

ACTS CHAPTER 24 BIBLE STUDY

PAUL'S TRIAL BEFORE FELIX

A. The accusations against Paul.

1. (Acts 24:1) The Jews assemble their case against Paul.

Now after five days Ananias the high priest came down with the elders and a certain orator *named* Tertullus. These gave evidence to the governor against Paul.

a. **Now after five days:** The Jewish leadership (**Ananias the high priest** and the **elders**) brought a man named **Tertullus** — a skilled lawyer — to present their case.

b. **These gave evidence to the governor against Paul:** The presence of all three (**Ananias**, the **elders**, and a skilled lawyer) at the court of Felix reminds us of how serious the Jewish leadership was about obtaining a conviction against Paul.

2. (Acts 24:2-4) Tertullus introduces his accusation against Paul with flattery towards Felix.

And when he was called upon, Tertullus began his accusation, saying: “Seeing that through you we enjoy great peace, and prosperity is being brought to this nation by your foresight, we

accept *it* always and, in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness. Nevertheless, not to be tedious to you any further, I beg you to hear, by your courtesy, a few words from us.”

a. **Most noble Felix:** Antonius Felix began life as a slave. His brother Pallas was a friend of the emperor Claudius; through such influence, he rose in status — first as a child gaining freedom, and then through intrigue he became the first former slave to become a governor of a Roman province.

i. But his slave mentality stayed with him. Tacitus, the Roman historian, described Felix as “a master of cruelty and lust who exercised the powers of a king with the spirit of a slave.”

ii. “The picture drawn by Tacitus of Felix’s public and private life is not a pretty one. Trading on the influences of his infamous brother [Pallas, a favorite of the emperor Claudius], he indulged in every license and excess, thinking ‘that he could do any evil act with impunity.’

b. **Seeing that through you we enjoy great peace, and prosperity is being brought to this nation by your foresight:** These were lies presented as flattery. Felix did not bring **peace** or **prosperity** to those he governed.

i. “In reality he [Felix] had put down several insurrections with such barbarous brutality that he earned for himself the horror, not the thanks, of the Jewish population.” In particular, he ordered a massacre of thousands of Jews in Caesarea, with many more Jewish homes looted by the Roman soldiers.

ii. Flattery is an often-neglected sin, one that the Bible speaks about more often than one might think. [Romans 16:18](#) speaks to us of those who *do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple*. [Jude 1:16](#) speaks of those who *mouth great swelling words, flattering people to gain advantage*.

iii. Four different times the Book of Proverbs connects flattery with the sin of sexual immorality. Many people have been seduced into immorality through simple flattery.

iv. [Proverbs 20:19](#) says, *He who goes about as a talebearer reveals secrets; there for do not associate with one who flatters with his lips*. This means that we aren't to make flatterers our close friends.

v. [Psalm 78:36](#) says we can even flatter God: *Nevertheless, they flattered Him with their mouth, and they lied to Him with their tongue.* When you give God insincere praise, it is flattery, and God doesn't want it.

vi. "I suppose that even Felix was shrewd enough to have listened with tongue in cheek. What is it that these Jewish leaders are after that they should come all the way from Caesarea and flatter me in this fashion? he must have wondered."

3. ([Acts 24:5-6](#)) Paul's accusers state their specific charges.

"For we have found this man a plague, a creator of dissension among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. He even tried to profane the temple, and we seized him, and wanted to judge him according to our law."

a. **For we have found this man a plague:** The charges against Paul were essentially that he was politically dangerous (**a plague... a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes**) and that he had profaned the temple.

i. Ancient Judea was filled with would-be messiahs and revolutionaries against Rome. Tertullus wanted to put Paul in the same group with these kinds of terrorists.

b. **A ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes**: The reference to Paul being a **Nazarene** was intended to connect him to a generally despised and lowly place. It was term of slight scorn used for the followers of Jesus. Nazareth had a poor reputation as a city ([John 1:46](#)).

c. **Among all Jews throughout the world**: Here, Tertullus gave an unintended compliment as he described the extent of Paul's work in the Roman Empire.

d. **He even tried to profane the temple**: This was the only really specific charge against Paul; but Tertullus gave no *evidence* for this charge because there *was* no evidence. This was a fabricated charge based on rumor only ([Acts 21:26-29](#)).

i. Paul had nothing to fear from the truth; but he knew that the truth does not always win out in a court of law.

ii. Significantly, the same man who found it so easy to flatter also found it easy to accuse with no evidence. The two almost always go

together; the person who flatters today will likely tomorrow accuse without evidence.

4. (Acts 24:7-9) Tertullus concludes his accusation against Paul.

“But the commander Lysias came by and with great violence took *him* out of our hands, commanding his accusers to come to you. By examining him yourself you may ascertain all these things of which we accuse him.” And the Jews also assented, maintaining that these things were so.

a. **The commander Lysias came by and with great violence took *him out of our hands*:** The Roman commander **Lysias**, who rescued Paul, was here put into a bad light. Clearly Paul’s accusers regretted that the case had come this far, having preferred to settle it with mob justice.

b. **By examining him yourself you may ascertain all these things of which we accuse him:** Tertullus did not even pretend to offer outside evidence of the charges. His only hope was that Paul would incriminate himself under examination by Felix.

i. “His oration has been blamed as *weak, lame, and imperfect*; and yet, perhaps, few, with so *bad a cause*, could have made *better* of it.”

c. **The Jews also assented, maintaining that these things were so:**

The other Jewish accusers present (the high priest and the elders)

agreed with the charges, but they also offered no supporting *evidence*.

B. Paul's defense.

1. **(Acts 24:10-13) Paul exposes the weakness of the case against him.**

Then Paul, after the governor had nodded to him to speak, answered: "Inasmuch as I know that you have been for many years a judge of this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself, because you may ascertain that it is no more than twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem to worship. And they neither found me in the temple disputing with anyone nor inciting the crowd, either in the synagogues or in the city. Nor can they prove the things of which they now accuse me."

a. **I do the more cheerfully answer for myself:** Paul was happy to answer for himself, knowing that the facts of the case were in his favor — and notably, Paul used no flattery in his address to Felix.

b. **Nor can they prove the things of which they now accuse me:**

Even though it had been **no more than twelve days**, and many

witnesses could be easily found, Paul's accusers gave no witnesses to **prove** that he was in fact **in the temple disputing** or **inciting the crowd**. There was simply no proof for their accusations.

2. (Acts 24:14-21) Paul explains his ministry, and why he was arrested.

“But this I confess to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect, so I worship the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets. I have hope in God, which they themselves also accept, that there will be a resurrection of *the* dead, both of *the* just and *the* unjust.

This *being* so, I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men. Now after many years I came to bring alms and offerings to my nation, in the midst of which some Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with a mob nor with tumult. They ought to have been here before you to object if they had anything against me. Or else let those who are *here* themselves say if they found any wrongdoing in me while I stood before the council, unless *it is* for this one statement which I cried out, standing among them, ‘Concerning the resurrection of the dead I am being judged by you this day.’”

a. **According to the Way which they call a sect, so I worship the**

God of my fathers: Paul made it clear that he had not abandoned the **God of my fathers** or the **Law and the Prophets**. Instead, he acted in fulfillment of them both.

i. Tertullus called Christianity *the sect of the Nazarenes* ([Acts 24:5](#))

Paul called it **the Way**.

b. **That there will be a resurrection of the dead:** This was believed by many or most devout Jews of Paul's day, though not by the

Sadducees ([Acts 23:8](#)). Paul's belief that there **will be a resurrection** was connected to his specific trust in the resurrection of Jesus ([1 Corinthians 15](#)).

c. **Both of the just and the unjust:** Paul clearly believed in a resurrection for both the righteous and the unrighteous. The idea of soul-sleep or annihilation for the unrighteous is not accurate according to New Testament teaching.

d. **I came to bring alms and offerings:** This refers to the collection Paul made for Judean Christians among the Gentile churches of the West ([Galatians 2:10](#), [Romans 15:26](#), and [2 Corinthians 8-9](#)).

e. **They ought to have been here before you to object:** In this, Paul reminded Felix that there was no eyewitness *testimony* to prove the charges of his accusers.

i. “This was a strong point in his defense: the people who had raised the hue and cry in the first instance, claiming to be eyewitnesses of his alleged sacrilege, had not troubled to be present.” Because Paul was in the right, he consistently called the case back to the *evidence*, the very thing his accusers avoided.

ii. Christians should never be timid about or ashamed of the truth or of the evidence. If we are truly following God, the truth and evidence are our friends, not our accusers.

C. Felix’s decision in the case.

1. (Acts 24:22-23) Felix avoids making a legal decision.

But when Felix heard these things, having more accurate knowledge of *the Way*, he adjourned the proceedings and said, “When Lysias the commander comes down, I will make a decision on your case.” So, he commanded the centurion to keep Paul and to let *him* have liberty and told him not to forbid any of his friends to provide for or visit him.

a. **When Lysias the commander comes down, I will make a decision on your case:** Felix avoided a decision under the pretense of waiting for more evidence through the Roman commander Lysias. But Felix clearly *had* enough evidence to make a decision in Paul's favor (**having more accurate knowledge of the Way**).

b. **Let him have liberty:** Yet, knowing Paul's innocence, he granted Paul generous liberty even while he was held in custody.

i. Felix tried to walk a middle ground. He knew Paul was innocent, yet he did not want to identify himself with Paul's gospel and the Christians. So, he made no decision and kept Paul in custody.

2. (Acts 24:24-25) Felix avoids making a spiritual decision.

And after some days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, he sent for Paul and heard him concerning the faith in Christ. Now as he reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and answered, "Go away for now; when I have a convenient time, I will call for you."

a. **Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, he sent for Paul and heard him concerning the faith in Christ:** Felix wanted his wife to hear Paul's testimony, either as a curiosity or so that she could

advise him. After all, he claimed to have insufficient evidence for a decision.

b. **With his wife Drusilla:** This woman was the sister of Herod Agrippa II and Bernice mentioned in [Acts 25](#). Drusilla was beautiful, ambitious, and about 20 years old at this point. Felix seduced her away from her husband and made her his third wife.

i. “The lax morals of Felix and Drusilla help to explain the topics on which Paul spoke to them.”

c. **He reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come:** These were the three points Paul used when he spoke to Felix and Drusilla. These are three points many modern preachers would avoid speaking about, especially in speaking to a high figure like Felix.

i. We don't know exactly how Paul developed these three points, but we can speculate on something like this:

- The **righteousness** that is ours in Jesus Christ.
- The need for Christian ethics (**self-control**) that was evidently lacking in the life of both Felix and Drusilla.
- Eternal accountability before God (**the judgment to come**).

ii. We admire Paul's bold preaching, directed right to the issues of Felix's life: "Are there not some to be found, who think the highest object of the minister is to attract the multitude and then to please them? O my God! how solemnly ought each of us to bewail our sin, if we feel we have been guilty in this matter. What is it to have pleased men? Is there aught in it that can make our head lie easy on the pillow of our death? Is there aught in it that can give us boldness in the day of judgment when we face thy tribunal, O Judge of quick and dead? No, my brethren, we must always take our texts so that we may bear upon our hearers with all our might."

iii. "But some men will say, 'Sir, ministers ought not to be personal.' Ministers ought to be personal, and they will never be true to their Master till they are...But now we poor craven sons of nobodies have to stand and talk about generalities; but we are afraid to point you out and tell you of your sins personally. But, blessed be God, from that fear I have been delivered long ago. There walketh not a man on the surface of this earth whom I dare not reprove." (Spurgeon)

d. **Felix was afraid**: Hearing this message made Felix **afraid**.

Knowing something about his life, at least we can say that he probably

understood it. The gospel should make those who are intent on rejecting Jesus **afraid**.

e. **Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for**

you: However, Felix was unwilling to *declare* his

decision *against* Jesus. Instead, he rejected Jesus under the pretense of *delaying* his decision.

i. Many respond to the gospel in this way; they express their rejection through delay, by delaying their decision to commit to Jesus Christ — but it is rejection none the less. The Bible tells us to come to Jesus in repentance and faith today: *Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation* (2 Corinthians 6:2).

ii. It is foolish to trust in **a convenient time** to repent and believe.

“Thou sayest, ‘Another time.’ How knowest thou that thou wilt ever feel again as thou feelest now? This morning, perhaps a voice is saying in thy heart, ‘Prepare to meet thy God.’ Tomorrow that voice will be hushed. The gaieties of the ballroom and the theatre will put out that voice that warns thee now, and perhaps thou wilt never hear it again. Men all have their warnings, and all men who perish have had a *last warning*. Perhaps this is your last warning.”

iii. “God to-day is pulling the reins tight to check you from your lust; perhaps, if to-day you spurn the bit, and rush madly on, he will throw the reins upon your back, saying, ‘Let him alone;’ and then it is a dark steeple-chase between hell and earth, and you will run it in mad confusion, never thinking of a hell till you find yourself past warning, past repentance, past faith, past hope.”

iv. The claims of Jesus are never convenient for us. If we insist on waiting for **a convenient time**, we will wait for an eternity — an eternity spent in agonizing separation from God.

3. (Acts 24:26-27) The motive of Felix’s heart is revealed: greed.

Meanwhile he also hoped that money would be given him by Paul, that he might release him. Therefore, he sent for him more often and conversed with him. But after two years Porcius Festus succeeded Felix; and Felix, wanting to do the Jews a favor, left Paul bound.

a. **He also hoped that money would be given him by Paul, that he might release him:** Though Felix met often with Paul, it was not honest seeking. He hoped to be paid off with a bribe.

b. **After two years**: Under Roman law, the type of custody Paul was in could only last two years. Felix showed that he was willing to break Roman laws by keeping Paul for more than **two years**.

c. **Felix... left Paul bound**: Felix refused to release Paul, though he knew that he was innocent. He did this for the same reason Pilate condemned Jesus while knowing His innocence. They both acted out of pure political advantage (**wanting to do the Jews a favor**).

i. In a way, people like Felix and Pilate are the guiltiest of those who reject Jesus Christ. They *know* what is right but refuse to do right purely out of the *fear of man*. They have an eternally fatal lack of courage.