

**Acts 24:1-26 ~ Teacher's Lesson
Paul's Trial Before Felix**

Review: At the end of his third missionary journey, Paul went to Jerusalem with a love offering from the Gentile churches. Along the way, the Holy Spirit repeatedly told him he would be arrested and handed over to the Gentiles. Sure enough, unbelieving Asian Jews saw Paul and rioted, assuming Paul had brought Gentiles into the Temple. The local Roman garrison intervened to restore order. Later learning of a plot to assassinate Paul, the Romans transferred him from Jerusalem to the Mediterranean coastal city of Caesarea. Caesarea was a Roman administrative city where Felix, the governor of Judea, lived. It was about 50 miles northwest of Jerusalem.

To whom was the book of Acts written? See *Acts 1:1 and Luke 1:1-4*. Luke wrote it for a mystery man named Theophilus. Some have speculated that perhaps Theophilus was a defense attorney and that what Luke wrote for him was a sort of legal brief to give Theophilus background information for the upcoming trial.

******Of what crimes was Paul accused (21:1-9)?** Tertullus, the prosecuting attorney, accused Paul of starting riots (sedition*) and profaning the temple (21:5-6).

* Sedatives calms people down, but sedition riles people up!

What was the purpose of what Tertullus said in 24:2b-4? See *Proverbs 12:20, 27:6*. History has not judged Felix to have been a good governor. For example, Felix had the least peaceful reign of any Roman governor up to his rule, and was known for his bribe taking.¹ In an effort to put down civil unrest, he crucified a large number of innocent people along with the insurgents, causing considerable political backlash.² Tacitus the historian described him as someone who reveled in cruelty and lust, and who wielded the power of a king with the mind of a slave.³ This was probably flattery for the sake of gaining Felix's favor. If these men would give false testimony about Paul's "crimes", they would have no qualms about giving false flattery to Felix.

ESV **Proverbs 27:6** . . . profuse are the kisses of an enemy.

ESV **Proverbs 12:20** Deceit is in the heart of those who devise evil . . .

ESV **Psalm 12:2** Everyone utters lies to his neighbor; with flattering lips and a double heart they speak.

¹ *ESV Study Bible*, 2136.

² Kistemaker, 835.

³ Steven Cole, "Lesson 62: A Life of Integrity (Acts 24:1-23)", Bible.org. Accessed August 11, 2018.

Application: Be wary of compliments paid by those who want something from you. With Felix, it came from those seeking a favorable judgment. For most of us that involves salesmen. For a teacher, it might come from students or parents wanting a better grade than deserved. For the unmarried, it might involve a potential suitor. If you are a manager it can come from your subordinates. Hopefully, as a parent, it won't come from your kids!

1. Tertullus described Paul as a “plague” who caused riots all over the world (24:5). What was the true cause of these riots? As the book of Acts reveals, it was usually the unbelieving Jews themselves who, in opposition to the Gospel, incited pagan Gentile rabble to riot to run Paul out of town.

How did Tertullus describe Christianity in 24:5? He described it as the “sect of the Nazarenes”. This is the only time in the Bible that Christianity is so described.⁴ It was probably derisive in some way. Paul usually described Christianity as the Way (22:4).

2. Tertullus accused Paul of trying to profane the temple (24:6). What really happened? See 21:23, 26, 27-30. Paul did no such thing. He merely went to the temple as part of a vow. Foreign Jews, from Asia, wrongly assumed that Paul had brought a Gentile into the temple.

Strategy: The Jews had no evidence at all; theirs was a flimsy case. Tertullus evidently calculated that Felix, based on the Jews' testimony (24:9), would act in his usual insensitive manner and have Paul executed.⁵

3. How did the Jews heap judgment upon their own heads in 24:9? See Exodus 20:16, Deuteronomy 19:16-19. They bore false witness against Paul.

ESV **Exodus 20:16** You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

ESV **Deuteronomy 19:16-19** If a malicious witness arises to accuse a person of wrongdoing . . . The judges shall inquire diligently, and if the witness is a false witness and has accused his brother falsely, then you shall do to him as he had meant to do to his brother.

The Situation: you have Paul, a sincere man of integrity, facing a corrupt judge, a trial lawyer who would say anything for money, and a group of religious leaders who were thoroughly corrupt. The judgment that fell on Jerusalem in A.D. 70 was richly deserved.

Truth: A life of integrity does not shield us from being falsely accused.⁶

Application: ESV 1 Peter 3:15-16 . . . in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.

⁴ Marshall, 395.

⁵ Cole, Bible.org.

⁶ Ibid.

****4. **What was the essence of Paul's defense (24:10-21)?** Paul stated that:

- He was innocent of inciting riot either in the temple, synagogues or the city (24:12, 18a)⁷
- There was no proof of the charges against him (24:13)
- He did not profane the temple (24:18a)
- The supposed witnesses were from Asia and not present to testify against him (24:18b-19)
- The Jews already had one hearing with him and were not able to agree to any wrongdoing (24:20).

Ironic: Ananias (24:1) was the high priest who, just a few days earlier, ordered Paul struck into silence (23:2), yet now he was forced to listen to Paul's defense before Felix.⁸

5. To activity what did Paul confess in 24:14-15, 21? Paul confessed that he believed everything in the Law and the Prophets and that he had a hope that there will be a resurrection of the dead. This made it clear to Felix that the problem was a dispute with Judaism, not that he had violated any Roman law. It was a theological dispute, not criminal activity.

New Covenant Theology: NCT should not lead to dismissive approach to the Old Testament. The Law and the Prophets are inspired by God and are profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness (2Ti 3:26). The OT is neither impractical nor irrelevant.

ESV 1 Timothy 1:8 . . . we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully . . .

Why did Paul specify that both the just—and the unjust—would be resurrected (24:15)?

See John 5:28-29. The universal resurrection of the dead, both good and bad, suggests payday some day!

ESV John 5:28-29 . . . an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.

Baptist Faith & Message, 2001: . . . Jesus Christ will return personally and visibly in glory to the earth; the dead will be raised; and Christ will judge all men in righteousness. The unrighteous will be consigned to Hell, the place of everlasting punishment. The righteous in their resurrected and glorified bodies will receive their reward and will dwell forever in Heaven with the Lord.⁹

⁷ Paul's statement that he had only arrived Jerusalem twelve days previous seems to have been to make the point that there was no way he could have stirred up trouble so quickly.

⁸ Kistemaker, 839.

⁹ Article X, "Last Things".

6. Your belief determines your behavior. What behavior (2:26) grew out of Paul's belief in the resurrection of the dead (24:15)? In light of the future resurrection, Paul took pains to have a clear conscience toward both God and man.

Application: Even as Christians, forgiven by the blood of Christ, we will all stand in judgment before God. This judgment will not determine if you go to heaven or not, but it will determine what heaven will be like for you. Heaven will not be the same for everybody.

ESV **2 Corinthians 5:10** F. . . we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

ESV **Matthew 5:11-12** Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven . . .

ESV **Matthew 6:20** . . . lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.

ESV **Matthew 16:27** . . . the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done.

ESV **Matthew 19:29-30** . . . everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first.

******At this point, Felix dithers. What two reasons did Felix have for delaying a decision (24:22-23)?** Felix did not want to hear any more testimony because he already had an accurate knowledge of the "Way" (24:22). Since the evidence against Paul was so slim, Felix felt he should not decide the case until Lysias came to Caesarea. In reality, this lack of evidence from the prosecution should have resulted in Paul's acquittal.

Who was Lysias (24:22)? See 23:26-30. Claudius Lysias was the Roman tribune who commanded the garrison in Jerusalem. Lysias rescued Paul in the Temple, then saved him from assassination by sending him to Caesarea.

7. What did Lysias' presence have to do with Felix's decision (24:22)? See Acts 23:29. Felix evidently thought Lysias might be able to provide more information from a Roman perspective on what really happened. However, in his original letter to Felix, Lysias has already concluded:

ESV **Acts 23:29** I found that he was being accused about questions of their law, but charged with nothing deserving death or imprisonment.

What does 24:23 indicate about Felix's attitude toward Paul? He did not consider Paul to be a violent criminal, and so accorded Paul the relative freedom due a Roman citizen being held in custody.

******How did Paul spend the next two years (24:24-27)?** He spent them in prison (around A.D. 57-59), occasionally talking with Felix and his wife Drusilla about the Gospel. Drusilla was of noted beauty, around 20 years old when this conversation took place. She was the daughter of Herod Agrippa I, who executed the apostle James and who tried to execute Peter, and himself died from an infection of worms. Felix and Drusilla had a son who was killed in the explosion of Mount Vesuvius in A.D. 79.¹

Interesting History: It is reasonable to conclude that during this two-year period, Luke was busy writing the Gospel of Luke.¹⁰

8. Doubtless Lysias eventually arrived and reported what he knew about Paul to Felix. Why then did Felix not acquit and release Paul? Why did Felix dither? What were his motives? Felix may have suspected there was more nefarious about Paul than was obvious and that he was a public threat.¹¹ More likely, Felix may have wanted to curry favor with the Jewish leadership, and so left Paul in jail. He didn't turn Paul over to them, but neither did he release him.

9. What did Paul say that alarmed Felix and caused him to cut their conversation short (24:25)? See *Hebrews 9:27, 10:26-31*. Both Felix and his wife had marital histories tainted by promiscuity. Drusilla was his third wife (his first wife was grand-daughter of Anthony and Cleopatra).¹² Felix was her second husband.¹³ Felix stole her away from another king in Syria. Paul's words about the coming judgment scared him. Felix was an unjust judge and violent ruler.

ESV **Acts 17:31** . . . he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.

ESV **Hebrews 9:27** . . . it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment . . .

ESV **Hebrews 10:26-31** . . . if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has spurned the Son of God, and

¹⁰ Kistemaker, 850.

¹¹ Marshall, 397.

¹² Steven Cole, "Lesson 63: No Time for God (Acts 24:24-27)", Bible.org. Accessed August 11, 2018.

¹³ Kistemaker, 851.

has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace . . . It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Opportunity of a Lifetime: Felix blew it. He had the opportunity of a lifetime: endless hours conversing with the apostle Paul about spiritual realities. The problem for Felix was that Paul quit preaching and went to meddling. The truth hit too close to him. Felix should have responded like the Philippian jailer who asked, “What must I do to be saved?” Instead, Flex sent Paul away.

Application: Evidently, Paul was not seeker-friendly. He did not offer them Jesus without mentioning their sin. Paul did not offer Felix abstract theological truths. Along with the theology, Paul taught them about righteous living and an unavoidable judgment day coming (24:25). So too, whenever we speak with someone about the evidence for Christianity, we should also warn them about the certainty of a coming judgment day.

10. What would have happened had Paul given money to Felix (24:26)? *See Proverbs 17:8.* The implication is that Felix would have released Paul. When Felix heard Paul testify that he had come to Jerusalem with money for the poor, he probably assumed that Paul was a man of means or had access to wealth, and so was in a position to pay a bribe.

ESV Proverbs 17:8 A bribe is like a magic stone in the eyes of the one who gives it; wherever he turns he prospers.

11. Would there have been anything wrong with Paul giving Felix money (24:26)? *See Deuteronomy 16:19, Proverbs 17:23.* A bribe is clearly wrong if it is given to pervert justice. However, in this case, it would not have been a perversion of justice, but rather it would cause justice to be done (an innocent man acquitted and released).

ESV Deuteronomy 16:19 You shall not pervert justice. You shall not show partiality, and you shall not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and subverts the cause of the righteous.

ESV Proverbs 17:23 The wicked accepts a bribe in secret to pervert the ways of justice.

ESV Ecclesiastes 7:7b . . . a bribe corrupts the heart.

The Bottom Line: Both Luke and Paul knew exactly what Felix wanted (money). Yet it was not given, either because they did not have it, or because they felt it would be wrong, or perhaps he thought it might imply guilt.

12. Two years went by; Felix’ time as governor was up yet he left Paul in prison (24:27); why? Felix was not a man concerned with justice. First, he failed to do justice for Paul because Paul did not give him money, then, he left Paul in jail in order to do the unbelieving Jews a favor. Paul’s imprisonment was about politics, not justice. Paul was a political pawn.

Time Line: Felix left office around A.D. 60. Josephus recorded that he was recalled by Nero due to his heavy-handed tactics against the Jews of Caesarea.¹⁴

So What?

Application: Don't be naïve in your thinking. Expect persecution. The words of Jesus are still true today:

ESV **John 16:2-3** . . . the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor me.

ESV **John 16:1** I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away.

The Jews were not able to refute Paul's claims about Jesus. Instead, they provoked riots to silence him, and brought false accusations against him in court. Like Paul, we must keep telling the Gospel to whoever we can.

19. Why did our sovereign God allow one of His most effective evangelists to languish in jail for two years (24:27)? See Acts 9:15-16, 21:13, Philippians 1:12-14.

ESV **Philippians 1:12-13** I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ.

Even though Jesus treats us as friends rather than servants, many of the ways of the Father are still mysterious to us. We walk by faith, not by sight.

ESV **John 15:15** No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.

ESV **2 Corinthians 5:7** . . . we walk by faith, not by sight.

Example: Joseph did what was right in resisting the advances of Potipher's wife, and it landed him in prison. It is better to have the Lord with you in prison than to be in freedom without the Lord.

20. The next time you feel like God has forgotten the situation you are in, how might you be encouraged from what happened to Paul in 24:1-25:12?

Truth: God is sovereign. Not a sparrow falls from the nest without God's knowledge. He has not forgotten you and He knows the situation you are in. Trust in His goodness and wisdom. He is using your situation to advance His kingdom and to make you more like Jesus.

**** = ask this question before reading the text aloud. Doing so will cause focus.

¹⁴ Kistemaker, 853.

- These lessons are designed for a 45 minute session and are based on the text of the ESV.
- You can hear this lesson being taught at SermonAudio.Com/NTRF.

Stephen E. Atkerson
NTRF.org
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ⁱ Steven Cole, "Lesson 63: No Time for God (Acts 24:24-27)", Bible.org. Accessed August 11, 2018.