **24:8b-9**

All the Jews who were present agreed with these false charges. They all agreed that if Felix examined Paul he would conclude the same thing; he is guilty.

**PART #3** – Paul responds to the charges and states his defense. **24:10-21**

Apparently Felix didn’t say anything; he just nodded to Paul to speak. There are nine responses.

**(Response #1)** - Paul acknowledged that he was happy to give a defense before Felix. **24:10**

Paul begins by being courteous. He does not flatter here; he simply acknowledges that he knows Felix had been a Roman judge for many years, probably since A.D. 52. If we place this trial around A.D. 56-57, he had been judge for 4-5 years.

He was happy to be able to give a defense in a protected setting. He would much rather present his case here than in Jerusalem where there were plots to kill him. He does not call Felix “most excellent,” he simply says you have been a judge for a long time.

**(Response #2)** - Paul testifies that he had gone to Jerusalem to worship just twelve days ago. **24:11**

Let’s break this down: **Day #1**—he arrives in Jerusalem and the first day appears before James and the elders (21:18); **Day #2**—he agrees to get in on the end of a vow in the temple (21:26), which covers **Days 3, 4, 5, 6**; on **Day #7**—the final day of his vow he is arrested (21:27); **Day #8** he is standing before the Sanhedrin (22:30); **Day #9**—a conspiracy is formed to kill him (23:30) so he leaves at night and arrives in Caesarea on **Day #10** (23:32); **Day #11** and **Day #12** and **Day #13** he has been in custody waiting for his accusers to arrive in Caesarea.

**Now this fact right here proves the foolishness of the charges to Felix.** Paul had not even been in Jerusalem for twelve full days and yet he is being charged with putting together a sect that would overtake the Roman Empire. How could anyone do that in twelve days?

**(Response #3)** - Paul says at no time anywhere did he discuss causing some riot. **24:12**

He did not talk about forming some riot group in the Temple, in any synagogue or anywhere in the city. He was not stirring up some political dissension anywhere.

**(Response #4)** - Paul says these Jews cannot prove one charge they have made. **24:13**

There is a great line in a story that is about a major trial. A defense attorney is asked if he believes his client is innocent. His answer is, “it doesn’t matter what I believe, it only matters what I can prove.”

**Paul says they can say what they want, they can believe what they want, but they cannot prove anything.** He is not a pest to society, he is not stirring up a riot all over the world, he is not a leader of any sect and he did not desecrate the temple. They are making this up.

**(Response #5)** - Paul admits that he is a believer and promoter of “the Way.” **24:14-16**

Paul says “I believe in God, I believe in the Law and I believe in the Prophets.” It is all true. He says “I believe in Jesus Christ, the Way, which they call a sect.” Paul’s faith was based on what is revealed in the Law—that we are all sinners and what is revealed in the Prophets—that we need a Savior, who was predicted to come and die and be raised from the dead.

Paul is clear to point out that his hope or faith is in God, just as the Jews have faith in God and he also believed there would be a resurrection of the righteous and the wicked. Now Paul says he does his best to maintain a blameless conscience before God and men about what he believes. He believes in the resurrection of the just and the unjust, the righteous and the wicked.

What Paul actually believed is that faith in the resurrected Christ was the only way to have a justification and righteousness. Paul believed in the Law; he believed the Law declares us all to be guilty. He also believed that the prophets predicted that Jesus Christ would come into this world and pay the price for our sins.

**(Response #6)** - Paul reports that he brought a major offering back to Jerusalem for the Jews. **24:17**

Paul says I am charged with desecrating the temple; well, I brought an offering to the poor Jews of Jerusalem.

**(Response #7)** - Paul says when the leaders found him in the Temple, he had been through the purification ritual and he had caused no uproar. **24:18a**

Paul was accused of profaning the Temple when in all reality he was in the temple for purification purposes. There was no sect, there was no crowd and there was no uproar. I was not leading some revolutionary revolt against Rome or Israel. In fact, I was involved in Jewish purification.

**(Response #8)** - Paul says certain non-present Jews from Asia started the trouble. **24:18b-19**

Paul says I didn't start the trouble, the Jews from Asia started the trouble and none of them are even here.

**(Response #9)** - Paul challenges the men there to tell what misdeed he did before the Sanhedrin. **24:20-21**

Paul says let any of these men show any evidence of any misconduct. Paul said the only thing that he had said was that he believed in the resurrection of the dead. That is why he was on trial. Paul says I believe the Scriptures, which clearly speak of a resurrection and that is why I am on trial.

**PART #4** – Felix responds to this trial. **24:22-27**

There are four main responses:

**Response #1** - Felix postpones his verdict as the judge. **24:22a**

Notice that Felix had exact knowledge about the Way. What that means is that he knew accurate facts about Jesus Christ and he knew that the Gospel of grace was a real thorn in the side of these Jews. He decided in view of his knowledge to put off a decision.

**Response #2** - Felix decided that he would make a decision when Lysias arrived. **24:22-23**

Felix does what so many do; adjourn the meeting without making any decision.

He decided to wait for Lysias the Roman commander of Jerusalem to arrive. He kept Paul under arrest, but gave Paul freedom and his friends could come and go and minister to him.

**Response #3** - Felix and his Jewish wife Drusilla sent for Paul and asked him to speak to them about his faith in Jesus Christ. **24:24-25**

Now Felix knew quite a bit about the message Paul was preaching (**24:22**). He had a precise knowledge of “the Way.” It is very possible that his wife Drusilla wanted to hear Paul explain things.

This is interesting because according to Josephus, Drusilla, a Jewish woman, had been married when she was fourteen years old to King Azizus of Emesa, which was a small kingdom in Syria. According to Josephus, Felix sent a sorcerer to convince her to leave her husband and marry him (*The Complete Works of Josephus*, p. 420). This was Felix’ third wife and it was Drusilla’s second husband. She was a very beautiful woman who was about twenty years old and she came from the family of Herods that had an abominable track record when it came to God.

She was one of three daughters of Herod Agrippa I.

- 1) Her father, Herod Agrippa, had murdered James (Acts 12:1-2).
- 2) Her great-uncle was Herod Antipas who had murdered John the Baptist.
- 3) Her great-grandfather, Herod the Great, had killed the babies two years old and younger in Bethlehem (Matt. 2:16).
- 4) Drusilla had used a sorcerer named Atomas and his incantations to seduce Felix.

Both Felix and his wife wanted to hear about Jesus Christ so they called for private meetings with Paul. Since Drusilla was Jewish, she would be interested in this Christian movement.

Now Paul did not start blasting them for their demonic involvement and immorality. But it is interesting to see things he pointed out. **Paul talked first about faith in Christ (v. 24). More than likely he developed the doctrine of justification by faith alone in Christ alone.**

However, according to **verse 25**, he also discussed righteousness, self control and coming judgment. He must have taught that once one believes on Jesus Christ, he should pursue biblical righteousness, which promotes self-discipline and self-control in view of coming judgment.

We don’t know what he said about righteousness, but may assume that he told them that in order to go to heaven they must have a righteousness imputed to them that they could only receive by faith in Jesus Christ. He certainly would have taught that there is “none righteous no not one.”

Then he brought up the subject of self-control to two people who lacked self-control. Then he brought up the subject of future judgment. We must say that Paul is not backing down from presenting truth to these two very powerful people. As one writer said Paul did seem to go from “preaching to meddling.”

As Paul was speaking on these things, Felix was “frightened” (**v. 25**). Felix was a man controlled by lust and greed and power and Paul is speaking about future judgment and he came under conviction that made him shake. In fact, he was under such conviction that he sent Paul away.

It is interesting that Drusilla did not seem to be under any conviction at all. She didn't tremble at sin in any way. History says that she and her son perished at Pompeii and were killed by the volcanic fires.

**Response #4** - Felix sends Paul away until he would call for him again. **24:26**

Felix makes the assumption most people make—there is plenty of time for me to respond to this truth. Felix was hoping that Paul would give him some money and so he would regularly call Paul in to appear before him. He would listen to Paul preach and teach the truth, but he did not respond.

**PART #5** – Felix was replaced by Festus but he (Felix) left Paul in jail. **24:27**

Two years from the time of the trial, Paul was still in jail and this was all part of the sovereignty of God to get Paul to Rome.

The biggest problem with Felix is that he would not make a decision for Jesus Christ. He put off the decision. Do not ever let that happen to you. When you hear the truth of God, respond to the truth of God. Don't put off a decision because when it comes to God, procrastination will lead you down.